

## Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*

When Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* appeared in 1934 the dominant themes of Australian writing were rural, the characteristic settings were the country, the bush and the outback. There had, of course, been poems and fiction written about the cities; it isn't the case that there were no urban materials. Henry Lawson had written powerfully about urban poverty in the series of stories set in 'Jones' Alley' in the 1890s and had begun his career with the powerful urban ballads 'Faces in the Street' and 'The Army of the Rear'. William Lane's *The Workingman's Paradise* (1892) had described urban conditions in Sydney in the 1890s. But the received impression is of a literature devoted to perpetuating the outback myth of Australia, even though the population was predominantly urban.<sup>1</sup> *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* can be seen as a work confronting and challenging this outback myth.

At the same time Stead's urban project was very much in accord with the powerful trends in world fiction. From Balzac's Paris of the 1830s and 1840s and Dickens' London of the 1850s and 1860s a strong tradition of recording the nature of urban life had been established; indeed, of life specifically in the large urban metropolis, the capital or major city. The same concern could be found in the avant garde modernist writing of the twentieth century—James Joyce's celebration of Dublin in *Ulysses* (1922), Louis Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926).

So Christina Stead had a myth to react against (the outback as representative of Australia), a tradition to participate in (Balzac, Dickens), and an avant garde modernist achievement to suggest ways of making it new. In writing about Sydney she is creating a new world, a new myth to replace or complement the outback myth; and she is making a

1 Brian Kiernan, in *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, ed. Laurie Hergenhan et al., Ringwood, 1988, p.274.

personal and a national assertion in putting Sydney on the fictional map. As H. M. Green put it in a strangely begrudging way

Yet *Seven Poor Men*, incomplete and one-sided, uncharacteristic of any country as is the life that it presents, was yet somehow the first novel to convey an impression of Sydney as a world city, one of the foci of world life.<sup>2</sup>

Stead's implicit claim is that Sydney is as worthy a site for fictional enshrinement as any other world city; it supports sufficient complexity of life, its settings are as representative and evocative as Paris or London for fiction. The city itself becomes a character. There is no single hero or heroine, no one figure is given preference; rather, we are offered a collectivity of characters; and what holds them together are their poverty, their familial and work and personal interrelationships, their ideological discussions and explorations, and the city.<sup>3</sup>

The novel opens with three paragraphs of geographical scene setting: 'The hideous low scarred yellow horny and barren headland lies curled like a scorpion in a blinding sea and sky. At night, house-lamps and ships' lanterns burn with a rousing shine, and the headlights of cars swing over Fisherman's Bay.' (1)<sup>4</sup>

In the 1920s, when the novel is set, South Head was still something of an outpost and Watson's Bay ('Fisherman's Bay' Stead calls it) was a fishing and commuter village. But it is, for all the barren headland, part of the urban influence as the house and car lights indicate. The immediate impression is a negative one: 'hideous'. The terms are persistently negative—hideous, scarred, barren, scorpion,

2 H. M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature* (1961), revised by Dorothy Green, Sydney, 1985, volume 2, p.1158.

3 Dorothy Green offers a contrary view: 'the inner world, in short, is the world not of seven men and a woman, but of one woman, Catherine, whose selves have been separated and given a local habitation and a name'. 'Chaos or a Dancing Star?' *Meanjin* 27 ii (1968): 154. See, however, Jennifer Gribble, *Christina Stead*, Melbourne, 1994, p.14: 'But rather than making Catherine "the real centre of the book", as Green argues, Stead shows Catherine's deprivations as a woman, distinctive of her gender though they are, as part of a general, and representative, poverty—local, yet part of the world's history.'

4 Christina Stead, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934), Sydney 1965. All quotations are from this edition.

blinding. The first paragraph goes on to describe the military camp, a menacing presence. 'It was, and remains, a military and maritime settlement.' (1)

I once took a literary critic from Melbourne out to Watson's Bay to show him the settings of this novel and the later *For Love Alone* (1944) and he was surprised to see that there actually is a military camp at the entrance to the Heads. He had read it as symbolic. Now to read it as symbolic is, of course, exactly what is intended. Militarism was not a positive in Stead's notation; the nightmarish account of World War I in Michael Bagnenault's pre-suicide horrors in chapter 8 makes that quite unambiguous. The camp is there as a symbol of repression—military, political, social. There is no later narrative point made of the military settlement. The images of military presence are part of a thematic or tonal argument.

When the gunners are in camp, searchlights sweep over the bay all night ... in the daytime, when the red signal is flown over the barracks, the plates and windows rattle with the report of guns at target practice. (1)

In the midst of life there is this constant reminder of death; ostensibly we live in a time of peace but the images of war and preparedness for war are there from the beginning. The war we see is the class war, the struggles of the seven poor men in their poverty, the political confrontations (in their varying degrees of commitment) of the socialists and communists with the imperialist capitalist society. The Folliot's may be political dilettantes but Tom Winter ends up gaoled 'on a charge of sedition, inciting to riot, etc., for a speech he made to seamen at the Union's offices....' (283) We are not given Winter's speech (though we hear some of his ideas and their expression). The novel focusses on the individual consciousnesses rather than on dramatic action. But in the background there is a seaman's strike. There is a federal policeman investigating Montagu for participation in drug importing. These things are only touched on, like the military camp. But cumulatively they serve to establish a context of Sydney as a representative city of the modern capitalist world, with all those familiar components: military preparedness, poverty of the working people, financial chicanery, international drug dealing, and political repression.

