

A. A. Phillips as Critic

As for untold thousands of other secondary school students, my first encounter with the name A. A. Phillips came through textbooks with such titles as *Presenting Ideas*, *In Fealty to Apollo*, *An Australian Muster*, and *Thinkers At Work*—the title of the last in red letters on a green cloth cover, or at least this is the image memory brings to mind, and with it other associations.

Writers of textbooks must be among the least lionised of authors, and here I should like to take the opportunity of acknowledging one student's gratitude to A.A. As one who had difficulty with such elementary exercises in logic as Pythagoras's Theorem, rote memory of which was necessary in the public examinations, I was excluded from the science stream. Even the low level of mathematics we 'humanities' students had to achieve seemed impossibly demanding. Algebra and geometry were taught, as were the classics to Tom Tulliver, with never a hint as to their place in the scheme of things. Language, or at least English, conveyed the pleasures of literature and the fascination of history; but these were regarded as peripheral pursuits, even feminine distractions, compared with the hard, central, masculine disciplines of a mathematical kind.

Thinkers At Work, our textbook for the 'clear thinking' section of the obligatory English paper, which was written by A.A. and A. Boyce Gibson, opened up other possibilities. It suggested that language, rather than simply being the vehicle of 'soft options' could, indeed should, be used with precision and rigour, and that it could also lead to discoveries. Gratifyingly, many who could fill their physics or chemistry exercise-books with symbols had difficulty in English classes with isolating 'essential factors' or perceiving 'slides' in a writer's use of term. When

First published as the introduction to *Responses: Selected Writings by A. A. Phillips* (Australia International Press, Kew, Vic., 1978). A. A. Phillips died in 1985.

confronted with the problems of the 'real' world, with the causes of epidemics or the interpretations of aerial photographs in war-time, many a budding physicist or chemist revealed limitations as a 'clear thinker'. Perhaps because of the compensation it allowed, 'clear thinking' became a passion. I dreamed of teaching it myself one day, of the satisfaction of revealing to others the structures of thought, or deceitful snares, that lay just below the surface of language, and which only needed, to expose them, the keys which *Thinkers at Work* provided.

Other early encounters with A.A.'s name (though I doubt if I saw the connection then) were in the Saturday Literary Supplement of the *Melbourne Age*. The 'Lit. Supp.' was an institution greatly revered by teachers of English, who urged their students to study the model essays provided by the paper's second leader (usually whimsical, always studiously unprovocative) before turning to the reviews and articles in the supplement. In the suburban steppes of Melbourne in the 1950s, the *Saturday Age* held out the glittering promise of metropolitan cultural sophistication—theatre, film, music, painting and books—to the starved souls of school-teachers and some of their students. Colin Bennett, Geoffrey Hutton, Ian Mair and A. A. Phillips were some of the fixed stars in this cultural firmament glimpsed from afar. After twenty years, my memories of A.A.'s reviews merge into a general impression of an astonishing familiarity with writers ancient and modern, a manner both magisterial and idiosyncratic, and—to a reader whose notion of literary 'appreciation' were formed by presumed knowledge of what the examiners would expect at the end of the year—a recklessly oblique approach to the subject in hand. Those openings that avoided the obvious, straightforward, and dull approach, the telling of appropriate anecdotes, the maintenance of an individual and intimate speaking voice despite the severe limitations on length: these characteristics worried me, profitably I hope now, as they were so contrary to what we were told would be 'expected' from us.

Later, when I escaped from the suburban provinces into the inner keep of metropolitan culture, the University of Melbourne, A.A. was still a presence, at least behind the scenes. There was then no course in Australian literature, though Australian History was well-established. It stirred many of us into adopting a proletarian tie-lessness, singing bush ballads, and sensing for the first time in our lives that there was an Australian culture—even one worthy of our serious undergraduate

attention. Dimly, connections became apparent between what was presented in the History course and what was appearing in local periodicals, which I began to read at this time. Manning Clark, Geoffrey Serle, Ian Turner, Brian Fitzpatrick, Stephen Murray-Smith, Vance Palmer, and A. A. Phillips were amongst those who were not only debating and defining what our culture was but who could also be seen and heard around campus, as staff or visitors. Not only were they living, unlike most whose work we studied, they were living in our society. One evening, Vance Palmer gave a reading which included Lance Skuthorpe's 'The Champion Bullock Driver', 'The Backing of the Colt' passage from *Such is Life*, and his own 'Josie'. Ballads were sung by Miles Maxwell, son of Ian Maxwell the Professor of English who introduced the guests (and who on such occasions used to claim not to have read much Australian writing). Excitingly, the evening suggested that Australian culture could find as appropriate a place in the English Department as it had already in History.

