

On the Edge
Volume 2 – Exegesis

Martin Eddy Knight
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School of Humanities

Department of English and Creative Writing

University of Adelaide, Australia

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Abstract

My creative work is a cycle of thirteen short stories entitled *On the Edge*. Each story is located in what might be described as Greater Port Adelaide. This is an area which stretches from Alberton and West Lakes northward through the historical port adjacent to the Port River and its Inner Harbour, and thence along the Le Fevre Peninsula from Birkenhead and Semaphore to North Haven and the Outer Harbour. Apart from a number of mansions and holiday homes built close to the beach by wealthy Adelaide businessmen around the turn of the 20th century the area has predominantly been occupied by members of the working class. By working class I mean that group of individuals normally regarded as wage labourers and their families, although under modern economic conditions many of its members are unemployed.

Most employment in the area has traditionally been linked to shipping, the wharfs and numerous related maritime trades. Containerisation and other technical innovations drastically reduced the need for labour on the docks, just as globalisation has curtailed opportunities for local employment in manufacturing. It is the results of such shifts that my work seeks to illustrate by creating a montage of differing experiences for residents of the area.

To emphasise the cyclical nature of the work I have started with the alienation of a school-leaver frustrated by his lack of opportunity and ended with the death of a seaman, a hang-over from the days of a more cohesive and politically committed society. There are also a number of characters who reappear or are at least mentioned in more than one story.

As I was unaware of the existence of such a genre as a 'cycle' of short stories I have used my exegesis to undertake a brief enquiry into its history, concentrating on my proposition that such a genre is particularly suited to the exposition of social criticism. To this end I have traced its development from the ancient epic cycles, through the collections of the middle ages, to the final establishment of the cycle as a genre in its own right at the beginning of the 20th century. Subsequently I have concentrated on the works of two Australian authors, Frank Hardy and John Morrison, as I believe that each created a work that should be considered as a 'cycle'

rather than as a 'collection' of short stories. It was reading Morrison's *Stories of the Waterfront* that inspired me to write *On the Edge*.

The exegesis begins with a short consideration of the differing modes of 'realistic' writing as this is the area I consider myself to be operating in. Indeed, in an era coming to be described as one of 'post-truth', I consider realism to be the method incumbent for a socially committed writer to utilise. The final chapter of my exegesis is concerned with those writers whom I feel have had a major influence on my own practice.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act of 1968.

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I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

(Signed) Martin Eddy Knight
BA (Hons)
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Thanks is predominantly due to my partner Justene Knight for her belief in me, and for persuading me to apply for a place on the Creative Writing program in the first place. We have both come such a long way since meeting on stage in New Zealand. Acknowledgment is also due to the support that her mother Barbara has given me over the years, and also to the memory of her grandmother Guppy whom we all miss so much. My own parents, now long gone, I thank for the sacrifices they made on my behalf, and my eldest brother Tony and his deceased partner Mike Trenaman for the brave example they have always provided me.

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Finally I wish to thank Professor Brian Castro and all the staff and students of the Creative Writing program of the English Department of Adelaide University who have welcomed me, included me, and made me feel that I am a real writer at last.

CHAPTER 1

REALISM.

Having dropped out of university in the wake of the student protests of the late sixties I eventually undertook an adult apprenticeship and became a bench-hand joiner. As such I have worked not only in Britain but also in the Netherlands, New Zealand and ultimately in Adelaide, South Australia, where I arrived in 1991.

On receipt of a very modest inheritance nearly twenty years ago my partner and I started looking for a house that we could afford to buy. Our budget limited us either to far-flung suburbs or, alternatively, to a number of predominantly run-down working class areas of Adelaide. Having been born in a South Devon fishing village and brought up in the port and naval dockyard city of Plymouth I had no hesitation in voting for Port Adelaide, in an area between the river and the sea. At the time there were a large number of cheap, workers' cottages on the market which although somewhat dilapidated demonstrated a great deal of potential to someone with experience in the building trade.

Over the intervening years I have witnessed numerous changes in the area. Since becoming an employee of the South Australian Maritime Museum I have also become intimately aware of its history. This history is as long as European settlement and much longer in terms of the traditional custodians of the land, the Kurna people. It is a site of reasonable cultural diversity due to the successive waves of immigrants who first stepped ashore here, until the late 1960s when

'official' migrants mostly arrived by plane. Having decided to write a number of short stories this locality seemed the obvious setting.

Despite the grand houses and holiday homes which wealthy businessmen built along the sea front, the area has remained predominantly working class, and has been seen as such by the citizens of Adelaide, who have regarded it as a site of 'otherness' and made it the butt of numerous jokes emphasising a lawless and potentially dangerous nature. As with other terms of disparagement, such as 'anarchist' or 'queer', this sense of otherness has been embraced by locals as a means of demonstrating pride in their identity.

Traditionally most families would have had some connection with shipping and the seas, from stevedoring to boatbuilding, from sailing to fishing, and from sail-making and chandlery to entertaining sailors on shore leave. Some occupations necessarily declined with the changing of shipping technologies (sail to steam for example), but at the same time others were created (such as collier and boilermaker). From the end of the Second World War there has been a rapid adoption of new technologies which have decreased the need for labour on the waterfront, such as fork-lifts on the wharves or ship-board heavy lift cranes. Finally the universal adoption of containerisation in the 1960s and 70s totally eliminated the need for much dockside manual labour. This coupled with globalisation in general has had a massive impact on the area in terms of the opportunities available for working people to earn a living.

Generally the material conditions of life are infinitely superior to those of the depression era, and even of the immediate post-war period, nevertheless the arc of

improvement has been, or rather, is being gradually reversed. While still a long way from the era of the soup kitchen, and indeed ragged trousers are currently mostly a fashion choice, it appears that we could well be heading back that way. On a global scale Australia is still one of the wealthiest nations, however for a large section of the population life is getting harder. Many of the improvements to the welfare state achieved during the sixties and seventies are gradually being wound back as areas such as health care, education, housing, insurance and others become more and more expensive and beyond the reach of many working people. Globalisation has been a double edged sword: material possessions have undoubtedly become easier to afford for the general populace, but the increasing dearth of employment opportunities is leading to increased poverty¹, rapidly expanding demands being placed on welfare agencies and to greater social dislocation. Problems such as suicide, drug dependency, homelessness, domestic violence and even the health issues caused by the consumption of a cheap, fat-laden diet appear to be on the rise².

I would sheet home the blame for these ills on the bad economic conditions prevailing for a large and growing section of society. As a writer I feel it to be my responsibility to reflect some of these issues in my practice, while trying to avoid becoming overly didactic. Having spent much of my working life as a bench-hand joiner I am now primarily concerned with the creation of aesthetic experiences, with art rather than with pure functionality. Raymond Williams is quoted as saying, "We must, then, retain the right to judge a civilization by its culture. For culture is the embodiment of the quality of living of a society...Assessment of it is the social function of the critic and the creative writer" (in Higgins 1999, p.14). In the privileged position in which I now find myself, I feel an obligation to give an unromantic voice

to the kind of people with whom I have worked over the years, to record some of their experiences and aspirations, to describe something of their lives in their social and economic landscape.

There is a long tradition of writing about working people such as those of Port Adelaide, mostly utilizing some form of literary realism. This is a term notoriously difficult to define but which Pam Morris describes as dependent upon an “empirical view of knowledge” and goes on to state that:

...literary modes of writing that can be recognised as realist are those that, broadly speaking, present themselves as corresponding to the world as it is, using language predominately as a means of communication rather than verbal display, and offering rational, secular explanations for all the happenings of the world so represented. (Morris 2003, pp. 9-10.)

The fashion in Australian writing in the wake of post-structuralist literary theory has been more towards the fabulist rather than the realist end of the spectrum. Indeed in the era of so-called post-modernism the philosophical underpinnings of the possibility of any kind of validity for realism has been called into question. In discussing the work of Roland Barthes, Terry Eagleton stated that:

Realist literature tends to conceal the socially relative or constructed nature of language: it helps to confirm the prejudice that there is a form of ‘ordinary’ language which is somehow natural...The realist or representational sign, then, is for Barthes essentially unhealthy. It effaces its own status as a sign, in order to foster the illusion that we are perceiving reality without its intervention. (Eagleton 1983, pp.135-136.)

The fact is, however, that most prose fiction, barring a few easily recognised sub-genres such as fantasy or speculative fiction, deal within paradigms that can be labelled as (small-r) realism.

Writers write stories that purport to reveal to readers some aspects of the world they perceive around them, either contemporaneously or historically. Story-telling would seem to be a fundamental characteristic of human culture and, whether it is an origin

story or an anecdote related in a pub conversation, as we tell each other stories that either did happen, might happen or could have happened, to convince the receiver we include as many realistic elements as we deem necessary to achieve this.

This is as true in works of science fiction as it is in those labelled naturalism. Indeed the writer of speculative fiction often has to work harder at this in order to encourage the reader into their created worlds. For example the Portuguese Nobel Prize winning author Jose Saramago begins his magnificent dystopian novel *Blindness* with a description of the commonly experienced frustration of being held up at traffic lights. As the book proceeds to describe the breakdown of society's norms, as the result of an ocular contagion, each episode is relayed with such 'realistic' precision as to leave the reader in no doubt that, given this situation, these effects would follow. Saramago is using realism to reinforce his central thesis that society is a fragile construction that can easily fall apart given the right circumstances, and that 'humanity' is not necessarily innate in all humans. In this he is working in the same way that William Golding did in his 'realistic' speculation *Lord of the Flies*. There are thus many different kinds of realism.

The main theoretical objections to realism seem to mostly centre on the works of the nineteenth-century in England and France, particularly on the works of Balzac, Jane Austen and George Eliot. By purporting to reflect real life, by giving their characters what their readers will interpret as ordinary experiences, it is argued by contemporary theorists that these realists were using literary conventions to promulgate (their own) bourgeois ideology. Matthew Beaumont points out that in many critical overviews of postmodernism, "there is absolutely no reference to realism either as a literary or cultural form or as a set of philosophical assumptions."

He then continues, “When introductory textbooks on postmodernism do allude specifically to realism they tend to impugn the concept both for its ingenuousness and for its disingenuousness” (2010, pp. 3-4). He illustrates this by quoting one such Reader on Postmodernism, edited by Nigel Wheale, which while deriding realism’s simplicity as, “inadequate because it implies an unexamined relationship with some prior reality”, simultaneously condemns its duplicity:

In so far as realism pretends to offer an unproblematic representation, it is in fact the most deceptive form of representation, reproducing its assumptions through the audience’s unexamined response to an apparently natural image or text. (Wheale in Beaumont 2010, p. 4.)

The fact is that all works of art depend on the audience accepting certain conventions. A person sitting in an armchair holding a heavy book in their hand is no more necessarily going to accept what they read as actuality than a person looking at a framed two-dimensional painting, which uses the convention of perspective, is likely to think that they are looking out of a window. Similarly all creations of the human mind are bound to be involved in promulgating ideologies, the modernists no less than the realists who preceded them. To argue with the ideologies is not to turn one’s back on realism, it is just to take a different approach to it. The stream of consciousness employed by Virginia Woolf and James Joyce were, after all, merely attempts to portray a more ‘realistic’ picture of life, as it is lived by the individual, than that of the supposedly ‘scientific’ observations of the naturalists.

Naturalism was a further refinement of realism occurring in the late nineteenth century. In discussing its relationship with realism, Fredric Jameson states:

...where the stereotype of the latter involves social observation and the detailed rendering of urban settings, the naturalist text, with its *nostalgie de la boue*, seems rather to breathe a kind of *Stimmung* or affect associated with pessimism or melancholy...this falling curve of the naturalist narrative shares

in that more general late nineteenth-century ideology which Marc Angenot has described as a simultaneous belief in progress and conviction of decadence and well-nigh biological deterioration, which expresses itself socially in the panics about degeneracy and widespread decadence. (Jameson 2010, p. 283.)

Naturalist writers such as Emile Zola present their narratives almost as if they are scientific experiments, having been much influenced by theories expounded in the wake of Darwinian thought, whereby their characters are shown to be at the mercy of the forces of heredity and environment, navigating their lives rather in the fashion of laboratory rats. It is significant that when portraying characters driven by basic animal instincts such as sexual desire, and at the same time buffeted by economic and environmental pressures so that they are inevitably destroyed, the naturalists should have chosen to select them from the working classes. Jameson attributes this to a bourgeois fear of loss power and status, "What stands at the centre of the naturalist narrative paradigm is the perspective of the bourgeoisie and its vision of the other (lower) classes" (2010, p. 284).

The working classes, or the proletariat, reappear in the works of Socialist Realism, although in a reversed position. This genre was spearheaded by Maxim Gorky's *Mother* in 1906 and ossified into an orthodoxy during the Soviet era, particularly under Stalin, and formalised at the Writer's Congress of 1934. This resulted in such works as Ostrovsky's *How the Steel was Tempered* of 1936 and, most well-known in the west, Sholokov's Nobel prize-winning *And Quiet Flows the Don* of 1934 and its sequel *The Don Flows Home to the Sea* of 1940. "Socialist realism conveyed as reality only heroic proletarian protagonists in plots of always ultimately optimistic struggle; any form of experimentalism was denounced as decadent" (Morris 2003, pp. 100-101). Hence such a work as Bulgakov's masterpiece *The Master and*

Margarita, although completed in 1938, was not published in full in the Soviet Union until 1973.

In Socialist Realist works the working classes are usually portrayed overcoming the oppressions imposed upon them by bourgeois capitalists, or celebrating, “the virtues of the proletariat, and the felicities of life under Soviet Socialism” (Abrams 1988 p. 154). That such works are exemplars of another ideology goes without saying; a genre more concerned with showing that the economic class struggle is the basis of human life, rather than with any photographic portrayal of it. The duty of the Socialist Realist artist lay with encouraging participation in the struggle, in effect with promoting the Stalinist programme.

Lying in a position somewhere between the nineteenth century realists and the Soviet inspired Socialist Realists is a group that could be termed social realists, who may or may not subscribe to a Marxist view of history, yet who do emphasize, “the influence of the social and economic conditions of an era on characters and events” (Abrams 1988, p. 120). Such writers would include John Steinbeck in America and John Morrison amongst many others in Australia. That such writers would emerge during, or concentrate on describing, life during the Great Depression is no accident. Paul Galimond said in his article on Morrison, “A socialist realist writer was to work with facts and certainly during the Great Depression the facts were plain enough: massive unemployment and poverty” (2015). Morrison was certainly a socialist, and certainly wrote as a realist, but to describe him as a Socialist Realist is to mistake genres, I feel, as Dorothy Hewitt’s letter to him dated 15/8/1966 makes clear:

Like you, socialist realism means nothing to me but a jargon word...If realism means that a work of art is based on reality, that’s okay by me...if it means a concept of style in writing, I can’t cop it...I agree wholeheartedly with your concept of man’s struggle with himself. If you take that out of literature then

you destroy what literature is about. It all seems to hark back to the Stalinist “no conflict” theory. (Hewitt 1966, letter.)