The military camp is present in the novel to establish themes, symbolic within the fictional structure. But it is also indisputably real; it is there. Christina Stead was amused at the assumption that it was a fiction since the whole basis of her art was realistic. She wrote to me:

About the South Head military camp—alas! It seems to me, without extensive research, that Australian critics, some of them, are much more closely and stickily settled in Laputa than any other critics in the world. And in a land which IS reality and talks only of reality! Why is that? Fancy an inhabitant of Sydney not knowing what is on South Head. But when *Seven Poor Men* appeared a Sydney critic (though born in Ireland and that may be an excuse) contended that I was crazy (or romantic) when I said sailing ships bearing timber came in through the Heads “surely it happened many years ago but not now.” Sad for him—my family at Boogarre and I saw them first outside (looking from The Gap and then coming into the Harbour)—I think they were from S. America—waterlogged to the gunwales—but of course afloat. But the thing that does interest me in critics’ reports is that they do in fact live in a world of fantasy. It is the writers who are the scientists. (Painters, too perhaps. I remember always that I thought certain roses I saw in Chinese paintings were artists’ fantasies until I saw the identical sort of rose in the Bagatelle gardens in Paris (outside Paris); and the curious hills in Flemish painting I thought imaginative, fictive, till I learned those hills existed (but were imported and built), and Chinese hills were fictive, till I saw photographs quite recently of such a geological formation in Vietnam, and I even thought (in Australia) that the white houses in Paris, Toulon and elsewhere were rather anaemic artists’ dreams—till I saw them, in Toulon and Paris; and I thought the dreamy watery stretches of the Low Countries were feeble dreams—till I saw them! So now it becomes me little to criticise critics! Alas, the scornful realist.<sup>5</sup>

Christina Stead portrayed the settings she knew, drew on the characters

<sup>5</sup> Letter, 8.7.72. Christina Stead, *A Web of Friendship: Selected Letters (1928–1973)*, ed. R. G. Geering, Sydney, 1992, pp.457–8.

she knew. The point is not to oppose the realistic to the symbolic, not to see a literary work as one or the other, imagination or history. For Stead, as with so many great writers, the point was to discover the themes and symbols in the reality: to read the actuality, to interpret it, to see its meanings. Etymologically the word 'invent' comes from discover, come upon; inventing is not a matter of 'making it up' but of discovering the meaning of what is all around. The idea of fiction as an autonomous world, a world of pure fiction, was utterly alien to Stead's vision.

And so we get the vivid, authentic recording of Sydney's geographical and social particularity. There are those powerful descriptions of the university, for instance, in chapter 6. Initially we see it through Joseph Baguenault's distant, awed vision.

He still thought of the University grandly mounted, as on horseback, in Camperdown, as a kind of holy place, holy and exciting. Things happened there that amounted to the legendary. There was the famous young surgeon who died, who lectured before European congresses, almost at Joseph's age. There was Pumblecherri, the wild art lecturer, who was allowed to lecture though drunk; there was Garnet Gotham, who had been a father to the students in his little round-tower room and had been kicked out for having a mistress, so they said, but really, it was whispered, for being a Communist. Was it possible, a professor? Their heads, too, are like little round-tower rooms and no one knows what goes on inside. (164–5)

The image of the university grandly mounted as on horseback establishes that elevated, ruling-class position: probably not without some sexual implication possible in the 'mounted', since we go on to the professor dismissed for having a mistress (which in effect was what happened to Christopher Brennan). We are shown these mythical figures through Joseph's awed response; but importantly even his awe, even his feelings of distance and exclusion, are not crudely mystified. The dismissal for having a mistress is perceived by Joseph and no doubt others in the society as the cover story for getting rid of a communist. The harassment Stead and her husband were to experience for their communism is recorded in Chris Williams' biography of Stead.<sup>6</sup>

Towards the end of the chapter when Joseph gets to the university

this mythic vision, the little round-tower room evoking both John Milton's hermetic philosopher in 'Il Penseroso' and the colloquial 'ivory towers', yet physically there too in the quadrangle at Sydney University, is replaced by one of mud and raw clay and wind and rain.

They alighted at the University steps, near the Men's Union, and tramped along cuttings and new roads past the Teachers' College.... They squelched through the fat clay ruts and grass. There were lights in the Medical School and a faint glow in the Fisher Library still. Out here the wind raged, the rain ran down into their socks and their necks, and streaked their uncut hair. The trees lashed about and the few lamps tossed on their stalks. Frogs croaked in the basement of the Teachers' College and in the University Oval. Faint lights gleamed, as in castles over the bog, in the Methodist and Presbyterian Colleges. They fought their way over the cinder-paths and marsh leaning against the wind, towards the new Physics Building. (181)

Again, the recording of reality is literal and detailed. But it is at the same time like one of the stages of the journey in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). They are heading for enlightenment—indeed a lecture on light—but the passage indicates some of the deluding, illusory lights around: 'faint lights gleamed, as in castles over the bog'.

So Stead establishes the physical environment, and the legends accreting to it. This is an important part of commemorating a society: it fulfils a social need, the writer in describing a place gives it a mythic significance that often attracts years later the crowd of pilgrims and tourists. But this is not merely, not restricted to being, a geographical or architectural account. It is that, but more than that it creates a memorable picture: romantic, mythic, symbolic, even sardonic and satiric. And it is a dynamic portrayal; the initial high-flown expectations are replaced by the muddy boggy undercutting; and that too in its turn is followed and so qualified by the account of the actual lecture that follows, which adds a further richness and complexity to the episode.

6 Chris Williams, *Christina Stead: A Life of Letters*, Melbourne, 1989, pp.164–5, 177–9, 208–13. On Brennan's dismissal see Axel Clark, *Christopher Brennan: A Critical Biography*, Melbourne, 1980.

Frederick Macartney, noting that *Seven Poor Men* is Stead's only novel set wholly in Australia, adds a rider—'though the references to the locale are overlaid by her intellectual grotesquerie'.<sup>7</sup> The 'though' sounds disappointed—but rather than agreeing with such disappointment, we might argue that the 'references to the locale' are often most successfully imagined when they are so overlaid. It is this grotesquerie that marks Christina Stead as so distinctive a writer. She uses the setting of Sydney in the depression, but makes of it far more than her realist contemporaries. This is in no way to deny her fundamental committed, radical impulse.<sup>8</sup> Certainly she is concerned with the social-realist aspects of poverty; the specific detail of the place-naming establishes a 'real' setting;<sup>9</sup> and she deals with the social aspects of poverty, the economic factors determining it. But her picturing of the streets of depression transcends the merely limited socio-economic, historic reportage. She is brilliantly successful when, from the documentation of cartography, she reaches out to a phantasmagoria:

7 Frederick Macartney, *Australian Literature*, Sydney, 1956, p.441.

8 Cf. Brian Kiernan, *Images of Society and Nature*, Melbourne, 1971, p.79: 'Although the characteristic presentation of society in Christina Stead's 'Australian' novels is far removed from the social realism of more conventional Australian novels, the critique of Australian society implied in both of them is amongst the most radical in our literature.' Nonetheless, he finds 'the Marxian element' in *Seven Poor Men* 'obtrusive', p.74. See also Joan Lidoff, *Christina Stead*, New York, 1983, p.130: 'From the start, Stead unites social realism with a gift for lyric prose.'