When, after this, I took the newly established honours course in Australian Literature, A. A. Phillips's still fairly recent *The Australian Tradition* was a constant reference. I seem to remember that Mr. Phillips and others who had been propounding a democratic social and literary tradition were found to be sadly ignorant of the rigorously disciplined 'new' criticism that seemed so fresh and revealing when it reached Australia, thirty years after its emergence in Cambridge and Nashville, Tennessee. Mr. Phillips and others had recklessly misappropriated such technical terms as 'tradition' without appreciating the mysterious, quasi-theological associations they held for the initiated. They confused social with literary concerns (disturbing during the Cold War period) and paid scant heed to such central literary shibboleths as 'texture', 'ambiguity' or 'organic form'. In short, they were trampling across what was intended to become a well-weeded and fenced-off campus lawn.

Some students on the campus who had a different interest in Australian writing were those who were already determined to become writers themselves. Another memory of A.A. as an incorporeal presence around the university is of one of these writers-to-be asking if I had seen A.A. 'in action' at any literary meetings—'He's quite terrifying'. For him (and he did go on to become a prominent writer), A.A. was the epitome of impassioned and aggressive Australianness. His impression is worth recalling because, I imagine, it was fairly general at that time.

Those were the days when it was much easier to be regarded as extreme, or eccentric, or nonconformist, when *Meanjin* was considered 'left wing'—with a hint of subversiveness. Among students I knew, A.A. had acquired something of a reputation as a literary nationalist and a formidable guest of the Literature Club—though he can only remember addressing them once on an Australian topic. When finally I did see him for the first time, standing up in the audience and speaking in his characteristically deliberate and forceful manner, I thought him more impressive than 'terrifying'.

Eventually I met this presence who had haunted my school and undergraduate years when I spent some weeks at Wesley College as a student teacher. A.A. the Senior English Master, with cushion, stick and, invariably, a cigarette was obviously the respected 'character' of the common room. But how would he, with his slight build, close-clipped moustache, spectacles, and gentleman-of-the-old-school manner, handle a class of strapping adolescents such as I had been observing? I received his permission to sit in on a Matriculation literature class and found that the answer was, very well indeed. It was no impressive 'demonstration' lesson for my benefit. A.A. walked in, arranged cushion and walking stick to his satisfaction, reminded the dilatory that the essay list for the year was behind the door, that they should select a topic and get on with it, and then talked to the students individually or in small groups while the rest went on with the projects he had devised for them. A.A. refused to dictate notes, the prevailing form of instruction at this level, and guided the students to acquire familiarity with the authors and texts themselves.

It was only after his retirement from Wesley that I came to know Arthur personally, and to discern the links between what had seemed to be the very different worlds he moved in. School mastering was his chosen profession, and he remained dedicated to it for fully fifty years, but his interests spilled over naturally into broadcasting, editing anthologies for the schools and the general public, writing for newspapers and the new periodicals as they emerged, acting and producing, participating generally in the life of the *community* (a key word in his criticism). As well, friendship with writers, editors, academics and theatrical people, and contacts through the position he has built in numerous associations over the years (including six, politically lively years as president of the Victorian Fellowship of Australian Writers)

had kept him in touch with a wild range of individuals and groups. Personal acquaintance also provided the opportunity to confirm what I suppose every reader of his criticism would suspect from his favouring metaphors related to judicious seasoning and superior vintages—he had a discriminating palate for food and wine and was also a good cook.

Angell Arthur Phillips was as old as the century. His own twenties and thirties coincided with those decades he has often referred to in his writing—decades of comparative aridity and striving to stimulate local art and literature, or to recapture some of the cultural efflorescence at the end of the nineteenth century. In a number of essays he recorded this sense of deprivation, and also the sense of excitement towards the end of the 1930s when the poetry of Slessor and Fitzgerald seemed to confirm the promise of a new beginning. Yet the barrenness these recall was that of the native culture. It was not that he saw Australia as uncultured.

