

# Behind the Book: Vance Palmer's Short Stories and Australian Magazine Culture in the 1920s

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In the most recent biographical study of Vance Palmer, Vivian Smith describes him as “one of the most representative figures of the literary culture of his time”, serving at the forefront of “the struggle between an imported tradition and attitudes and the search for a viable local tradition” (Smith 263). As a testament to this struggle, Smith presents the books of essays and short stories and the novels that Palmer published during a long career. These books serve most critics and biographers as signposts to the development of Palmer’s fiction by providing a chronological sequence of achievement. But behind these publications another sequence of events is found in the newspapers and magazines to which he contributed his short stories. In addition to the stories for which he is best-known, he published hundreds more in Australian periodicals, many of which fed an editorial appetite for tales of light romance and adventure. Palmer’s career during the 1920s provides an excellent example of what it meant to be a freelance storyteller in Australia during that decade. He is, also, one of the most representative figures of the *magazine* culture of his time.

Any attempt to position Palmer in Australian magazine culture is complicated by his range of stories and the variety of periodicals to which he contributed. From a farm-house in the Victorian Dandenong Ranges (1919-25) and a cottage at Caloundra on the Queensland coast (1925-29), he mailed probably thousands of manuscripts to editors in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. With little opportunity for book publication in Australia or overseas (Nile and Walker 286-89), the payments and exposure offered by newspapers and magazines were essential to any established or aspiring freelance writer. As cultural institutions, these periodicals performed a significant critical function and their pages often reveal a “lively, wordy, intelligent, sometimes intellectual and certainly literate and ‘literary’ local culture” (Carter 9-10). Within this culture, Vance Palmer’s short stories were

more than autonomous texts addressed to isolated readers. They were an integral part of a competitive network of production and distribution that culminated in the sale of periodicals in the local print economy.

This essay considers Palmer's shifting position in this network by examining his relationship with three popular Australian magazines: the *Bulletin*; the *Triad*; and the *Australian Journal*. These magazines published the short stories subsequently collected in *Separate Lives* (1931) and *Sea and Spinifex* (1934), and provided Palmer with a moderate income and a testing-ground for the fiction on which he would ultimately stake his reputation. More than an episode in Australia's literary history, Palmer's association with these magazines informs a broader cultural history of writing, publishing and reading.

#### THE *BULLETIN*

Like most Australians of his time, Vance Palmer accepted the *Bulletin* as the most appropriate place to publish short fiction because of an enduring reputation that originated in the late nineteenth century. Sixteen of the 22 stories in *Separate Lives* were first published in the *Bulletin*, suggesting that the weekly newspaper was the primary destination for what Palmer considered his best short stories. The weekly newspaper's reputation meant that it provided unequalled exposure to literary-minded readers in conjunction with relatively low but competitive payment for each contribution. The *Bulletin* maintained its status as the premier literary magazine by default, but it also published works of historical romance and adventure in its short story columns, creating an unrefined space that Palmer often found intolerable. The *Bulletin* might have been the premier destination for Palmer's stories, but it fell far below the level that he thought Australian writers deserved.

It seems to be universally accepted that the literary quality of the *Bulletin* declined after A. G. Stephens' departure in 1906 and by the 1920s, under the literary editor, David McKee Wright, it was a much weaker publication. By 1930, the circulation of the *Bulletin* had dropped to 30,000 (Arnold 265) after a reported circulation of 100,000 at the turn of the century (Lawson 212-13), becoming, in the process, primarily an organ for urban middle-class readers (Lyons and Taksa 80-81). The American journalist C. Hartley Grattan provided a blunt assessment of the *Bulletin* after his visit to Australia in the late 1920s:

Today *The Bulletin* has lost its literary "punch". It is still lively and entertaining in other fields. Its stories, however, are commonplace. It prints mediocre historical romances by J. H. M. Abbott, and the vaudevillian gaucheries of Steele Rudd. Its reviews and critiques of

literature, with some honourable exceptions, lack any penetration, force, or modernity. The literary editor is David McKee Wright, a kindly soul to whom rhymes and poems are indistinguishable, and to whom literature is something “genteel” and “refined” in the most wishy-washy senses of those very wishy-washy words. (Grattan 15)

Grattan’s negative assessment of Australia’s “strongest paper with literary interests” suggests the barrenness that most literary histories attribute to this period. But even without literary distinction, this period still fostered a dynamic writing culture for which the *Bulletin* provided a regular space.

