

Country and City in the Short Stories of Margaret Fane and Hilary Lofting

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At an October 2011 ASAL conference on writers and the Blue Mountains, I presented a paper on regional references in the writing of Margaret Fane (Beatrice Osborn) and Hilary Lofting. Like that paper, this essay explores how these formerly well-known but now largely forgotten writers of popular short stories separately and collaboratively drew on extensive experience of residence in Sydney's inner suburbs and remoter Blue Mountains settlements to create two distinctive literary sites that imaged their sense of an Australian imaginary. This essay is correspondingly biographical and illustrative, though it can be said at the outset that the couple's fiction, in particular, reveals tensions between the stultifying and the attractive elements of urban (and suburban life), and at times between the ostensible advantages and crushing disadvantages of rural life. In stories set in Sydney slums, fashionable city addresses and leafy suburbs, or in closer rural communities or remote bush farms, the writers foregrounded their characters' attempts to embody individualism, aesthetic appreciation and creative effort in the face of equalising societal pressure.

The authors did not resolve the social issues they portrayed. They wrote in the contemporary romance, crime and mystery genres of popular fiction. Their stories often involved people attempting exploits or quests and overcoming obstacles to effect a conclusion in which emotional justice served. If some of their stories bear more than a whiff of presumption that domestic topics entailed relegation of women's and men's roles to conventional expectations, they could, on occasion, create mould-breaking characters.

The writing represents something of a literary equivalent to the discoveries of the Australian filmmakers of the 1920s and 30s and of artists like Thea Proctor, Gladys Owen, Ethel Spowers, Grace Cossington Smith, and Margaret Preston. In the world of the Fane and Lofting stories, landscape and even cityscapes are far from bleak; a natural setting takes on something of the appeal that it had for Adrian Feint, the Dee Why painters, and poets who saw it not as drab and soulless but as intricate, alluring and, in the words of Fane and Lofting in their story 'The Sentimental Thief', 'wonderful' and even 'gorgeous' (54). Interestingly, the writers found working class districts like Woolloomooloo and Darlinghurst, and fashionable inner city apartment dwellings equally engaging: the backstreets and close-packed houses' inhabitants made up a cast of near-Dickensian characters enacting domestic moral dramas where redemptive acts of courage or, on occasion, passionate crimes might occur. The scenes of such adventures and melodramas recall the urban settings familiar to audiences of Longford's *The Sentimental Bloke* (filmed by Raymond Longford in Woolloomooloo), and society dramas like the McDonagh sisters' (Isobel, Paulette and Phyllis) society dramas such as *The Far Paradise* (1928, filmed in both urban and rural settings) and *The Cheaters* (1930).

In some respects, the lives and aspirations of Osborn and Lofting parallel those of many of their romantic creations. In what follows, I first sketch Osborn's life up to and including her attachment to Lofting and the locations that formed the settings of their earliest joint fictions. Because their stories have lacked consideration for some three-quarters of a century (in part

because of the status of popular short fiction, the romance tendency of their work and perhaps more obviously, the work remains uncollected), I have found it helpful to outline some salient aspects of their writing before resuming the biographical narrative to indicate Lofting's European and other experience and the extent of his infatuation with Australia in his independently written stories as well as those written in conjunction with Osborn.

The couple's frequent moves around Sydney are reflected in stories that reflect their chameleon-like immersion in a range of urban and rural milieux and their easy familiarity with aspects of high and middlebrow culture. They tempered their fictions to editorial tastes, and were at first encouraged by their friend (and partner in Osborn's case, at the time when she first met Lofting), David McKee Wright, literary editor of the Sydney *Bulletin*.

Lofting first contributed adventure stories set in Argentinean engineering camps to the *Bulletin*, and he and Osborn later contributed stories of Sydney slum life to the same journal. For the P.F.A. (Pastoral Finance Association) *Quarterly*, *Sydney Mail*, the *Australian Journal*, the *Australian Women's Mirror* and the *Australian Women's Weekly*, they provided stories whose discourse reflected the more sophisticated tastes and aspirations of readers targeted by editors who treated suburban themes and especially women's interests as important rather than as diversions from more traditionally newsworthy concerns. Like the predominantly male proprietors and editors of these middlebrow periodicals, Osborn and Lofting saw the value of catering to an expanded readership of stories that introduced dramatic events, mystery and romance in otherwise ordinary and recognisably Australian middle-class lives.

While the popularity of the stories might be ascribed to the wish-fulfilment element apparent in many of them, the stories broadly portray country-oriented life and town-oriented life as possessing competing attractions as well as far from unambiguously appealing facets. If some of the focal characters of such stories escape to enjoy emotional and physical renovation in a *plein air* life beyond the city, a handful contrive to win some contentment in their familiar haunts in the face of restrictions on ambition and the equalising pressure of over-curious or obstructive peers.

At times, the couple's works veer toward sentimentalism of the urban poor and reinforcement of gender inequality and racial stereotypes, in the manner of many of their popular literary contemporaries. In stories of low and high life, they unflinchingly employ melodramatic cliché. Some of their middle and upper-middle class people exemplify the mores of the beau monde, including self-absorbed social climbers and frivolous parasites. While Osborn and Lofting most frequently write of middle-class characters, they characteristically endorse those who query and abandon conformist expectations to initiate a mode of life that represents a middle way between poverty and unreflecting consumerism. Fane and Lofting heroise individualism, variously expressed in the uncompromising exercise of talents and embrace of a life-affirming relationship with nature. Especially in their collaborative fiction, the nexus between the attitudes and linguistic habits of readers and of the narrators and characters of the stories is by no means straightforward.