9 E.g., Catherine left him at the word, swung down Macquarie Street towards Hyde Park. She had a room in an old building in Elizabeth Street....' (137) Baruch lived in a room on the fourth floor back, in a side street in Woolloomooloo Flat, not far from the old public school. His window commanded the Inner Domain, the Art Gallery, the spires of St. Mary's Cathedral and the Elizabeth Street skyline.' (138) See R. G. Geering, *Christina Stead*, New York, 1969, p.37: the city itself is vividly and often precisely described and this prevents the characters from becoming merely rarefied emotional states;' and Grant McGregor, 'Seven Poor Men of Sydney: The Historical Dimension', *Southerly*, 48 (1978), 380–404. Clement Semmler, however, has argued for the novel's lack of Australian specificity. 'For as magnificent, as moving as Christina Stead's descriptions of Sydney are, her characters belong no more to its slums and foreshores than to those of Los Angeles or London. It is part of an uncanny cosmopolitanism which may perhaps in a sense explain her own remarkable expatriation.' Clement Semmler, 'The Novels of Christina Stead', in Geoffrey Dutton, ed., *The Literature of Australia*, revised edn, Ringwood, 1976, pp.492–3. See also Adrian Mitchell in *The Oxford History of Australian Literature*, ed. Leonie Kramer, Melbourne, 1981, p.134–5.

They reached the less-frequented regions, they turned out of the shopping districts down by Paddy's Market and the Technical High School. Most of the shops were closed. Three young men with hats in their hands played leap-frog outside a closed bar. A pool of blood on the pavement, with several clots, made them look around: opposite were two streets in which were houses of ill-fame—a fight between bucks, a girl having a baby, a bleeding nose? They walked on, the light gradually becoming less, crossing and recrossing the road, dodging the little traffic. They were fatigued now. Baruch had walked for some minutes without talking, looking very pale, limping slightly. They stopped to breathe outside a lolly-shop brightly lighted, in which were purple, mauve and red boxes of chocolates with gilt filigree paper. Going with one of those under your arm to a red plush parlour, a daguerretyped aunt in a red plush frame, to a girl: looking at the boxes Joseph had an affection for all girls....

A well-dressed girl came up with them and passed them; she hesitated, looked at Joseph and walked on a few steps ahead, the high heels tapping impatiently, marking time. She turned down a side street; who knows? They have to earn their living. How did she know Joseph had just been paid? A broken ostrich-feather, pale blue and grey, lay on the pavement under an open window on the second floor; in the window was a pink blind drawn, on which a woman's head-dress darkly moved. They passed a lighted entrance, with polished handle, varnished door, and two whitened steps. Baruch was silent. Who knows? thought Joseph. (121)

It is like a nightmare in the random detail, the wordlessness of the walk, the prostitute approaching and moving away, wordlessly, like a wraith in the underworld; the only sound her high heels. The colours are all vivid, garish and fluctuating, just as the light changes, just as Baruch and Joseph cross and recross roads. The images all have a potential menace—the blood, the silhouetted head-dress—and so have the actions—the prostitute's uncanny knowledge that Joseph had just been paid; and the menace is heightened by the absurdity—the men playing leap-frog of all things, the inappropriate ostrich feather in that street. The passage loses by being abbreviated and taken out of context, since the effects are cumulative. By accretion and aggregation the grotesquerie



is established, and Ultimo becomes an image of Hell. It is this accretion of the macabre and odd that is so effective.

One of the famous episodes of the modernist novel that made such an impact on literary Europe, James Joyce's *Ulysses* of 1922, was the nighttown sequence.<sup>10</sup> Christina Stead does not replicate Joyce; she is not amongst those novelists using stream of consciousness techniques. But the night life episodes are part of a literary tradition. The Paris of Balzac and Flaubert includes prostitution as one of its components. Within the Australian tradition William Lane includes prostitution in his portrait of Sydney in *The Workingman's Paradise*, and Henry Lawson has an early poem about a prostitute, 'Watch on the Kerb'. Stead is participating in the tradition.

The lights were on dimly to light a little the interior dusk and still to admit what remained of the daylight; the street was not yet that covered way which is endless and mysterious at night, but 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. An old man out walking with a cane looked friendlily at the two boys, with the friendliness of a Biblical comment, "Look, what you are experiencing the prophets experienced in their adolescence two thousand years ago." He went stooping on. I am young, thinks Jo. This is what the old man intended him to think. 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 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. She smiled unconsciously as she tapped with vanity past him. More soft steps and, rubber-soled, came the lamp-lighter who had just got through

10 On Stead's reading of *Ulysses* see Hazel Rowley, *Christina Stead: a Biography*, Melbourne, 1993, pp.121–2. I have indicated my reservations about this biography in *Australian Book Review* 152 (July 1993): 8–9.

the district of gas-lamps. Tea was preparing everywhere; night had begun. (122)

The city is the character, the subject here. *Seven Poor Men* is not trapped by the demands of narrative action. The setting, the ambience, was not 'background' but itself part of the very subject of the novel. To focus on characterisation or plot is to miss the further complexities and richness that fiction offers. These may seem peripheral to the narrative rush of who does what when; but it is often in the peripheral, or apparently peripheral, that the writer has the freedom from the oppression of the narrative, from 'advancing the action', to introduce other possibilities.

In throwing out the 'Dear Reader' convention of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction, the modernists also threw out one possibility of talking about ideas, of discussing themes, of talking about the presented material and its issues. At the point that critical discussion of English and American literature began on a large and institutionalised scale, critical discussion of ideas began to be deemed improper in the novel.

Stead was never a writer who participated in this exclusion of ideas. *Seven Poor Men* is full of political and social discussions. At the same time as her inclusion of discussions, however, she also exploited the modernist strategy of the indirect introduction of ideas through image, symbol and setting. Here she makes use of the tradition of representing the city as a way of inserting a set of ideas into the novel. Joseph's walk gives us an initial external view; later we have an episode with Michael Bagueuault and Tom Withers in a brothel; it is displaced from the chronological moment when they go off together, and recurs in Michael's delirium when he has broken into the Folliot's house.