The fate of working people when suffering this breakdown of the capitalist system provided writers like Morrison and Steinbeck with much serious and affecting material, in the latter’s case to be utilized in such masterpieces as *The Grapes of Wrath* of 1939. No doubt, similarly to Raymond Williams, they believed this to be the “social function of the...creative writer” (in Higgins 1999, p.14), and considered it their duty to record and report to the reading public the effects of this breakdown on a swathe of society not used to being given a public voice.

In conversation with Ian Reid, John Morrison talked about the effect the Depression had on him when he described himself as having gone through:

...what might be described as a social/political awakening. I was never out of work myself, but many of my friends, good men, went through a bad time. I came to understand what was the real cause of it all, and this so influenced my attitude to writing that I turned to stories with deliberate social content. (Reid 1979, p. 42.)

Writing under his middle name Gordon, his early stories appeared in communist newspapers and trade union journals. The Morrison archive at Melbourne University contains several pamphlets where Gordon’s stories are introduced as “a five minute read”, presumably designed to be read by workers during their smokos or their lunch breaks. As he himself said, these were “propaganda pieces” featuring episodes of exploitation of station hands by owners, of tenants by landlords, or of middle-class ladies congratulating themselves on their fine feelings as they attend cocktail parties to raise miniscule amounts of charity monies for the poor. Although somewhat crudely black and white, these pieces are not devoid of literary interest and provided him with a useful apprenticeship in an economical yet affecting writing style, much as news reporting served Hemingway.

As Morrison's writing style developed and he began to portray characters, rather than mere caricatures, he became a member of the Realist Writers' Group in Melbourne and started being published in literary journals such as *Meanjin* and *Overland*. He never deviated from his area of interest however: the lives of working people. These stories were based on his own experiences as a station-hand, a gardener and as a waterside worker. In an essay collected in *Australian By Choice* he remarked on his approach to realism, "if the writer had not had a certain experience he would not have written the story. It's what he does with truth that makes the story...It's a matter of selection and arrangement, construction" (Morrison 1973, p. 151).

Having only arrived in Australia from Britain via New Zealand in the early 1990s, I was unaware of Morrison's work. When I began to write short stories I started to study the form in Australian literature, the only practitioner whose work I had been previously familiar with being Henry Lawson. When I came across John Morrison I was tremendously impressed and rapidly devoured everything he had written. I was particularly drawn to his *Stories of the Waterfront*, which I saw as a short story cycle as defined by Forrest Ingram and which gave me the idea of writing my own cycle.

What particularly struck me about all of Morrison's works was the authenticity of his portrayal of the lives of working people, and the emotional impact he was able to impart, meanwhile avoiding the twin pitfalls of sentimentality on the one hand or of didacticism on the other. His characters spring from the page full of life, often forced into a position where they have to make moral decisions or at least grapple with what Stephen Murray-Smith refers to as, "moral ambiguities. And the more fully fledged his stories are, the more firmly the reader rather than the writer is pushed

into the judgement seat.” (1982, p. xi). This is a major accomplishment for any writer, particularly for the creator of short fictions, and places Morrison firmly in the rank of Maupassant, Chekhov and, of course, Lawson. In the Morrison archive there is a letter to him from Katharine Susannah Prichard dated 18/3/1956 where she states, “I said to myself when I’d finished reading *Black Cargo* – ‘this is better than Lawson’ – whose shadow our writers have lived under too long.” In the same archive there is a letter from Frank Hardy dated 16/9/1957 where he states that, “Morrison is the best short story writer since Lawson beyond doubt, and that a selection of Morrison’s short stories could not be matched by any living writer in the world.” His contemporaries thus held Morrison in the highest regard.

In his ‘*Waterfront*’ stories Morrison reported on conditions which were gradually improving for his protagonists. In the first story of the cycle his workers were operating under the Bull pick-up system, which involved strenuous competition for jobs promoting an ethos of ‘the survival of the fittest.’ By the last story, entitled ‘Easy Money’, wharfies were still working in a hard and dangerous occupation, but after years of struggle the union had won for them much better conditions of employment. This would have been as true for Port Adelaide wharfies as it was for those of Port Melbourne who featured in Morrison’s stories. Such conditions for waterside workers may well still prevail, or even have improved further, but there are now a tiny fraction of their previous numbers in a position to enjoy such conditions.

Although regarding Morrison as something of a mentor, or role model, I am a very different writer and contemporary society is now very different from that of his time. However, it is with these characters, residents of Port Adelaide, the descendants of the wharfies and others of Morrison’s era, that my stories are concerned. This

exegesis seeks to trace the development of the short story cycle as a form particularly suited to elaborating such social commentary.

Endnotes

- ¹ According to ACOSS “poverty is growing in Australia with an estimated 2.990,300 million people (13.3% of the population) living below the internationally accepted poverty line” including “731,300 children below the age of fifteen (17.4% of all children).” ACOSS – Poverty in Australia Report 2016, Web. acoss.org.au Viewed 27 October 2016.
- ² According to the Australian Government’s Department of Health’s ‘Unhealthy Eating’ section of their report on Women’s Health, last updated 7/2/2011 “At least one-third of welfare-dependent family weekly income is needed to be allocated to food in order to eat according to public health recommendations. However, access to unhealthy food options are readily available with Australian studies showing that poorer suburbs have much higher concentrations of alcohol and fast food outlets than more affluent areas.” Web. health.gov.au Viewed 13 December 2016.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CYCLICAL HABIT OF MIND.

When I first encountered Morrison's *Stories of the Waterfront* I was unaware that there was such a genre as the Short Story Cycle; a genre identified by Forrest Ingram in his seminal work *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*, first published in 1971. Indeed the only such cycle that I had (unknowingly) previously read was James Joyce's *Dubliners*. With Morrison's work, however, it was clear that there was a linking pattern operating here. I determined to investigate the genre further as I was contemplating writing a collection of short stories and the idea of linking them together was appealing. This chapter will be concerned with a brief archaeology of the genre in order to trace its gestation before its emergence in the twentieth-century.

Firstly, however, it is necessary to define terms. Ingram positions the short story cycle on a spectrum between an unrelated collection of stories at one extreme and a novel at the other. He describes such a cycle:

...as a book of short stories so linked to each other by their author that the reader's successive experience on various levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts. (Ingram 1971, p.19.)¹

The short story itself did not appear as a genre until roughly the middle of the nineteenth-century but such patterns, Ingram observes, were created in ancient and medieval cycles by the use of such devices as repetition, juxtaposition and contrast, and by the creation of parallels. These features appealing to what the critic P.M. Kramer referred to as the "cyclical habit of mind" (in Ingram 1971, p. 24).

Watching cycles being enacted would have been the first experience of literature for the majority of the English population in the medieval period (and for that of much of continental Europe). These were the Mystery Plays or Cycles staged, presumably, in most major cities and not just in those whose texts have survived such as York, Chester and Wakefield. These cycles portrayed various scenes from the Bible, staged independently on successive pageant wagons and performed by the members of different craft guilds, usually those with direct connection to the stories. Margaret Drabble points out that, “their great popularity in England from the time of Chaucer to Shakespeare is repeatedly attested by those writers, among others” (1985, p. 684). In effect they were very much like a modern cycle of short stories presented for a pre-literate audience. This audience would have reacted with a wide range of emotions to the different sections and understood them as a series of portrayals of the very real historical progression from the days of Adam and Eve to the death and resurrection of Christ.

The popularity of such cycles while reflecting the human desire for spectacle could also speak to an affinity felt because of ‘the cyclical habit of mind.’² Furthermore the critic Robert Cohen points out that the York cycle consisted of forty-eight plays, twice the number of hours in the day, that the Chester cycle consisted of twenty four and that:

these numerological features...would certainly have attracted the medieval mind, addicted as it was to discerning patterns in the universe...giving the whole a mathematical order that achieved, in the view of its spectators, an echo of divine organisation. (Cohen 1994, p. 112.)

The Bible itself, certainly one of the most formative influences on the creation of English literature, is comprised of a series of disparate stories, recording the history of the Jews and later of the early Christians but presented as if forming an inevitable, interlinked progression.

When viewed as a work of literature, rather than as the direct word of God, the Bible could be regarded as a proto-typical short story cycle, in keeping with Forrest Ingram's definition. Even beyond the assertion of Mosaic Law, each episode exemplifies some aspects of desired 'right behaviour', or punishment meted out in response to acts of 'bad faith'. Thus they are teaching stories, which would appear to be one of the predominant functions of such ancient cycles. The parables ascribed to Christ in the New Testament could also be regarded as stories within stories, as exemplified by the Panchatantra discussed below. There may seem to be a great divide between the Old and New Testaments, but the author of Saint Matthew's Gospel immediately seeks to reinforce the continuation of the great cycle by citing Christ's genealogy and then stating:

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations. (Matthew 1:17.)

The Bible, of course, was not available to the illiterate majority of the population, and, until the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, its circle of potential readers was further circumscribed by being in Latin, Greek and/or Hebrew. For the small circle of educated readers there were other examples of cyclical literature, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for example, which had a profound effect on writers of the English renaissance. One of the most ancient of these would have been Homer's *Odyssey*, although apparently not of particular interest in England before Chapman's translation of 1616. Most of the ancient cycles of teaching stories were survivors from the oral traditions of their cultures, probably handed down for hundreds of years before being written down. This may account for many of them,

like the *Odyssey*, being fashioned within a framing story, such a structure referring back to the original oral story tellers.

One of the oldest and certainly the longest of the surviving ancient epics, the Indian *Mahabharata* ³ contains multiple “stories [which] are told as moral lessons to the human heroes and heroines” (Doniger 2015, p. xxvi). Similarly to the Bible it is revered as a religious text (one of the foundation texts of Hinduism), at the same time as it is considered a history of a people. Numerous of its multiple stories are as familiar to Hindus as Bible stories are to Christians. The *Mahabharata* is thus another collection of stories intended to instruct the populace in ‘right behaviour’. According to the renowned Indologist Wendy Doniger in her introduction to Carole Satyamurti’s retelling:

Above all the *Mahabharata* is an exposition of dharma, the moral and religious law of Hinduism, including the proper conduct of a king, of a warrior, of an individual living in times of calamity, and of a person seeking to attain freedom from rebirth. (Doniger 2015, p. xxix.)

As was the case with the European Mystery Cycles, stories from the *Mahabharata* were and are performed all over the Hindu world, by shadow puppets, in dance dramas and nowadays on television as well as in Bollywood films. A feature of interest to adherents of post-modernism might be the fact that the authorship of the epic is attributed to Vyasa, who is also the grandfather of the two sets of warring protagonists, the Pandavas and their cousins the Kauravas, thus, “the author, is himself a character in his own story” (Doniger 2015, p. xxvi).

This is also the case with the attributed author of the *Panchatantra* Vishnu Sharma, and is probably further evidence of such cycles being the product of an oral tradition. In this case it is true of a secular text which, similarly to Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, is a treatise on the practice of government. Vishnu Sharma is supposed to have written

it down, probably in Kashmir, at a date posited by some scholars to be as early as 1200 BCE, but much later according to others. According to the prologue Vishnu Sharma was engaged by a king to teach wisdom to his three sons. Despairing of teaching them formally the sage instead regaled them with a five-part collection of animal fables, each intended to illustrate the precepts necessary for effective administration; diplomacy, politics and the handling of relationships - the making of allies out of enemies. Each of the five sections is contained within a main framing story which contains within it several other stories, some of which themselves contain other stories in a style which might seem familiar to a post-modern readership.

It is possible the work was known in ancient Greece, perhaps in the wake of Alexander the Great's campaigns, as a few of the stories are identical to those in Aesop's Fables. Of course this borrowing might have been in the other direction. What is known is that the *Panchatantra* was translated into Persian in 570 CE and from thence into Arabic in 750 CE. This version was then translated into several European languages, a Greek version appearing in 1080, Italian at some point, and Spanish in 1252. It was printed in Latin in 1480, and a German version being one of the earliest books printed by Gutenberg's press after the Bible in 1483. The first English translation was by Sir Thomas North in 1570. While it is no longer widely read in English (Penguin published a translation in 1993, Oxford U.P. in 1997) it can be said to have had a widespread readership amongst renaissance scholars, who responded to its cyclical nature, its use of framing stories and of stories embedded within other stories, in order to promulgate ethical precepts. Roderick Hindery states that:

...the Panchatantra presents stories and sayings which favour the outwitting of roguery, and practical intelligence rather than virtue...[which] are eminently

ethical...the prevailing mood promotes an earthy, moral, rational, and unsentimental ability to learn from repeated experience. (Hindery 1996, p. 166.)

Thus the ancient cycles were not only concerned with illustrating exemplary spiritual behaviour, or with providing examples of courage and heroism, 'right action' as in the cases of Odysseus or Arjuna, but also with more quotidian, practical matters. What is certain is that in their diverse ways they were all collections of 'teaching stories', a function which, by the Middle Ages, had morphed into the social commentary as practiced by the likes of Boccaccio and Chaucer, who retained something of the mythological flavour of the earlier cycles.

It is not known whether or not Boccaccio had read a translation of the *Panchatantra* but it is certainly possible given its popularity at the time. Katherine Brown points out that it was amongst numerous collections of stories that might well have been familiar to him:

The first distinction concerning story collections available to Boccaccio as models for the *Decameron* involves geographic origin: the difference between collections from the East and those from the West...collections such as the *Panchatantra* can be traced back to India...The use of a frame characterizes the Eastern compilations transmitted to Western Europe beginning in the twelfth century. (Brown 2014, pp. 85-86.)

Certainly the 'mood' mentioned by Hindery is also prevalent in the *Decameron*, it similarly begins with a prologue setting out the reasons for the subsequent collection and each of the succeeding cycles of ten stories begins within its own framing story. In this case the prologue features a very realistic description of the catastrophic plague⁴ which devastated Florence in 1348. In response to the plague Boccaccio's seven young women and three young men flee the city to reside in neighbouring villas until the danger has passed. In order to entertain themselves they decide on a story telling competition, each person telling one story a day over the course of ten days. Many of these stories, in keeping with Ingram's description mentioned

above, use the devices of parallelism, juxtaposition and contrast to create a satisfactory whole, rather than just an unrelated collection of disparate stories. In contrast to the realism of the prologue the subsequent atmosphere of the setting is that of an Arcadian myth. The stories themselves deal with the outwitting of fools and hypocrites, many of them bawdy tales of transgressing monks and nuns, old men marrying young women they are incapable of satisfying, and young men and women conducting illicit affairs. Altogether the work could be described as a comedy of manners, or as a satirical attack on contemporary Italian *mores*, certainly the function is secular rather than religious.