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The literary collaboration of the two writers began soon after they formed a relationship in 1918. They co-created stories that found favour with editors and readers of the *Bulletin* and other non-specialist magazines that provided matter for leisure, entertainment and information. The stories carried the attribution Margaret Fane and Hilary Lofting though many appeared under their joint pen name Francis Osborn. Prior to their collaborative work, they had established separate identities. Adopting the pen name Margaret Fane from the start, Beatrice Osborn (1887-1960) wrote romantic and comic poems and stories for adults and children. Independently, writing as Hilary Lofting or Francis Brien—a conflation of one of his own and one of his father's given names—Lofting (1881-1939, oldest of five brothers including Hugh Lofting, later author of the Dr Dolittle books) produced travel writing, occasional poems, short stories, and book reviews. According to their daughter Nina Beaton, the couple's agent handled over seven hundred of their productions (Beaton, 1988). The agency, Napier, Gardiner & Co., of 79 Pitt Street Sydney, had been established to assist professional writers to place work with Australian and London publishers, and it offered advice and criticism to amateur writers (1935).

Twice rejected for service by the British Army, Lofting had arrived in Australia in 1915 with his English wife May (née Wheatcroft) whom he married at St Giles, London, before embarking. Their son Paul was born in the same year, and a daughter, Elizabeth ('Betty') later born, before the couple separated. Lofting met Osborn around 1917, when she was living with David McKee Wright, the *Bulletin's* Red Page editor. Osborn had four sons by Wright and an earlier son whom her parents raised. Wright was already attracted to, or by some accounts under siege from Zora Cross, a younger poet freshly-arrived from Queensland. Wright and Cross set up home together a couple of years later, eventually domiciling themselves at Glenbrook, while Lofting abandoned an unhappy marriage to become Osborn's devoted partner, and father of three children until his death in 1939. Osborn and Lofting lived in successive locations including Woolloomooloo, Balmoral, Pennant Hills, Braemar near Mittagong, the Blue Mountains, Gosford, and back to inner-suburban addresses, their shifts often resulting from May Lofting's pursuit of Hilary for arrears in maintenance for herself and her children. The Fane and Lofting stories consequently reflect familiarity with an unusual breadth of town and country locations, as well as places that Lofting had earlier visited.

Lofting had begun publishing stories and travel articles on exotic cities for the *Bulletin* within two years of his arrival in Australia. He drew on his pre-War careers as a civil engineer in Europe and South America, and as a London journalist. Some of the later collaborative fictions also portray aspects of those experiences such as the mingling of races in frontier society, or the activities of political operatives in cosmopolitan cities, but Fane and Lofting's jointly produced stories more characteristically shed light on the social relations of white Australians at every level in the interwar years. Their *Bulletin* tales typically drew on shared scenes of life in working-class Sydney suburbs and on remoter small farms and soldier-settler allotments; they are sometimes comic though more frequently naturalistic and melodramatic.

Stories published in the *Sydney Mail*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, and *Australian Woman's Mirror* generally portray a more fortunate social set at home in city clubs, Macquarie Street and Elizabeth Bay flats, Blue Mountains residences and holiday retreats, country-house parties, Island plantations, and hotels and art galleries in the European centres of culture. 'The

Lips of Naa', a story that ran for four issues of the *Sydney Mail* in June and July 1926, was set on a coffee plantation with a diffusely fictional locality. 'Feed the Brute', an *Australian Journal* story of 1 June 1932 (pp. 651-653) concerns a young Melbourne woman artist's efforts to gain the attention of the owner of a Fijian coffee plantation. The fictions dealing with this top-end society reinforce codes of manners similar to those of the well-to-do protagonists of the contemporary fiction of Dornford Yates, Dorothy L. Sayers, Evelyn Waugh and Aldous Huxley—that is, characters often exercising discretionary ethics in matters of self-advancement or maintenance of the social order. Beatrice Osborn's son Ullin McKee Wright, (born 1915) who lived with the couple from 1918, recalled that his parents' stories for the *Sydney Mail* (the weekly magazine of the *Sydney Morning Herald*) 'were required to have female appeal' (Wright, 1988). One inference we might draw from such a range of stories is that Osborn and Lofting astutely gauged the tone of every publication for which they wrote. For the *Sydney Mail*, they portrayed the inhabitants of Potts Point and the fashionable North Shore as poised and refined, for the most part enjoying a life that might be the envy of the magazine's readers were it not that the conditions portrayed were so clearly infused with a moral element concerning the sorrows and perils of the well-to-do. A hard-case business mogul suffers a heart attack through too strenuous pursuit of wealth; an indulged society wife at length the reality of her dysfunctional family; a man at the top of his profession discover his wife a flighty cheat. Such 'lessons' might suggest contentment with one's lot, or they could simply present the age-old tragedy and comedy of life in contemporary Australian settings and language. At all accounts, they suggested that the dramas of contemporary or historical societies portrayed in imported books and on the screen from America and England had their counterparts in stories of life closer at hand.

The Fane and Lofting people from the lower echelons are small shopkeepers, pensioners, jailbirds, single or deserted mothers, deadbeats and the unemployed. The action is set in Woolloomooloo (where the writers first lived) or in suburbs from the upper North Shore to Pennant Hills, Parramatta, Granville and other localities where they subsequently sojourned. Cathedral Street, Brazier, Burge and Essex Streets, and others at the bottom end of Woolloomooloo were home to crowded boarding houses, modest dwellings, coal and wood merchants, the fish markets, corner stores, cheap cafes, and a thriving underworld. In the 1929 *Bulletin* story, 'The 'Loo', Marty, an old one-armed storekeeper, reflects that half of his customers have had some member of their family behind bars (51). Lofting had ushered such a cast and locality on stage two months earlier, in November 1918, in his solo story 'Spiky of the 'Loo'.