Two women came to him and beckoned him to his feet; it seemed Withers was laughing behind him on the divan. Michael plucked their arms, they all ran about the room. They clustered round him again, and he invited them to drink. Although he poured out three glasses, the women did not drink, so he had to drink the wine for them. He poured out wine again, and this time they drank, but they only drank with him; they would not sip it till he raised it to his own lips. There was a murmur of laughter from the piano under his

hands. Someone played the tune of an obscene song, somewhere out of sight he knew a girl was sitting on a soldier's knee, pulling his ear affectionately. He knew that on the wall was a mirror festooned with gilt and decorated with paper roses, and on the ceiling was now Leda and the swan. He didn't care for obscenity. He was engaged in watching the eyes of the two women, who would certainly go away if he did not insist on them staying, by staring at them through the palm of his hand. They were very voluptuous women and only lightly dressed. (230)

Prostitution has its specific resonance in Marxist thought, as noted in the study of *The Workingman's Paradise*. The particular references bear repetition. The *Manifesto of the Communist Party* declared:

On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among proletarians, and in public prostitution.

It is self-evident that the abolition of the present system of production must bring with it the abolition of the community of women springing from that system, i.e. of prostitution both public and private.<sup>11</sup>

And prostitution features in Karl Marx's reference to Australia in *Capital*. It is a reference that put Australia on the international map of literary allusion, inscribing it in international discourse. Marx wrote:

The shameless lavishing of uncultivated colonial land on aristocrats and capitalists by the Government, so loudly denounced even by Wakefield, has produced, especially in Australia, in conjunction with the stream of men that the gold-diggings attract, and with the competition that the importation of English commodities causes even to the smallest artisan, an ample "relative surplus labouring population", so that almost every mail

11 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, translated by Samuel Moore (1888), Moscow, 1973, pp.68, 71.

brings the Job's news of a "glut of the Australian labor-market," and prostitution in some places there flourishes as wantonly as in the London Haymarket.<sup>12</sup>

The novel's exploration of the theme of poverty necessarily involves this inclusion of prostitution as one of its aspects. This is not part of the explicit discourse, but it is no less effective for that. We need have no doubt about the thematic significance for Stead. Her novel about the corruptions of capitalist finance, *House of All Nations* (1938) was named after a Parisian brothel.

The organization of Christina Stead's novels is not conventional. Various critics have indicated the lack of plot in *Seven Poor Men*; but lack of plot does not necessarily imply lack of structure. The novel deals with the lives of seven poor men, all of whom are connected by friendship, work, or family; but other characters—such as Michael's sister, or the Follotts, or Montagu the financier—are at least as important as some of the seven. What unity the novel has comes not from plot, nor from character relationship, but from the theme stated in the title—poverty. It is this, the varieties of poverty, its different effects, that provides the organization—so the novel can be seen almost as a 'meditation' on poverty. And the meditation is not restricted solely to the economic manifestations that are demonstrated in Chamberlain's printing works for instance; the way poverty determines and limits lives not merely economically, but also culturally, mentally and sexually is the book's concern. We can say that Michael is a born misfit, is created as a melancholic and irrational child; but poverty subdues him, too, plays on his character to lead him to his final destruction. The social-realist novel has tended to deal with the 'normal' individual oppressed by his or her economic and social environment; Christina Stead extends the analysis to show the 'abnormal' similarly, indeed worse, afflicted.

Poverty, then, is the major organizing theme that provides, along with the portrayal of Sydney, the novel's coherence and unity. It is a range of poverties that Stead explores. At one extreme we find the frequent references to the homeless, to the tramps sleeping in the Domain. (266) Part of a literary tradition (the homeless in the Domain

12 Karl Marx, *Capital*, volume I, translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (1887), edited by Frederick Engels, Moscow, 1978, p.724.

are recorded by Robert Louis Stevenson and by William Lane),<sup>13</sup> they are also a painful reality. An extreme condition, it is not one that the novel's characters are exempt from; more than one of them sleeps out of doors at some point in the novel. At the more prosperous end of poverty is Gregory Chamberlain, the owner of the printing works who, by the novel's end, has lost his business, his wife, his daughter and his possessions. He is listed as one of the seven poor men.

The destructive effects of poverty are everywhere apparent. Joseph is constantly ringed by a gang of children who jeer at his poor clothing.

He looked at himself between his hands. The sole of one boot was attached by a hair-pin, the worn knees of the trousers showed the colour of his pale skin when he sat down. His hat was an old one of his cousin's. The rest of his attire fell in with these items and produced a sort of harmonious costume, the uniform of misery. The children of Fisherman's Bay shouted after him, "Joey, Jo, Jo, Ullo Jo," when he went past in the evenings. He knew what this song meant; it meant, "You are rubbish thrown out by men, and we are allowed to play with you, no one even has a salvage interest in you." The Clown of the Universe had produced a man in his image. The accumulated misery, shame, hunger and ignorance of centuries straddled the path as he advanced against the evening sun, and they shrieked with laughter to see his hat getting taller in the new lamplight and his coat more uncouth as his shadow fell backwards to them. (96)

Tom Winter

was thin, ill-looking, poor; his face gave him thirty-five years of labour, but his voice and manner showed him to be only twenty-five, or even less. (123)

Catherine Baguenault ends up 'in a shelter in a very poor section':

Lying on the bench, at rest, because with the lowest and lost, with

13 Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, London, 1892; William Lane, *The Workingman's Paradise*, Brisbane, 1892.

the degraded, unambitious and debauched, Catherine reviewed her life. (214)

The experience of poverty is described not only externally, but with a powerful sense of its human indignities:

Joseph came up the place this spring morning taking short steps and putting his feet down flat to hide the holes in his soles, with legs slightly apart so that the trouser-cuffs should not be further rubbed, but doing this as a matter of habit and all the time glancing up at the blue sky over the new bank buildings. (71)

The poverty and the restrictions it imposes is emphasized by the freshness of Spring and the blue morning; and underlined by the contrasting presence of 'the new bank buildings'. The next page Joseph 'bought a packet of used razor blades for twopence'. (72) Baruch Mendelssohn lives in the slums of Woolloomooloo:

The dwellings on the borders of the hot asphalted pavement were holes in which moved dimly a world of heaving bosoms, gasping mouths, fanning arms. There were visible black-socked feet and bare feet in slippers, bare arms starting upwards from a bush of black hair at the armpit; locks 'straight as candles' hung wet and tangled, hairy men's breasts gaped in the vees of open work-shirts. The oil-lamps or gas-jets lighted corsets and stockings carelessly thrown on beds, discoloured with sweat and dirt. The rancid breeze blew in from the wharves with the smell of weeds grown on the piles, beer from the saloons, rotten vegetables from the garbage tins. (139)

But as well as the economic deprivation of poverty, Stead establishes the effects on consciousness.