The greatest secular cycle of stories in English literature is Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Although probably influenced by Boccaccio's work the whole atmosphere of the pilgrimage is much more realistic, whereas the stories themselves are not necessarily so. As with Vyasa's *Mahabharata* and Sharma's *Panchatantra* Chaucer inserts himself into the retinue of travellers, being prevented from finishing one story on grounds of boredom before relating another. His primary function is as witness however, enabling him to collect the stories together for his book. Perhaps his greatest achievement in developing the cyclical tradition lies in the fact that he chooses a cross section of members of his contemporary society to recount their stories, enabling him not only to portray that society but also to utilize every literary genre then current.

Edward Wheatley, "surveys five modes of representation in Geoffrey Chaucer's work: allegory, exemplum, satire, parody and realism," and says that Chaucer utilizes these modes to 'refashion' the genres of the often well-known stories he was re-telling (2008, p. 296). Chaucer then juxtaposes these stories in order that his

pilgrims can comment on each other either through 'parallelism' or 'contrast', thus inviting the reader to also pass judgements on their characters.

Before the tales themselves comes the magnificent Prologue, much expanded from the *Decameron's* brief scene setting, to explain not only the set-up and Chaucer's own place amongst the pilgrims but also to give brief pen-portraits establishing the characters of most of their number:

Chaucer translates the gentle satire of his own narrator in the General Prologue into his treatment of pilgrim narrators as they tell their tales; both Chaucer the narrator and his pilgrim companions show a lack of self-awareness that results in dramatic irony. (Wheatley 2008, p. 301.)

It is with these portrayals, as with the inter-woven banter between pilgrims and the comments and instructions of the host, that Chaucer introduces a level of realism not previously attained by story cycles, enabling him to express a heightened level of social commentary and, at times, biting satire. For example the Pardoner's Tale (an exemplum on the nature of greed, coming as it does after the self-revelation of avariciousness in his Prologue), rather than showing how cleverly he plies his trade of gulling the ignorant, merely emphasises the spiritual bankruptcy of his office. Finally the host feels compelled to say that he wishes he could cut off the Pardoner's testicles and bury them in pig shit.

The short story proper, as a literary genre, appeared towards the middle of the nineteenth century. According to the novelist William Boyd in his essay, "A short history of the short story", this was as a result of:

...industrial and demographic processes. The short story had always existed as an informal oral tradition, but until the mass middle-class literacy of the 19th century arrived in the west, and the magazine and periodical market was invented to service the new reading public's desires and preferences, there had been no real publishing forum for a piece of short fiction in the five to 50-page range. (Boyd 2006, web.)

Shortly after the introduction of this new form, attributed variously to Walter Scott, Nathaniel Hawthorne or Edgar Allan Poe, what might be termed a hybrid form began to appear, somewhere between a collection of short stories and a novel, which Ingram was later to name the short story cycle. As stated above cycles have a long and glorious history but it is not until the acceptance of the short story as a genre in its own right that the further genre of the short story cycle came to be recognised. The progenitor of this new genre is widely acknowledged to be Ivan Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches*.

Periodicals and journals were certainly as popular in Russia as they were in the West. They were possibly even more widely read and subscribed to, given the number of noble and landowning families who spent large periods of time on their country estates, cut off as they felt from the culture and sophistication of Moscow and St. Petersburg. There is certainly much mention made of such periodicals in 19th century novels, including Dostoyevsky's *The Devils*, in which novel he parodies Turgenev in the character of Karamazinov, the failing 'great writer'. "Dostoevsky himself had actually taken steps to denounce Turgenev, the hated aristocrat and atheist, to 'posterity' long before he lampooned him as Karamazinov" (Magarshack 1953, p. xiii).

It was in the periodical *The Contemporary*, "a liberal Petersburg periodical edited by his friends, the poet Nekrasov and the critic Panaev" (Berlin 1983, p. 7), that most of Turgenev's stories which make up *A Sportsman's Sketches* were first published between 1847 and 1851, a further four being added in the 1870s. He wrote most of them when travelling outside Russia as he was a confirmed Westernist, as opposed to the more Slavophile Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. The stories relate his observations

made while hunting in and around his mother's estate of Spasskoye where he grew up. According to Freeborn:

The fact that he was drawing on memory may account for the brilliant lustre, so evocative and even nostalgic, that surrounds the best of them. Equally, perhaps, it may be that some of the luxuriance of the countryside about Courtavenel⁵ shines through the richness of the nature descriptions. (Freeborn 1990, p. 3.)

Turgenev had an unerring eye for the beauty of the countryside and a poet's power to evoke it, but was similarly observant of the conditions of the serfs he grew up with. So at one and the same time he was able to portray the idyllic lives of idle Russian nobles and contrast them with the wretched lives of the serfs that they owned, the slaves who enabled their indolent existences. Moreover he managed to do this at the same time avoiding the didacticism which would have brought down the wrath of the censors of the repressive Czar Nicholas 1st. This finally did eventuate when the stories were first collected together into the book published in 1852. On their own the individual stories seemed relatively innocuous but, the whole being greater than the sum of its parts, their cumulative effect was considered subversive and he was arrested and exiled to his estate before he left Russia for good.

In many of the *Sketches* Turgenev illustrates not only the inhumanity of the serf-owning system, but also the incomprehension of the landholders that there is anything morally wrong with such a system. Like the slave owners of the American south the whole system was not only considered as 'natural' but also as somehow God ordained. The attitude of the landholder Zverkov in "Yermolay and the Miller's Wife" is a prime example. Turgenev sets up this tale by describing how Yermolay, a serf the narrator has borrowed from a neighbouring landowner to help him hunt, treats his dog. Yermolay never feeds him and allows all sorts of people to beat him

and treat him badly, but nevertheless the dog serves his master very well. On meeting the miller's wife the narrator recognises her as a former house-serf of Zverkov, a man he had once had a conversation with about serfs. Zverkov's wife had obtained her as a little girl and trained her to be her chambermaid, at which she served her mistress well. There was one rule, however; she didn't allow her chambermaids to marry as then they wouldn't devote all their time to satisfying her needs. After ten years the servant asks permission to marry and twice Zverkov refuses, incensed by her ingratitude. When the girl falls pregnant he attaches no blame to the male but orders her hair to be cut off, dresses her in her shabbiest clothes, sends her off to the country and ultimately sells her to the miller, who finds her useful because she can read and write:

You know my wife, she's, she's, she's – she's an angel, when all's said and done! After all she was attached to Arina – and Arina knew that and yet behaved shamelessly...I had no choice. The ingratitude of this girl annoyed and hurt me personally – yes, me, myself – for a long time. I don't care what you say, but you'll not find any heart, any feeling, in these people! (Turgenev 1990, p. 39.)

Zverkov is completely unaware of the irony of his last words; serfs to him, and to most of the landowners in the book, are nothing more than chattels, somewhat akin to Yermolay's dog.

I would hesitate to describe *A Sportsman's Sketches* as a short story cycle, it is a collection of disparate stories, admittedly with similar themes and generally set in a particular geographical area, but lacking development into what Ingram describes as a pattern. Be that as it may it certainly pointed the way for subsequent writers of cycles, amongst them Joyce, Anderson, Hemingway and Steinbeck. It exemplifies the culmination of a development of such stories from the teaching story designed for the moral edification of the individual, through the amusing social commentary

of such works as *Canterbury Tales*, to the site for a much more explicit social critique.

Endnotes

- ¹ There is a further elaboration of what Ingram's means by 'patterns' in my chapter three, page 31.
- ² It is worth pointing out that the pre-modern population would have been much more aware of, and in tune with, the natural cycles which would have dominated them. The seasons would have governed their working lives, both the crops they grew and ate as well as the fertility cycles of their animals. The phases of the moon would have been obvious to them; the cyclical movements of the stars significant; the regularity of the tides, if they were coastal dwellers; the cyclical nature of the weather they experienced; the recurrent changing of the lengths of day and night; as well as the cycles of their own lives – women's menstrual cycles and Shakespeare's seven ages of man, for example. Added to and emphasising these natural cycles would have been the repetition of religious ceremonies as well as of more secular festivals. Truly they lived in a world whose cyclical nature has been mostly forgotten by modern urban peoples.
- ³ Wendy Doniger in her forward to Satyamurti's edition states that the *Mahabharata* is "fifteen times the combined length of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, or seven times the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined" (Doniger 2015, p. xxi).
- ⁴ This was the Black Death which began to spread to Europe from Constantinople and has been calculated by Professor Ole Benedictow to have gone on to wipe out sixty percent of the population of Europe.
- ⁵ It might also have something to do with the fact that Courtavenel, where he was living for a time, was the French estate of Pauline Viardot, the opera singer whom he was in love with for most of his life and her husband Louis, with whom he was on equally good terms and who was also a dedicated hunter.

CHAPTER THREE

TURGENEV'S OFFSPRING.

That there is a genre separate from 'mere' collections of short stories was a theory promulgated by Forrest Ingram in his 1971 work *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*. Having named this genre the 'short story cycle' he identified that:

Patterns that unify a cycle of stories may be patterns of setting, action, theme, character, tone, symbol, subject matter, style or (to borrow Friech Weltz's term) "conception". Usually, more than one such pattern rivets story to story. In some cycles, theme-patterns or motif-patterns predominate...; in others, some character or group of characters undergo a change from one condition to another...; in still others a unity of conception, tone, or subject links the stories to one another more strongly than any other pattern...; in others still, a setting or locale (usually treated symbolically) serves as a dominant unifying backdrop to the thematic actions of each story. (Ingram 1971, p. 200.)

In this chapter I shall be discussing chronologically four authors who in the early 20th century all wrote short story cycles, and who indeed could be said to have invented the genre. That all of these writers had read Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches* and, to greater or lesser degrees, had acknowledged some debt to his work is what prompted me to call the chapter Turgenev's Offspring.

According to Elke D'hoker subsequent critics¹ have objected to Ingram's term 'short story cycle', but she states that his term, "still enjoys the greatest critical currency, despite objections to the connotation of circularity it may imply" (2013, pp. 151-152). Since the four writers mentioned in this chapter all exhibit circularity in the works of theirs that I shall be discussing I shall continue to use Ingram's term. Joyce's cycle moves from the death of an old man in the present to that of a young man in the past; Anderson's from the dreams of an old man to those of a young one;

Hemingway's starts with the evacuation of Greeks from Smyrna in 1922 and ends with the abolition of the Greek monarchy in 1924; and Steinbeck's begins with the Spanish corporal's unfulfilled dreams of settling in the valley he discovered in 1776, and ends with a modern-day tour bus driver having the same, probably unrealisable, thoughts.

I do take issue with Ingram's description of locales as being 'usually treated symbolically' however, as it seems to imply the unimportance to each author of any realistic portrayal of locations. On the contrary, to my mind it is precisely the realism of the portrayals which imbue the cycles I shall be discussing in this chapter with much of their power. These locales reflect the primary impulses which spurred the authors to create such cycles - their desires to express some form of social commentary similar to that evinced in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* or Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches*. Of the four, Joyce is the only one to be somewhat dismissive of Turgenev, considering him as second rate when compared to Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, but according to Neil Cornwell, "Joyce still prefers Turgenev's early *A Sportsman's Sketches* to the later novels...The *Sketches* for Joyce went deeper into life" (1992, pp. 27-28).

In 1914 James Joyce's cycle of short stories *Dubliners* was finally published, ten years after he had started writing them and seven since he had completed the final story 'The Dead'. According to Andrew Gibson (2006, p. 175) in that same year he had completed *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which Ezra Pound then began to serialize in the *Egoist*, and begun work on both his play *Exiles* and on *Ulysses*, the novel for which he is regarded as the father of modernism. Ingram points out that it took thirty years after publication, "before critics began to recognise

the various levels on which *Dubliners*, now fifteen stories, cohered to form a single book” (1971, pp. 26-7), rather than a mere short story collection. Ingram goes on to analyse the various patterns that critics have put forward to justify their arguments for a cohesive whole, from an analogy to *The Odyssey*, to an exemplification of the seven deadly sins, to a parallel with several of Ibsen’s plays. Although not accepting any of these arguments wholly he goes on to say that these critics:

...however, have uncovered a sufficient amount of convincing data to establish *Dubliners* as one of the most significant short story cycles of this half-century...its unity rests primarily on its concomitant development of themes and motifs...as in other cycles, Joyce’s final story concentrates dominant motifs, and structures more clearly central symbols so that, in retrospect, earlier stories of the cycle are illumined. (Ingram 1971, p. 33.)

Gibson says that, “*Dubliners* is about Dublin at the turn of the twentieth century. In other words it is about the Dublin Joyce left, and helps to explain why he left it,” accompanied by Nora Barnacle in 1904. Gibson goes on to describe it as, “possibly the most impoverished European city outside Russia” (2006, p. 68). That Joyce saw his project as an attempt at the ‘liberation’ of his people from the joint constraints of church authority and colonial subjectivity, rather than as a means of washing his hands of them, is illustrated by his reaction to the proposed title of the German translation of the work: rather than ‘*What They’re Like in Dublin*’ Joyce preferred ‘*What We’re Like in Dublin*’ (Gibson 2006, p 73).

That the work was conceived as a patterned whole was stated by Joyce himself in a 1906 letter quoted by Scarlett Baron, “I have tried to present it [Dublin] to the indifferent public under four of its aspects: childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life” (Joyce in Baron 2012, p. xxiv). That its primary focus was as a work of social criticism was also spelled out at the outset; John Banville quotes a letter to a friend Joyce wrote in 1904, “I shall call the series *Dubliners* to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city” (Joyce in Banville 2012, p. x).

Joyce considered himself to be a revolutionary, attempting to shock the city's inhabitants out of their paralysing complacency and drag them into the modern world. To do this, for all the use of 'themes and motifs', he uses a fastidious realism in the stories, whereby, as Baron puts it, "realistic techniques were mobilized to particular ends" (Baron 2012, p. xvii.). Echoing Shakespeare, his intention is to hold up a mirror in which Dublin's citizens can take a 'long hard look at themselves':

Joyce may indeed have felt that the creation of a faultlessly honest looking-glass was the only form of representation that would be true, and therefore worthwhile. But to render the lives of everyday Dubliners – struggling against poverty, alcoholism, violence, and exploitation – strictly as he saw them, was a considered choice (one which pitted him starkly against the mythologizing of the Irish Literary Revival) and the source of his stories' abiding originality. (Baron 2012, p. xx.)