In the early 1920s, Osborn and Lofting moved to Rhondda Valley near Lawson, and then to Faulconbridge and Glenbrook in the Blue Mountains. These and other localities are sometimes given fictionalised names. 'Bongaderie', in the January 1926 *Sydney Mail* story 'The Spanish Comb', for example, is the fictional site of the studio-home of the famous artist Paul Sichel. The house is reportedly a place of 'regular Bohemian upheaval' and 'Byronic orgies' that scandalise 'respectable and censorious' citizens of Bongaderie (16)—much as reputed goings-on at Norman Lindsay's home at Faulconbridge offended strait-laced contemporaries like Zora Cross's sister Helen Somerville. In other stories, mystery and romance surround some of the mountain residences. In 'The Smiling Face', Oliver Spencer, an English-born engineer who has adopted Australia as his home, commends the 'bonzer' English gardens that his ex-Indian Civil Service friend Andrew Wakefield and Wakefield's unnervingly silent Indian servant Daoud maintain at 'Woodlands' (apparently Leura). Wakefield's home is a treasure house of Indian artefacts and a place of serenity, but

Wakefield is haunted by the deaths of seven former colleagues, all of them high officials in India, and he fears he will be next. It remains to Wakefield's Australian-born neighbour Basil Dampier, exemplar of 'a kind of heroic attractiveness', to shoot Daoud in the latter's very act of attempting Wakefield's life. Dampier has independently investigated Wakefield's background, and discovered Daoud's record as a demagogue incensed against the British for their general treatment of the native population and especially because Wakefield's father had sentenced Daoud's father to death for murder. The story contrasts Wakefield's earlier trust in his servant's loyalty with the Dampier's attitude to 'that nigger': at the conclusion, Dampier pointedly asks his host, 'what about "White Australia" now, Andy?' (38).

The conservative tone of 'The Smiling Face' reflects the *Sydney Mail's* acceptance of stories that, however entertaining, adhered to the conventions of racial and class condescension. Immigrants like Wakefield bring a certain cachet to a district; parvenus, even those who are Australian born, can bring down the tone. A September 1926 story, 'The Sentimental Thief' is one of several concerning the louche Elizabeth Bay poodle-faker and connoisseur Theodore ('Teddy') Lee. Teddy invites his neighbour Drew, and arriviste stock-market gambler, for a weekend at what he calls his 'camp', a luxuriously appointed lodge 'a few miles out of Lawson', and drives him there in his 1926 Rolls Royce (19, 55). There, he effectively imprisons Drew and browbeats him into following his often-stated dream of cultivating prize dahlias rather than gambling on the stock exchange and thereby ruining his family—especially the daughter who has attracted Teddy's interest. The story endorses conservative values—Teddy and his mother take inherited wealth for granted—but the 'moral' is of a piece with a consistent theme of the Fane-Lofting stories, that one should abandon 'artificial' means of attaining happiness, and assert individualism. Attitudes to class are ambivalent: if Teddy shares some of the attitudes and eccentric manners of Dorothy L. Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey, many of his friends and neighbours are absurd creatures.

Fane and Lofting take aim at the greedy, the affected, the snobbish, and the ill-mannered nouveau riche. Unexceptionally, the latter are exploited by their servants, employees and clients. Members of the great landowning class live at a remove from the protagonists of the Fane and Lofting tales. To the poorly paid bush schoolteacher Tom Hood, in the story 'Boots' for instance, the pastoral families are as mysterious as the rhetorical devices of poetry he attempts to understand. At story's end, Tom has been enlightened to the beauties of literature by a former teacher turned swagman and has acceded to the laconic courtesy of a wealthy pastoralist who invites him to take part in the landowning community's sporting recreations (17). Tom, it is implied, will achieve success in his studies and social activities.

Individualism and independence, exemplified by living in accord with needs rather than aiming to satisfy undignified desire, is best asserted by pursuing an active life in a natural setting. Fane and Lofting crafted heroic types of Australian men and women employing their abilities and talents in the service of instinctive 'right' action. A shopkeeper performs a redemptive act to reinvigorate a relationship; a jobbing printer attains hero-status in the eyes of his rooming-house peers as a result of his selfless rescue of a returned serviceman; and a struggling teacher in a remote school awakens as a result of a charitable act to the transformative power of art. In 'A Life for a Man', published in 1932, a Woolloomooloo idler is shamed by his son's enterprise in growing and selling vegetables, to declare, 'Living here from hand to mouth in a back street—three rooms and a balcony in a slum [...] It's a place on the land we should have, and eating the fresh green and growing it ourselves. Putting our lips to the work of our own hands, and safe from all times, good or bad' (344).

Osborn and Lofting frequently invoke and endorse beauty: music (and especially song), painting and poetry, are among the highest goods life bestows. In the stories treating with middle-class and elite society, references to artists, performers and collectors abound. In stories set in working-class and slum society, beauty takes the form of cultivating flower and vegetable gardens or practising skills related to husbandry. A talent for a particular sport, or an eye for a finely composed view may indicate redemptive aesthetic taste. Competitive sport and engagement in productive activity are alternatives to gang membership or solo deviant behaviour. The stories endorse physical occupations: several of their heroes are alert, physically fit youngsters. In the 1928 story 'Independence', the painter Miss Lauder, engaged to the rich Mr Trevor Hills of Potts Point, observes among the 'splendid people' of Woolloomooloo, the 'hard beauty' of a young male model's 'Australian head, its half dramatic harshness softened by his smile'. She learns independence through observing his graceful swimming and diving and his rebuff of a North Shore girl's patronising invitation to her birthday party where he would be a performing curiosity (36). Inspired by his assertion of self-worth, she decides to live and work among the people of the 'Loo, to better interpret their humanity. Associated with this highlighting of gracefulness is an unstated endorsement of the idea that good physique and posture are allied to a mind equipped for useful contribution to adult life. In effect, the fictions affirm the claims of post World War I physical educators, that good posture was related to good health (Bailey *et al*).