The Melbourne of his youth was not the constellation of suburbs I remember, and cheerfully disparage, in a way I'm sure he would not have approved. His family background related him to the quite vigorous colonial culture of late nineteenth-century Melbourne. His great-grandfather, the Reverend Solomon Phillips, had arrived in Australia, newly-married, in 1830. He was assistant minister of the Bridge Street Synagogue in Sydney until 1852, when he moved to Melbourne and went into business. He returned to Sydney to become first Minister of the Macquarie Street Synagogue, and on retirement in 1874 moved again to Melbourne. His son, Arthur's grandfather, became a solicitor in Melbourne in 1860, thus founding a family association with the law, and was a member of colonial Melbourne's literary circles: he contributed to the *Melbourne* and *Victorian* reviews, belonged to literary societies, was president of the Shakespeare Society—his lecture 'The Jew in English Literature' was published in pamphlet form—and played a part in establishing the university's Law School. His home in East St Kilda was eventually acquired by Dame Mabel Brookes. His eldest son, and Arthur's father, M.M., studied law at Melbourne, taking both the Supreme Court Prize and the Exhibition in the History of Philosophy. After a time in the family's legal firm, he entered the public service to become eventually Master in Equity and the first Public Trustee. He

also served as president of the Shakespeare Society, was active in university government, and chief president of the Australian Natives' Association. M.M.'s youngest sister, and Arthur's aunt (whom he used to visit when at Oxford) was Marion Phillips, who became a member of the House of Commons and whose *A Colonial Autocracy* (1909), researched while she was at the London School of Economics, remains a classic study of Macquarie's period based on documentary sources. A cousin of M.M. was E. Phillips Fox the painter, who studied in France and later returned there to live. One of Arthur's cherished heirlooms was a fine example of the work of this most mellow of the Australian Impressionists.¹

Arthur's mother shared her husband's interest in literature and education. Under the name 'Phillip Ray' she wrote stories and articles for the *Argus*, the *Australasian*, the *Bulletin*, and the *Weekly Times*. During the First World War she published a novel, *White Feather*. Prominent in philanthropic, educational and cultural organisations, she was active in the foundation of the Free Kindergarten movement and organised the appeal to establish Women's College at the university. She was a keen theatre-goer, like her husband, and a good amateur actress. She played Mrs George in Shaw's *Getting Married* with the McMahon Players; and a one-acter she wrote was put into rehearsal by them. While growing up, the young Arthur was not conscious of cultural deprivation. One memory is of Ellen Terry, then on a lecture tour, visiting their home: 'It was my first close-up of a Great, though she was a weary and half-blind old woman.' As well as visits to theatres and concerts, there was also a good library at home; and Arthur's youthful impression was that Melbourne was a remote cultural dependency of London which maintained contact through visiting theatrical companies, musicians, and books and magazines. He was, he says, a good deal protected from feelings of national inferiority: at home and school, Melbourne Grammar, he had the sense that patriotism was a matter, first of all, of loyalty to the empire, though this was not in conflict with some degree of national pride.

After a brief taste of law when he went up to the university,

¹ Victor Cohen, 'Reverend Solomon Phillips and his Descendants', *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal and Proceedings* 3 (1940): 73–84; Len Fox, *E. Phillips Fox: Notes and Recollections* (the author, Potts Point, 1969). Unacknowledged quotations in this essay are from conversations or letters.

Arthur switched to Arts and pure English, and left it to his elder brother to continue the family legal tradition with distinction. The vocation Arthur had in mind was not then a usual one for a member of the professional classes, but his parents supported him after he had decided to become a schoolmaster. In his English course there was no Australian literature, indeed little literature beyond 1860. The Literature Society did bring writers in—Bernard O’Dowd, Frederick Maccartney, and Vance and Nettie Palmer, who came to promote the Pioneer Players. These though were invited as local Melbourne writers, rather than as ‘Australian’ writers—the term then would have suggested the coarse bohemian Sydney variety. Arthur can remember being unimpressed by the *Bulletin*, or *Vision*, and finding *Triad* more to his taste in those years. As a student he had a poem published in *Melbourne University Verse*, and began organising a national selection of undergraduate poetry. *Australian University Verse* appeared in 1922 with an introduction by John Le Gay Brereton. E. H. C. Oliphant made the final selection to avoid any suggestion of partisanship for a particular university. Included were R. D. Fitzgerald, Jack Lindsay, Ian Maxwell and A. A. Phillips. Among contemporaries at Melbourne were W. K. Hancock, later the distinguished historian, and R. C. Bald, who took the exhibition in Arthur’s final year and was to become a professor at Columbia.