There are many similarities between Joyce's *Dubliners* and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* - similarities of feeling if not of style. It is not known whether Anderson had read Joyce's work, although it is possible since *Dubliners* was first published in America in 1916 by B.W. Huebsch, Anderson's publisher, some three years before he issued *Winesburg*. The two lonely characters in 'A Painful Case' could well have been examples of Anderson's grotesques - the one isolated in his fastidiously furnished room, the other trapped in a loveless marriage, both unable to make a meaningful connection with the other. Joyce's first story 'The Sisters' functions somewhat similarly to Anderson's framing story 'The Book of the Grotesque' introducing, as it does, the major theme of paralysis – "It filled me with fear and yet I longed to be nearer to it and look upon its deadly work" (Joyce 2012, p. 3). Most of Joyce's characters are unfulfilled and unsatisfied with their lives, many of them have dreams of escape but are held back, like Eveline in her eponymous story, by their own paralysing fears. In the penultimate sentence of her story she becomes "passive, like a helpless animal" (33).

It is this passivity that Joyce is railing against. He portrays a society whose inhabitants willingly accept their own chains, whether these are formed by an empty religiosity, a fear of authority or of shaming themselves in other's eyes, however fascinated they may be by their glimpses of possible alternate lives. As he puts it in 'After the Race', "through this channel of poverty and inaction the continent sped its wealth and industry. Now and again the clumps of people raised the cheer of the gratefully oppressed" (34). Joyce's characters escape from their humdrum lives either by dreaming or by drinking, often both, which render them incapable of effecting any change. Little Chandler in 'A Little Cloud' dreams of writing a book of poetry, since he feels in himself a poetical melancholy akin to the writers of the Irish Literary Revival popular at the time, whom Joyce obviously enjoyed satirising - "their little circle of kindred minds" (63). Rather than writing anything though, Little Chandler imagines instead what would be written about him, his personal fantasy so strong that he misses the street he is aiming for. With this deft touch Joyce illustrates that the would-be poet is completely oblivious of the reality around him, until at the end of the story he is ashamed of his inability to quiet his screaming child.

There is much mention of violence towards children in the stories. This is sometimes overt, as by the paedophile, "queer old josser" (19) who, having masturbated in the corner of the field in 'An Encounter', turns from his attempt at seduction to an excited reverie on the pleasures of whipping young boys. At other times the violence is mentioned almost casually, as when Old Jack in 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room' regrets that he is now unable to stand over his nineteen year old son as he used to and beat him with a stick (107). More grotesquely a walking stick is used by the humiliated alcoholic in 'Counterparts' to beat his small child who is attempting to cook his dinner but has allowed the fire to die down (86). The viciousness of this

attack is emphasised, while the reader is left in no doubt that it is carried out solely so that the father can regain some sense of authority amidst the failure of his own life. The pitiful pleading of the little boy that he will say Hail Mary's for the father if he doesn't beat him, serves to emphasise the uselessness of the religion that they are all steeped in.

Scarlett Baron, in her 2012 introduction to *Dubliners*, points out that, "If the stories are realistic in their attention to the ascertainable facts of Dublin life, they are also realistic by virtue of their psychological penetration" (2012, p. xxi). Joyce then, like Sherwood Anderson, considered the new genre of the short story cycle he was creating, influenced by his reading of Turgenev, to be the perfect medium for a realistic portrayal of a society and its ills, as they affect a cross section of individuals.

Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches* was frequently mentioned as an influence by Anderson, and as Myler Wilkinson points out, "much of the pathos and poetic realism which Anderson found in the Russian's stories eventually found its way into his own evocations of men and women of Middle America" (1986, p. 5). Ingram posits a continuum of short story cycles. He places Kafka's *Hunger-Artist* at the end most akin to a loose collection and Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* at the other, the almost-novel end. Between these extremities he places Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* as being most representative, or easily recognisable, of the new genre he was postulating. Concerned as he is with establishing the cycle as a genre, Ingram concentrates on the structure of Anderson's work which, "emerges from the complexus of static and dynamic patterns of their self-contained, relatively independent components" (Ingram 1971, p. 200). In his chapter devoted to *Winesburg* Ingram firstly concentrates on the function of the narrator, then on the

developing character of George Willard as he grows towards his “mythic departure”, following this with discussion of various themes (such as adventure, dreams and hunger) and then of recurring symbols he perceives in the stories. Ingram does give some space to a discussion of setting, usually in terms of the room, or cell, that each individual ‘grotesque’ inhabits, however there is scant discussion of Winesburg’s society as a whole.

While there is much discussion of each individual character’s loneliness and/or alienation as the basis of their grotesquery, whenever Anderson makes a more general point about the causes of this alienation it is dismissed by Ingram as a “distressing” intrusion by the author into the story proper (1971, p.160). In this context he particularly singles out the passage in ‘Godliness’ which is worth quoting in full as, it seems to me, it neatly encapsulates Anderson’s impetus for writing *Winesburg, Ohio* in the first place:

In the last fifty years a vast change has taken place in the lives of our people. A revolution has in fact taken place. The coming of industrialism, attended by all the roar and rattle of affairs, the shrill cries of millions of new voices that have come amongst us from over seas, the going and coming of trains, the growth of cities, the building of the interurban car lines that weave in and out of towns and past farmhouses, and now in these later days the coming of the automobiles has worked a tremendous change in the lives and in the habits of thought of our people of Mid-America. Books, badly imagined and written though they may be in the hurry of our times, are in every household, magazines circulate by the millions of copies, newspapers are everywhere. In our day a farmer standing by the stove in the store in his village has his mind filled to overflowing with the words of other men. The newspapers and the magazines have pumped him full. Much of the old brutal ignorance that had in it also a kind of beautiful childlike innocence is gone forever. The farmer by the stove is brother to the men of the cities, and if you listen you will find him talking as glibly and as senselessly as the best city man of us all. (Anderson 1997, pp. 48-9.)

In this particular story he acknowledges that he is describing the America of the period immediately following the Civil War to his contemporary audience (1919 being the date of publication). Placed somewhat half-way between these two

periods is the action of *Winesburg* itself, set in the time of Anderson's own growth to manhood in the small mid-western town of Clyde, Ohio. Thus the action detailed in the majority of these stories mirrors the uneasy transition period in American history from the relative collective stability of an agrarian frontier society to the new industrial and urbanized era of the early twentieth century:

As with Ingram much has been made by critics of Anderson's concentration on loneliness, isolation or the psychology of sexual repression which has turned these characters into 'grotesques'. These factors are undoubtedly highlighted in most of the stories but little mention was made, until the later part of the 20th century, of what might have caused them. This is the 'revolution' which Anderson mentions overtly in the above passage, or more obliquely and/or symbolically in many of the stories – that is, the breakdown of any sense of collective identity, the absence of the feeling of community that might be expected in a small mid-western American town. In effect Anderson is exploding the nostalgic myth which might have existed in the minds of 1920s Americans about the good life of the 1890s from which they themselves had escaped in the so-called 'revolt from the village.'

In the first story 'Hands', immediately following the prologue or framing story 'The Book of the Grotesque', the main character, "did not think of himself as in any way a part of the life of the town where he had lived for twenty years" (11). This character is described as a natural-born teacher of youth on a somewhat prelapsarian Socratic model, one who through his own example and through physical contact enables his charges to expand their imaginations, "to dream" (15). In traditional small-town America the school teacher would have been one of the pillars of the community, respected as equally as the preacher. In this case the modern, homophobic fathers

of the town, filled no doubt with “the words of other men” that they have read in their magazines, immediately accept the troubled fantasies of one of his charges, a “half-witted boy”, as gospel, beat the teacher ruthlessly and drive him out of Pennsylvania (the Quaker-settled home of ‘brotherly love’). This causes him not only to change his identity, give up being a teacher which he was “meant by nature to be” (15), but also drives him to self-doubt, destroying his natural personality to such an extent that he has to keep his one expressive feature, his hands, hidden away, or otherwise under control when conversing with his only friend. Finally he is reduced in his isolation to kneeling and picking breadcrumbs from his floor: symbolically doing penance for something of which he was innocent.

Clare Colquitt places Anderson’s book with others that have been described by Sandra Zagarell as “narratives of community” which, she said, locates its focus in “the collective life of the community” and “seeks to represent what gives the community its identity, what enables it to remain itself” (quoted by Colquitt 1990, p. 73). Unlike Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs* with which Colquitt contrasts *Winesburg, Ohio* she points out that on the contrary “Anderson’s small Midwestern town is devoid of rituals commemorating the essential harmony – and connectedness – of its inhabitants” (Colquitt 1990, p. 83). The sole remaining community ritual Anderson mentions is merely in its aftermath, when “the sadness of sophistication” (193) comes over George Willard and he sits with Helen White in the “half-decayed old grand-stand” of the fairground surrounded by phantoms, “on all sides are ghosts, not of the dead, but of living people” (198). *Winesburg* is peopled by grotesques and the only sense of community is one between the ghosts of the living dead. This is what Anderson is aiming at portraying with his cycle, not merely a succession of pen portraits of psychically deformed individuals, but rather

the breakdown of community which had caused this malaise. It is with his often quoted 'new looseness of form', the short story cycle influenced by his reading of Turgenev, that he found it possible to describe such a community, in whatever symbolical and psychological terms he deemed to be appropriate.

Thomas Yingling, in following an argument of Gramsci's, posits that the sexual repression evidenced in so many of the stories is a symptom of this breakdown of community as: "sexuality does not exist apart from the discourses, practices, and institutions that make it meaningful." (Yingling, 1990: 101.) He goes on to say that:

To turn the discussion of *Winesburg* towards the question of material history is not to divert it from its own stated themes. The text displays a consistent (if somewhat incoherent) interest in economic relations...Does this book about a town have any collective experience or identity at its centre? The question of the collective ought to arise...for although the book examines the burden of separation in some detail, it is itself a collection, a series of stories that cannot but raise the question of what binds it (and the town it represents) together. (Yingling, 1990, p. 102.)

One thing to say before leaving my discussion of *Winesburg*, as it has bearing on my own practice, is Anderson's emphatic use of 'realism'. For all his use of symbols and mythic themes, and for all his presentation of the characters as 'grotesques', each of them are given fully detailed back-stories, as well as entirely believable descriptions and character traits which bring them into sharp relief. Even when the characters are blissfully unaware of their own psychological drives, the reader is left in no doubt. The Reverend Hartman in 'The Strength of God' may interpret his impulse as a divine "trial of his soul" (124), but the reader understands that he is merely struggling with his own voyeurism, of which he is ashamed. The reader is left wondering how long the reverend's supposed triumph will last, since it is based on a fevered self-deception, leading only to a bloody fist, a bigger hole in the window

(which he is convinced he will now fix), and a self-justification of his spying on the naked woman, whom he now interprets as a manifestation of God.

Anderson's use of detailed realism is carried on to his descriptions of the town itself, indeed the first edition included a mud-map with a numbered key pointing out many of the more significant locations. Anderson's use of a narrator who relates the stories in a 'down-home' oral style reminiscent of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* goes further to reinforce the reality of the tales, at the same time being in ironic contradiction to the underlying theme of the book, the breakdown of community. This is because, as Yingling mentions in his essay, according to Walter Benjamin oral storytelling is dying out in the modern age as it is a form, "connected to a collectively oriented art, to an integrated social world" (Yingling, 1990: 123).

Ernest Hemingway was another creator of what is regarded as a short story cycle, *In Our Time*, who had been influenced by Turgenev. In his later memoir *A Moveable Feast*, written about the period when he was honing his craft, Hemingway describes first going to the Shakespeare and Company bookshop and lending library shortly after arriving in Paris and borrowing books:

I started with Turgenev and took the two volumes of *A Sportsman's Sketches* and an early book of D.H. Lawrence, I think it was *Sons and Lovers*, and Sylvia told me to take more books if I wanted. I chose the Constance Garnett edition of *War and Peace*, and *The Gambler and Other Stories* by Dostoyevsky. (Hemingway 2004, p. 21.)

In the same chapter he makes clear that he was already aware of the works of James Joyce and, indeed, that he had seen him in Paris. According to Susan Garland Mann (1989, p. 71) in 1935 Hemingway listed *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Dubliners* as amongst the 16 books that he wished he could read again for the first time. Previous to his 1921 trip to Paris he had struck up a friendship with Sherwood

Anderson in Chicago, who had given him letters of introduction to Gertrude Stein and Sylvia Beach, the owner of Shakespeare and Company. It is possible that it was Anderson who introduced Hemingway to the works of Turgenev, and Myler Wilkinson notes that Noel Fitch recorded Hemingway as borrowing *A Sportsman's Sketches* and other Turgenev titles multiple times during the 1920s (1989, p. 7).

Wilkinson goes on to remark that:

On both a stylistic and thematic level the stories in *A Sportsman's Sketches* foreshadow much of what Hemingway would do in his own short fiction seventy years further on – one witnesses the same concern for, and love of, landscape and terrain; the same exactness and subtlety of natural description to evoke complex emotional states; the same empathy for simple people who have not yet entirely lost connection with place; and, finally, the same pathos connected with a simpler, more integrated past. (Wilkinson 1989, p. 28-29.)

In Our Time is structurally a much more complicated work than either Turgenev's, Anderson's or Joyce's, to the extent that it is questionable whether it should be considered a short story cycle at all. This is not only because of the interleaving between the stories proper of the earlier written vignettes, but also because of a lack of any unifying setting. The vignettes read much more like pieces of reportage, Hemingway's occupation at the time, and the settings range between Michigan, Turkey, Greece, Massachusetts, Italy, Oklahoma, Switzerland, France and Spain. Nick Adams, who is the nearest thing to a central character, only appears in one of the sixteen vignettes and overtly in only eight of the sixteen stories (counting 'Big Two-Hearted River' as two stories, and the prologue 'On the Quay at Smyrna' as another one), although in another three the unnamed main character could be construed as him. Nevertheless Adams does provide some sense of chronological unity as, in his stories, like George Willard in *Winesburg* and the disparate characters in *Dubliners*, he moves from childhood, through adolescence to maturity.

