Xavier Herbert's Capricornia: Ironic Structure and Imaginative Vision

Russell J. McDougall, B.A. (Hons.)

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SYNOPSIS

This thesis concentrates on the artistic rather than the polemical aspect of Capricornia. The purpose nevertheless is to reassess the much maligned form and vision of the novel as a whole.

Initially, the argument is concerned with structural principles. It examines the ironic interrelation of events and demonstrates that the apparent formlessness is deliberately deceptive. There is a pattern of interlocking ironies which reveals an underlying structure, and this corrects the reader's innocent perceptions of the explicit narrative. Herbert's reinterpretation of national history is then considered in the context of the ironic narrative mode. The shattering of certain myths about the past simultaneously develops a counter-myth, which can be defined as pseudo-messianic. After careful consideration of the symbolic implications of the Mark Shillingsworth narrative in terms of failed Romantic idealism, attention is drawn to a curious art/sex dialectic which operates throughout the novel. The major incident discussed here is the seduction of Mark by the young lubra, but this in turn leads to exploration of his typological relation to Norman, his son, and to Ned Krater, who introduced him to Black Velvet. These characters extend the historical reinterpretation through three generations, and their narrative progress develops typologically the pseudo-messianic myth.

An examination of the conflict and progression of certain metaphors reveals that the nihilism of the counter-myth examined previously represents only one term of the novel's central paradox, the other being the salvation symbolized ironically by the death of Tim O'Cannon. That event is linked with the ending of the novel, which can be seen as similarly ambivalent, representing the spiritual salvation of the Aboriginal and the final meaninglessness of the whiteman's death. This paradox of nihilism versus

salvation is then related to the national literary tradition of Romantic idealism contradicted by existential awareness.

The fourth and final chapter is essentially concerned with the relation of the artist to his art. The theory of Romantic Irony is used as a critical tool to aid explication of the personal element in the novel. The purpose is to demonstrate how the author imaginatively transcends the universal ironies represented in the heterocosm of his art. The argument focuses on the artist's self-conscious figuring of himself within his art, and on the development of a personal mythology, to which the symbolic salvation of O'Cannon is central. It will be shown that Capricornia is virtually two novels in one, both a public and a private drama, each embodying one term of the paradox illuminated in the previous chapter. That paradox is now seen in the context of the artist's Romantic dilemma as representing a conflict between an ideal of the unity of man and Nature and a perception that the universe is essentially irreconcilable, or ironic.

Finally, the implications of the imaginative vision revealed by the preceding argument are projected back upon the apparent social thesis in an attempt to discover whether the novel succeeds as a whole integrated structure or is broken in half by conflicting demands of art and ideology. Thus, in the end, Herbert's attitude to the Aboriginal is re-evaluated in the context of both the social commitment and the artistic strategy of Capricornia.

This Thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the Award of any Degree or Diploma in any University and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text or Bibliography.

The thesis does, however, contain some original material which has been published. The relation of imaginative vision to ironic structure received its first tentative examination in an article based on fragments of early drafts of the novel, "Capricornia: Recovering the Imaginative Vision of a Polemical Novel," which was published in Australian Literary Studies, X, 1 (May, 1981).

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Acknowledgement is due to the National Library of Australia, where I spent many hours poring over the manuscript of Capricornia, and to the Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature for permission to quote from the photocopy of that manuscript as well as from many other items in its Sadie Herbert Collection. Particularly I wish to thank Ms Margaret O'Hagan, Fryer Librarian, who did much to make my research there as civilized as possible.

INTRODUCTION

One has only to consider the history of critical attitudes to Capricornia, or those to Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath or Plomer's Turbott Wolfe (which occupy similarly ambivalent positions in American and South African literature, as dubious classics), to realize that the novel of purpose needs to be around a long time before the critic is able to detach himself sufficiently from the controversial subject-matter to consider whether it has any intrinsic aesthetic value. The fate of the Aboriginal was a major public issue when Capricornia was published in 1938, and Herbert's theme of miscegenation fuelled the debate by shifting the focus of a civilized sense of responsibility from vague paternalism to the reality of the halfcaste population. But the literary value of the novel was circumscribed by the assumption that its whole intention was social protest against racism; elements of burlesque, authorial puppeteering and ironic exaggeration were therefore perceived as evidence of a defective artistic strategy, because they took "the picture . . . too far from reality."[1] The apparent formlessness was similarly presumed to be a sign of technical incompetence, rather than possibly embodying an artistic theme of universal disorder, and close analysis of organizational principles was considered unnecessary. Only in 1960 did an article appear by Vincent Buckley which attempted to redress the critical imbalance by drawing attention to the novel's metaphysical context, its concern not only with social but with "cosmic injustice."[2] But rather than opening up discussion of this hitherto unrecognized aspect of the novel, Buckley's article has more often been taken as definitive. Brian Kiernan, for instance, believes that Buckley's definition of the metaphysical theme is "surely right"[3] and accordingly builds his own argument concerning

the destructiveness which energizes Capricornia's world, and unbalances relationships within it, upon that understanding. As recently as this year, John McLaren published an essay in which he notes "something more important in the novel than the subsidiary themes of racial injustice, political stupidity, or official dereliction of duty," citing both Buckley and Kiernan and questioning only the degree of the anarchy they had observed, which he believes extends to "complete nihilism."[4] He refers us to Buckley's article also for a proper interpretation of Tim O'Cannon's death.[5] Only Neil Mudge, in his unpublished M.Litt. thesis "Xavier Herbert's Capricornia: Image, Theme, Structure," has questioned the precise correctness of Buckley's argument.[6]

Since Mudge is also one of the few critics who have attempted any sustained analysis of Capricornia, and because his thesis has a title somewhat similar to my own, I should briefly point out where we differ. He rightly questions both Buckley's and Kiernan's conception of Nature as the source of anarchy and destruction, noting that the question of its hostility never occurs to the Aboriginal, who does not try to impose an order upon it. He also argues that justice in Capricornia is more poetic than natural, but does not seem to realize that O'Cannon's death is utterly ironic, as we shall see, and therefore mocks any concept of equity. Of course, the inappropriateness of the argument to the novel's imaginative vision in a sense contradicts the ideal of a just society that lies behind its polemical protest. My own thesis is finally directed towards a consideration of precisely this kind of inconsistency. Mudge believes that Buckley's idea of the cultural division in Capricornia, as a device enabling Herbert to explore his own sense of universal disorder, holds the key to a "logically developed"[7] structure. Thus, although he disagrees about the role of Nature, he spends a good deal of time extending

Buckley's general argument by trying to make sense of the various oppositions embodied in the novel: night and day, the Wet and the Dry Season, sun and water imagery, rational and irrational states of mind. The patterns which he discovers, when related to the central conflict of white and Aboriginal culture, are illuminating, and I will be referring to these at various stages throughout my own argument. But Mudge does not see these oppositions in the context of general irony. Like almost all of Capricornia's critics, he does refer in passing to particular ironies but does not perceive that the concept of general irony, of an infinite number of self-contradictory dualities, is much more precisely relevant to the Weltanschauung presented in the novel than related ideas of disorder and anarchy. My own view is that, although there is a structure, it is not, as Mudge says, "logically developed," but rather is revealed by a pattern of interlocking ironies. I shall argue that since the narrative mode is ironic the structure will only reveal itself to the ironically aware reader. Obviously, then, many of my conclusions are quite different from those reached by Mudge.