After completing his degree with distinction, Arthur spent some time teaching before going to Oxford to undertake the Bachelor of Literature. No training in research was offered and the topics suggested—for example, early ballad production of the eighteenth century—failed to inspire him. As he had intended to do the Oxford Diploma of Education after the B.Litt., and now wanted to drop the latter, the master of his college, Sir Michael Sadleir, offered to tutor him in a private study of educational issues until he could begin the diploma the following academic year.

It proved a wonderful chance for contact with one of the most knowledgeable and vigorous minds in the field of my main interest. It was also valuable because the tutorship system is the most valuable aspect of Oxford education and B.Litt. students didn’t have tutors. I remember one ploy of Sadler typical of the demanding and stimulating Oxonian mode. Having listened to me read my essay for the week, he commented, ‘You advance such-

and-such a theory. What do you think Plato would have said about that?' After I had done my best to ventriloquise for Plato, he went on, 'Yes, that seems a reasonable interpretation. Now, what would Lenin have had to say about it?'

On completing the Diploma, Arthur returned to Australia and in 1925 commenced his career at Wesley College which was to continue until 1971. A. A. Phillips the literary critic did not emerge until later. In the early 1930s, he made a start in broadcasting over what was soon to become the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and after this was instituted he continued to broadcast in programmes like 'Books Worth Reading' for many years. Otherwise, he was active around societies, giving talks and judging competitions. When, in 1932, the English Association in London asked the local branch to submit some Australian poems for inclusion in an empire anthology, Arthur came into closer contact with Australian writing. Percival Serle, who was also on the committee, lent him books from his library, and after the selection was made, Arthur realised that there was more good local writing than he had been aware of and he decided to explore it. He then went to the bookshop Frank Wilmot was running, and made his acquaintance—the beginning of his admiring friendship with the poet—and asked him for all the worthwhile Australian books he could buy: 'I relied on him to do the choosing—with due regard to the slenderness of my purse'. Arthur joined a private discussion group with Wilmot and Serle, another with Bernard O'Dowd and Marie Pitt, as well as larger public bodies such as the Home Reading Union. But he felt that his most important association was with Dolia Ribush and his dramatic productions from 1936 to 1948. 'Ribush's devoted artistry, and the contacts I made through him—his home was the nearest thing to a *salon* that Melbourne had, though it was more bohemian than patrician—were the strongest influences on me at a critical period of my life.'

It was not until 1945 that he first contributed to the still fledgling *Meanjin*, the publication with which his name has been most closely associated ever since. 'Their Sweet Jargoning' was an attack on the pretentiousness and sloppiness of some of the magazine's previous contributors. His first major article on Australian literature, 'Henry Lawson as Craftsman', appeared in 1948. Some years earlier he had given Commonwealth Literary Fund lectures that had included

some discussion of Lawson. Then, when asked by the P.E.N. Club to again judge their annual prize, he disqualified himself by saying that he was to be an entrant and drew upon lecture to write the essays on Lawson which won the prize. Hearing him read it at a P.E.N. meeting, editor Clem Christesen requested it for publication in *Meanjin*. It was not until the mid-1950s that he began reviewing regularly for the newspapers.

The core of A.A. Phillips's criticism is to be found in *The Australian Tradition*. The original edition appeared in 1958, the same year as Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend*, four years after Vance Palmer's *The Legend of the Nineties*, and three years before the long-awaited appearance of H. M. Green's *A History of Australian Literature*. As a later generation of historians has realised, the period in which these studies appeared was an important stage in the development of cultural awareness. The fact that such *books* appeared was significant in itself. Discussions postulating a democratic social and literary tradition, which these studies have in common, can be found, particularly in *Meanjin*, during the Second World War and the post-war decade of reconstruction. By the mid-1950s there was a large enough readership with interest in our culture for book-length studies to appear. This was a new departure, or a long-interrupted continuance of a development that had languished after the turn of the century.