As well as the lack of coherent setting there seems to be a disjunction of styles between some of the stories included in *In Our Time*². Most of them were written in a very short space of time³. However 'My Old Man' and 'Out of Season' had been published two years previously in *Three Stories and Ten Poems* and were possibly included because they are good stories in their own right, rather than any natural linkage with the others. Their inclusion might speak more to Hemingway's stated desire to "bring out a good fat book" (quoted in Mann 1989, p. 84). Maybe he would have included the third story 'Up in Michigan' had not Gertrude Stein previously described it as "*inaccrochable*", as reported in *A Movable Feast* (Hemingway, 2004: 9).

While previous publication does not disqualify the inclusion of those stories in an 'arranged' cycle⁴, as will be discussed in relation to John Morrison, the humour and satirical tenor of *Mr and Mrs Elliot* seems totally out of step with the rest of *In Our Time*. The constant repetition of the couple "trying to have a baby" in various locations is hilarious, as are lines like "they tried as often as Mrs Elliot could stand it" (151). Similarly laughable is Mr Elliot's incomprehension at his abandonment by all his previous sweethearts once he informed them that he had kept his body pure. At least Elliot is actually writing poems, rather than merely dreaming about it like Little Chandler in Joyce's 'A Little Cloud'. Nevertheless we are left in little doubt about the quality of his output, "He wrote very long poems very rapidly" (151). Not only does Mrs Elliot fail to have a baby, she is not very good at typing Elliot's poems and finally hands that chore over to the girlfriend she now shares her bed with.

The vignettes don't follow any chronological pattern. They start being wartime scenes, but then there is one about an American policeman shooting a Hungarian

robber. This is followed by a series of bullfighting scenes, and then there is the description of the execution of a criminal, presumably in America. Finally there is an epilogue concerning the deposition of the Greek King, which relates thematically to the opening story 'On the Quay at Smyrna', to the vignette which begins Chapter Two which describes Greek refugees fleeing from Turkey, and also to the one at the start of Chapter Five about the execution of Greek politicians. Although somewhat unrelated the vignettes are all concerned with violence and death in one way or another.

There are thus several reasons for not considering *In Our Time* as a consistent short story cycle...and yet...and yet...they do seem to hang together, just not in the same way as the others considered in this chapter. Certainly Hemingway considered it to be a unified whole and Susan Mann quotes him as saying, "There is nothing in the book that has not a definite place in its organization" (Hemingway in Mann 1989, p. 73)⁵. The fact is that Hemingway was taking the experiments of his previous influences much further. The narrative strategies employed by Anderson and Joyce in their individual stories are reasonably straightforward, which they then organise into their cycles in such a way that they have a logical chronological development, as well providing them with a stable setting, so that they become Claire Colquitt's "narratives of community" (1990, p. 73). Hemingway's cycle, as its title states, is an attempt at the narrative of the general Western experience in the years preceding and immediately following the First World War. That this is an experience of fragmentation is mirrored by his work, possibly influenced by the experimentation going on in the visual arts all around him in bohemian Paris, as well as by writers such as Ezra Pound, T.S. Elliot and Gertrude Stein. There seems to me to be a correlation between *In Our Time* and the multiple views of a single subject found in

cubist paintings and the dislocations featured in much post-cubist work. Hemingway was a 'creature of his time' reflecting it back to us in this, possibly his most experimental work.

The final writer I wish to include in my list of 'Turgenev's sons' is John Steinbeck. When comparing Steinbeck to Hemingway Jennifer Smith states that both of them, "were deeply influenced by two earlier practitioners of the short story cycle: Ivan Turgenev and Sherwood Anderson. Both read and admired *A Sportsman's Sketches* and *Winesburg, Ohio*" (2013, p. 176).

In 1932 Steinbeck published his second work, *The Pastures of Heaven*, a cycle of stories set in a secluded valley near the Californian town of Salinas. The ten stories are all set in the years 1928 and 1929, framed by a foundational prologue set around 1776 and an epilogue which looks to the future and has a much more contemporary feel. Of the many techniques Steinbeck uses to unify his stories perhaps the most pervasive is irony – both in the tone of the narrative, as well as implicit in the stories themselves. This irony is in evidence from the outset where the Spaniard, who discovers and names the valley, is hunting down Indian slaves who have run away from their task of building a religious mission. Firstly Steinbeck describes them ironically; they demonstrate "diabolic guile in concealing traces of their journey" and practice "abominations" by falling "asleep in attitudes of abandon" (1995, p. 3). The rapacious Spanish corporal who recaptures them is also ironically described as the "savage bearer of civilization" (4). Having delivered the Indians back to religious servitude he meets an ironic end himself, as, rather than returning to the valley to enjoy his last years in peaceful serenity, he was locked into an old barn to die as, "an Indian woman [had] presented him with the pox" (4). Thus Steinbeck introduces

not only his ironic style but also a number of the major themes of the work: the unfulfilled dreams and shattered illusions of the protagonists, self-delusion, the conflict between nature and civilization, and his use and undermining of Biblical allusions.

In using Biblical stories he ironically inverts their outcomes. The Indians labouring in the clay pits to make adobe bricks for the mission are reminiscent of the Israelites making bricks in Egypt, except that the Indians fail in their 'exodus' and are delivered back into bondage. George Battle's wife could be thought of as being possessed by the devil when she attempts to burn down the house, but once exorcised by crocheting the life of Christ, her possession is passed on, as in the parable of the Gadarene swine. Her son inherits both her "epilepsy and the mad knowledge of God" (8), and goes about madly trying to cast out devils until he is bitten by a snake. The story of Shark Wicks in chapter three is reminiscent of the parable of the talents, as Shark tries to hide the gift of his beautiful daughter, and then fantasises about his growing wealth. The Tularecito story has an affinity with the tale of the prodigal son as he calls "My father, I have come home" (52) only to receive no answer. Helen Van Deventer is a Job-like figure, except that "she hungered for tragedy" (55), relishes her travails and is proud of her endurance, until she is driven to murder her burdensome daughter. Junius and Robert Maltby expel themselves from the Pastures of Heaven when they become ashamed of their near nakedness, much like Adam and Eve. The Lopez sisters have the innocent faith of the reformed prostitute Mary Magdalene but end up being forced to realize that they are sinners. A parallel for the character of Molly Morgan could be Christ himself, with the adoration that the children have for her, her skill at settling arguments, her planning of refreshments, her feelings for the thief Vasquez, and her relationship with her

father, from whom she eventually flees when she realizes that he has 'forsaken her'. Steinbeck emphasises the whiteness of Raymond Banks' farm buildings where there was 'never any filth', his frequently whitewashed house, his five thousand white chickens and one thousand white ducks. This and the fact that he watches executions reminds me of the passage in Matthew's Gospel which goes "For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness" (Matthew, 23:27). For Pat Humbert there is an affinity with Lazarus, except that it is his parents who die, allowing him a kind of temporary rebirth. His parlour is described as sepulchral and is "never entered except by corpses and their attendants" (150-1) which he locks fast. Later we learn that the "centre of his fears" is the Bible itself (162). Richard Whiteside resembles a Biblical prophet with his vision of the valley and the building he will erect to house the forthcoming dynasty which never eventuates. He 'builds his house on rock', or at least with a slate roof, guaranteeing that it will last for five hundred years, "a temple built around the hearth" (182), as his son John remembers. John carries on his father's patriarchal dynastic dreams but *his* son Bill has no interest in the inheritance, and moves to Monterey with his new wife. Then, of course, there is the name of the valley itself, a modern-day Eden where, as the bus driver in the epilogue ironically says, "how quiet and easy a man could live" (201).

Like *Winesburg* and *Dubliners* Steinbeck's work has a specific location and a semblance of chronological development. As Susan Mann points out each story, whenever it begins, always ends slightly later than the preceding one and that by:

Generally restricting background information about the protagonist(s) to the first few paragraphs, Steinbeck quickly shifts to the present tense action of the story. Through this method, a sense of progression in time is gradually achieved. (Mann 1989, p.96.)

It is even more tightly unified by the presence of the Munroe family who appear in every story, although not as an evil force, as some critics have thought, since they are merely incidental characters in some of them. Whether the Munroes have been active participants or merely passing onlookers, the fact is that each story deals with the destruction of the protagonists' dreams, aspirations or self-delusions. Sometimes this could be thought of as a conflict between societal norms and individuality, but in effect it is always reality intruding into the lives of the characters and exposing the emptiness or impossibility of their fantasies. Helen Van Deventer would never have been able to look after her daughter forever. Shark Wicks was bound to be exposed as a pauper eventually. You just cannot live without ever working as Junius Maltby wanted. Romantic dreamers such as Molly Morgan are bound to be disappointed when confronted with earthly reality. Pat Humbert has left it too late to attract a young wife, however pretty his nest. You cannot guarantee the future against accident as the Whitesides had wanted. This is the theme of the book; it is not a parade of psychological cripples as Anderson had presented, it is not a vicious attack as Joyce may have intended, nor yet is it a portrayal of human violence as per Hemingway. Rather it is a wry portrayal of human foibles rendered with Steinbeck's gentle and gracious irony, and occasional poetic evocation of nature. As the tourists look down into the valley in the epilogue they all have dreams that they project onto the place but ultimately decide that such dreams are impossible. Even the priest 'punishes' his thoughts of an Arcadian escape and wistfully considers, "Maybe I'll come to a place like this when I'm dead" (200).

In this discussion of the works of four of the seminal writers of the first half of the twentieth century I have pointed out that each of them utilized the short story cycle as a perfect vehicle for the expression of some form of social criticism. Joyce by

commenting on a specific society in a specific time, Anderson by creating a representative town in a period of transition, Hemingway by relating a plethora of experiences across a number of locales in a violent epoch, and Steinbeck by conjuring up a mythical settler valley to illustrate the dangers of self-deception inherent in the American dream.

Terry Eagleton in his book *Marxism and Literary Criticism* cites Walter Benjamin as considering that, “montage – the connecting of dissimilars to shock an audience into insight – becomes...a major principle of artistic production in a technological age” (1976, p. 63). The method pioneered by these writers in the creation of their short story cycles could be likened to this film editing technique for much the same reason. The theory of montage was developed firstly as a stage technique by Meyerhold in his production of Mayakovsky’s *Mystery-Bouffe* in 1918, and was considered by the two men as a “declaration of war against the caution and routine of the established stage.” (Braun 1995, p. 158) The same might be said for these four writers who each contributed to the forging of a new fictional form in order to shock their audiences into enlightenment.

Endnote

- ¹ In this context she mentions R. Luscher and J. Nagel.
- ² Susan Mann states that “image patterns and symbols contribute subtly to the unity of *In Our Time*” (81).
- ³ “Most of the *In Our Time* vignettes were written between December 1922 and August 1923 and most of the stories between January and September 1924” (Mann 1989, p. 73).
- ⁴ According to Forrest Ingram there are three kinds of short story cycles; those “COMPOSED as a continuous whole, or ARRANGED into a series, or COMPLETED to form a set” (1971: 17).
- ⁵ This was in response to his publisher asking for changes, in much the same way that Joyce had reacted to requests for changes by his publisher, “you really cannot expect me to mutilate my work” (Joyce in Baron 2012, p. xx).

CHAPTER FOUR

TWO AUSTRALIANS.

In this chapter I intend to discuss works by two Australian authors - Frank Hardy and John Morrison. The particular works under scrutiny of these close contemporaries I contend are short story cycles rather than 'mere' collections, which is how they have been traditionally described. As with the four authors considered in my previous chapter I consider that these two authors have deliberately constructed their works as cycles, exhibiting numbers of the unifying patterns Ingram stated characterize cycles, as they considered this a more effective means of expressing social commentary.

In 1963 Frank Hardy collected a number of his short stories and published them as *Legends from Benson's Valley*. That these stories were written over a number of years, 'The Load of Wood' having been first published in 1946, does not militate against my argument since Ingram posits three methods for the composition of such a cycle, "Linked stories may have been COMPOSED as a continuous whole, or ARRANGED into a series, or COMPLETED to form a set" (1971, p. 17). According to his analysis *composed* cycles are those which have been conceived as a cycle from the beginning, such as Steinbeck's *The Pastures of Heaven*. The *completed* cycle then being one in which the author has written more stories to complete the pattern, such as Joyce did with his concluding story for *Dubliners*. The *arranged* cycle is one where the stories have been written independently and then subsequently juxtaposed in order to create some kind of pattern. This would appear to be the technique employed by Sherwood Anderson for *Winesburg, Ohio* and the

one adopted by Frank Hardy for his *Legends from Benson's Valley*, and later by John Morrison for his *Stories of the Waterfront*.

Further grounds for considering *Benson's Valley* as a cycle are given by Susan Mann in the introduction to her work on the subject:

Although there is no limit to the kinds of subjects or themes that are found in cycles, one repeatedly discovers that twentieth-century cycles are preoccupied with certain themes, including isolation, disintegration, indeterminacy, the role of the artist, and the maturation process. One also finds that they tend to be dominated by one particular element of fiction, whether it is character, plot or setting. (Mann 1989, p. 13-14.)

Although not all of Hardy's stories are set in the heart of Benson's Valley they all revolve around it – characters might leave for work or to attend demonstrations and then return, until in the final story the narrator is about to leave the valley for good. Some of his characters are finely drawn, although the majority are sketches portrayed in such a way as to emphasise their eccentricity. It is Hardy's careful plotting that has particular appeal to me, a skill honed presumably in the school of yarn-spinning. The foundation of a good yarn is usually a real event that is then worked on again and again in its numerous re-tellings until it achieves a shape satisfactory to the teller at that particular moment. This is the essence of constructing a story, whether it be spoken or written down.

The predominant theme in Hardy's work is abundantly clear; the struggles of working people to survive and to maintain their dignity when faced with the catastrophe of the Great Depression. Concomitant with that is the breakdown of social relations as class differences become more blatant with the changing economic situation. In 'The Final of the Billiards' Tournament' Hardy states this quite baldly:

Prior to the depression, the town had been relatively free from class distinction and snobbery...The sons and daughters of farmers and workers intermarried without interference from their parents...[the children] when they grew up, found friendship more important than money or social position...Then the coal mine closed down and the milk factory machines whirred only part time. More than half the workers' families were on the dole. The small farmers on the poorest land...were in the hands of the banks or the stock and station agents and many were driven from their farms to join the dole queues in the town. The barriers of wealth and class, previously hidden from view, loomed high to divide the community with walls which not even young love could climb. The wealthy clustered closer together to protect their privileges and talk with contempt of the susses who didn't work. (Hardy 1976, p. 54-55.)