It is my view in this thesis that Buckley's definition of the metaphysical theme is inadequate. The disordered, or as I prefer to call it, "ironic" universe, and its rejection of human purpose, represents only one term of a conceptual and formal paradox that is central to a proper understanding of the novel. Tim O'Cannon is singled out for redemption because he adopts the halfcaste Tocky. His physical death as a whiteman symbolizes in spiritual terms Aboriginal birth. The paradox, then, poses salvation against nihilism, and also, since O'Cannon's death seems just as meaningless as most others in the novel, appearance against truth. This latter tension is appropriate, of course, to the themes of racism and identity; but it is also integral to the form of the novel. The apparent nature of the narrative as rambling and shapeless is deliberately

deceptive. Verbal echoing and image reiteration are used to signal stylistically the structural ironies which embody the "real" story. Some of the patterns made by imagery are explored by Mudge, but he is hampered, I believe, by his attachment to the idea of a "logically developed" structure. In any case, he does not consider the imagery which in my opinion is most central to the novel and its theme of conflict: the dingo, the kangaroo, the crow, and the bones. Consistent with the ironic mode of narrative is Herbert's exploitation of the potential ambivalence of language to signify covertly that the apparent meaning of events is different from that of their underlying symbolic action. This self-conscious use of language is linked with the author's figuring of himself within his art. The theory of Romantic Irony, by which an author simultaneously presents and transcends the disorder of a generally ironic universe, is useful when considering the personal element in Capricornia, as I shall suggest more fully in the final chapter of this thesis. Mudge tries to defend the novel against the charge of authorial intrusion, and does not realize that Herbert creates in the novel his own personal mythology, with himself figured self-consciously at its centre, to transcend imaginatively the disordered reality which he presents at the surface of the narrative. It is towards the elucidation of this personal mythology, and in order to understand its implications for a work of fiction which is less obviously self-reflexive than socially defined, that this thesis is directed.

At various stages of my argument I will be referring to the manuscript of Capricornia. My purpose is not to conduct an extended comparison of the texts, but to use the manuscript as a critical tool to confirm perceptions of the published novel where the evidence is not so obvious as it was before revision. It does seem appropriate, however, that I should give in my introduction a brief outline of the evolution

of the novel and some indication of the status of the manuscript.

It is well known that Herbert wrote Capricornia in London in the winter of the first half of 1932. Some twenty months earlier, on the ship going from Australia to England, he had written Black Velvet, and from the re-writing of this unpublished novel Capricornia developed. Apparently it was "a tough little book . . . a negative sort of thing, about bad people only,"[8] and publishers were not attracted by its subject-matter. Herbert says: ". . . it was an attack, it wasn't fun. It was an attack on the system, you see. The ill treatment of these people [the Aboriginal]. It was a violent book . . . a violent book about a violent young man."[9] What is not generally known is that the motivation for Black Velvet was a suggestion by Colin Wills, who had been impressed by and referred Herbert to Leon Gordon's theatrical work White Cargo: A Play of the Primitive.[10]

This play seems to owe much to Conrad's Heart of Darkness. It concerns four whitemen who live on a rubber plantation in the depths of the West African jungle, where they are visited once every three months by a ramshackle steamer which brings news of civilization and takes away the rubber consignment. Throughout three acts we witness the gradual degradation of Langford, who has just arrived from England to replace another man who has been utterly broken by his African experience. When Langford first appears he is wearing tropical whites, intending to dress decently and shave regularly. (" . . . I knew the conditions I'd have to fight - and I tell you . . . I'm going to fight them. I'm white and I'm going to stay white.") But soon the "damp-rot" sets in; he becomes slovenly and drinks excessively. Although he had initially repulsed her, he succumbs to the charms of the halfcaste seductress, Tondeleyo, who preys on newcomers like himself. Taunted by his own sense of hypocrisy, he marries and tries to civilize her. But she grows tired of such treatment

and seeks release by poisoning him. The plan is discovered by Witzel, who has been there seven years and is less naive than Langford, and he forces Tondeleyo to drink the poison in her husband's place. Finally we witness Langford being carried on to the steamer, a hopeless wreck of a man, and the round begins again with the arrival of another naive type to take his place.

Although Capricornia is, of course, an original work in its own right, many of its aspects recall White Cargo. The arrival of Ned Krater, as one of the "supermen who had come to stay and rule,"[12] and the title of the final chapter, "Back to Earth," contain echoes of Witzel's comment to Langford in the first act of Gordon's play: "You'll unthink a hell of a lot of things, Langford, before you come down to earth. We're all supermen when we first come out."[13] It is fairly obvious, too, that Herbert used Langford as a prototype for both Oscar and Mark Shillingsworth. He gave Langford's tendency to idealize himself to Oscar, and his naivety to Mark. In one of the fragments of an early draft of Capricornia,[14] Krater offers Oscar some Black Velvet, and he responds in much the same self-righteous terms as Langford does in White Cargo when Witzel prophesies his seduction by native women. The symbolic significance that, as we shall see, Herbert gives to Mark's seduction in the published version makes the incident an embodiment of the concept voiced by another of Gordon's characters: "Woman is race."[15] Although the whiteman's term for the native woman as a sexual object is different - "mammy-palaver" in White Cargo, Black Velvet in Capricornia - its significance is the same: she is a symbol of the whiteman's hypocrisy, reflecting both his desire and his debasement, containing the essence of Africa or Australia and signifying European exploitation. Obviously, then, some of the basic elements of Gordon's play which Herbert translated from the African to the Australian context for Black Velvet also found their

way into Capricornia.