Elsewhere, I have outlined the broad context of the debate between 'localists' and 'universalists' on the issues relating to Australian writing.² Here I want to consider A.A.'s stand in relation to the extreme positions of 'aggressive' literary nationalism, on the one hand, and a disdainful formalism on the other. In compiling *The Australian Tradition* sub-titled 'Studies in a Colonial Culture', A.A. drew together the most related of the essays he had published from the late 1940s onwards, chiefly in *Meanjin*. In his preface to the second edition (1980), he recalled that he had chosen this title for 'the air of combative paradox' it presented at a time when 'it was pretty generally assumed that the Australian community was too young to have any traditions'. He was successful

² See my *Criticism in the Australian Writers and Their Work* series (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1974).

in provoking reaction, and his coinage 'the cultural cringe', seen as the keynote to the collection, passed into currency as a term to condemn anything short of unreserved confidence in all things Australian. This might suggest that its creator was espousing such an attitude. To look again at the conclusion of 'The Cultural Cringe' is to realise that he was saying nothing of the sort. He sees the most important development that Australian writing had made in the previous two decades as being in the direction of being unselfconsciously Australian—a phrase that places him in some very conservative company in terms of the same cultural debate during the 1890s. The public are seen as not having progressed correspondingly because they still share an attitude of colonial inferiority about their own culture. Instead of the Cringe, or the Strut, A.A. preferred 'a relaxed erectness of carriage'.

Perhaps the most succinct statement of the basic ideas underlying the essays in *The Australian Tradition* can be found at the end of 'The Democratic Theme'.

The wind which blows from the far country through the mind of the Australian democrat is the spirit of the nineties. As a literary influence it is obvious not so much in political conceptions ... as in the inheritance of certain humane values ... In many of our writers there is the same belief in the importance of the Common Man, the same ability to present him without condescension or awkwardness, the same square jawed 'dinkum' determination to do without the fripperies, the modes—and sometimes the graces—of aesthetic practice, the same unembarrassed preference for revealing the simple verities rather than the sophistication's of human nature.³

With the Palmers and H. M. Green, and the historians Manning Clark, Russel Ward, Ian Turner, and others, A.A. saw this tradition coming down from the 1890s. What he saw as uniquely Australian about it was that it was written of and about 'the Common Man'. A radio talk for 1944, 'Dickens and Democracy', reprinted in this book, is an early example of this interest in implicit class assumptions in literature, and

3 A. A. Phillips, *The Australian Tradition: Studies in a Colonial Culture* (Cheshire, Melbourne, 1958), p.56. Subsequent page references, included in parentheses, refer to this edition.

A.A.'s refusal to distinguish ultimately between literary and social values. The essay on Lawson, originally published in 1948, which opens *The Australian Tradition*, provocatively develops this interest in class attitudes by beginning:

When the Australian writers of the nineties achieved a revolution in nineteenth century Anglo-Saxon letters, setting fiction free from the cage of a middle-class attitude and a middle-class audience, they set themselves problems of technique as well as of subject matter. (p.1)

Another contention in 'The Democratic Theme', which recurs elsewhere in his criticism, is that in writing for and about the Common Man these writers dispensed with the conventions and 'aesthetic practice' of their time. Again in 'The Craftsmanship of Lawson'—with the essay on Furphy, one of the first close examinations of an Australian writer's style—openings of stories by Hardy, Kipling, O. Henry and Conan Doyle are contrasted with some of Lawson's to show how his craftsmanship was the search for the style and the form which would allow him 'not to tell stories for their own sake, but to reveal the Australian way of living and the ethic informing it' (p.3).