Woolloomooloo's denizens fascinated Osborn and Lofting. The suburb was additionally attractive as providing cheap lodgings and proximity to the newspaper and publishing establishments the couple relied on, and to theatres, art galleries and concerts that they reviewed. It was also relatively close, by tram or ferry, to the beaches where Osborn and her boys loved to swim. It appealed to the cosmopolitan Lofting and to the bohemian in Osborn. Both had been brought up in far other circumstances than those of the people at hand, whose habits they attempted to present sympathetically. Despite imbuing their characters with motives and attractive traits though, the tales of the urban and rural poor never wholly avoided a maudlin note. Additionally, while their characters rarely question the social or political conditions under which they live, the more enterprising of them contrive to break from the monotony of commercial or servile drudgery or unemployment by a sudden act of will provoked by chance acceptance of an offer too good to refuse. Osborn and Lofting undoubtedly understood the limits of social analysis in what was meant to be entertaining fiction in the journals for which they wrote, but they nonetheless identified with the poor and the workers when they spoke of their indigence or voiced discontent with the social set-up. Concerning political action, Lofting's American tales dwelt at times on plots and revolutions, but his protagonists are supporters of the establishment, opposed to organised labour and political agitation by ostensibly democratic parties.

The couple brought individual as well as complementary experiences and literary talents to bear in their joint creations, and demarcation is sometimes relatively clear. Osborn discussed their methodology in a January 1929 interview (one in an extended series on contemporary Australian poets, novelists and journalists, conducted by Zora Cross for the *Australian Woman's Mirror* between 1926 and 1935), remarking

I usually think out everything first, you know—the plot, the characters, and what they do, and where they go, and why they are all mixed up anyhow. Then when everything is complete in my mind, I tell it in elaborate detail to Mr Lofting. Not just the bare bones—everything. I describe the room or road, or whatever it is

where things begin, and the conversations—all in minute detail. Often I dictate the conversations word for word and Mr Lofting takes them down. I'm every particular about conversations. Then there is always a discussion, of course. I may have bits that don't fit. You know how nasty some characters can be. Mr Lofting may suggest the putting in of a character to make things smoother....

Then he goes away and writes it. I have to hear every bit of the story as it goes on.... Oh, no, I don't bother to look at the spelling, which is one good thing. But I have to keep the feeling for the story and the general make-up. Mr Lofting is much better at the atmosphere than I am. Fortunately he knows practically the whole wide world, so I can send my characters anywhere, knowing that he can handle them in whatever surroundings I choose for them. Also his newspaper work before he came to Australia [in 1915] consisted partly in interviewing a wide variety of people—from a petty king to a mere stage comedian—so that I am never at a loss for a character. I consider that his special gift is for characterisation, probably owing to the scores of people he has met personally all over the world. We have written dozens of stories together. Sometimes he has had to hand the stories over to me to do myself, where he has found them too Australian, while I have had to leave South American stories entirely to him.

Oh, yes, we each write stories separately, but he is generous enough to flatter me by telling me that the story part is safer in my hands than in his. All the "stories" in his *Mirror* tales, for instance, have been mine. I let him do all the hard work, so to speak—the writing up. (10)

Earlier in the interview, Osborn told Cross, 'I'm so perfectly lazy at the manual work of writing', and 'I never could spell, and when one has to write down words and spell them, too, it becomes a real task'. Taking these remarks together, and given Lofting's greater newspaper experience, it is probable that he contributed something more than 'manual work' on the stories before they went to editors' desks. On the evidence of relatively frequent disparities in the speech-register of narrators and characters, Osborn's comment on the 'too Australian' stories points to her easiness with Australian colloquialisms, in contrast to Lofting's more formal register that was honed on English journalistic practice and book reviewing. Linguistic tension in their stories is subtle, but at times, a word like 'bonzer', even in a working-class character's dialogue, shatters tonal integrity in a way the authors might not have intended. In the October 1926 story 'You'd Never Believe It', a relatively unsophisticated up-country farm girl farewells her lover, about to embark on a business trip, with the jarring remark, 'Felix, Dearest, [...] I feel that my faith in you may be justified during this trip' (16). Osborn's and Lofting's independent columns, essays and reviews are by contrast more consistently coherent in register.

Their individual styles diverge in several respects. Lofting is brusquer in action scenes, furnishing settings with telling detail and moving rapidly from scene to scene. As often, he presents panoramas of city and country scenes. His narrators and characters assemble anecdotes that build up tension. Osborn deftly sketches the stories' plots, generates vivid, even lurid crises, and provides a fluent account of her characters' thoughts. These are 'rule of thumb' divisions, and the two writers' styles overlap, so precise attribution of share in the stories is not as self-evident as Osborn's remarks on her plotting versus Lofting's 'writing up' suggests. Sometimes, their stories' resolutions strain credulity though given the pace of their composition and the volume of fiction the couple generated, the quality of the stories is still

impressive. Osborn and Lofting's composite manner clearly had appeal; their stories were in demand, and their agent's efforts resulted in an American magazine paying the largest sum they received for a single story.