There was scarcely any furniture in Baruch's room, but on the small pine table were papers from drawing, and inks. There he sat early in the evening, breathing seriously over some small black-and-white design, the margin scribbled with faces, legends and monograms. But it was just as likely that he would be miserably

stretched out on his bed in his outdoor clothes. The rarity of his bursts of energy, due to his thin purse and bad food, seemed to syllabicate the sentence of a hopeless fate. He had a wide and wandering vision which showed him all kinds of miseries more than physical, the self-deception of vanity unapplauded, drudgery unrewarded, the mind which for recompense kneels to the tintinnabulating priesthood, the symbolist, sick and sunless for ever, the tempestuous who leap from brink to brink and the thin ambitious who wrench their hearts out to put one idea on foot in their lifetime, and those who are for ever in the green-sickness of an unrequited love or desire, and those who work out new-fangled systems to detect fate in her workings, those who are swollen with pride and those who creep in their dejection. He was so wretched to see these people swarming around him, with all these evils added to their poverty, that he often fell into a fever, and this idea was with him, day and night, that he was obliged to relieve them in some way. But he hardly knew in what way. He lived by choice among the sordid southern lives of the native and immigrant poor to get himself impregnated with this fever so it would never leave him. (140)

A major part of Stead's concern is the distortion and limitation of consciousness consequent upon poverty, and upon the social system that creates and depends upon that poverty for many and privilege for a few. There is a brief vignette of Joseph's mother and the circumscription of her life. It is a sympathetic portrait. It is not contemptuous or sneering of Mrs Bagueault; she is presented as a victim of her social environment, deprived of education, deprived of information.

She was a plain woman. Hearing her speak, the tongue clung to the palate and the throat whirred, one's own ideas dried up, in sympathy. That was the effect of a dull youth, a devout life, an intelligence developed between smoky kitchen-walls, a slow remastication of ancient events to amuse long tediums. Sixty years of poverty had extinguished that fountain of life which lives in infant flesh and ejects experiment and improvisation out of the mouth. The cheap print which hung over the piano showing Jesus with his sacred heart, in three colours out of register, blood, thorns,

a nightgown, worn hands and tears, represented her own life as she knew it and as she was not ashamed to record it. Then, she went to church to know what was going on in the world, to know what view to take, as people used to go to panoramas; bad paintings artificially lighted in a little round hall, to find out what the country was like that lay around them. She saw the workaday world through a confessional grille, as a weevil through the hole he has gnawed in a nut. It might have opened to the thrust, that grille, if she had had the will, or if her husband had had the patience to teach her; but he had not, he thought too little of her brains. (65–6)

Her plight as a proletarian is intensified by her plight as a woman; her husband ‘thought too little of her brains’ to enter on discussion. The image of the weevil chewing its way out of a nut is sardonic, but it is important to stress that Stead is never sneering at her poor and deprived characters. The poverty of cultural possibility and of cultural representation (the cheap print), the circumscription of ideas by the reactionary Roman Catholic church, this imposed limitation on the possibility of human understanding, is as much Stead’s theme as the immediate physical poverty.

The critique of the reactionary church produces one of the novel’s most memorable episodes, when Michael hears his mother revealing his illegitimacy to a priest. It is a superb piece of macabre humour. ‘The priest’s traitless face showed a shade of interest, malice, revenge and victory.’ He asks Mrs Bagenault to visit him at the church that afternoon:

‘Ah, the bastard’, said Michael to himself, ‘he won’t get her; I’ll stop her’.

‘Ah-ha, a bastard’, said the priest to himself; ‘I’ll get her, nothing will stop her’.

He got up with a satisfied air. She fumbled around in her dress, the woman, her neat hair slightly disordered, her eyes with their swollen tear-sacs, suffused. She looked older than she had a few minutes before. The priest full of spite and pride walked slowly down the garden path along the roses. ‘So that’s the way the land lies’, he said to himself. ‘Look at those roses, those French beans:



very nice. So that's how the husband got his touch of satire: well, foh, foh, it's always the same. These meek dames and meek husbands, the devil gets into one or the other with great ease'. He looked at the roses with a vicious smile, as if he accused them for the soft effusion of their unreligious saps.

'Not bad', said he.

Michael was joyful. (21)

An amazing passage—Michael's reaction is surprising yet so right—it gets much of its effect from the comic mannerism. 'Foh, foh' suggests the 'fee fi fo fum' of the childhood ogre, the inversion of 'said he' suggests again a ballad; and the whole scene, Michael hiding and overhearing, and the parallelism of his and the priest's silent words, has the tone of grotesque, macabre farce; while the imagery is ironically sexual, the traditionally vaginal roses, the phallic beans (French ones, too), and the secretions of 'unreligious saps'.

Minds as well as the bodies are being starved and deformed. It is in this context that we are presented with Joseph's attempts to reach into the educational or cultural spheres: hence his visit to the adult education lecture at the university. And in this context we can see Kol Blount's paralysis as a type of the paralysis created by poverty in all the realms of these characters' lives. Poverty deforms the physical life, the intellectual, the mental, the spiritual, the sexual. The paralysis of poverty prevents growth and development in all these areas. Moreover, Kol's paralysis is a direct consequence of the social system; because of his mother's poverty he has not received proper medical treatment; by the end of the novel Baruch tells Catherine

I understand they are going to make an experimental case out of him in one of the hospitals. A Macquarie Street doctor thinks he can be cured. He should never have been in a chair all these years, it seems; a pure case of neglect and poverty. (310)

It is no fairy tale happy ending; there is no certainty Kol will be cured. If he is, it will be through offering himself as an experimental case: the destiny of the poor. Economic and class discriminations are always firmly recorded and in place in Stead's writing. The chance of a cure is a possibility that is given; but it is also stressed that it is only because

of poverty that he was not treated properly originally.