For decades the *Bulletin* was Australia’s dominant publisher of short stories by Australian writers, collecting the work of a diverse range of amateurs and professionals in the latter pages of its weekly format. Examination of issues of the weekly newspaper published during the 1920s reveals a total number of short stories that exceeds 1,500.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of these were contributed by amateur writers seeking their 15 minutes of fame. More than five hundred authors can be listed as *Bulletin* contributors during the 1920s. With 114 stories, the king of the *Bulletin* short story in the 1920s was J. H. M. Abbott, the much-maligned author of historical romance. The journalist, poet, novelist and Queensland politician Randolph Bedford ran a distant second with 65 stories based on his experience in mining towns and his travels through the bush. The combined total for the champion freelancer Harold Mercer and his pseudonyms “Hamer” and “Percy Pawnticket” reaches 49, but the work of collaborators Margaret Fane and Hilary Lofting surpassed this with 53. In addition to these, a large group of more infrequent contributors can be identified: Alys Brown (18); Dale Collins (11); Bernard Cronin (15); Edward Dyson (20); “Junior Hamer” (25); Ion Idriess (19); David McKee-Wright (17); Myra Morris (15); Steele Rudd (22); M. G. Skipper (16) Edward Sorensen (16); and G. L. Thomas (22). Vance Palmer fits into this latter group with 17 stories, but he probably chafed at his association with some of these writers. Often situated next to one-time authors at the rear of the newspaper, Palmer’s work relied on the sympathetic reader to appreciate its difference to the usual *Bulletin* contribution.

In total, the small group mentioned above contributed approximately one-third of the weekly newspaper’s short stories during the 1920s, providing a range of stories with those settings required by the *Bulletin*. Alys Brown and Ion Idriess wrote many stories set in Papua New Guinea and the latter set most of his other stories in the far north of Australia. G. L. Thomas took China and the Chinese as his central theme and M. G. Skipper’s stories frequently explored Indonesia and Malaysia. Closer to home, most writers

had bush settings, particularly Dale Collins, Edward Sorenson and Myra Morris, the latter frequently exploring women's issues. David McKee-Wright contributed stories that examined science, inventions and mythology and "Steele Rudd" continued to supply Dad and Dave stories throughout the 1920s. Fane and Lofting took readers from the working-class districts of Woolloomooloo and Darlinghurst to the upper-class of the North Shore in their stories (Sharkey 126-27) and Harold Mercer appears to have crossed all genres and settings as a highly efficient freelance writer. Vance Palmer's stories of ordinary Australians living in rural, coastal and urban settings fit neatly with this kind of *Bulletin* story.