Herbert tells us that he first drafted Capricornia in pencil on the clean side of his Black Velvet script, "literally between the lines,"[16] and then produced a typescript to present to publishers. The novel was turned down by Jonathan Cape, the only publishing company in England to whom Herbert admits showing it,[17] and soon after that he departed for Australia. In 1933 he was advised by P.R. Stephensen, after submitting the typescript to him at the Endeavour Press in Sydney, that Capricornia needed to be revised, drastically shortened and retyped before any decision could be given.[18] After it had been rejected also by Angus and Robertson, and when Stephensen had established his own publishing house, Herbert approached him again. The two men met regularly from December 1933 to late January 1934 to consider the reworking of the typescript. Although there has been great controversy concerning who was actually responsible for the editing, it is beyond doubt that Herbert did receive editorial advice from Stephensen:[19] only the degree of assistance remains unknown. In any case, the author began a new draft in February 1934. After this, as Craig Munro notes: "A further clean typescript would have been made which would then have been sub-edited at P.R. Stephensen and Co. for the printer."[20]

The National Library's manuscript was acquired for £100 in 1961 through Beatrice Davis, then an editor with Angus and Robertson Ltd. Publishers, who acted as Herbert's agent for the transaction. This is the only version known to survive. It is definitely not a "first" manuscript, since it is a skilful combination of various drafts, some hand-written and some typed. Although the hand-writing is Herbert's only, Munro is probably correct in his speculation that the manuscript in the National Library is the draft on which Herbert worked between about February and April 1934, after he had already revised his original typescript in

collaboration with P.R. Stephensen.[21] Re-written sections were possibly juxtaposed with sections of the revised typescript that did not need rewriting in order to save time and energy. On the reverse side of the prepared manuscript's pages are scattered fragments of a narrative which, although recognizable as Capricornia, sometimes differs quite substantially from the published novel. In part this reverse side represents what may be considered as a disordered and incomplete manuscript, although it also contains versions of short stories, a longer prose piece, and an unpublished scenario. All of this material is frustratingly disorganized due to the piecemeal combination of drafts for the sequential manuscript on recto. The Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature at the University of Queensland holds a photocopy of this manuscript (recto and verso) in its Herbert Collection (MSS 1475). Although I have consulted the original document in great detail, in this thesis all quotations from the manuscript refer to the Fryer Library's photocopy and are noted in the text by the abbreviation "MS."

The fact that Herbert's writing functions so obviously on more than one level of meaning has confused many critics unwilling to face the implicit challenge to their critical assumptions about literature - in particular, that the work should be exclusively either self-contained and self-sufficient or socially concerned; and that the inclusion of an imaginative element, necessarily subjective, will inevitably undermine the social "objective." The eternal problem of art versus propaganda has not been so particularly vexing in Australia as, for example, in South Africa, where almost every major writer must be considered to some extent in relation to "the colour question." In contrast, as J.J. Healy writes: "The dominant energies of Australian literature in the twentieth century have been directed towards the recovery of the Aborigine by the

Australian imagination."[22] The focus has been mainly contemplative or philosophical, and from a relatively private perspective, as in the case of Katharine Susannah Prichard, Judith Wright and Patrick White. Occasionally, it is true, the interest has been more political and from a public perspective, as can be found in the work of F.B. Vickers, Gavin Casey or Peter Mathers. But only in the case of Capricornia, and much later in Poor Fellow My Country, do the two kinds of fiction merge. Herbert is perhaps the only major Australian writer to take an ideological stance in relation to "the colour question" and also present it by an act of the private imagination. Healy says: "The Aborigine in Capricornia is not the enigma of conscience, or the spectre of consciousness, that he has been in so much Australian literature."[23] The environment of social protest is metaphysical.

But old myths about this reluctantly admitted classic apparently die hard. Even this year, in the long awaited Oxford History of Australian Literature, there seems to be a formal expectation underlying Adrian Mitchell's comments that the roman à thèse should be rational and realist:

> The contrivance and the excitation in Herbert's narrative is everywhere apparent. More lively than life-like, he is closer to caricature than realism. He exaggerates and over-stresses, whether in the careless comic violence of his action or a too evident and therefore suspect anti-sentimentalism. His effects are often bizarre . . .[24]

Some critics still allow the biographical fallacy to distort their vision of the writing. Brian Elliott's entry for Herbert in a recently published and apparently authoritative reference book, Commonwealth Literature, gives wide currency to such views when he says of the "enormous truculence" of the writing: "but that is the man, the style, and inescapable."[25] Related to the biographical fallacy is the assumption that he is an untutored and wholly inspirational writer. However, his letters written prior to the publication of Capricornia reveal a wide

breadth of reading: de Maupassant, Balzac, H.G. Wells, W.W. Harris, O. Henry, Galsworthy, Dickens, Conrad, Lawrence. Apparently it was the later works of Galsworthy, for instance, with their rendering of Cockney speech, that gave Herbert the impetus for the Australian idiom in Capricornia. There are references within the novel to both Hemingway and Melville. The final impression from correspondence is that he was a voracious reader, and it seems unlikely then, despite his poverty at the time, that he would have been unaware that London in the 1930s was seeing the rapid expansion of the conventional limitations of prose. The general milieu was that of Conrad, Woolf and Joyce, when writers were meeting in the evenings for mutual society and literary discussion, cheap weeklies were making their work more widely accessible, and prose structures were becoming more deliberately poetic in strategy.

I have tried neither to presuppose nor to circumscribe the purpose of the novel, and the re-examination of critical assumptions such as those I have outlined above is implicit throughout this thesis. The fact that the world of Capricornia is "far from reality" has as much to do with imaginative vision as with distorted mimesis. If the work is finally to be confronted in its own terms, the social and historical analysis has to be related to its artistic context.