The effect of Stead's account of the omnipresent poverty and the distortions consequent in her characters' psyches could have been deeply depressing. Indeed, in part the novel is depressing in this way. But it is not unrelievedly so. *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* was published in 1934, the year the concept of socialist realism was promulgated in the Soviet Union. The concept had been one of a number of theories of socialist art in discussion before it was finally adopted as official policy. Stead's first novel, in its conscious refusal of a negative ending, in incorporating the possibilities of hope and continuity, indicates her role as a pioneer of socialist art, rather than of the nihilistic, negatively oriented aesthetic of most modernism.

Michael Bagueenault's suicide is significantly not given the climactic place in the novel. To have ended with that would indeed have suggested that there was no way out, no hope, no possibility, and Michael's choice could have been taken as one valid for any of the other characters. But Stead carefully places the sequences of events. Michael's death is one response to the world, but it is not privileged as in any way an especially representative let alone an endorsed one.

The novel ends instead with a focus on Joseph, on someone continuing, not running away or giving up or going mad, but someone at last falling in love, planning a future. It is a bleak picture that we are offered. But at least Joseph refuses to give up; he represents a continuing, humane life force. Joseph tells Baruch:

'Through listening to you and Winter I know where I stand.'

'You have found that out. Is it worth knowing?'

'Yes; I'm not a missionary like Winter, nor an intellectual like you, understanding every step I make. That must be queer, though, to know what you are doing. I'm not selfish and scheming like Withers, and not a straw in the wind like Michael. I don't get into dramas and excitement like everybody else.'

'What are you, Joseph?'

'This is how I think of it. I'm a letter of ordinary script. Events are printed with me face downwards. I will be thrown away when I am used up and there will be an "I" the less. No-one will know.'

The presses will go on printing; plenty more have been made to replace me. History is at a standstill with me. That is what I am. I see my life, after all; I know what I am doing, too, in my way. Even you and Winter don't see yours as I see mine. But I realise everything is against me, as my smallness and oddness show. There are—as they say in the Bible—hierarchies and hierarchies over me economically and intellectually, and I shall never rise against them....' (316)

Christina Stead commented on the vision contained here in a memoir she wrote in 1968, 'A Writer's Friends'.

At Sydney Girls' High School, I had my first serious project, based on a footnote in the textbook of European history we used. The footnote referred to the *Lives of Obscure Men* and this appealed to me markedly. I planned to do that.... It came back to me later, when I returned to England, after the war and felt I did not understand the people. I began to collect notes for an Encyclopaedia (of Obscure People), to have another title; a sort of counter Who's Who. By this time I knew something about official reference books and I knew some very able people who would never appear there, because of their beliefs....

With regard to the 'obscure men', I did eventually do something of that sort. My first novel was called *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (title taken from Dickens' *Seven Poor Travellers*) and one of my most recent, *Cotters' England* (the working class north of England) has this subject.<sup>14</sup>

As well as Kol's paralysis, there is another paralysis running through the course of *Seven Poor Men*; the paralysis gripping the city and docks in the seaman's strike. A phase in the struggle between capital and labour, the strike is another paralysis resulting from the socio-economic

14 'A Writer's Friends', *Southerly* 28 (1968): 163–8, reprinted in Christina Stead, *Ocean of Story*, Melbourne, 1985, pp.496–7. Margaret Harris discusses the Dickens connection in 'Names in Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*' in Margaret Harris and Elizabeth Webby, eds, *Reconnoitres: Essays in Australian Literature in honour of G. A. Wilkes*, Melbourne 1992, pp.190–2.

situation. It is hardly an 'image' in fictional terms since we do not 'see' the strike; rather it is an absence, an absence of movement, an absence of participation in the maritime network of which Sydney is a part.

From the novel's opening we are told of this network—'liners from Singapore, Shanghai, Nagasaki, Wellington, Hawaii, San Francisco, Naples, Brindisi, Dunkirk and London'. (2) Baruch's room overlooks 'the wharves of the German, Dutch, Norwegian and Cape lines'. (138). From the beginning there has been this lure of the exotic, the potential of escape on this world network. But the escape is in abeyance, for most of the novel the seamen's strike has prevented movement. The only exceptions to the paralysis are a few scab vessels. Winters, Baruch, Catherine and Michael see one sail:

The vessel was an island trader putting out with scab labour picked up around the wharves. They all looked at it with aversion as if at an unclean thing. (198)

Michael remarks of it

'I'd like to join them ... to see what it is like to join a lost ship, to be with the lowest of the low....' (198)

And Michael is the only person who does get out of Sydney before the strike ends, with his suicide. His outsider status, his non-belonging, is analogous to the lack of co-operative, socialist commitment, the non-unionised desperation and opportunism, of the scab labour on the schooner. Indeed, Michael goes on to respond to Catherine's charges of being 'a class, or social traitor' by claiming 'I have no class ... I am a man alone'. (198) Michael has no sustaining political faith. He pretends to a socialism in order to get closer to Marion Folliot. But what characterises him is a lack of any belief. His suicide is emblematic of his isolated individualism. We might compare the protagonist's suicide in Jack London's *Martin Eden* (1909) after he has lost his sustaining belief in socialism.