Particularly telling in this piece is the phrase "previously hidden from view." Hardy is not only trying to describe the everyday reality of the workers of Benson's Valley during the depression but, as a committed communist, also to expose capitalism's underlying structures which make such suffering inevitable when markets fail. This is a rare piece of didacticism in the work as a whole, somewhat similar to the piece which Ingram found "distressing" in Anderson's story 'Godliness' quoted in my previous chapter. Rare because, for all his political concerns, Hardy was first and foremost a storyteller, like the example of his yarn-spinning father Tom (affectionately referred to as Toss), and also his literary hero Henry Lawson. As Paul Adams states, "Hardy is principally a storyteller; the real events and real people he depicts are often incidental to the act of storytelling itself" (1999, p.9).

The model for the town of Benson's Valley was Bacchus Marsh, the small country town in western Victoria where Hardy spent the majority of his childhood before leaving for Melbourne at the age of twenty-one in 1938. He had left school at fourteen during one of the worst years of the depression. The family was very poor, with two parents and eight children living in a small rented cottage in Lerderberg Street. Tom having lost his job meant that they were on 'sustenance relief' which entailed being granted a limited number of food vouchers which the recipient had to state at which shop they would be redeemed. This was the demeaning 'bag system'

that Darcy and Ernie Lyle travel to Melbourne to demonstrate against in the story 'It's Moments Like These...'¹ This relief was withdrawn should anyone living in the house find work, which prompted Hardy, like the narrator of 'The Cockie In Bungaree', to travel around the area living in sheds while picking fruit and vegetables. In her biography Jenny Hocking quotes an interview Hardy gave with Andrea Stretton:

I dug or picked anything that grew, followed the seasons, potatoes, grapes, apples, pears, peas, beans. That way you got a bit of work. You see if you stayed at home, your father, if he happened to be out of work...he couldn't get rations or dole while any of his sons were working. (Hardy in Hocking 2005, p.11.)

Jenny Hocking goes on to say:

All around them evictions and mortgage defaults were common. The State Bank of Victoria had taken possession of 1,710 properties in 1934 alone, from a total of fifty-eight just four years earlier. The role of the private banks during the Depression was stark and vicious...Yet at this time the Labor Party...was invisible, just when working people needed it most. It was the Unemployed Workers' Movement, an offshoot of the Communist Party of Australia, that represented an angry, betrayed and unemployed workforce. (Hocking 2005, p. 11-12.)

From this it can be seen that the stories which comprise the *Legends from Benson's Valley* describe something of the lived experience of the Hardy family in the 1930s, however much the episodes were modified as Frank wrote them down from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. It has to be remembered that as well as being a member of the Realist Writers' Group in Melbourne in the 1940s Frank Hardy was the son of a champion yarn-spinner. He is quoted as saying, "People would come on Sunday night to hear him tell yarns and recite and we'd all join in" (Hardy in Camm 1986, p. 291). Indeed some of the younger Hardy's stories were based on his father's yarns. Jenny Hocking relates an incident wherein Toss Hardy and a number of locals are waiting to tar and feather the Prime Minister Billy Hughes who was supposed to be speaking at a rally in support of conscription for World War 1. When Hughes didn't

turn up they all went to the pub, swearing that they would chase him back to Melbourne and string him up. They then proceeded to get so drunk that they missed any opportunity to confront him. She goes on to say:

Frank Hardy had heard his father retell this story many times, and over the years the crowd grew from Tom Watson and a few farmers headed for the pub to fifty, a hundred, now hundreds of angry farmers intent on revolution, dispersed by police into reluctant surrender. (Hocking 2005, p. 2.)

This story metamorphosed under Frank's pen into the hilarious drunken action of 'When Sandy Mitchell Won the Lottery' just as Tom Watson, the Hardys' neighbour in Bacchus Marsh and the leader of the local Unemployed Workers' Movement, became the Col MacDougal of *Benson's Valley*.

The story 'Isn't It a Bloody Caution?' is another Toss Hardy yarn according to Paul Adams who describes it as, "a kind of celebration of the triumph of the oral word over written language" (1999, p. 22). This phrase is the only one the farmer ever utters, but which always conveys clear and adequate meaning in the context of his lived traditional culture. That this culture is in decline is demonstrated by the fact that his cycle riding son, who is in the process of breaking away from the life of his horse and cart driving father, is no longer clear about the meaning of this utterance.

The yarn-spinning element in Hardy's work is accompanied by a more hard-line social realist element in such stories as 'The Load of Wood', 'The Gambler', 'Not So Many Lately' and 'Good As Ever'. 'The Gambler' is a stark picture of working class poverty, more a sketch in the Lawson vein, where the only hope of improvement is a big win on the races. The father is described as "powerfully built and broad shouldered", but his hair is "prematurely white". Both he and his wife are "shabbily dressed"; she has "a certain dignity and charm of bearing" but walks "bent slightly forward from the hips as if carrying a heavy burden" (Hardy 1976, p. 133). They are

the very picture of a couple ground down by unemployment. Even the cobbler's last, on which he is attempting to repair the family's shoes, has one of its three metal legs broken off, emphasising in one concise image both the wasted skill with which he is endowed, and their impoverished circumstances. They have been living off credit and are likely to face eviction if they can't pay their bills. While listening to the radio on the old, faulty crystal set the father gets excited that he might be on to a good win that will save them. He starts to fantasise about what they would do with the money. The daughter is unimpressed having "heard that tale before" (136) and leaves. The wife sits gripping at the edge of the kitchen table in anticipation but sags and mutely returns to her chores when it is apparent that the horse didn't win. The man returns to his boot last and swears at a bent tack, "There was no anger in his voice – only despair" (140).

Arguably the most successful story in the cycle is 'The Load of Wood' first published in 1946. It introduces the character of Darky Nolan, who is the major protagonist in three of the stories and appears in another six of the remaining ten, usually in a fairly important role. In spite of this Hardy manages to portray him as one amongst many characters who inhabit the valley rather than singling him out as the witness figure that Anderson makes of George Willard in *Winesburg, Ohio*. In this his first story, possibly because it was written so early (that is before the 20th Party Congress of the C.P.S.U.², followed by the Soviet invasion of Hungary, in 1956 which had disrupted communist circles in Australia) Darky appears as a prototypical 'working class hero'. I find him easy to imagine as one of the models for the Vera Mukhina statue of the *Worker and the Kolkhoz Woman*, wielding an axe rather than a hammer.

Darky's enormous power and strength is emphasised, in contrast to the weak and frightened Ernie Lyle, although he is unable to stir the majority of his workmates into any meaningful collective action. Indeed it seems that he has long given up on such an idea, repeatedly referring to himself as an individual – “Here’s one Darky”(p.45), “this Darky here” (p. 46), and so on, and emphasising that he is operating out of self-interest, that his intention is to sell half the load of stolen wood. As they start delivering the wood it soon becomes clear that this is far from the truth, Darky gives most of it away to his workmates, includes an old woman pensioner in the share out, and finally even the scab Sniffy Connors, whom he hates – “a man orta chuck a few logs in” (52). It is in such simple, natural seeming phrases that Hardy displays his mastery. Several times elsewhere in the book Ernie Lyle describes how difficult it is to know what Darky is thinking. The reader, on the other hand, is left in no doubt that Darky has a code of conduct that “a man orta” live by if he wishes to maintain his own self-respect. Such a code would include generosity of spirit, bravery and mateship. As a strong man he demonstrates the desire to protect those weaker than himself, hand in hand with the refusal to kowtow to those in authority – such as the local Nationalist Member of Parliament.

What is particularly appealing about Hardy’s work is the way he manages to convey that his working class community, for all their individual disagreements and personal foibles, is still one community. This is in contrast to Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* whose inhabitants are portrayed essentially as a collection of discrete individuals - the grotesques - who each have their own individual stories. Occasionally in Anderson’s stories mention might be made of another character but, apart from George Willard, the supposed narrator figure, they rarely deeply *involve* one of the others. In *Benson’s Valley* Hardy introduces an equally large number of characters

but they appear and reappear again and again throughout numerous stories, in greater or lesser degrees of importance, so that through their very familiarity the reader is almost invited to be part of their community. Darcy is obviously very important but we also meet such characters as Ernie Lyle, Col MacDougall, Tom Rogers and Arty MacIntosh in several of the stories each, and others, such as the boy Ginger Picton and the policeman Flaherty, in at least two. It is interesting to note, in the light of Paul Adams' observations about the transformation from an oral to a print culture, that Hardy reinforces the identities of many of the minor characters in the readers' memories by providing them with verbal tics which provide their nicknames. Thus we get such characters as 'Turns-Around' Atkins, 'By-the-Way' Lawton, Sparko the Swearer, the lipping Muvver Palmer and the one phrase speaker Old Bill Green.

One of the ways in which Hardy is able to construct his characters as members of one community is by having an oppositional group – including the remnants of the squattocracy in the shape of Fleming, the businessmen such as Ambler, the government servants like Tye, and other assorted members of the bourgeois Australian Natives Association. However Hardy is too smart to fall into the trap of painting too black and white a picture and characters are often multi-faceted. The workers include Sniffy Connors who probably voted Nationalist and doesn't "hold with communists". The bourgeoisie includes Squatter Fleming who is shocked to suddenly find that his position holds no sway with the new policeman. Finally there is the eponymous stranger from Melbourne, the outsider, the seller of *The Workers' Voice* who brings an epiphany to the narrator of the closing story. It seems fitting that this is written in the first person as is the one that opens the sequence. The only other story written this way is 'A Question of Heat Against Cold', which at first I found

to be a little problematic, not seeming to fit with the rest of the cycle, but which left me wondering if 'the old training oil' (195) is supposed to be some kind of metaphor for the dialectic method.

'The Stranger from Melbourne' is unashamedly autobiographical, concerning a real event in Hardy's young life when he bought a newspaper from a travelling communist agitator. Reading this paper led to his decision to leave Bacchus Marsh in 1938 for the broader horizons of Melbourne. Paul Adams infers that it also led him away from the oral tradition and into the modern, print-dominated world:

For the young narrator literacy provides a new, more exciting form of understanding. It is a powerful modernizing influence, establishing new forms of knowledge which can be contained outside the human mind...offering the young narrator an alternative critical position which promotes 'discontent' with a more traditional life. (Adams 1999, p. 23.)

Hardy himself said:

Reading that paper I had bought from the stranger I learned something about the wider world. I read about evictions and strikes...I had been somewhat politically aware before the event. My father and Tom Watson next door would talk to me for hours about the class struggle and world events...After the episode with the stranger from Melbourne, I started going to the Mechanics Library where I'd read anything I could lay my hands on. (Hardy in Camm 1986, p. 288.)

This would later eventuate in his development from yarn-spinning to writing stories, initially for the soldiers' newspaper during the Second World War.

The author who inspired my decision to write a cycle of short stories rather than a random collection was John Morrison. I was introduced to his work by my supervisor Dr Phillip Edmonds who, having read the short stories which had got me accepted onto the Creative Writing program, advised me that I would probably find his work sympathetic. He was right. To find a new writer whom you like is always exciting. To find one of the skill and stature of Morrison, who moreover has been out of print for

a number of years, was a revelation. While studying his complete oeuvre I was particularly struck by his collection *Stories of the Waterfront* which I would describe as a short story cycle as it conforms to Ingram's description of an 'arranged' cycle.

In her 1987 *Meanjin* article 'John Morrison: Writer at Work' Morag Loh described Morrison as having:

...arrived in Australia from England in 1923 at the age of eighteen with a sense of adventure, sound training as a gardener and a naturalist's skills in observation. He also had a passion for writing and reading...Books had influenced his decision to emigrate. Tales of far-off places, those by Conrad in particular, had gripped his imagination and contributed to his urge to leave Sunderland and see the world.
(Loh 1987, p. 496.)

A similar fascination with, and response to, Conrad's works was still operating some fifty years later, at least on myself. There was an overwhelming counter-cultural impulse in western societies in the sixties which not only led to a widespread adoption of elements of Buddhist, Hindu and Daoist philosophies but also to large numbers of westerners undertaking travels to the 'mystic east'. Amongst the more spiritually inclined members of the young English reading public the leading literary spurs for these travels were undoubtedly the newly translated works of Herman Hesse. To those of us of a more realist persuasion there was the desire to experience the world evoked by Conrad, which is why my own travels in the seventies concentrated on the Thai and Malaysian peninsula and on to the Indonesian archipelago, and possibly why, like Morrison, I ended up domiciled in Australia. Morrison acknowledges his debt to Conrad in his essay outlining 'The Books That Drove Me On' collected in *The Happy Warrior*:

However, let me try finally to get down to one writer who had most influence on me in boyhood and youth. I would have to answer: Joseph Conrad. I'm not sure what I inherited from him in the art of story-telling, but, more than any other writer, he drove me on...Joseph Conrad offered everything. (Morrison 1987, p. 79.)

It was the mention of Morrison's love of Conrad, coupled with my knowledge that as a seaman he had visited Port Adelaide on three occasions, which prompted me to include the story 'A Southern Tale' in my cycle. Although it disrupts the contemporary chronology of my cycle I felt justified in so doing by Morrison's disruption of his own cycle with the story 'No Blood on Deck'.

Morrison was brought up in a working class family in Sunderland, one of the great ship-building cities of England. Such a nautical history might have been one of the affinities that he felt with Conrad, and the reason that, for him, escape from the prospect of a dreary life involved catching a ship to Australia. Paul Galimond in his essay 'John Morrison: Writer of Proletarian Life' in the *Sydney Review of Books* lists his further early influences as "the Russians: Tolstoy, Turgenev and Gorky. These were the writers [in translation] who moved and excited him, particularly their short stories" (2015). I am surprised that he didn't include Dostoevsky as when I read his 1949 novel *The Creeping City* I was struck by certain correspondences of style and content, not least his naming of the wise selector Mishkin, and also the psychological disturbance of the character John Rae. This is possibly because of my own regard for Russian writers of the 19th century and my appreciation of Dostoevsky as, to me, the greatest of all fiction writers.

One thing that particularly drew me to Morrison's stories was the way that he is concerned with portraying characters at their work. His early stories are fed by his time as a roustabout on Australian stations, later ones by his time as a gardener, and those collected as *Stories of the Waterfront* inspired by the ten or so years he spent as a wharfie on the Melbourne waterfront. In the same way that few television programs show people watching television, although this is the main leisure

occupation for most, very few modern writers portray people working at their occupations, despite the fact that work occupies such a central position in all of our lives³. Similarly very few of the characters portrayed in contemporary fiction are members of the working class. As Phillip Edmonds stated in his essay about short fiction in the 1980s:

Many of the short stories of the period...engage with the naturalizing assumption that the average Australian was middle class or indeed classless (and by the 'postmodern' definition – more uniquely individual). Few of the characters go to work...in much of Australian short fiction, unfashionable working characters have been exported off the page. (Edmonds 1998, p. 10.)