CHAPTER ONE

THE STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLE OF IRONY

In this chapter I shall examine irony as a structural principle in Capricornia. The manner in which one event anticipates or looks back upon another is essentially corrective, altering the meaning of the action by the transformation of the reader's innocent perceptions: action is conceived ironically. We shall see in the following chapter that the specific action of the novel is to some extent symbolic of a collective action representing various stages in Australian history, and that the implications of narrative structure can therefore be understood to define the author's historical attitude. The relation of one event to another is even more important than the individual events themselves. The historical dimension of the narrative requires a certain detachment on the part of the author: after all, the re-definition of history from a relativist point of view can only be possible if it is retrospective. In aesthetic terms, however, the author can stand at a distance from the events of his narrative only by virtue of technical strategy. So in Capricornia Herbert adopts an ironic stance, thereby contriving an objective point of view. Here, however, I am not so much concerned with the ironical attitude of the narrator, which is implicit in the sardonic tone of the narrative voice, as with irony as a principle of organization. When we consider the relation of the artist to his art later in this thesis we shall see in any case that the concept of ironic detachment proves to be something of a misnomer. Herbert is not always able to suspend his own judgement, and we do not often lose sight of his anger and anguish behind the facade of amused indifference. We shall see too that ironic detachment is an adopted method for disguising those feelings, for masking the novel's motives, and that the work is therefore not nearly so simple as it seems. But I mention the artist's apparent

detachment from his art at this point in my argument only by way of introducing the idea of the disadvantaged reader.

Definitively, the ironist adopts a superior position. The implications of ironic detachment and objectivity are ultimately concerned not only with a critical attitude, with disengagement and dispassion as D.C. Muecke puts it,[1] but also with personal freedom. (The ironist's feeling of being "unburdened and liberated" is easily documented.[2] Herbert, for example, has said that he overcomes the crushing realities of life by "making positive out of negative" in his writing.)[3] What the ironist describes from on high, then, is seen as "the contrary of his own position."[4] Implicitly, he assumes that he alone is aware of and, intellectually at least, immune to the ironies he presents. (This often turns out to be presumptuous and we shall see that Herbert does partly become a victim of "that irony of the infinite regressiveness of irony which was one of Friedrich Schlegel's important discoveries.")[5] More particularly, where the ironies are structural, the apparent meaning of specific events being modified and even contradicted by their relation to each other, the author places his reader at a distinct disadvantage. In a first reading the impossibility of knowing the narrative future denies the reader the flexibility needed to detect the irony of one event looking forward to another, except where that irony is coarsened by a high degree of self-consciousness. We shall see in this chapter that although much of the irony in Capricornia is obvious, even crudely so, nevertheless much remains subtle.

The more subtle ironies are embedded in narrative structure rather than directly related to the tone of the narrative voice. Indeed a key note of the manuscript's final revision seems to have been the subtler re-working of structural ironies. The published novel is generally differentiated by its omission of much of the stylistic signalling of

incidental ironies that is found in the manuscript, as will be seen a little later (pages 6-7; 12). Thus, on the whole, irony in the published novel is more subtle, more covert, and the ironic relevance of one event to another, what can be called a structure of interlocking ironies, is less clear. In a sense, too, this kind of revision altered the reader's role. Rather than being simply an observer of overt ironies, the reader must be a detective, following certain covert clues to discover the hidden ironies. On the other hand, the obvious social thesis of the novel requires nothing of the reader, and often cudgels his intelligence rather than relying upon it to infer the same ideas from principles of narrative structure. Of course, most novels need to be read twice. A deep understanding of the thematic significance of a literary work does not always go hand in hand with an appreciation of its "story." But Herbert's removal of many stylistic signposts to structural ironies can be seen as deliberately obscuring the artistic form and significance of Capricornia. Since it is nevertheless plain that the novel is more than just a polemical tract or historical analysis, the artistic strategy makes it absolutely necessary that the novel be read more than once. We shall see in the course of this thesis that there are ideas important to Capricornia as a whole which are not articulated, and which must be inferred from the structure of interlocking ironies. Yet that structure can be detected only if the reader's ironic awareness is wide-ranging and flexible enough to cross-reference narrative events which look forward to or back upon each other - a task which, particularly for a first reading, is made extremely difficult by the omission of many of the original stylistic pointers. There are, as we shall see, virtually two novels in Capricornia, one for the first reading and another for the second; and, as I suggested at the conclusion of a recent article,[6] even this, remarkably, seems to have been part of the author's complex artistic

strategy. Herbert writes, in a private letter to the historian Manning Clark:

> Nor is a single reading safe for true judgement, since my love of intricate storytelling tends to obscure the purpose for which I am telling a story, which in fact is the primary motive for the composition. I write like that deliberately, to snare my reader, but on the assumption that after the story has become a part of his or her experience (as a really good story should) he or she will say: "But there seemed something else to it, some lesson I must learn. I must read it again some time."[7]

The rambling and episodic "story" of Capricornia has tended to obscure its structure, and criticism has often been based accordingly upon the didactic pronouncements of opinion by characters such as O'Cannon and McRandy without any apparent understanding of the ironies of events which sometimes undermine their points of view. The danger of this kind of criticism is apparent in the titles of many of the reviews which attended the novel's original publication: "The Colour Question," "A Great Australian Problem: Our Halfcaste Population," "Capricornia: The Aboriginal Question," "Problems of Aborigines Outlined."[8] These reviews clearly missed the point that the main focus of the novel's concern with racism is on white rather than Aboriginal society.

If we are not to presuppose or circumscribe the purpose of Capricornia we must put aside, for the time being, received opinion about its social thesis. In this chapter, then, I shall approach the novel with the idea of function uppermost in mind, and I will attempt to relate that to form, in order to show precisely how the author attempts to change the reader's thinking about Australian society. John McLaren notes: "Herbert's Capricornia is not, of course, the Northern Territory, let alone Australia. It is an imagined world of his own created from the elements of his experience in northern Australia."[9] Just as obviously, the novel - any novel - is not life but a complex pattern of its own. As Dorothy Van Ghent writes: "In it inhere such a vast number of traits, all

organized in subordinate systems that function under the governance of a single meaningful structure, that the nearest similitude for a novel is a 'world'."[10] In Capricornia the "subordinate system" which reveals the whole novel's integral structure is a pattern of interlocking ironies.

The first chapter of Capricornia, like that of Poor Fellow My Country, is seminal. In Poor Fellow My Country it spells out the thesis of the whole novel, and John McLaren notes that the rest of that novel could be described as "a series of controlled experiments"[11] to demonstrate the validity of the thesis that the whiteman is his own worst enemy, alienating himself from the land by his actions. This might also be said of Capricornia. Krater's desecration of the Yurracumbunga Tribe in the first chapter and his own death in Chapter Four function as points of reference for the ironies of the rest of the narrative. Neil Mudge notes too that the first chapter establishes "the basis for a pattern of colour associations."[12] It also introduces the imagery of the dingo and the kangaroo, which will be developed throughout the novel. We shall see in later chapters that the colour and image patterns support the system of structural ironies in producing the whole meaningful structure. But it is the ironies themselves which constitute the most significant structural component, and, since Chapter One is seminal for this "subordinate system" as well as for the others, we may begin its exploration there.