Palmer's association with the *Bulletin* exposed his work to a considerable audience and provided a small contribution to the annual income of his family, but it did not exclude him from editorial interference. By far, the *Bulletin* contributed most to the Palmers' income during the 1920s, but if the £400 prize for a national novel competition is subtracted and a £77 payment for serialisation is excluded, he was paid less than £100 between January 1923 and December 1930, calculating from notes in the Palmer diaries. For this payment he wrote paragraphs, articles and short stories, the latter usually bringing around £4/10/0 per story. Palmer's stories were never guaranteed publication, however, and increasing rejections only fuelled the Palmers' criticism. "The Frost" was rejected in August 1925 and "Delaney's Bus" was rejected in June 1927, prompting them to wonder whether they had been excluded from the *Bulletin* (Walker 216). Subsequently, a very cool reception of the *Bulletin* can be found in the Palmers' correspondence and diaries. Overwhelmingly, the Palmers' attitude to magazine publication is found in Nettie Palmer's hand, making it difficult to gauge Vance Palmer's attitude with any certainty. On 19 April 1928, Nettie Palmer lampooned a survey of *Bulletin* staff meant to determine the best short story writer in the world: "Shows them up as the [worst?] mechanical illiterates: will anyone notice? The level of *Bulletin* short stories as recently appearing justifies that." Nettie also pointed to the "awful fake stories" in the *Bulletin* on 11 February 1926, betraying their opinion of J. H. M. Abbott's "The Queen Regent" which appeared in that issue. Even promotion in the *Bulletin* could be distasteful to the Palmers. On 6 September 1928, Nettie Palmer wrote, "Today the *Bulletin* prints photo of Vance with a note that he is a 'prolific' writer: an almost libellous epithet." If this association with a declining periodical and its writers of questionable value were not enough for the Palmers, it appears that passages were regularly clipped from Palmer's stories in order to fit the newspaper's requirements. Comparison of the *Separate Lives* texts with their *Bulletin* counterparts shows regular variation of up to

eight hundred words. Most frequently this variation consists of neatly excised passages. Conceivably, Palmer could have added this material, but it is more likely that these passages were clipped by *Bulletin* editors.

The publication of Vance Palmer's stories in the *Bulletin* during the 1920s reveals just some of the constraints placed on Australian story writers by the thematic requirements and word limits of that periodical. According to the Palmers, the *Bulletin* provided an inadequate medium for Australian short fiction because of its low standards and its poor treatment of superior writers. Nevertheless, the *Bulletin* maintained a prominent position in Australian magazine culture throughout the 1920s by providing a weekly space in which many Australian short story writers hoped to see their work published. Combined with the literary "Red Page" this space had the capacity to bestow significant cultural value, but publication provided a limited and (for most writers) irregular economic return. Palmer's uneasy occupation of this space during the 1920s reveals his reluctant acceptance of the conditions imposed by Australia's "strongest paper with literary interests".

#### THE TRIAD

When the *Bulletin* rejected "The Frost" in August 1925, Palmer immediately sent the story to L. L. Woolacott, editor of the Sydney *Triad*, who promptly published it in the November issue. Woolacott was appointed editor of the *Triad* in October 1924, opening up another space for Palmer's short stories. Palmer described him as "a very good chap and ready for good work. Short articles, of course, and not very good pay, but still something" (Palmer and Palmer 20). During the next four years he contributed articles and short stories through changes of ownership and editorship as the magazine evolved into the *New Triad*. When it ceased publication in July 1928, Palmer had published seven stories in its pages, most notably "The Birthday" and "The Rainbow Bird". He was also the regular contributor of the "Brisbane Notes" for the *New Triad*. As an alternative to the *Bulletin*, the *Triad* delivered Palmer's stories to a general audience with more pronounced literary aspirations, but one that was, nevertheless, comfortable with the tone and content of a modern Australian commercial magazine.

By 1924, the *Triad* had built a strong reputation among various literary circles because of its devotion to the arts and a tendency towards the risqué. Established in New Zealand during the 1890s by C. N. Baeyertz, the magazine began an Australian edition in 1915. Printed in Sydney between 1915 and 1928, the *Triad* was a magazine devoted to art and culture packaged for a general readership. Laced with the acerbic wit of Frank Morton until his

death in 1923, the *Triad* was a significant reference point for “intellectuals” of various backgrounds. The New Zealand journalist Patrick Lawlor recalled that “While it had a strong ‘snob appeal’ it was widely read even by the average reader. To be up with ‘The Triad’ was to be considered ‘intellectual’.” Frank Morton also had his particular appeal for he was accounted ‘naughty’” (Letter to Miss J. Stephens 28 February 1968, Lawlor papers). But the magazine faltered after Morton’s death until Woolacott sought to recapture the interest of middle-class “intellectuals”. Distancing himself from the “snob appeal” of the earlier series Woolacott attempted to produce a more modern magazine with a greater concentration of short fiction suitable for his middle-class readers.