In 'The Family Relationship', later writers like Katharine Susannah Prichard and Frank Dalby Davison are seen as continuing this tradition in that they write 'a rough-hewn prose in the dinkum tradition with a touch of slap-dashery' (p.84); and this slapdash quality is viewed as an expression of the national character. When we see this tradition associated with preference for 'the simple verities rather than the sophistication's of human nature' (p.56), we find a view similar to those perceiving two streams in American culture—the genteel, Brahmin, Highbrow and Paleface versus the native, democratic, Lowbrow or Redskin. And A.A.'s terms—the Australian writer's preference for a 'pragmatism' which excludes the 'exaltations of the mysteries' (p.88)—suggest some correspondence to that disjunction between the real and the ideal discerned by a long line of American critics. Yet, according to A.A., he was not aware of American criticism and its similar concerns with the issue of an independent native tradition when he was writing these essays. (Later, in his review of a collection of American criticism he suggested that the local equivalent of 'Redskins' and 'Palefaces'

could be 'Abos' and 'Pommies'.)⁴ The end of 'The Family Relationship' looks forward to the resolution of 'the colonial dilemma', when the native stream and the European, with its acceptance of 'mystery' and 'incertitude', will converge. The comment, added in a footnote, that in the then recently published *The Tree of Man* Patrick White had succeeded 'in reconciling a sympathetic interpretation of Australian life with a keen feeling for the spiritual mysteries' (p.88) is prophetic—though for years after this was written White's novels were made the centre of dispute between the democratic traditionalists and the universalists. A.A.'s characteristically independent approach avoided commitment to either extreme.

The postulation of an Australian democratic tradition furnished an historical 'reality', which could be seen as having helped form the present, and as offering it relevant ideals. Between the period when this tradition was being propounded and the past which was being re-examined, there had already intervened what A.A. calls the 'Neo-Ninetyism' of the Jindyworobaks and P. R. Stephensen. Like the historians, A.A. should be seen as trying to reevaluate a past which, as Vance Palmer pointed out in *The Legend of the Nineties*, had already become mythic. As the whirligig of time brings the 1950s and 1960s under scrutiny, we need to remember the context in which *The Australian Tradition* appeared, and the qualifications added in A.A.'s later writings. The view of cultural history that underlies the book is that of the pendulum-like swing of attitudes between colonial subservience and national assertiveness, and the implication of the sub-title is that the period in which the essays were written and collected together was one still subject to this swing. It is not, then, a static image of two opposed sets of attitudes, one of which is preferred by the author. The attitudes are seen as complementary, mutually reactive, and combining in different proportions in different decades. The tension between them is seen as historically inevitable, and as needing to be worked through rather than avoided. Perhaps the book's focus on individual writers has obscured for some readers this discerning perception of cultural history, which provides the themes relating the separate essays. And it is not a book preoccupied with the past; instead it looks forward to a resolution of

⁴ Review of Harold Beaver, ed., *American Critical Essays, Age* [Melbourne], Saturday, 27 February, 1960.

'the colonial dilemma', though it is mercifully free of pontification on how this might be hastened. A.A. avoids the danger of a nostalgic infatuation with the past, with what he calls, 'Neo-Ninetyism', as a 1962 *Meanjin* essay emphasises:

The trouble with the traditionalists is that they are traditionalists, and have lost the sense of forward movement. They follow the tracks of pioneers ... who followed no man's tracks.⁵

When A.A. came to select from the varied writing he had published over the preceding thirty years for *Responses*, he deliberately avoided the kind of thematic unity found in *The Australian Tradition*. Readers who know only that, and his book on Lawson,⁶ might see him as exclusively preoccupied with Australian literature, chiefly of the 1890s period. *Responses* complements the earlier books by revealing his wider interests. The range of subjects is much broader, as also is the range of publications these essays were originally written for, and together these allow the reader to form a more varied impression of his work as a critic. The earliest pieces in the collection were written for radio. They are among the earliest broadcast scripts preserved in the Australian Archives, and include A.A.'s contribution to the programme 'Standard Works I'd like to Burn' for 1950—his talk on Pope, which in his preface to *The Dunciad Minor* A. D. Hope refers to as a source of inspiration (and much of the mock epic's scholarly apparatus is attributed to 'A.A.P.').⁷ As well as writing for *Meanjin* (and providing editorial assistance), and *Overland*, A.A. began reviewing for newspapers in the later 1950s: for the *Age* (most frequently), the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Nation*, and later, *Nation Review*. In selecting from the considerable volume of his literary journalism for *Responses*, he chose a high proportion of reviews of Australian authors. These, he felt, would be more likely to be of interest to readers of the collection than his opinions on English, American and European books of all kinds—which, rather

5 'The Literary Heritage Re-assessed', reprinted in *Responses*, pp.72–81.