In "The Coming of the Dingoes" Ned Krater is initially treated "as a guest" by the Yurracumbunga Tribe when he invades their island territory of Arrikitarriyah ("Gift of the Sea"): "Far from hating the invader, the Yurracumbungas welcomed him, thinking that he would become one of them and teach them his magic arts" (4). They call him Munichillu, the Man of Fire, and are quite prepared to grant him all the privileges normally reserved only for guests qualified by tribal law relating to marriage and

caste. They are not willing to grant the same privileges, however, to his crew, who are from a neighbouring enemy tribe and "definitely unqualified according to the laws." The ensuing violent quarrel between the different tribesmen is settled by Krater, who, "bellowing and firing his revolver" (5), orders the Yurracumbungas to give their lubras to his crew. That night, in retaliation for the violation of their laws, the Yurracumbungas attack Krater and his men. But this attempt to preserve their social order is aborted when, having taken the firearms from Krater's guards, one of the Yurracumbunga warriors accidentally shoots his headman, Kurrinua. In the confusion that follows, Kurrinua manages to roll away and hide in the sandhills, burying himself to the neck. Throughout the night the invaders hunt for him, and in the light of dawn they discover "the blood and the track of crawling" (6). Krater arrives and, pointing his gun at the face in the sand, murders Kurrinua.

The central irony within this chapter can be stated thus: the whiteman brings the attack of the natives upon himself by his ignorance of their society; the natives fail to protect their own social order because they are ignorant of the working of firearms, which are, of course, emblematic of civilization, of the whiteman's social order. Many of the ironies of later events exist by reference to this original irony.

In Chapter Two the Gift of the Sea has been re-named Flying Fox by Krater, who invites Mark Shillingsworth to visit his camp on the island. When Mark arrives there he is confronted by a native who offers to lend his lubra for a bag of flour. This incident should be seen in ironic relation to Krater's violation of the tribe's social order in the first chapter. The manuscript often directed this kind of cross-referencing of events by taking key words or phrases from their original narrative context and placing them in another apparently incongruous context. Thus we find

in the manuscript's Chapter Two: "'Givvim one bag of flour, Mister?' Shade of Kurrinooa [sic] (MS 35). Obviously, the reader should recall the social organization of the Yurracumbunga Tribe, of which Kurrinua was headman, in Chapter One. The absence of the stylistic signal, "Shade of Kurrinooa," in the published version, merely makes the irony less overt and more sophisticated, in accord with what seems to have been a general principle of revision. The way in which the materialism of the "procurer" looks back upon the demoralization and disintegration of tribal society corrects our naive judgement of him. The ironic linking persuades the reader to see him as a moral victim rather than an immoral pander. Retrospectively, his materialism represents a predictable stage in the contamination of Aboriginal culture by the whiteman. We should remember that when Krater forces the tribe to lend their women to his "unqualified" crew this means "violation of the traditions, the weakening of their system, the demoralisation of their youth" (5). The whiteman's society is based on materialism, as Herbert makes perfectly plain in the polemical diatribes by those characters whom he uses as a mouthpiece. It is a system, we are told, of "sweat and worry and sinfulness" (325), invented by a people generally characterized by their "sheer animal greed" (79). It is appropriate that Krater's reason for inviting Mark to the island is to persuade him to help finance the establishment of a trepang-fishing business. We learn later that such commercial plans provide the impetus for social growth, for the establishing of a township, although this does not occur on Flying Fox because Krater and Mark do not have sufficient energy. Of course, private enterprise <u>is</u> the basis of capitalist society. But, in Herbert's terms, "the perfect state of society" (325) is based on a "code of simple brotherhood" (79), and "Brother Binghi has it" (325). The ironic effect of linking the procurer's materialism in Chapter Two with Krater's violation of tribal

tradition in Chapter One is that the reader's moral judgement is directed away from the Aboriginal and towards the whiteman. The point is not so much that the procurer is corrupt but that the whiteman is the agent of his corruption.

In Chapter Four Ned Krater is the ironic victim of his own presumption that he is immortal, a belief which drives him mad as he approaches death. Inevitably, this irony refers back to the first chapter, in which he appears to the natives as a creature of legend, a superman, "who had come to stay and rule" (4). Although the narrative in the early stages of the novel is condensed so that we do not witness the process, Krater's self-delusion evolves from that point. The manuscript originally made this more explicit: "In his opinion he was immortal. Excusable presumption considering the life he had led" (MS 63). His illusions of immortality are a direct result of his racism, a sense of superiority boosted by his awareness of the Aboriginal image of him as a terrible god, the Man of Fire. Even as he is dying he chuckles at the sound of the natives' Death Corroboree, "considering the cause of it proof of his superiority" (39). He is unable to see himself as existing on the same human plane as the Aboriginal whose death is being lamented. But the reader is encouraged to compare the deaths of Krater and Kurrinua by the ironic linking of Chapter Four with Chapter One. The hints to cross-reference are obvious: "The natives buried him in a shallow grave in the hillocks of the isthmus where he had shot Kurrinua, then looted his house, then staged another Death Corroboree in which they sang of Kurrinua and Retribution" (40). Krater's and Kurrinua's fates are linked by the notion of retribution, by the Death Corroboree which drives one mad and gives the other mental strength, and by the common site of their burial. The cross-referencing forces the reader to an ethical judgement: Krater's manner of dying reflects upon his manner of living, and our final impression of him

is as a pathetic, self-deluding and inferior creature; Kurrinua, on the other hand, dies a heroic death, true to himself and to Aboriginal tradition, which reflects admirably upon his life:

> The pain of his wounds, which he had kept in check for hours by the power he was bred to use, began to throb. But he did not move a hair. He had been trained to look upon death fearlessly. To do so was to prove oneself a warrior worthy of having lived. His mind sang the Death Corroboree - Ee-yah, ee-yah, ee-tullyai - O mungallinni wurrigai - ee-tukkawunni - (7)

Kurrinua is one with tradition and with the land. He dies <u>in</u> the ground, with the Death Corroboree <u>in</u> his mind, and after he dies he remains in the ritual and song which record the history of his people. But Krater tries to stop the Death Corroboree, to keep it <u>out</u> of his mind, because it drives him mad; he is rooted <u>out</u> of the earth and devoured by crocodiles and, being something of an outsider, he is neither missed nor remembered by his society. As we have seen, however, his materialism is the mark of his society, and it is worth noting that, in the manuscript, part of the reason for the shipwreck which leads to his death is his greed - he overloads the boat with fish in anticipation of perfect weather (MS 61).