For the most part, the stories that appear in the *Sydney Mail* and *Sydney Morning Herald* combine love interest and emphasis on the effects of nationality or place on character. Romantic love is common, and plots often include reconciliation of family or other disputes, and concern for others' welfare. Love of place is more frequently evident than strident patriotism. Lofting's celebration of Australian place and manners sits comfortably with Osborn's predilection for characters who, whatever their social caste, wear their consciousness of national identity more lightly. Though Osborn and Lofting's joint productions sometimes lay stress on a fictional character's identity, Osborn rarely does so in her journalism, for the *P.F.A. Quarterly*, later the *N.Z.L. Quarterly*, for example, unless to emphasise the distinctive Australian features of a writer or artist's work. In her cultural roundup column 'Letter From Margaret' in these periodicals, she reviewed current books, plays, exhibitions, musical productions, and wrote on local and visiting writers, journalist friends, and matters close to home, such as her Blue Mountains residences, neighbours, and a Repatriation hospital.

Lofting's independent writing is marked by curiosity about ways in which Australian and others adapt to New World ways. In 1923, he recalled how his enthusiasm for Australia was first aroused in 1910 when a London bookseller offered him a copy of Arthur H. Adams' *Galahad Jones*, a book that celebrated the 'absurd, heroic lives' of ordinary people; he had delighted in the 'drift of boronia perfume' that infused the tale, and said 'I didn't know what boronia was then, but it didn't matter... I loved the book' (3). In 'Red Flame and the Breeze at Bondi', his earliest travel sketch in the *Bulletin*, published in November 1917, he repaid the discovery:

Billjim transplants well, although I say it myself. In his homeland he is up against it from birth—drought and bushfire and flood. All endurance he learns very early. Struggle is his natural environment. In foreign lands I find him serene and rather silent: always of a precise and assured dignity in which unquestionably he is not clothed at home. There is a polish, too, that I do not see at home. [...]

Up and down the world's ways I have seen some men and things: the slack Englishman, snobbish and cold, holding very responsible positions, and holding them well; the buoyant, windy American, getting the uttermost effort out of his subordinates and loafing himself; the fiery Frenchman and Italian, doing vividly a week's work in a day, and anon a day's work in a month; the distant, arrogant Spaniard, doing nothing at all with smiling urbanity. The Australian I see always doing his share, and often more than that, with a quietude that is rather remarkable in the younger nations. He absorbs from his childhood a tacit acquiescence in this need of hard work—of hard, silent work. Hence, no doubt, in lands where all men do not work, he stands forward a little in dignified value, and its unconsciousness is its best quality. (7)

Lofting contrasted the 'call' of Buenos Aires with that of Sydney, cities he found congenial for different reasons. He had been attracted to Spain and the Spanish language early, as his 1936 story, 'Souvenir', reveals: plainly based on Lofting's early employment, it records a

young man's sortie into his favourite Italian and Spanish cafés in London, and an encounter with an alluring Czech femme fatale (53-56 and 59). One of his favourite haunts was Monico's restaurant and café in Regent Street, where Joseph Conrad invited Edward Garnett to drop in for a glass of Vermouth (261). Lofting's travel articles and memoirs for the *Triad* and *Bulletin* commenced in 1917; those for the *P.F.A. Quarterly Magazine* and *N.Z.L. Quarterly Magazine* (and the *New Nation* magazine which incorporated the earlier titles) ran through the 1920s and reflect his interest in the history and culture of every place he visited. His earliest short stories drew on his surveying work for one of the large British companies that built the provincial Argentinean rail services, and he recreated scenes of jealousy and revenge in small towns, and of assassination in political quarrels.

Lofting was adept at flourishes of local colour, and national 'types' abound in his travel writing as well as his fiction, often appearing in appreciative ways in the former, noting paradoxical impulses in the Irish, Dutch, Spanish, Argentinean, Indian, Chinese, and others he had encountered. Recounting his European experiences in the *Bulletin*, for instance, he dwelt on the history, architecture and art (especially paintings) that had impressed him. His accounts of cities such as Hong Kong and Delhi (written for the *N.Z.L. Quarterly*) give a more fleeting impression of lived experience: his European and South American locations are described from the point of view of a working and even resident observer. The accounts of Asian and Arabic-speaking capitals and locations are more redolent of mass-tourism brochures, and many appear to have been compiled from encyclopaedic and promotional materials as much as from brief sojourns. In his fiction, including the co-written stories, foreigners are sometimes figures of mystery or menace, but always of fascination. In 'Transplanted Cockneys', a 1918 memoir of a forty-mile walk with six other laid-off English "bushwhackers" from the Bogan River to Nevertire one winter soon after his arrival in Australia, Lofting reproduced the colourful language of a fellow migrant who had been in every gaol in the London region, and of Ike, a former fish carter. The party roughed it across the outback, arguing about the way to their destination, lighting a fire at night and witnessing a fight between Ike and a Russian who enjoyed practical jokes. At the time of writing, three years after the event, Lofting supposed that 'those sad Ishmaels' were probably still bushwhacking 'and getting cheques and cashing and drinking them', and he concluded 'We reached Nevertire (before any of us died of old age), cashed the cheques proudly and spent them royally. But I should like to meet the man who christened it Nevertire' (95). His tone recalls that of Lawson, who travelled by rail to Bourke via Dubbo in September 1892 and similarly remarked 'Somebody told me that the country was very dry on the other side of Nevertire. It is. I wouldn't like to sit on it anywhere. [...] I'd rather settle on the water; at least, until some gigantic system of irrigation is perfected in the West' (50). Beatrice and Hilary drew on Hilary's back-country New South Wales experience in stories like 'A Cup of Tea', whose heroine has come from Barren, north of Cobar, to seek her lover in Sydney (680-682, 690).