At a cost of one shilling, with its contents printed on high-quality paper, the *Triad* was obviously different to the *Bulletin*, a broadsheet weekly newspaper that sold for sixpence, but it also asserted a different tone. Endorsing Australian writing that does not “go in for rhapsodies about gum-leaves, stringy-bark and wattle, or exploit weak imitations of Henry Lawson’s prose and verse”, Woolacott positioned his magazine in relation to alternatives such as the *Bulletin*, a rival that he once described as “an esteemed, if senile, contemporary”. Taking a more worldly position, he stated that “The *Triad* will be Australian in sentiment and cosmopolitan in outlook” (August 1926, 3).

A significant feature of this outlook was the several hundred stories that the *Triad* published during Woolacott’s tenure as editor and proprietor. Random examination of these issues suggests that melodramatic stories with loaded endings were not uncommon, though the magazine also accepted stories with a more serious tone, but with limited literary interest. Fiction in the *Triad* could employ bush settings, but urban or suburban settings were more common. In these settings *Triad* writers often told stories of sexual desire and seduction, marriage (broken and unbroken), illegitimacy and abortion. Occasional stories addressed artistic or literary themes; and stories about business, businessmen and clerical workers were common; perhaps echoing the cult of the businessman that was a feature of the American weekly, *Saturday Evening Post*. Occupying more than 30% of the magazine’s page-space by August 1926, short fiction was the dominant feature in Woolacott’s *Triad*, trailed by advertising at 21% and articles on music at 8%. In this aspect, the *Triad* more closely resembled foreign competitors than any other Australian periodical (Reed 242-52).

The advertisements printed in the *Triad* suggest a middle-class readership, with a prevalence of women’s underwear, domestic products and home-remedies accompanied by other advertisements for whisky, international travel, banks

and Bollinger champagne. Aimed primarily at the more wealthy female Sydney resident with a penchant for art, music and literature, advertisements even encouraged such readers to visit The Latin Café, “Sydney’s Bohemian Restaurant . . . Where the Literary and Artistic folk foregather”. But this does not mean the magazine was exclusively read by women. Evidence of a significant male readership is revealed in the letters published each month. Informed by the music critic A. L. Kelly, exposed to American theatre critics like George Jean Nathan and involved in conversations about the merits of modernist art, the *Triad* reader was addressed with a cultural sophistication exhibited by few other Australian magazines.

The six Vance Palmer stories accepted by Woolcott display a range of themes and sentiments that reflect the various types of stories published by the *Triad*. Palmer’s familiar bush settings are found in “The Little Duck” and “Johnny”, stories in which he explores a retired miner’s rejection of urban life and philandering for a return to the diggings, and a white man’s failed attempts to keep a hard-working Aboriginal boy away from his girlfriend in order to avoid the boy’s inevitable lack of interest in work. The latter story featured the header, “This is a real Australian Story! Written by an Australian who knows Australia, the history of Johnny will appeal to everyone, from the psychologist in search of material, to the ordinary reader who wants only an absorbing yarn” (July 1925, 15). This promotion indicates Woolcott’s awareness of the range of readers his magazine could serve, placing Palmer’s story in both light and more serious moods. Palmer contends, however, with a different class of characters in “The Frost” (November 1925), “The Man of Vision” (June 1926) and “Maxie” (December 1926), stories that were overlooked for the subsequent book collections. Following the travails of a politician, a real estate agent and a fickle flirt, respectively, these stories contrast with the stories of more common folk that Palmer published in the *Bulletin*, making it surprising that he contributed “The Frost” in the first place. These *Triad* stories were not disposable commodities, however, because they reveal Palmer’s first treatment of themes and situations tackled more fully in his later novels. The coastal setting, the themes of urban encroachment and the drama of love between different classes in the latter two stories signal Palmer’s first engagement with material that would be used later for his novel *The Passage*. In “The Man of Vision”, Palmer rehearses the rise and fall of the township, Lavinia, in *The Passage* with this story of a real estate agent with an insatiable desire for urban expansion. Further to this, Palmer recycled “Maxie” four years later, expanding the plot and extracting several passages word-for-word for the *Australian Journal* story “The Flirt” (October 1930).