Such ironies as I have shown are corrective, forcing the reader constantly to re-examine and re-adjust his point of view in order to reach a truer understanding of the events being unfolded in the novel and, implicitly, of Australian history. The apparent unstructured historical saga conveys a sense of the immediacy of history in the making that few such works attain. In fact, the whole novel is very tightly organized. A pattern of interlocking ironies directs the reader's attention back and forward through the narrative, binding the novel together and giving it the force and energy which even its harshest critics have not denied. As Neil Mudge notes, there is a glaring inconsistency between the claims of structural weakness and those made by the same critics for the novel's strength, its vitality and forcefulness.[13] In a loosely structured novel

the reader is able to relax his grip on the unfolding narrative, as the writer presumably has done. But in Capricornia the continuing pattern of ironies necessitates that the reader be constantly alert for the clues which reveal it.

We cannot, for instance, relax with the comforting notion inferred from the interlocking ironies of Chapters One and Four that Kurrinua might, in a sense, live for ever in the traditional ritual of his people, absorbed into the whole life of their community. That point of view is in turn corrected by ironies created in relation to future events. In Chapter Nineteen we discover that the tribe has lost its tradition: "Civilization, even the little that had touched that part of the country yet, had robbed the Yurracumbungas and their neighbours of much of their own philosophies and left them on the way to become spiritually destitute" (244). We learn that for many years a Gospelist Mission has been operating on the island of Flying Fox. The missionaries are "enslaved to a cult" which preaches "a doctrine of self-denial" (244-45). But the success of their indoctrination of the natives proves to be self-parodic, since a profitable business is established on the basis of the free labour of the converts. For this reason the Gospelist Mission is better known as the Hallelujah Copra Company, the main business of which is the extraction of copra from the coconuts produced on its plantations. The materialism of the Mission not only undermines the integrity of its "doctrine of self-denial" but also reveals the hypocrisy of its "offer" to the natives: spirituality for physical labour. Herbert portrays the Mission as a perversion of religion, as a mere tool for capitalist exploitation. It is a symbol of physical confinement, and of the oppression, rather than the freedom, of the spirit:

> It was not Mr Hollower's wish to keep a prison. He wished only to bring his victims into contact with Christianity and keep them there till they might grasp its significance, which was something in which he had such great faith himself that he was prepared to keep them in its neighbourhood till they died. (246)

Hollower is the principal minister of the Mission, nicknamed Old Lucifer by his native flock, some of whom he has gathered from other islands "by simply blackbirding them" (246). He also conducts "punitive expeditions" against certain primitive rites adhered to by "pagan" Aboriginals, such as the sacrificial murder of tribal enemies for their kidney-fat to appease the indigenous devils of the bush:

> The fat-taking practice was introduced by refugees from the Jittabukka Country, who believed, in common with several other tribes, that if the bark of a certain tree were impregnated with the fat of an enemy's kidneys and burnt at billabongs or creeks or hunting-grounds, the devils responsible for the supply of fruit or fish or game would be more indulgent. It was a sort of religious rite, like the burning of blessed candles.
>
> (247-48)

The comparison of the burning of a fat-impregnated tree with the burning of blessed candles implicitly conceives of the physical environment in spiritual terms: Nature itself is the Aboriginal equivalent to the whiteman's house of God. Our moral judgements are again turned upside down. The establishment of the Gospelist Mission is a profane act, and the missionaries are sacrilegious, since the transformation of the island's physical landscape "out of recognition" (245) is a desecration of things spiritual. In this context, the immediate ironies of the chapter can be seen as interlocking with the original violation of Aboriginal tradition by Ned Krater in Chapter One.

We should recall that Krater's weakening of the tribal system occurs initially because he brings to the island a crew of natives from an enemy tribe who do not care about the Yurracumbungas' traditions: "The islanders said that the old order had passed; and to prove it, one of them seized a lubra and ravaged her" (5). This looks forward to Rev. Hollower's "blackbirding" in Chapter Nineteen: "The old order of things had changed in Yurracumbunga. Refugees from islands and distant coastlands joined the tribe, so that at length it became a mob with mixed philosophies, whose

common tongue was Pidgin . . ." (246-47). The blackbirding of converts represents a further stage in the disintegration of tribal society initiated by Krater. The materialism of the Hallelujah Copra Co. also finds its precursor in Krater's trepang-fishing business, originally established on the same location as the Mission. In the manuscript version of Chapter Nineteen Herbert signposted the point of relative significance by employing the same method of juxtaposition that has already been noted with regard to the ironic linking of Kurrinua with earlier events. Thus we find: "Time had dealt freakishly with Flying Fox. Of all places, that old sink of iniquity had been chosen as the site of the Gospelist Aboriginal Mission Station. It had become a font at which the natives of the neighbourhood were baptised into Christian Grace. Shade of old Ned Krater!" (MS 285). Although the irony in Herbert's misrepresentation of the facts is signalled in the manuscript by this final phrase it still exists in the published novel: time has not dealt freakishly with Flying Fox. The interlocking ironies outlined above reveal a structure which implies that the material exploitation and spiritual imperialism practised by the Gospelist missionaries is a logical and inevitable development from the earlier actions of Ned Krater. In the published version of Chapter Nineteen there is one explicit reference to Krater: "Birds and beasts had fled; so had the crocodiles; so no doubt had Krater's devil" (245). Here the reverberations set up in the reader's mind recall the crocodiles which rooted out and devoured Krater's body in Chapter Three. It is particularly ironic that the Gospelists' offer of spirituality to their Aboriginal "flock" should look back upon Krater's death, since that revealed to the natives the whiteman's immortality as a deception. As a clue to cross-reference events, however, Chapter Nineteen's explicit reference to Krater is itself ironically misleading. The structural ironies suggest that his devil has not fled

from the island; and the manuscript's use of the phrase, "Shade of old Ned Krater!", to signal those ironies overtly, confirms his presence. The clues are again misrepresented when Herbert writes:

> Not a stick of the old settlement remained. Even the ancient mango trees and skinny coconuts had been uprooted as though they were counted as original sins. . . . A grove of coconuts, comprising a thousand or more fine palms, lined the ocean-beach from end to end, these the virtues, as it were, supplanting the ousted sins.
> (245)