But the presentation of Michael is not only a presentation of absences. There is a richness of psychological presentation, as well as of the macabre or grotesque. Michael's violence and cruelty, and his other-worldly weirdness which may be of insight or of delusion, are suggested

in the beautiful opening chapter describing his growing up. The hints of cruelty, and the hints of the sexual involvement with his half-sister are caught in a fine glimpse:

He assumed that his sister Catherine, called Kate, had told on him. 'Kate has a boy', he said. Kate slapped his face and punched him on the temple, which hurt very much; in return he hit her on her budding breast. She tripped him up and pummelled him all over the face, her own face purple with fury. (6)

His fantasies are caught, too. He talks at school of wanting to fly:

And when he sat at home later and looked up the green and yellow hill where the school sat, and the road home with its houses and bits of bush, he wished that he could see himself on the road home, where he had been a few minutes before. He pretended that images of himself were still marching along every stage of that much-travelled road, and would have liked to see them from this distance, familiar mannikins. (7)

His dizziness, his dreams 'that he was suffocating or being attacked by bears, or being followed by gigantic funereal phantoms' (14), his speculations, all these that so brilliantly establish his personality, have little to do with the novel's central concerns. Christina Stead always allows her characters a creative freedom; they are never narrowly subordinated to an over-riding, determining theme.<sup>15</sup>

Michael's suicide is a mark of defeat. It is no effective escape. But the novel does not end with him. It moves on, the strike ends, and Baruch

15 Cf. Don Anderson, 'Christina Stead's Unforgettable Dinner-Parties', *Southerly* 39 (1979): 38, reprinted in Don Anderson, *Hot Copy: Reading and Writing Now*, Ringwood, 1986, p.102. 'Consideration of, for example, the story and fate of Michael Bageunault in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, leads to the conclusion that, though she includes characters who act as spokesmen for theories of economic and historical determinism, Christina Stead is not an author whose novels are structured on determinist principles. Thus she is utterly unlike, for example, the Upton Sinclair of *The Jungle*. In Michael Bageunault, in Letty Fox, in Teresa Hawkins, we have what may be loosely termed a "Lawrentian" dimension that is at least as important as any deterministic one....'

and the Folliotics leave Sydney. In one sense they seem deserters. Their commitment to socialist action is suggested, by their departure, to be unstable. They were middle-class intellectuals, not the proletariat proper on whom the socialist future depends. The Folliotics return to England to their inheritance; Baruch goes to America to get into business. As much as Michael in his suicide or Catherine in her retreat to the mental asylum these escaping figures can be seen as having failed in their political beliefs and abandoned the collective struggle.

But at the same time there is a powerful force for escape in the novel. The emotional commitment to getting away is something that gives the ending its poignancy and complexity. Joseph's staying behind is not an unqualified positive. Christina Stead herself escaped from Sydney in 1928 and in her novel *For Love Alone* Teresa's process of escaping from Sydney is the dominant note. The impetus of rejecting the place you were born in and yearning to move on runs through *Seven Poor Men* and *For Love Alone*; but it coexists with an equally strong impetus to commemorate Sydney, to make it memorable in literary terms and put it on the literary map.

To escape Australia for educational or cultural experience in Europe has been a pervasive feature of Australian middle class life. But Stead is not presenting a vision of cultural riches elsewhere. Michael, after all, did get to Europe and experience the horror of the first world war; hardly an escape. There is no escape, in Stead's vision. The illusion of escape is an evasion, and it is associated with the other evasions considered in the novel that serve to prevent organized co-operative social action.

'We should have struck long ago,' said Baruch regretfully.

'No, I don't strike. I want to run things my own way. I'm not a whining underdog. I want to be manager, I want my money. I'll make my own way or not at all.'

'Well, our relations are stereotyped,' concluded Baruch drily. 'This identical situation occurs in hundreds of small shops, because we're not organised. You're too good to strike, you want to run other workers. Joseph's priest won't let him strike. You're intriguing with a man you know to be a pig, Montagu; I'm counting on getting away to America. That's the great secret: how does a small minority oppress a large majority?—we count

on making a getaway. We don't realise our whole life is bound up with a million others: we're all individuals. We believe in God, luck, astrology.' (193)

Although poverty is omnipresent in *Seven Poor Men*, it does not totally dominate. The characters are crushed, but not absolutely defeated. There is a core of resistance in the political activities of Catherine, the Folliot, Tom Winter and Baruch. Just as the despair of the novel's culminating events—Michael's suicide, Catherine's madness, the various departures—is mitigated by the survival of Joseph, so the overall economic conditions are challenged by the commitment to resistance, to struggle. In these insistent positive notes Christina Stead's fiction refuses that despair and nihilism characteristic of modernism, while remaining clear-eyed about social realities.

At the same time as emphatically including these socialist thinkers and activists in the novel, asserting a positive, resistant stance, Christina Stead is also concerned to indicate the various limitations and inadequacies of these political figures. It is important to stress that this is not presented as an attack on them. Rather, she establishes a shared socialist hope, and her criticisms are made within the movement. Henry Lawson similarly wrote stories attacking certain aspects of unionism in order to correct errors and improve perceptions. These are not external, hostile accounts but attempts at raising consciousness to perceive limitations and to avoid making the same mistakes again.

The inclusion of radical activists and thinkers as a major part of her cast means that Stead's characters are able naturally to discuss political and social themes. This should hardly need remarking; but the predominant fictional development of the twentieth century has been the surrender of ideas; English language novelists have fled from the explicit discussion of political, economic or philosophical ideas, characters have rarely debated substantial issues. The developing stress was on aesthetic form, on manner, on implication: ideas could occasionally creep in through the imagery, through the patterns of symbol. The exclusion of ideas was not total, of course. A number of writers resisted this, and Stead is important amongst them. She has no embarrassment in dealing with substantial issues, and she readily allows her characters to make explicit utterance about them.

Baruch Mendelssohn especially is a mouthpiece for progressive ideas in *Seven Poor Men*. 'My first study of my husband to be,' she said in an interview.<sup>16</sup> Baruch harangues Joseph:

'... in this country where you are technically all free, where you all vote and think yourselves political governors, where the land is free and you have no complications, if it weren't for your crazy bounties to protect what won't grow cheaply and your tariffs as high as the moon to protect the uneconomic industries of cheap capitalists, you should live in an earthly paradise: you shouldn't have to think of any other heaven. And what do we see? Beggars, tramps, thousands of workless in misery, poor mothers whelping yearly generations who get wretcheder, gaols full of criminals, madhouses of madmen, extravagance, superstition. You might as well be in the depths of Bulgaria.'

'Madmen and criminals,' said Joseph, 'can't be helped; you get them everywhere.'