Having spent a large part of my life working as a bench-hand joiner I found Morrison's preoccupation with the details and travails of the working life to be refreshing. It was under his influence that I decided to portray as many of my characters as possible engaged at their occupations. Such a desire is unfortunately not so easily satisfied in these days of underemployment and unemployment in my particular locale.

In common with Frank Hardy, Morrison had the highest regard for the short stories of Henry Lawson, in particular the straight-forwardness of his narrative style, something that he emulated in his own work. He expressed his opinion of Lawson in his 1967 *Overland* essay 'English is Good Enough', collected in his book *Australian By Choice*:

He is the best story-teller this country has yet produced, and I think it's significant that he has a narrative style which is simplicity itself...He just wanted to tell stories, a capable craftsman completely satisfied with the tool he was going to work with. English was good enough, and no other Australian writer has shown equal genius for capturing scene and atmosphere. (Morrison 1973, p. 175.)

In the same essay he enumerated another of his own stylistic characteristics when he quoted Katharine Susannah Prichard as saying, "a good short story should take the reader through an emotional experience" (1973, p. 173). There is a letter from

Prichard to Morrison held in the Morrison Archive of the Baillieu Library of Melbourne University dated 18/3/1956 where she wrote, “I said to myself when I’d finished reading *Black Cargo* – “this is better than Lawson” – whose shadow our writers have lived under too long.”

In the same archive there is a letter from Frank Hardy to Morrison dated 16/9/1957 regretting the latter’s decision not to contribute a short story to *Tribune*, in favour of submitting his work to *Meanjin*, and accusing him of orientating his “work away from the left, away from the working class and towards the bourgeois intelligentsia.” He then goes on:

...and I say this as one who has argued and continues to argue that Morrison is the best short story writer since Lawson beyond doubt, and that a selection of Morrison’s short stories could not be matched by any living writer in the world. (Hardy 1957, letter.)

Hardy was no doubt angered by Morrison’s refusal to contribute to *Tribune*⁴, as well as piqued by his own rejection as a contributor by *Meanjin* when he continued:

I think you and KSP [Katharine Susannah Prichard] owe a bloody lot more than either of you will ever know to the Australian Communist Movement. I’m sure KSP acknowledges her debt...Rest assured, John, the Party will attain power, it will end capitalism, and literature will be better for it in the long run – and I’ve got no patience with people who hold back from helping the Party to power because of unwarranted and precious fears about the fate of literature. (Hardy 1957, letter.)

This letter was written in 1957, when the only published collections of Morrison’s stories were *Sailors Belong Ships* and *Black Cargo*. When reading numerous of his stories later collected in *This Freedom*, *North Wind* and particularly *Stories of the Waterfront*, it is impossible to agree that he had turned “away from the left and from the working class”. In his introduction to *Stories of the Waterfront* Morrison reflected on the ten years he had worked on the Melbourne waterfront between the late thirties and the late forties and acknowledged, “the riches of the human material I got from the men I worked with, by far the staunchest community of men my lot was

ever thrown among” (1984, pp. vii – viii). Although still a committed socialist, Morrison, like many Australian writers with links to the communist party, had probably been shocked by the revelations of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, and the subsequent Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Uprising⁵. These events caused many members of the Realist Writers Group (of which Morrison had been a member) to rethink their allegiances and many left the Party after Ian Turner’s⁶ expulsion in 1958.

As well as his desire to involve the reader in an emotional experience Morrison seems to have been concerned with portraying his characters facing moral dilemmas. Stephen Murray-Smith in his introduction to *North Wind* quotes a remark made by A.A. Phillips in 1962, “He likes to take his characters...at the moment of ethical decision” (1982, p. x). Murray-Smith ascribes this tendency to Morrison’s upbringing by Presbyterian parents both of whom had been Sunday School teachers and to his later affiliation to the Communist Party of Australia. To this extent Morrison’s fictions might be regarded as ‘teaching stories’ which, as I remarked in my second chapter, was one of the functions of medieval and later story cycles. In the above mentioned introduction Murray-Smith expands on Phillips’ assertion by stating that Morrison, as well as positing ethical dilemmas for his characters, takes this one step further by placing the reader into similar positions:

The interesting thing about much of Morrison’s writing is that, within certain ‘ethical’ considerations, he is so often able to suggest moral ambiguities. And the more fully fledged his stories are, the more firmly the reader rather than the writer is pushed into the judgement seat. (Murray-Smith 1982, p. xi.)

Murray-Smith went on to say, “his view of humanity is seldom disapproving in a judgemental sense. It is distanced, regretful, sometimes sad. His overwhelming quality as a writer is a quiet capacity for detachment” (1982, p. xiii). It is this sympathetic yet detached quality of Morrison’s work that I find so appealing.

This is not to say that Morrison was politically ambivalent. Far from it. It is obvious, when reading his *Waterfront* stories, to appreciate that his sympathies lie with the workers as opposed to their employers. This is made explicit in stories such as 'The Nightshift' where the blame for the death of Joe, the narrator's older mate, is laid squarely on the shoulders of the Harbour Trust "which provides neither ladder nor landing stage". The wharf beams the men are forced to climb up at night, "Toiling upwards, always toiling upwards, with just a little glimpse of beauty now and then" are covered "with wet coal dust and icy cold" (Morrison 1984, p.120). The old man's fingers slip and he plummets to his death. In 'Tons of Work' the pick-up system is compared to a slave market, "In the plantation sales the slaves stood on a platform and looked down on their masters; here the masters stand on a platform and look down on the slaves" (13). In 'Bo Abbott' Morrison explains the eponymous hero's contention that, "as all laws were specially designed for the convenience of the 'bosses' there could be no moral principles binding workers to observe them" (19). In 'Nine O'Clock Finish' Joe enumerates the struggles the workers have had to undergo to get any improvements in their conditions and explains that they only achieved them by consolidated direct action:

You've got to have strength behind you at any conference. The ship owners have always had it – our jobs. Do as we say or else! That was their idea of sitting down and talking it over. Now we've got something. We're organized – we can chop their profits off. (Morrison 1984, p. 80.)

This last reminded me of a conversation I once had with a Dutch union organiser in the 1970s while I was working for a construction firm on a temporary contract in the Netherlands. I asked him how come they didn't have as many industrial disputes as we did in England. He replied that the employers knew that there was enough money in the union coffers that all Dutch carpenters could go on strike for two years on full pay. So wage negotiations were realistic on both sides - the union didn't ask for

twice as much as they were prepared to accept and the employers didn't offer half as much as they were prepared to pay. Amicable settlement was achieved on the basis of mutual strength.

While emphasising the dangers inherent in their work Morrison, like Hardy before him, doesn't fall into the trap of painting all the wharfies as angels. In 'All Through the Night' there is a falling out in the hold gang because one of them is intent on pillaging a case of war supplies for some unobtainable sticking plaster. He is described as "a rank individualist, no sense of responsibility whatever" (53). Eventually the other five threaten him and he gives up. The narrator, who has a son a prisoner of war in Malaya, concludes that "It's a hard job, this disciplining one's own workmates" (53). In 'The Drunk' one of the gang doesn't return from lunch. This places his hold mates in a moral dilemma. In the spirit of solidarity they cover up for him but most are resentful of how much harder they have to work. When he does finally return he's too drunk to work, "that bastard's spoiling a good gang" (106) is the stated opinion of one of them. This, like the story 'Going Through' is illustrative of the necessity for collective responsibility that the men instinctively feel. Similarly the story 'Bo Abbott' shows the concern that they feel for each other's well-being.

To me the most touching of all the *Waterfront* stories is 'The Welcome' which starts as a diatribe against racial prejudice, which Morrison ascribes to economic uncertainty and to lazy thinking. He qualifies this with the statement that, "Human decency will always come to the top if it gets even the ghost of a chance" (65). He then goes on to illustrate this point with a story concerning the arrival of one of the first immigrant ships after the war. To the wharfies the immigrants are all 'dagos' who threaten a return to the unemployment of the 1930s. "There's a popular idea

that immigration is the direct cause of unemployment, an idea that the real culprits take good care to foster...when it suits them” (66). The poor working-class immigrants are frightened by the unwelcome faces of the wharfies as they troop aboard. An ice-cream vendor arrives on the wharf and countless immigrant children stare down at him from the ship, knowing they have no chance of buying from him. Then one of the most tight-fisted of the wharfies, who can no longer stand to watch their suffering, buys one of the children an ice-cream. A whip-round is quickly organised by the workers so that all the children can be provided with a treat. When the supervisor tries to stop the flow of ice-cream the wharfies threaten to walk off the job. The immigrants, although not understanding the language, recognise the exchange and raise a cheer for the wharfies. This is a parable-like story where working-class solidarity and common humanity triumphs over fear and ethnic antagonism. A story which, in the current refugee climate, I find to be incredibly moving and certainly took me ‘through an emotional experience’. The kind of experience that I hope people will undergo when reading my story ‘A Short Walk to the Sea’.

For his cycle of stories Morrison eschews the use of a relatively stable character such as George Willard or Nick Adams. However, many of the stories are recounted by a single narrator who, mostly unnamed or given different names, could be regarded as Morrison himself. The stories were published in various magazines and collections between the years 1944 and 1962. In 1984 they were brought together and arranged into a rough chronological sequence, with two of them undergoing major revisions. The cycle starts with ‘The Compound’ where the narrator first gets his ticket to work on the waterfront, progresses to ‘Going Through’ where he gets accepted into the Federation, then passes through the inter-union dispute of ‘Black

Cargo', to the final 'Easy Money'. This is a story where old timers instruct a newcomer in the struggles they have undergone before achieving the better conditions that they now enjoy. One of them tells him, "I've been on this waterfront twenty-seven years. The shipowners would never get out of my debt, not if they kept me in bloody idleness all the rest of my bloody life" (194). The central character in *Stories of the Waterfront*, the hero if you will, is a multiple one: the waterside workers themselves, which accords satisfactorily with the notion of collective responsibility.

Like Joyce, in his desire to paint a picture of Dublin society by a cross section of disparate stories, Morrison constructs a portrait of the life of a particular group of working men, at a particular time. By so doing, as Ivor Indyk said in his 1987 essay 'The Economics of Realism: John Morrison':

Having restricted his focus to a closed community of men, founded on a certain kind of labour, Morrison is then able to reach out, by implication at least, to the larger worlds beyond. This kind of extension through time and space allows Morrison to see, in the stacking of fifty thousand bags of flour in the hold of a ship, the expression of an 'ancient and significant urge' [Morrison, 1973. p. 23] which takes us back to the very origins of human culture. (Indyk 1987, p. 507.)

Both Hardy and Morrison created realist fictions to portray the lives of working people in specific locations for particular purposes. Hardy concentrated more on describing the economic situation of his characters in the face of the Depression and unemployment, while Morrison was more concerned with the moral decisions that his working characters were forced to make. They both saw and utilised the advantages of the short story cycle as a vehicle for extended social commentary, carrying on what Ivor Indyk in the above mentioned essay called, "an intense preoccupation with the morality of conduct [which] has been a hallmark of Australian realism from Lawson and Furphy on" (1987, p. 507).

Endnote

- ¹ A part of a well-known advertising slogan for Minties lollies which figure largely in the story – ‘At moments like these you need Minties.’
- ² Where a speech was given by Nikita Khrushchev on the 24th and 25th of February 1956 condemning Stalin for his autocratic rule under what is known as his ‘cult of personality’. Web. Viewed 23 October 2016. marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm
- ³ Unless they be university lecturers like David Lodge that is, or, alternatively, their protagonists are writers themselves.
- ⁴ The official newspaper of the Communist Party of Australia.
- ⁵ Possibly encouraged by the liberalisation which seemed to be heralded by Khrushchev’s speech, a student demonstration against the government of the Hungarian People’s Republic sparked a widespread revolt after the murder of a protesting student by pro-government and Soviet forces. A new government was formed which declared its intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact, disband the pro-Soviet security services and prepare for free democratic elections. After a couple of seemingly peaceful weeks the Soviets invaded and re-imposed communist government. At least 2,500 Hungarians were killed and 200,000 fled (including the man who became my family doctor in England). This led many Marxists throughout the world to leave the communist party, as mentioned in my story ‘Angel’.
- ⁶ Ian Alexander Turner, 1922-1978, was a political activist, author, historian and academic. He was expelled from the Communist Party of Australia in 1958 for condemning the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956.

CHAPTER 5

THE UNCERTAINTY OF INFLUENCE.

My intention on enrolling in a creative writing course was to write a collection of short stories. On being introduced to the work of John Morrison and then coming across *Stories of the Waterfront* I realised that there was such a thing as a 'cycle' of short stories, a collection of stories that, although not quite as unified as a novel, acts on the reader in much the same way. This concept was appealing to me and as a correlation to writing my own cycle I undertook this study - an investigation into the history and development of cycles in order to better understand the potential of the form.

A novel tends to have a limited number of major characters, with usually a main protagonist whom the reader follows and around whom the action revolves – it might have sub-plots but essentially it tells one story – that of the protagonist. The short story collection tells many separate stories, featuring multiple protagonists, even when, occasionally, all are written from the point of view of a single person. It offers nothing beyond the author's style to pull the reader through to the end and provides no ultimate sense of resolution. The individual short story itself is a more ephemeral form, betraying its origins as a creation of nineteenth century capitalism. It satisfied what Boyd referred to as the "new reading public's desires" (2006) by producing material for the emerging middle-class magazine market. At the same time this market provided a potentially enlarged income stream for the growing numbers of professional prose writers.

The broad scope of the novel offers ample opportunities for sustained social criticism. The short story while capable of raising issues, or even of mounting an attack, is, by its very ephemeral, individual and limited nature, incapable of mobilising prolonged arguments or of providing in-depth perspectives on situations that an author wishes to decry, or otherwise considers necessitates change. In this exegesis I have demonstrated that the short story cycle is a form well suited to such social criticism, developing from the ancient teaching story collections, through the medieval commentaries, before its various flowerings in the early twentieth century at the hands of the four authors described in my third chapter, all of whom used the form to criticise what they perceived of the world around them. I used my fourth chapter to illustrate how this new genre could be adopted by authors in Australia.

In my creative work I desired to portray something of the conditions experienced by contemporary working people and the creation of a cycle of stories seemed a powerful way of doing this. I consider all of the stories in my cycle to be experiments, although in a more general sense this could be a description of the creation of all works of art. I would describe myself as a realist writer generally attempting to portray my characters in their social and economic landscape. There are many different approaches to realism however, as described in my first chapter. By restricting the location of my stories to the Port Adelaide area I am able to give a sense of continuity to the cycle, whilst allowing myself the room to experiment with differing techniques of story-telling, differing narrative positions and differing styles.