Lofting and Osborn generally endorse men and women of no particular social distinction who follow their bent instead of meekly or grudgingly submitting to custom. Many stories concern young people who escape from intolerable family or work circumstances (frequently both) and embrace more congenial occupations, frequently on smallholdings where they can develop skills and work towards self-sufficiency. Sometimes a break or escapade suffices to cause a revolution in thought for a printer, lawyer, insurance-assessor, country doctor, or lady's companion: all these come to look on life, properly considered, as offering alternative possibilities for achieving self-assurance and a measure of happiness. In general, the social

setup is unthreatened by such small-time flights into rural or other self-improvement.

Osborn had rebelled against oppressive aspects of her genteel Melbourne upbringing, notably the endurance of strained politeness among her father's business colleagues and clients (he worked as a stock and station agent), and acquiescence in tiresome pastimes among her peers (Sharkey, 116). Her passion had been aroused by extensive, sometimes surreptitious reading, and by opportunities to see celebrated actors like Maggie Moore, in Moore's production of *Struck Oil*, soon after Moore and J.C. Williamson's acrimonious separation. She read voraciously throughout her life and her *P.F.A. Quarterly Magazine* column during the early 1920s reveals the range of fiction she preferred: she recommended to her readers the stories in the *Saturday Evening Post* and titles by Dorothy M. Richardson, Dowell O'Reilly, Edgar Lee Masters, Rebecca West, and D.H. Lawrence. Of *The Boy in the Bush*, she writes:

All the Sydney critics say the same things—the book is squalor, it is unnecessarily and unpleasantly sexy, even that it is 'filthy'. Personally, I cannot see it. D.H. Lawrence sees us as primitive people in a new, rugged country, and he chooses rugged, primitive imagery to tell his story. I like 'The Boy in the Bush', and I think D.H. Lawrence is the only visiting novelist (he was only here a few months), who has caught something of the real spirit of Australia. But I'd be afraid to say so before the critics. Anyway, if you are not afraid of being shocked, read the book and see for yourself". (157)

Her commendation of Dorothy M. Richardson (127-128), to whom Virginia Woolf and others attributed the invention of stream of consciousness writing as a distinctly feminist mode, is also significant. Osborn's fiction contains passages of apparently spontaneous conversation that is as loose and fluent as the 'voiced' thoughts of her fictional characters. Her 'Letter from Margaret' columns have the air of a narrator thinking aloud in an unedited, associative manner, though the motifs—spontaneous delight in nature, friendship, or a work of art—provide anchors for the impressions. She engages in repetitive and circling references to remembered pleasures, including those associated with places and people drawn from her earlier life among patrician Melbournians, or men and women of letters and the arts, whom she met in company with David McKee Wright, A.G. Stephens and others.

Osborn's early Victorian and Sydney experience of patrician and professional society converged with Lofting's in countless stories. One such is 'The Empty Boon', a 1926 tale concerning the return to Sydney of the civil engineer Lance Crawford after twenty years absence building railways in Africa, Asia, Europe and America. His wife now dead, and his son following his career as an engineer in Lagos, Crawford retires to a hotel in Cronulla, scene of his childhood years. His landlady's mother recognises him and tells him that Nancy, his former sweetheart, is a local doctor's widow. Crawford meets Nancy and becomes infatuated with her beautiful daughter, in whom he sees her mother's features and manner that first captivated him. The daughter ultimately refuses him, and he finds happiness instead with his former love. Here, Osborn's recollections of a pre-War Cronulla boarding house merge with Hilary's of his engineering career. The story opens with Crawford's recent memories of Madrid and his homesickness there for Australia. It transpires that Nancy, too, has travelled in Europe including Spain and has thought of him. Towards the conclusion, she observes to Crawford, 'We seem to know nothing at all of the real things of life until we are truly grown up. And I think it's because we never think in the first years, because we never give ourselves the peace and rest to think' (25).

Such collaborative pooling of memories underpinned many of the stories. The plot of the earlier mentioned story, 'The Spanish Comb', revolves around the identity of one of the artist's models. Sichel embarks on the portrait of an Amazonian Australian girl wearing a Spanish comb, but when her reclusive friend stands in to model the costume, he decides the imposing Australian girl is all wrong for the picture: the friend, he discovers actually has 'Spanish blood', and he creates a portrait that makes her into the personification of Spain itself. The Osborn-Lofting collaboration builds here on Beatrice's Spanish ancestry as well as Hilary's nostalgia for Madrid, where the story's Spanish woman will travel with the man who has fallen in love with her. So much of each partner's knowledge, style and sense of denouement is merged in the collaboration as to make it one of the more fascinating joint productions.

In his solo stories, Hilary had earlier made much of the Spanish temperament he had encountered. In 'How They Got Malzon', his first *Lone Hand* story in 1919, the Melbourne-born secretary of the Buenos Aires chief of police describes his superior as 'theatrical, in a way, a mixture of queer pride, of kindness, and what looks like—well, like damned foolishness. At times he is harsh and as hard as ice; at other times as soft as butter—too soft'(42). Like the fictional Melbourne man, Lofting spoke Spanish and his affinity for the language and culture inflects even the 'Tommy Tucker' stories that appeared serially in the *Sydney Mail* in 1927 and in the 1928 volume *The Happy Vagabond*: in the course of recounting his adventures, Tommy is in the habit of addressing some of his female admirers as 'Señora'. Perhaps this parallels a habit of Lofting's in conversation with 'Beppo' (Beatrice), whose pride in her Spanish heritage and features was part of her attractiveness. Her father Walter Ferdinand Osborn was the Colombo-born son of a Spanish-American couple from New Hampshire who came to Australia to investigate business prospects. Accounting for her love of romantic 'faery-places' in the Blue Mountains, Osborn wrote in one of her *P.F.A. Quarterly Magazine* columns in 1921,