The context of publication of “The Birthday” provides a representative example of the *Triad’s* placement of Palmer’s stories. Praised by Heseltine as the one story in *Separate Lives* “closest to being a kind of Joycean epiphany” (Heseltine 151), it was accompanied by less distinguished material in its magazine appearance. Featured as “A Great Australian’s Great Story”, it shared space in the August 1926 issue with five other short stories (by Morris Hay, Dulcie Deamer, W. H. Cazaly and W. D. Flannery), feature articles, book reviews and a cartoon that depicts a pen-wielding young man defending Australia against lies, abuse, Mrs Grundy, intolerance, hypocrisy, charlatanry, greed and wowsersism. Of the four short story contributors, only Dulcie Deamer has remained in the spotlight of Australian literary history because of her reputation as Sydney’s “Queen of Bohemia” (Kirkpatrick 161-86). Her story of “Virgin and Martyr” recounts the impending death of the title characters in a Roman arena, probably alluding to sexual union rather than any religious evocation of a good death. W. H. Cazaly’s stories assert a religious tone in his depiction of declining values in the modern world: such as a son’s rejection of church-going in “Kids in the Dark”; and a businessman’s profit from a war that will kill thousands of his countrymen in “The Cross”. Framing these stories are Morris Hay’s “Day Dreams” and W. D. Flannery’s “Frills and Feathers”, unconventional love stories that include an unplanned pregnancy, promiscuousness and sexual abandonment in their melodramatic plots.

Vance Palmer’s investigation of human responses to death in “The Birthday” might seem obtrusive in this collection of melodramatic and sensational stories, but it clearly marks his shifting place in Australian magazine culture. Not only is he a nationalist writer in the realist tradition associated with the *Bulletin*, he is one capable of a “finely wrought image of experience rather than statement” (Heseltine 153) and one capable of a story designed more for the entertainment of a magazine’s female readership. Such stories were never out of place during Woolcott’s editorship and the presentation of Palmer as a “Great Australian” might suggest that his growing reputation in the 1920s was used not just to promote his story, but also to promote the cultural capital claimed by the magazine amongst a significant number of middle-class readers. Opportunities for Australian short-story writers to see their work featured in a magazine with such high production values and cultural position were extremely rare. The closure of the magazine in 1928 left a significant gap in Australian magazine culture for both writers and readers.

THE *AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL*

During the 1920s, Palmer contributed popular fiction to many daily and weekly newspapers, but he probably received his greatest exposure in the pages of the *Australian Journal*. Unlike the *Bulletin* and the *Triad*, the *Australian Journal* had few literary aspirations, remaining comfortable in its mission to provide Australian readers with simple, entertaining fiction in an all-fiction format. Despite this, Ron Campbell, editor of the *Australian Journal* for more than 25 years, prided himself on the quality of writing he selected for publication, and he regularly promoted the magazine's role in the development of Australian literature. Palmer was an *Australian Journal* writer for more than ten years, a relationship that added significantly to his income and provided a medium for his work that probably reached more people than the *Bulletin* and the *Triad* combined. The *Australian Journal* may not have approached the reputation that its more illustrious companions held in Australian magazine culture, but it provided a competitive space for Australian writing that served a very large group of general readers.

When Palmer began to feature in the *Australian Journal*, it was one of Australia's oldest periodicals, serving a readership that demanded popular fiction. Established in 1865 as a weekly newspaper, the *Australian Journal* took its monthly format four years later, running continuously from then until 1958. Vance Palmer's regular association with the magazine coincided with the appointment of Ron Campbell as editor. Campbell joined the *Australian Journal* as a budding crime writer in the early 1920s and subsequently took on the responsibility of producing a story each month under the pseudonym, Rex Grayson. He was appointed editor in 1926 and continued in that role until 1954 when the magazine was sold by its long-time owners Massina & Company. Under Campbell's watchful eye, the work of Australia's best popular fiction writers was printed in the *Australian Journal* and he was probably instrumental in convincing Palmer to become a contributor.