If we look back to the original settlement in Chapter Three, encouraged by the verbal echoes, we find: "The humpies were set up on the isthmus between the creek and the sea, among a grove of fine old mango trees and skinny coconuts that Krater had planted" (22). The concept of original sin, then, is associated with Krater. As we have seen, the missionaries do not redeem his sin by their own virtue, as we are led to believe, but rather build upon it. Thus we are told that the steepled church stood "on the site of the humpies" (245); looking back to Chapter Three we find that those were originally set up "on the isthmus between the creek and the sea" (22); and we know from Chapter One that Kurrinua met his death in the sandy hillocks of "the isthmus that lay between the creek and the sea" (6). The irony here is that the church is built upon the very site of Krater's original sin. The same kind of irony exists in the Gospelists' uprooting of the skinny coconuts planted by Krater only to plant a whole grove of the same kind of tree. If virtues are to supplant sins they can hardly be of the same kind. The irony is appropriate, since the hypocrisy of the missionaries - motivated by a sense of superiority and a desire to ease their own conscience, preaching a doctrine of brotherhood of man and self-denial, exploiting their converts for material gain - continues the pattern of ironies established by Krater's ignorant desecration of Aboriginal culture at the beginning of the novel.

The ironic patterning of events reveals a structure in Capricornia

akin to that which F.H. Mares identified in Richardson's The Fortunes of Richard Mahony.[14] It is interesting to note that Richardson too was falsely criticized for being unable to organize her material, for not being in full control of her medium, although, as in Capricornia, the force of the work was undeniable. What F.H. Mares says of Richardson's trilogy is also true of Capricornia:

> Almost any passage will set up reverberations in the reader's mind - like the ripples when a stone is thrown into water - that imply the future and recall the past in the work. The whole trilogy is bound together and gains shape and structure from these interlocking ripples of significance.[15]

We have already noted Herbert's repetition and echoing of certain words and phrases as a means of shaping the narrative: the references to Krater's devil in Chapters One, Four and Nineteen; and the common location of action for those chapters on Flying Fox, with explicit or implicit reference to the isthmus between the creek and the sea. Mares points out this same technique for narrative organization in The Fortunes of Richard Mahony. For example, in the first volume, Australia Felix, Mahony has his pious platitudes deflated when he meets the chemist, Tangye:

> 'Ah, there's a lot of bunkum talked about life,' returned Tangye drily, and settled his glasses on his nose. 'And as a man gets nearer the end of it, he sees just what bunkum it is. Life's only got one meanin' Doctor; seen plain, there's only one object in everything we do; and that's to keep a sound roof over our heads and a bite in our mouths - and in those of the helpless creatures who depend on us. . .'[16]

In the third volume, when Mahony is in fact heading for disaster and death, and is soon to be utterly dependent on his family, he recalls those words:

> And here, as he tossed restlessly from side to side, there came into his mind words he had read somewhere or heard someone say, about life and its ultimate meaning. Stripped of its claptrap, of the roses and false sentiment in which we love to drape it, it had actually no object but this: to keep a roof over our heads and food in the mouths of the helpless beings who depend on us.[17]

The verbal echoes here are less self-conscious than in Capricornia because Richardson is concerned with the consciousness of one central protagonist,

so that the words from his past float into his mind, as well as the reader's, "like a half-remembered tune."[18] Indeed the deliberate disguising of interconnections that we have already observed in Capricornia - Herbert's placing of clues in a context where facts are misrepresented, his removal of much of the stylistic signalling that was in the manuscript - is reminiscent of Furphy's Such Is Life, another novel originally maligned as shapeless and out of the author's control. As Neil Mudge writes: "Apparent arbitrariness bewilders the orderly mind. Herbert makes as much play of apparent arbitrariness as does Furphy. He seems preoccupied with men's capacity to be deceived by appearances, prejudice or preconception just as much as does Furphy."[19] We shall see in later chapters that the form of Capricornia is compatible with Herbert's concern with the deceptiveness of appearance, and with the thesis that we should not judge a man by the colour of his skin. The vivid foreground is often so arresting, the immediate story so compelling, that apparently inconsequential detail - from which the pattern evolves that "interprets and comments upon the further meaning of the present scene and connects it with the body of the novel"[20] - is lost to all but the most attentive reader. But, as Mudge notes, the technique itself would be useless unless Herbert managed to create "a system of references"[21] to reveal the underlying pattern. In this sense, the structural effect of verbal echoing and repetition in Capricornia is the same as in The Fortunes of Richard Mahony, binding the novel together and subtly drawing attention to its pattern of interlocking ironies.

Imagery adds another dimension to Herbert's "system of references" by creating patterns which actually embody the ironies and reveal in this way the structure of the novel. Here again what Mares says of Richardson's trilogy is also true for Capricornia: "Besides words and phrases that are echoed and repeated there are images and symbols that grow in significance

as they are reiterated in different contexts in the progress of the book."[22] We have already noted that Krater's and Kurrinua's fates are linked by geography and verbal echoing: in Chapter Four Krater is buried "in a shallow grave in the hillocks of the isthmus where he had shot Kurrinua" (40); in Chapter One Kurrinua had tried to escape that death by crawling "towards the isthmus that lay between the creek and the sea" and burying himself to the neck in the "sandy hillocks" there (6). But the images of burial are themselves connective, and signal a specific pattern which is extended through the entire novel.

In Chapter Two Mark Shillingsworth meets an employee of Joe Crowe, the undertaker, whom he decides to help bury a destitute Chinaman. We are told that "The idea of taking part in the simple funeral appealed to Mark" (18). (The manuscript has that the idea appealed to "romantic Mark" (MS 22).) He is "filled with his experience" that evening at the Government Service Club's New Year dance and embarrasses his brother Oscar by his drunken behaviour, saying such things as:

> 'Now warrer y'think - buried a Chow 'safternoon - . . . N'yorter heard the hot clods clompin' on the coffing - hot clods - n'im stone cold. Course he couldn't feel 'em - but I did - for him. Planted him. Then we sat'n his grave and waked him with beer. Gawd'll I ever forget them clompin' clods! Clamped down with a ton of hot clods! Gawd! D'y'know - shperiences is the milestonesh of life - '
>
> (18)

He will never forget the "'clods clompin' on the coffing'" because they make him realize that he is in a sense "'clamped down with a ton of hot clods.'" The burial becomes a symbol for his own suffocation by civilized society. The point was clearer in the manuscript because his drunken rambling obviously shifted focus from simply recalling the events of the afternoon to judging his present audience in accord with what he has learned from that experience: "Gawd'll I ever forget them clompin' clods! Clods. That's 't yous birds are - clods - dunno y'live - frighen do an'thing's Not Done. Oh gawd! 'Speriences - thatsh y'want . . ." (MS 21). But in

the published novel he has the same new understanding of experience after the burial: "He learnt that he was a slave, in spite of all the petty airs he might assume, a slave shackled to a yoke, to be scolded when he lagged, flogged when he rebelled with the sjambok of the modern driver, Threat of the Sack" (19). But this same new understanding enables him to see the Sack as meaning "not misery and hunger, but freedom to go adventuring in the wilderness or on the Silver Sea" (20). The burial marks a turning point in his life: "He decided to become a waster" (20). Soon after this he is dismissed from his job and sails for Flying Fox with Ned Krater.