My grandmother was a Spaniard—perhaps that's what accounts for it. When I sit under the soft light of the tree-ferns and listen to the water's tinkle—my own Australian bush that I love—and I am in the cool dim *patio* of a Spanish house. The rustling of the gum leaves becomes the whisper of lazy, slipped feet on the *patio* floor, and through all the drowsy air come the splashing and singing of the *patio* fountain. Outside the thick walls is the Spain of my dreams and vague rememberings, the Spain I have never seen, but have known since birth. (137)

The couple's shared experience of living among less privileged people also complicates efforts to tease out individual input to the co-created stories set among working class people, the homeless, and petty criminals. 'Bittersweet', a 1928 *Bulletin* story in which an old man reflects on mortality and demographic changes in the 'Loo, evokes an edgy melancholy like that of Raymond Longford's 1919 *Sentimental Bloke* (23-24). Another story, 'Little Feller' records the adoption by an old, childless couple of the illegitimate child of a dying girl rejected by her Catholic family. The tale concludes with the bathetic revelation that Marty and his wife (the stories are parts, in effect, of a discontinuous narrative.) have mistaken the nature of each other's independent concern for the dying girl (33). Mary's five-years-long state of depression following the death of their adopted child is the subject of the 1929 story, 'The 'Loo', referred to earlier. Marty seeks to revive his wife's will to live by selling up their shop and taking her back to her Irish birthplace, but at the moment of departure, he decides flight is no escape and brings her back to their shop, where she recovers. The 1932 story 'A

Life for a Man' also finds a role for Marty as benefactor of a boy's effort to raise money for himself and his family.

Osborn and Lofting's experiences of unconventional liaisons and the deaths of children undoubtedly contributed to the emotions they attributed to characters of such tales. Their first son died soon after birth, and Lofting's legitimate first son, Paul, was killed before his eyes while waiting for a tram in William Street in November 1929 (*Sydney Morning Herald*: 1929, 1930). An extraordinary number of the Fane and Lofting characters, young or adult, have one parent or none. Aunts are commoner than parents, and the Fane and Lofting aunts occupy the *deus ex machina* firmament with those of Saki, P.G. Wodehouse and Dorothy L. Sayers. Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster declares, in a 1925 novel for instance, 'It's a curious thing how many of my pals seem to have aunts and uncles who are their main source of supply' (Wodehouse: 92). Fane and Lofting middle and upper-class characters occasionally find themselves recipients of a legacy, but working-class orphans or children of single parents have few if any such expectations. The best that can occur to a lonely child, like the protagonist of the 1929 story, 'Not Too Clever', is that a sympathetic pensioner neighbour might donate enough money to effect the escape of the boy and his beloved grandfather from their substandard rooming-house and the boy's tyrannical landlady aunt (51-52). Working-class aunts, as a rule, are thoroughly beastly people. In the 1919 story, 'Bim', Aunt Aggie taunts thirteen-year old Ronny's efforts at sculpture, and on the death of Ronny's mother, kills the woman's pet parrot with a broom. The story concludes with orphaned Ronny telling his dog 'Bim' that they will place on his mother's grave the clay model parrot that made his mother smile in spite of her pain (57-58).

Osborn and Lofting allowed their own children considerable latitude, but on one occasion while they were absent, had their children briefly removed from their care by the Child Welfare Department. On that occasion, Basil ("Boz") one of Hilary's brothers who had come to Australia proved, in the words of Osborn's daughter, 'hopeless' as a child-minder and the children's behaviour and condition appalled their neighbours who reported the situation to the authorities (Beaton, 1989). Osborn and Lofting were appalled by the event, as were Zora Cross and David McKee Wright, who called on political friends to restore the children to their parents. Hilary and Beatrice long retained the affection of the older boys and Hilary's daughter.

Osborn was by all reports, like Lofting, a talented cook, but she preferred creative literary effort and stimulating company to anything like relegation to home duties. Where women are portrayed in the collaborative stories as cheerily engaged in domestic activities, the authors make it clear that more than a male suitor or spouse's expectation is the reason. Censure is reserved on the other hand for female characters who delegate household matters to others. The November 1926 story 'Fire and Ice' turns on the self-absorption of the status-seeking wife of a chronically ill businessman. While the husband recuperates in their servant-filled North Shore mansion from collapse brought on by overwork, the wife embarks on an extended series of sprees and jockeyings for social position in Melbourne. The servants perform their supernumerary roles, the children grow ungovernable, and a son contracts gambling debts until the grandmother shrewdly contrives to save the family by dismissing the servants, selling the house, paying the debts and removing the children and her son-in-law to the ancestral country smallholding. Here, the son-in-law confronts the artificiality of his former life and recalls his childhood dreams, the daughter shows signs of responsibility, and the wastrel son plants trees and reclaims a garden. On the wife's return from Melbourne,

seething with outrage, her mother preaches her a sermon on the manner in which she was brought up in the same house and rescued from a fire. The grandmother speaks of the family's former life as 'un-Australian', an epithet that will recur in several stories of lives lived according to the dictates of fashion. The narrators describe the grandmother's address to her daughter as 'the voice of Australia' (32).