6 A. A. Phillips, *Henry Lawson*, Twayne's World Author Series (Twayne, New York, 1970).

7 A. D. Hope, *Dunciad Minor: An Heroick Poem by A. D. Hope: Profusely Annotated by A. A. P. and A. P.* (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1970), pp.v–viii.

than Australian books, occasioned the bulk of his newspaper reviewing. Almost half of his reviews were concerned not with imaginative writing but with wider cultural, and political, concerns, such as education or government support for the arts. These facts should remind us that, like A. G. Stephens and Vance Palmer before him, his interests were much wider and more cosmopolitan than his more familiar writings might suggest.

Stephens, Palmer, Phillips ... there does seem to be a relationship between them that goes beyond their having been seen as 'literary nationalists'. Their names in sequence suggest elusively some pattern in cultural history, though not a line of simple descent from the 'Red Page Rhadamanthus'. They can be seen as the most prominent, and forcefully individualistic, critics who countered indifference towards Australian culture in successive periods. They were not alone; and their criticism, examined more fully, forces qualification of the received stereotypes we have of it. But that they were, however unintentionally, responsible for such stereotypes of the Australian Critic is a large, if inaccurate, measure of their achievement. Unfairly simplified as their views have been, at least they were recognised as provocative gad-flies with unfashionable interests; discomfortingly, they wrote against the grain of complacent dismissal of our own culture. Vance Palmer can confidently be seen as an influence on A.A. because of his pervasive influence on cultural life, especially in Melbourne, from the 1920s onwards. His views of the interdependence of national culture, democratic values, and the literature which expressed both had their fullest influence on *Meanjin*. An affinity between A.G.S and A.A. that one can sense—beyond their obvious common commitment to Australian writing—is more a matter of style and, with this, of stance. Both employ a direct, confident, vigorously colloquial manner that is provocatively pointed, a style that suggests the writer has matters of personal urgency to express in a pithy, down-to-earth way and has no time for, or patience with, academic jargon or affectations.

Although he can rise to the impassioned eloquence we find at the end of 'The Democratic Theme', A.A.'s preferred critical style tends towards terseness. In this he is very reminiscent of Stephens; both prefer brevity, not only in their sentences but also in their paragraphs. Their concern is with their judgements, or the direction of their arguments, rather than with proliferating analytic detail; their natural unit is the

essay rather than the book. They prefer a personal, informal engagement with an implicitly immediate audience, rather than to write formally and impersonally for 'ideal' readers, or posterity. Theirs is style—in the best sense of these words—of the teacher and the journalist, who know they have only so much time to make the points they want urgently to make—so they need to make them sharply, vividly, memorably.

In a review of a collection of American criticism A.A. wrote:

Professionalism gives a critic's work a valuable solidity. It gives the brooding time needed to hatch the eggs of thought. But unless the critic can also retain the essential impulse of the amateur, his work will be as dead as mutton.⁸

'The essential impulse of the amateur' was his attempt to give an account, to himself and to others, of the delight that he found in a work of literature. Speaking as 'a rank amateur' at the UNESCO seminar on the arts in Australia in 1968, A.A. contended that professionalism in literary criticism tended to distort responses by shifting the emphasis from 'delight' to 'significance'. Not that he disregarded significance—'Every work of art ... is also in some measure a statement, intellectually apprehensible, about the process of living'—yet if the critic is preoccupied with significance at the expense of delight (his example is F. R. Leavis with *Hard Times*) he misleads his readers. In this address on 'The Responsibilities of the Critic' A.A., like A.G.S. and Vance Palmer, saw himself as a mediator between the 'life' of literature and the lives of its readers. And if, he maintained, a fascination with forms leads a writer away from life and his readers, it is the critic's responsibility to speak up on the reader's behalf. Without being in any way daunted, he may have felt on this occasion at the University of Sydney that he was taking a stand against the more obscurantist tendencies in academia, an attitude not unprecedented in his writing.⁹ Be that as it may, it did not prevent the University of Melbourne from recognising that its former student had become 'widely regarded as the doyen of Australian literary critics' when in 1975 it conferred on him the Doctorate of Letters.

⁸ Review of Beaver, ed., *American Critical Essays*.

⁹ An extract from this address appears as 'Reader and Writer' in *Responses*, pp.152–54.