Palmer began a regular association with the *Australian Journal* in 1927 after the acceptance of the serial "Dubonnet's Daughter" on the condition that he use his real name rather than a pseudonym (Palmer Diaries, 11 December 1926). This suggests that he sought to remain anonymous with this rather inauspicious serial (it had been awaiting publication for many years). Campbell eventually relented and the serial ran under the name Rann Daly, a pseudonym that Palmer had used for novels, short fiction and articles for many years. He used his real name for many popular stories submitted to periodicals like the *Weekly Times* and the boys' weekly, *Pals*, so this was probably a device to appear less prolific rather than a signifier of his more

serious work. His use of both names for the *Australian Journal* attests to this, but it is significant that Vance Palmer is the dominant signature. In June 1928, he was introduced as a writer of Queensland life whose stories “sound the ring of the pioneer’s axe, the drumming hoofs of the stockriders horse, the wash of the waves along the Barrier, the voices of strong men”. Not simply a writer of adventure yarns or romantic stories, Vance Palmer was praised for the realism he brought to the lives of “ordinary everyday Australians”.

Regardless of the name attached to Palmer’s work for the *Australian Journal*, the Palmers frequently saw it as a distraction from his more serious work. In their diaries from this period, Nettie Palmer sympathises with Vance over his “monthly task” (11 November 1928) or the frequent “swatting at an AJ story” he was forced to do (December 1928) and she expressed regret to Leslie Rees in 1934 that Vance “still has to write blither-stories for some magazines” (Palmer and Palmer 100), making an obvious reference to the *Australian Journal*. Despite this regret, Vance Palmer and his pseudonymous alter-ego Rann Daly were often featured in the editor’s “In Passing” column where they were applauded for their achievements as novelists and story writers. In December 1930, Palmer was welcomed back from overseas. It was reported that *The Passage* had received favourable reviews in London and would soon be available in Australia, but readers might have been more interested in the report of his visit to Lord’s and The Oval to watch the Australian cricket team play.

The association with the *Australian Journal* brought significant exposure and also delivered a regular cheque to the Palmer household, providing much needed income to the freelance-writing couple. Palmer received £21 for “Dubonnet’s Daughter.” He contributed his first short story for the July 1927 issue, receiving £9/15/0, a figure that remained steady for the next few years before rising above £12 in 1930. By June 1930, Palmer had received almost £400 for his stories and serials, far exceeding the payments for short stories from any other source. He often completed the “monthly task” in several days, and so the £10 was a good return for the amount of time devoted to its composition. This ongoing association with the *Australian Journal* ensured that for several days each month Palmer’s mind was on the *Australian Journal* reader.

The success of the *Australian Journal* lay in its ability to please a range of readers with one issue by providing a variety of stories that included adventure, romance, humour and detective fiction. Xavier Herbert published his first short stories in the *Australian Journal*, eventually becoming a regular contributor, but he was less than kind to the readers that he served, referring

to them as “mutton-heads”: “The editor tells one that it is read by old maids and farmers and rail-road travellers, who are apparently morons” (Herbert, *Letters* 13). Campbell sought stories that would please an audience comprised mainly of women with little interest in literary form, but he prided himself on providing something of quality for every member of the family (in Herbert, *South of Capricornia* 4-5). When Campbell took over as editor, the magazine produced around 25,000 sales each month. This figure soon exceeded 50,000 and remained above that mark throughout the 1930s. The *Australian Journal* reached its peak circulation during the 1940s with sales of over 100,000, but as the 1950s proceeded and television began to compete for the leisure time of Australian readers and the money of advertisers, its circulation dropped too far to remain in print, eventually ceasing production in 1958 (Campbell, *First Ninety Years* 55-120 *in passim*). Nevertheless, for most of Campbell’s tenure as editor, the *Australian Journal* was one of the most widely circulating magazines in Australia, taking Palmer and those his fiction accompanied to more readers than many periodicals could provide.