In similar vein, a December 1926 story, 'The Open Door', indicates the gulf between an artificial and an authentic existence. The playwright fiancé of the socialite Audrey Merton abruptly informs her that he is about to take up with an attractive wealthy older woman who has offered to pay for his works to be performed. Quitting her fashionable Macquarie Street apartment, Audrey goes for a long country drive until an accident compels her to remain at a farmhouse and care for a pair of children left alone as a result of their mother's hospitalisation and their uncle's injuries. In the ensuing weeks, Audrey discovers an authentic life, managing a small farm and attending to immediate concerns. Her embrace of the self-sufficient mode is cast in unambiguous terms; and she finds herself at one with like-minded, independent neighbours:

Audrey welcomed them all, feeling that now at last she was accepted as a true Australian, made free of her own land wherein the land's realities gave it life... she took stock of her heart—had it out with herself, to find that nothing was left of John or Macquarie-street, or of all of that old life of shadows. She was free of it all now. (21)

The 'true Australian' theme intensifies through the mid to late 1920s, crystallising in the 'Tommy Tucker' stories. Tucker, a former officer who has come down in the world on the collapse of his investments, is the vehicle for observations on farm and station life, from casual labourers to the landed gentry. Tucker exudes optimism and skilfully helps his hosts and employers to surmount emotional and other crises. Beyond the Tucker series, several stories reveal the lot of unpaid workers such as the adopted 'State' child Lily (heroine of the 1929 *Bulletin* story 'Porcelain Baths') who dreams of the luxury of a porcelain bath, but is compelled to endure serf-like conditions imposed by the owners of a remote decrepit property. A predatory neighbour is an additional 'leering menace', but the story is resolved by the young woman's acceptance of marriage from an orchardist and war-veteran who falls in love with her in the course of several visits (51-53). Her domestic duties in the new dispensation are offset by her knowledge that she is valued for her intrinsic qualities as well as her practical talents. The theme is reprised in other stories including 'Sugar and Spice' (1934), in which a young woman's preoccupation with cooking cakes and pastries from recipes in a book of regional Italian confections attracts the attention of a sophisticated man who has lived in Italy (531-534).

Osborn and Lofting neither sought to sweep away the past as more radical modernist manifestoes had urged, nor waxed entirely sentimental over a bucolic dream. They celebrated individualist attitudes and creativity as well as civilised manners and appreciation of natural beauty. Especially in the *Sydney Mail* and *Sydney Morning Herald* stories, adult characters are often well educated, wealthy, and have the means, earned or inherited, to travel extensively abroad; they speak other languages besides English, and some have moved among the shapers and would-be shapers of European events. Many are former officers or lower rankers in the AIF or the British Army; several are former colonial civil servants; a

few, like ‘Tommy Tucker’, are English-born Australians who have more or less independent means of support but have experienced fluctuations on the stock exchange or the land. The men are professionals—doctors, company managers, lawyers, insurance assessors, and station owners. Some women characters appear as professionals, such as the university lecturer Clemence Margetson of ‘Opals for Luck’, who shows no interest in following what her snobbish aunt calls the family ‘code’ (16). Such characters live well and have an eye for fine furniture, china, jewels, and art. The better-off characters keep servants or maids. That some characters at times express a preference for Old Masters or speak disparagingly of the obscurity of modern art does not constitute anti-modernism on the writers’ part: the comments variously indicate antiquarian interests, connoisseurship or confusion on the authors’ part. (Osborn’s journalistic reporting elsewhere on contemporary visual and plastic artworks reveals an eclectic taste, and a predilection for modernist work.)

Many of the Fane-Lofting male and female hero-figures exile themselves from their social set for one reason or another and repudiate the snobbery and social climbing exhibited by its less attractive members. What some of the protagonists call the ‘artificiality’ of Sydney’s fashionable elite and even of society itself, is contrasted to the freedom that escapees from such conformity discover in living scaled-down lives in a modest neo-Georgian pattern: a small farm or country medical practice, a cultivated suburban bungalow, or, as in the case of Tommy Tucker, an itinerant life sustained by exercise of musical and socially useful skills including gourmet cooking. The more attractive characters embrace modernity while rejecting aspects of life that put ‘getting ahead’ before equilibrium. Concern for ‘smartness’ and haste often signals misplaced priorities that take the zest out of living: a scrappy meal in the cubby-hole kitchen of a Macquarie Street flat is as inharmonious as dining in ostentatious style to impress others. In ‘The Open Door’, Audrey Merton discovers that ‘chafing-dish cookery’ is ‘a poor foundation for the real thing’ while in ‘Fire and Ice’ and ‘The Open Door’ wealthy families that dismiss domestic staff and take control of their own food preparation rediscover the pleasure of each other’s company.

The civilising influence of shared meals in appreciative company is related to the influence of flower cultivation and musical appreciation. Osborn and Lofting maintained ornamental and vegetable gardens, and their love of flowers is frequently clear in their stories, even providing the *raison d’être* for the 1925 Lofting story ‘Magnolia’, the related co-written 1926 serial tale ‘The Lips of Naa’ and ‘The Sentimental Thief’. Song and instrumental music often provide what Osborn called ‘atmosphere’, indicating the nature of the performer. Teddy Lee, protagonist of ‘The Sentimental Thief’ and other stories, plays the violin for relaxation in his exquisite Double Bay flat; Tommy Tucker plays the violin and characteristically sings folk songs, popular songs like Cliff Bingham’s ‘Old Madrid’, and songs from operas by Gilbert and Sullivan, Jean-Baptiste Lully and others.

Osborn and Lofting at times appear to have marked out for themselves a distinct fictional territory in their stories of life on the western perimeter of Sydney, rather as Louis Stone, Kylie Tennant and Ruth Park may be said to ‘own’ certain inner suburbs of Sydney. Fane and Lofting’s Blue Mountains settings look promising in terms of such attainment, though it can be said with as much reason that they put Elizabeth Bay, Double Bay, Potts Point and residential Macquarie Street on the fictional map and ‘created’ Woolloomooloo in popular fiction.

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