'Certainly, I recognise the doctrine,' replied Baruch; 'the natural, the child of God; the criminal, the hounded of God; the madman, the scourged of God. Our psychologists in America have re-established the Binet-Simon test of intelligence which shows infallibly that poor children are ten per cent below the average, middle-class children at par, and rich children ten per cent above the average. That is the democratic way of putting the old doctrine; and it proves that foolery and knavery corrupt the most serious of men. This doctrine is intended to and does crowd "human beings into noisome cellars, and squalid tenement houses, fills prisons and brothels, goads men with want and consumes them with greed, robs women of the grace of perfect womanhood, takes from little children the joy and innocence of life's morning." I didn't make that up, that's from Henry George.' (89-90)

Henry George was an important figure in the radical movement in the nineteenth century, not only in his native America, but also in

16 Ann Whitehead, 'Christina Stead: An Interview', *Australian Literary Studies* 6 (1974): 241. For a perceptive and sympathetic view of Baruch, see Diana Brydon, *Christina Stead*, London, 1987, p.39.



Australia, where he gave a lecture tour in 1890. By the 1920s, however, George's ideas were no longer in the forefront of radical thought. In the next chapter we encounter Tom Winter, the communist union organizer, who declares

'There's only one book yew need to know, an' that's Marx, an' only one exegesis yew want to read an' that's Lenin on Marx.'  
(125)

There is a certain cut and dried quality to Winter's politics, he lacks the sinuous charm of Baruch. Winter takes a simple class line and opposes Baruch's statement 'I'm a natural Communist; everyone is my brother.'

'That's what's the matter,' said Winter bitterly, 'yew orter hate the upper classes; they're our natural enemy.... No, yew got to be uncommunist towards the capitalists; yew got to hate the capitalists. That's just it; that's just it. Yew want to make the workin'-class movement respectable by fraternity, by sincerity, by scientific socialism, by ease, by opportunist pacifism. But worst of all, yer on the make. Yew want to be a scholar. Am I a scholar? Er all them thousands and thousands of miners an' dairy-farmers an' boundary riders an' painters an' truck drivers an' wharfies scholars? There's only one book yew need to know, an' that's Marx....' (125)

Winter's dialogue is represented in an obtrusive, clumsy quasi-phonetic way. It is not a mark of authorial contempt or condescension towards the working class, as it generally is with Patrick White. Stead's intention, I suspect, was to mark out Winter as unambiguously proletarian; whereas the Folliotics are upper-middle class English, and Baruch, as Winter shrewdly observes, wants to mix in the society of intellectual socialists, in a world of socialism become respectable.

Winter is later gaoled for his political activities. He is presented as consistent, principled, committed. What he says about the dangers of socialist intellectuals who betray the movement is an important part of the experience of the labour movement, part of an important internal debate on strategy, and significantly related to the novel with the

departure from Australia of the Folliotics and of Baruch.

'I'm suspicious o' all intellectuals, and we got a right to be. We been betrayed too often. It's too easy for yew fellers to pass over into the other camp, an' be a barrister, a writer, a historian, a clever journalist. Wot's the fate o' so many labour-leaders? The whole world is acquainted with them; the upper classes laugh themselves sick over them. They rat: like MacDonald. And then, are they ashamed? No: they are lonely, misunderstood spirits, self-sacrificed to duty. (125-6)

The ambiguity of the Folliotics' role in radical politics is demonstrated in the speech Fulke Folliot gives to the striking seamen in Communist Hall. He talks about having gone to school with the Nationalist prime minister:

'I went to school with him, and the dear fellow was along with me in Trinity College, that was near seventeen years ago. And that time he was thinking of taking orders, and if he had he would at this moment be sitting in some Paris restaurant swopping *mots d'esprit* with fashionable actresses and dragging in Jesus Christ very adroitly to honour the cloth. (172-3)

What emerges is Fulke's fascination with power, with the ruling class from which he has come and to which he returns. As Winter remarks to Joseph, 'I don't think it's quite the style for the seamen'. (174)

Baruch has earlier summed up the Folliotics to Catherine:

'If I must say what I think,' said Baruch, 'they are romantics. They would be delighted to have a police-raid. Ever since their marriage they have had nothing but splendid adventures with the police and frontier-guards, and have always got off scot-free, of course. Fulke's father is a rich amateur collector of paintings. Marion's people are high up in the Government service in England. There are no romantic scuffles with a policeman in the life of the working-people. It riles me when I see Fulke get up before a body of bleak-faced, whiskered, half-starved men and get off his cheese-cake eloquence and well-bred witticisms.

I don't care if he has passed a merry quarter-hour with a traffic policeman in Moscow and discussed breakfast with Lenin.' (148)

The problem, as Baruch points out in an analysis as shrewd as Winter's, is that the Fulke Folliotics cannot be relied upon:

'Fulke is weak. He will give up sooner or later to comfort or vanity, if no worse. For, on my honour, if I had to pick out one man amongst them all who had the style, graces and talents of a prospective provocateur, it is Fulke!' He had flushed and stopped now, biting his lip, in anger. (148)

This fear of the agent provocateur, the police agent in the ranks of the labour movement, is part of the realistic vision of radical political action. It is a world of watching and surveillance. 'We spend all our lives watching each other like cats,' Baruch says to Catherine. (149) For the Folliotics, political activism, editing the *Independent Worker*, are a romantic game, or worse; but Winter ends up in gaol.

*Seven Poor Men* does not offer an unrealistic, romantic vision of social hope. There is no successful revolution; there is no successful cooperative action. It offers an analysis of the political situation, and resists nihilism by indicating those forces in opposition to the dominant system. But it provides no false illusions. The radical movement is in constant fear of being weakened by desertions or informers. What Stead offers us is an inside picture of the uncertainties and contradictions and uneasinesses of the left. It is not an external attack from a right wing position. The weaknesses observed are all weaknesses the members of the left were only too well aware of. The uncertainties, the ambiguities, are part of the texture of that world. And it is a world in which there are many undercurrents, many contradictions, many unexplained things: this is not the classic nineteenth century bourgeois novel in which everything is explained, conspiracies revealed, meanings made clear. Social activities are no longer seen as so easily explicable. The sense of not understanding, of not comprehending, is part of the subject of the novel now. We encounter these radical thinkers through Joseph, who feels an outsider, ill-informed, unaware. And this unresolved sense is part of the world of the twentieth century novel, its difference from that clearer nineteenth-century vision.