Campbell’s management of the *Australian Journal* brought the work of many Australian writers to a large group of Australian readers each month. Most of these have faded from view over time, but they all maintained a significant position in Australian magazine culture during the 1920s and 1930s. Writers who regularly contributed stories during Palmer’s time at the *Australian Journal* included Myra Morris, Xavier Herbert, J. P. McKinney, Osmar E. White, Margaret Fane and Hilary Lofting, Georgia Rivers, J. H. M. Abbott, Bernard Cronin and “Rex Grayson”. Campbell praised these writers in a column marking Australian Authors’ Week in 1927, where he celebrated the support that the *Australian Journal* provided to the writing community (September 1927, 1124). Looking back over his career as editor in 1954, Campbell also validated the work of a number of these writers by selecting them for inclusion in his planned “Australian Journal Story Book”. Vance Palmer’s inclusion in this company during the decade in which his contributions to Australian literature were being celebrated in the pages of *Meanjin*, emphasizes the dual nature of his production and reception in the field of Australian magazine culture. He was, at the same time, a prominent contributor to the traditions of Australian literary fiction and popular fiction.

Palmer’s association with the *Australian Journal* required a regular supply of stories, but different versions of a number of these are found in the short story collections of the 1930s. Palmer’s *Australian Journal* stories maintained the usual settings that he used for fiction contributed to the *Bulletin*, taking

in mining towns, cattle stations, coastal towns and an occasional urban scene. Most stories move steadily towards a romantic conclusion where a man and woman, separated by some complication, reunite when that complication has been overcome. The *Australian Journal* also continued to serve as a testing-ground for Palmer's longer fiction, most notably, *The Passage*. A short story called "The Passage", published in the April 1928 issue of the *Australian Journal*, prefigures the basic plot and characters of the 1930 novel with the family situation of the protagonist and his attraction to a hotelier's daughter producing the main conflict. This is neatly resolved when the initial objections of the couple's parents are forgotten in *their* renewed romance, allowing the younger couple also to unite. Despite Nettie Palmer's segregation of Vance's serious fiction and his "blither" stories, the two come together in the three stories from *Separate Lives* and *Sea and Spinifex* that first appeared in the *Australian Journal*. "Delaney's Bus", rejected by the *Bulletin* several years earlier, and "A Turn of the Coin" were both published in the *Australian Journal* in versions significantly different to that found in *Separate Lives*.

An examination of "Delaney's Bus" will serve as an example of Palmer's revision of an *Australian Journal* story for collection in *Separate Lives*. In the *Separate Lives* version a rural bus-driver, struggling against modernity in the form of his rebellious teenage daughter and a young competitor for his mail-contract, is numbed to these challenges when he gets behind the wheel. His daughter leaves for the city and he later discovers that she has given birth to the child of an errant timber-worker. He briefly considers pursuing the young man to punish him, but retires, instead, to the wheel of his bus, removing himself from the modern world. For the *Australian Journal*, Palmer offered a different plot: a rural bus-driver, struggling against modernity in the form of his rebellious teenage daughter and a young competitor for his mail-contract, is numbed to these challenges when he gets behind the wheel. When his daughter leaves home after a dispute about her relationship with a young timber-worker, he pursues the young man, fearing that his daughter has taken laudanum in her grief. Finding the young man in a distant camp, he begins to assault him, but is stopped by the voice of his daughter. The couple have eloped, and, chastened by this revelation, he subsequently grants the young man his mail-contract and retires to happily tend his fruit trees and dairy cows. Rejected by the *Bulletin* in June 1926, "Delaney's Bus" was published in the *Australian Journal* after meeting the editorial requirements of a family magazine, removing any suggestion of the girl's pregnancy. Such themes would not have been out of place in the *Triad*, but this might have

been one of the factors that saw the story rejected by the *Bulletin*. Each of the stories found in *Separate Lives* and *Sea and Spinifex* that Palmer expanded to the six thousand-word limit of the *Australian Journal* replace the sombre endings of the book versions with the happy ending expected by most of the magazine's readers. The *Australian Journal* contains more than one hundred Vance Palmer and "Rann Daly" stories that meet these expectations, but the traces of text that reappear in Palmer's novels and collected stories demonstrate that his "popular" stories and his "serious" fiction were, at times, closer than one might expect.