Fredric Jameson describes some of these approaches and genres that had become available to realist writers in the nineteenth-century:

I will enumerate four of these new realist genres without by any means claiming that they are the only new subgenres characteristic of realism. These are the

Bildungsroman, the historical novel, the novel of adultery, and naturalism (taking this last to be a somewhat different and ambiguous combination of a plot type and a mode). (Jameson 2010, p. 280.)

Some of my stories are told in a straightforward linear fashion, like the naturalistic 'Lonely' which seemed the correct style for a story which deals with psychic disturbance and sexual jealousy leading to an episode of domestic violence. By contrast, 'There's a Darkness' consists of two different narrative lines which eventually coalesce. 'The Consultation' is partly a re-working of the story of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* told in direct address as if to a psychologist. 'Mirror Man' is something of a Kafka inspired surrealistic fantasy. 'Angel' is pretty much a straightforward memoir, functioning as a *bildungsroman*. 'The Emasculation of Anthony' is an attempt to inject some humour into the cycle whilst still maintaining its overall political concerns. 'A Southern Tale' includes elements of pastiche and provided the opportunity to experiment with writing a piece of historical fiction. 'The New Fence' contains a number of Biblical allusions and is something of a parable on the theme of judgement and retribution, as well as a lament for the passing of a much more cohesive and politically committed society, which seemed an appropriate way to end the cycle.

Because of my experimentation with narrative styles I wanted to include other unifying features beyond just location to establish the fact that this is a cycle. Although there is no one central character as in *Winesburg, Ohio*, characters do reappear in different stories in much the same way as they do in *Legends From Benson's Valley*, although not as frequently. The youth Tom is the protagonist of two stories, his mother Wendy appears in three, the District Nurse Barbara plays a part in two, and maritime museum guides feature in three. The writer reminiscing in the story 'Angel' is shown typing away at a café table in 'A Short Walk to the Sea'.

The old communist wharfie Alex Mann who, along with several mates, is mentioned in three stories, provides a sense of the loss of collective identity when compared to the past, which is reinforced by the death of the seaman Brian in the final story.

One thing mentioned in several of the stories is the existence of the Port River dolphin pod. To a certain extent, particularly in the story 'Touch', I have used the fact that the dolphins have a really close communal culture to contrast with the increasing sense of isolation experienced in the human one. Landmarks familiar to any Port Adelaide resident, or visitor, appear in numerous of the stories, and act as another unifying trope. The Lighthouse features prominently, as does the Maritime Museum, the Port River and its wharves, Semaphore Road, and Largs Bay. However it is the water – the Port River and the sea – that frame and link the stories as it weaves in and out of them.

Even though I have spent much of my working life as a bench-hand joiner I have always been involved in the arts, as an actor, a theatre director and primarily as a reader. If asked what have been the influences on me I would have to say everything that I have read. By my mid-teens I was writing my own poetry, encouraged by an uncle who ran a printing firm that did a lot of work for the poetry division of Faber and Faber. He used to slip me proof copies, as well as discards of his own science fiction reading, which is how I first came across the imaginative social criticism of such writers as Ray Bradbury and Kurt Vonnegut, the speculations of Philip K. Dick, and on to such works as *1984* and *Brave New World*. Around the same time I remember I went through a stage of reading mostly French writers, in translation, from Andre Gide through Sartre and Camus, to Jean Genet. From the age of sixteen to eighteen I was studying for English A Level which in the late 1960s meant two

Shakespeare plays, the *Prologue* and two of the *Canterbury Tales*, a couple of books of *Paradise Lost*, two Bernard Shaw's and single plays by Harold Pinter and John Arden. For prose we had *To The Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy and short stories by D.H. Lawrence. Poetry included the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and Coleridge as well as some of Dylan Thomas. In the meantime, possibly in reaction to our schoolboy mono-cultural diet, I was particularly attracted to a series of translations entitled Penguin Modern European Poets; my favourite volumes being those of Apollinaire, Prevert, Rilke, Four Greek Poets, Quasimodo and Yevtushenko.

Having left school I came under the spell of the Germans for a while including all the translated works of Franz Kafka and Herman Hesse, as well as such novels as *Auto da Fe* by Elias Canetti and *Doctor Faustus* by Thomas Mann. For someone who considers himself to be very widely read I have to admit to a gaping hole in my education - having read very few of the writers considered as the great English and French realists. For me the nineteenth-century belonged to the Russians, and to one in particular – Fyodor Dostoevsky – the majority of whose works I have read at least once, and the great novels two or three times each.

Whether there really is some kind of genetic disposition (there is a family myth that one set of my great-grandparents were refugees from the pogroms of the late nineteenth-century) or whether it is just an inbuilt yearning for the exotic, I have always been enthralled by the Russians, not only Dostoevsky but also particularly Gogol and Chekhov, as well as Pushkin, Lermontov, Turgenev, and later Bulgakov and Pasternak. At some point I read George Steiner's book *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky* in the preface to which he states:

It was my conviction that Tolstoy and Dostoevsky tower over the art of fiction: that their pre-eminence entails certain fundamental points about western literature as a whole...and that the reader's inevitable preference of the one master over the other will define a whole philosophic and political stance. (Steiner 1980, preface.)

Steiner's main thesis regarding their differences has Tolstoy situated in the epic tradition of Homer whilst Dostoevsky is placed in the tragic tradition of Shakespeare. Tolstoy, like Homer, situates himself in a God-like position, observing the moral foibles of his creations, whilst Dostoevsky appears to be much more down there amongst his characters, floundering about in the psychological murk that they all have to struggle through. This does not mean that Dostoevsky was working in an anti-realist milieu, far from it:

He accepted Belinsky's injunction that it was the signal duty of Russian fiction to be realistic and to portray authentically the social and philosophic dilemmas of Russian life. But Dostoevsky insisted that his realism differed from that of Goncharov, Turgeniev [sic] and Tolstoy...The realities conveyed by Tolstoy... struck Dostoevsky as archaic and irrelevant to the anguish of the day. Dostoevskian realism – to use a phrase which he used himself in the drafts for *The Idiot* – was “tragico-fantastic.” It sought to give a total and true picture by concentrating on the nascent elements of the Russian crisis into moments of drama and extreme revelation. (Steiner 1980, p. 210.)

Whilst a cycle of short stories would structurally seem to relate more to the epic tradition, the individual stories in my cycle, I would posit, belong more in the Dostoevskian tradition. This is hardly surprising since I have spent a lot of time involved in theatre:

Dostoevsky's use and mastery of dramatic means lead to the comparison between his genius and Shakespeare's...What one implies, I take it, is that Dostoevsky achieved through his special handling of dramatic modes concrete tragic situations and degrees of insight into human motives which recall to our minds Shakespearean achievements more than they do those of other novelists. (Steiner 1980, p. 171.)

To ignore him as an influence would be akin to neglecting to mention the influence the Bible has had on English literature. I am not saying that I consciously used Dostoevsky as a model in any way, but I am certain that his writings have had a

profound effect on me and on shaping my own world-view, despite his supposed right-wing politics. My approach to realism is reliant on his kind of realism, a dramatic approach where action and gesture are more revelatory than painstaking descriptions of physical objects and settings, and where extensive use of dialogue serves to heighten an effect of immediate reality. It is also worth noting, as David Rampton does in his introduction to Constance Garnett's translations of *Notes From Underground and Other Stories*, that:

Dostoevsky lays claim to his right to represent the marginal, the lowly, the dispossessed, the meek of the earth, and the need to find a new lexical register for such humdrum details. Gogol had played a crucial role in making these people legitimate subjects for fiction; Dostoevsky was keen to carry on that tradition. (Rampton 2015, p. ix.)

Unlike the nobly-born Tolstoy and Turgenev, both Gogol and Dostoevsky were born into more modest families and both were familiar with the world of society's less powerful members whose lives they portrayed. In my stories I attempt to carry on this tradition.

Apart from the Russians there was one other writer from the nineteenth century who had a profound effect on me. This was Guy de Maupassant who, along with Chekhov, deserves to be credited with elevating the modern short story to the status of an art form. In the ten years between the publication of 'Boule de Suif' in 1880, which made his name, and the publication of his last novel Maupassant wrote some three hundred short stories and six novels. Unfortunately this was followed by increasingly rapid physical and mental decline, the "general paralysis of the insane" mentioned, and possibly suffered by James Joyce¹, as a result of the syphilis infection Maupassant had contracted in his twenties, which led to his attempted suicide in 1892 and death in 1893. I have never read any of his novels but devoured his short stories voraciously. Some of them contain gothic elements, from the

earliest one inspired by the hand given to him as a reward for helping to rescue Swinburne from the sea, to late ones such as 'The Horla' inspired by the fear of his own impending madness. Nevertheless the majority of his output is resolutely realistic, perhaps in response to his early mentorship by his mother's friend, and possibly lover, Gustave Flaubert, who insisted, "that the most important aspect of writing was to learn to see with his own eyes" (Miles 2004, p. xvii).

By the time he had reached the immensely productive decade of his thirties his observations had included the lives of Normandy peasants, prostitutes and their customers, soldiers and other countrymen suffering defeat by the Prussians, clerks and junior civil servants, and of the young pleasure seekers enjoying life by and on the River Seine as painted by Monet and Renoir. All of these characters found their way into his stories as did, once he became established and then rapidly famous, the wealthy *haute-bourgeois* that he now mixed with:

Maupassant witnessed in the capital and in the fashionable resorts frequented by the wealthy an equally brutish ethos [as that of the Normandy peasant] which he exposes with both frankness and humour. Under a façade of opulence and sophistication, his characters operate on a level no higher, as Henry James puts it, than the gratification of an instinct...to follow blindly and unquestioningly the exhortation...'*Enrichissez-vous!*' ('Get rich!').(Miles 2004, p. xxii.)

The realities which Maupassant lays bare in his stories, with a zeal born perhaps of an anxious determination not to be deceived himself, are rarely pleasant. A pessimist by nature, a pessimist from the influence and example of his friend and mentor Flaubert, and a pessimist out of admiration for the great philosopher of his time, Arthur Schopenhauer, Maupassant saw avarice and lechery, cruelty and greed, selfishness and hatred at work wherever he turned. (Colet 1971, p. 15.)

Whilst recognising the veracity of both of the above I would not describe Maupassant as overly pessimistic, rather I would characterize him as clear-sighted. His stories abound in beautiful descriptions, particularly of water, are full of colour and are told with a lightness of touch and often a profound sense of humour. I

believe the difference between the above two descriptions says more about their authors and times rather than about Maupassant and his. The Colet piece was written before the affluence of the 1960s had completely run down, whereas the Miles piece reflects the neo-liberal economic atmosphere of the end of the twentieth-century. That this remains the existential condition of the present-day is one reason that I consider Maupassant to still have contemporary relevance.

Another writer whose works I devoured in my twenties, and I imagine has had a positive influence on my work, was Joseph Conrad. For all that he appears to have disparaged Dostoevsky, in many ways he seems to be something of a natural successor. Certainly his novels *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* are very reminiscent of *The Devils*. In *Nostramo*, which Margaret Drabble described as, “an imaginative novel which again explores one of Conrad’s chief preoccupations – man’s vulnerability and corruptibility” (1985, p. 225), he seems to be mining the exact same vein as all of Dostoevsky’s great novels, albeit with much less melodrama and more straightforwardly realistic narratives.

When I discovered that John Morrison counted Conrad as an early influence, and knowing that he had visited Port Adelaide, I decided to include a story involving Conrad in my cycle. Since many of my own stories involve me in experimenting with different narrative styles I had initially intended to construct *A Southern Tale* in the epistolary fashion much used by nineteenth-century writers. I abandoned this after three pages, leaving it as a kind of prologue which proved useful as a means of communicating a large amount of back-story – the results of my research – thus creating an atmosphere of verisimilitude for the rest of the tale (a term much used by Conrad rather than story).

Another spur to writing such a story was the fact that in the late nineteenth-century² Port Adelaide was going through a change of industrial technology (from gas to coal and steam) in much the same way that computers have revolutionised the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Immediately prior to my writing this story Tony Abbott had described coal as a boon to mankind which the mining industry would be providing for decades to come. Knowing well Conrad's regret that sail was giving way to steam-powered vessels I couldn't resist the implicit irony in my character's asking what was supposed to happen to the sailors if they could not adapt to the new technology – "Then they will fall by the wayside. I'm sorry Joseph but it's commerce that makes the world go round."

There are other influences, of course, apart from those that I have mentioned elsewhere in this exegesis. Once I had decided to write short stories I re-read those of D. H. Lawrence whom I regard as one of the masters of the form. What particularly appeals is the quality of the stories firmly based on his own experiences, such as those included in *The Prussian Officer* of 1914, followed by the formal experimentation which eventuated in the publication of *The Woman Who Rode Away* in 1928:

...he was compelled to search for new narrative forms that lent themselves more readily to the expression of an ever-widening set of associated concepts. The need to link the actions of individuals to larger historical, social, political and religious forces. (Finney 1982, p. 23.)

There are too many writers to mention and since I was not studying formally it comes down to the unexamined foibles of personal taste – for instance I have read *Huckleberry Finn* three times yet after two attempts I have still not got past page thirty of *Moby Dick*, supposedly as important an influence on American fiction. I very much enjoyed reading the works of the so-called 'magic realists' but would in no

way claim to be influenced by them, nor want to employ their style. I operate in the area of realism because I agree with John Morrison that as writers, “we want to awaken something more than mere interest. We want to *move* the reader. We want to arouse him, to get him to go along with us...We want him to enter into the environment” (Morrison 1987, p. 132). This is something that I have aimed at in my own work, both in each of the individual stories but more so as, hopefully, the cumulative effect of a short story cycle.

Endnotes

- ¹ See Kevin Birmingham ‘The Most Dangerous Book: The Battle for James Joyce’s Ulysses’, London: Penguin 2014.
- ² My story ‘A Southern Tale’ concerns Conrad’s third trip to Port Adelaide, this time as first mate aboard The Torrens, which arrived on 16/1/1883 and remained in port for seven weeks. During this time he is known to have been ill, having caught a recurrent tropical disease whilst travelling in the Congo. It was on this trip to Port Adelaide that he showed the first seven chapters of *Almayer’s Folly* to W.H. Jacques and on the return voyage struck up a friendship with Edward Sanderson and John Galsworthy.

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