Palmer's significant position as a storywriter in Australia's magazine culture of the 1920s and 1930s has been obscured by the attention paid to the collected stories of the 1930s. The Palmers played some part in this. In a 1931 letter to George Mackaness, Nettie Palmer revealed the method of selection she and her husband used in compiling collections of their best work:

I am collecting a book of essays, but the collecting mostly consists of elimination. My husband's collections of short stories are like that. His book, "Separate Lives", which will be here in a few months, has rejected nearly all that he would have admitted if he had completed it ten years ago. It will contain some of the best work in any form. (in Heseltine, n.9, 175)

*Separate Lives* was published in London by Stanley Paul & Co. in October 1931. Of the 1500 copies ordered, only 424 of these had been sold by December, leaving Palmer with a cheque for £12 (Palmer Papers, MSS 1174/30/58-59). Reviewing *Separate Lives* in 1931, M. Barnard Eldershaw wrote that the collection "is at once so completely Australia and so completely a work of art. We are at last finding ourselves spiritually and emotionally at home in the new world" (Eldershaw 231). The small number of books that were imported from London probably received similar responses amongst the small community of serious readers of Australian literature. But resting in the files of the *Bulletin*, the *Triad* and the *Australian Journal*, the stories occupy a space that takes us beyond the literary culture of Palmer's time. Reaching hundreds of thousands of readers and earning their author significantly more money than that provided by book publication, Palmer's magazine fiction offers a useful reference point for the study of magazine culture during the 1920s and 1930s. In his movement through the pages of newspapers and magazines we witness a chapter in the history of Australian writing, publishing and reading that deserves more attention.

## APPENDIX

### First Publication of Stories Collected in *Separate Lives*

- “Jettisoned”, *Bulletin*, 20 March 1929
- “The Jackass”, *Bulletin*, 1 November 1923
- “The Visit”, *Bulletin*, 7 February 1924
- “The Stump”, *Bulletin*, 3 March 1927
- “Marriage”, *Bulletin*, 5 October 1922
- “The Alien”, *Bulletin* (Xmas Edition), 8 December 1923; *Australasian*, 24 July 1926
- “Faith”, *Bulletin*, 10 May 1923
- “The Birthday”, *Triad*, 1 August 1926
- “Mrs Ryan’s Willie”, *The Golden North: Queensland’s Xmas Annual*, 1923
- “The Red Bullock”, *Bulletin*, 17 February 1916
- “The Eyes of the Children”, *Bulletin* (Xmas edition), 11 December 1926
- “The Casket”, *Bulletin*, 6 September 1923
- “Ancestors”, *Bulletin* (Xmas Edition), 7 December 1929
- “The Black Mare”, *Bulletin*, 16 March 1922
- “The Brigadier”, *Bulletin*, 12 December 1925; *Australian Story Book*, 1928
- “The Dragon”, *Bulletin*, 13 July 1922
- “Tobacco”, *Bulletin*, 24 May 1917
- “The Line”, Unknown
- “A Turn of the Coin”, *Australian Journal* 1 July 1929 [as “The Turn of the Coin” by Rann Daly]
- “The Cook’s Mate”, Unknown
- “The Interloper”, *Daily Mail*, 6 March 1927; *Bulletin*, 16 December 1931
- “Delaney’s Bus”, *Australian Journal*, 1 January 1931

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The figures referred to in this essay are estimated from searches made on the AustLit database: [www.austlit.edu.au](http://www.austlit.edu.au). While there is margin for error in such calculations, the results provide the best indication available. As the *Australian Journal* is not indexed for the period under investigation, figures calculated for that magazine have been done manually.

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