We have already seen that Krater's violation of the traditional Yurracumbunga social order in Chapter One is linked with Mark's being offered a lubra by a native procurer in Chapter Two. The irony of Mark's association of freedom with Krater, adventuring on the Silver Sea, is embodied in the image pattern of burial. The apparent turning point in his life, instigated by the Chinaman's burial as an image of his own oppression, is ironically framed by the burial images already observed in Chapters One and Four, and these are associated not with where he has been but with Flying Fox, where he is going. This pattern is extended throughout not only by explicit images of the grave but also by implicit images of burial or deluge: of suffocation, confinement, physical oppression, of being crushed or swallowed up. Thus the irony of Mark's perception of freedom on Flying Fox is revealed by the imagery which heralds the birth of Norman:

> Grass was crushed flat . . . crash upon crash, blinding, deafening. Out of nothing the settlement leapt and lived for a second at a time . . . Misshapen houses reeled among vegetation that lay on the ground . . . Rain stretched down like silver wires from heaven of pitch to earth of seething mud. Rain poured through the roof of Mark's house and spilled on him.
>
> (23)

The christening party which follows Norman's birth looks back upon the

New Year party in the previous chapter. On both occasions Mark ends up in hospital. But it is particularly ironic that the birth, a conventional image of Romantic potency, causes Mark to be brought back to civilization. The imagery of the deluge involves a symbolic baptism, when the rain pours through the roof and spills on him, which anticipates the actual christening of his son, Mark Anthony Shillingsworth. At the same time the imagery of being crushed, blinded and deafened should be seen in relation to the burial in the previous chapter, revealing Mark's escape from civilization as an illusion. Since he has not made a new life for himself the symbolic baptism must also be ironic. Appropriately, the christening anticipated by that symbolism proves to be just as ironic: when Mark returns to civilization little Mark Anthony becomes Naw-nim, which is the native way of saying No-name.

It is appropriate, of course, that a pattern of imagery of physical oppression should figure heavily in a novel concerned with racism, and that burial should be the central image of the pattern, since the end of persecution is death. (Thus Dr Aintee, the Protector of Aborigines, regards his "great black and brindle family . . . merely as marsupials being routed by a pack of dingoes; and he understood that his duty was merely to protect them from undue violence during the rout" (238).) But the relation of the burial imagery to a pattern of ironies is not generally recognized. This in itself is ironic, since the novel is designed in such a way that the relation of image patterns to structural ironies is heuristic. As I have already indicated, the apparent story can be deceiving. The reader who is innocently unaware of Herbert's "system of references" for revealing interlocking ironies misses the internal contradictions of the narrative, which deliberately misrepresents itself. The contrast between reality and appearance is potentially problematic for a modern work of fiction with a social thesis, but thematically appropriate to a concern

with racism. We shall see that to some extent the novel forestalls the "problem" by the self-consciousness of its form, which embodies the contrast. But this means that the unaware reader becomes a victim of the irony of that contrast, which, within the novel, must be associated with the ignorance and inhumanity of racism.

We shall see that this is so if we consider the way in which Jock Driver's funeral in Chapter Ten looks back upon Norman's confinement in a rail truck in Chapter Six, retrospectively transforming the innocent perceptions which the reader had of that at the time. Let us look at the later incident first. Driver's body is hauled to the cemetery in "a vehicle that was just a box on wheels"(127), and then, as his coffin sinks into the grave, there is "the hiss and gurgle of the bubbles rushing from the vents" (128) because the grave is brimming from the seven inches of rain that had fallen that day. In Chapter Six Norman hears the "hiss and bubble" (59) of the locomotive, "so close that its hot breath choked" (58) and its frightful noises entered his heart. The "open truck" (58) into which he has been dropped is something like "a box on wheels." The linking of the two incidents reveals Norman's train journey, on which he was supposed to be accompanied by Jock Driver, as a symbolic encounter with death. We are made to realize that there was a much greater significance in Norman's thinking "it was The End" (59) than we perceived at the time. On the day of Driver's funeral there is "one long roaring shower" (126), and, so that the coffin can be sunk to the bottom of the flooded grave, the undertaker drills eight holes as vents for the water to escape. This too recalls Norman's experience: "Rain roared and raged down. The truck would have been filled to the top but for the gaping holes in its bottom." The verbal linking makes Norman's own association of the rain with deliverance <u>from</u> death particularly ironic: "Rain poured down and proved his condition earthly at least." But the raging

and roaring rain not only looks forward to Driver's funeral but also back upon Norman's own birth during the hurricane in Chapter Three. Thus we find that his symbolic encounter with death in the hearse-like rail truck is ultimately eclipsed by an image of birth: "A few sound whacks from a hard black hand soon told him that he was alive and with his kind" (59).

The train journey in Chapter Six is, of course, central to the narrative progression which sees Norman leave behind his life with the natives in Chapter Five and move, albeit unknowingly, towards a new life with Oscar at Red Ochre, accepted into the household "as a Shillingsworth of the blood" (88) in Chapter Seven. In this context the symbolic death obviously applies to Aboriginal identity and should be seen as interpreting the action of the previous chapter, in which Norman is forcibly taken from Flying Fox and given away to Jock Driver. Similarly, the symbolic birth applies to white identity, since it anticipates and comments upon the action of the following chapter, "Clothes Make a Man," in which Norman is adopted by Oscar. Thus events in Chapters Five, Six and Seven are subtly interwoven, referring back to Chapter Three (Norman's birth) as well as forward to Chapter Ten (Driver's burial) to produce an integrated narrative. The pattern of ironies extends throughout the entire novel. We have seen, for instance, that Norman's actual birth in Chapter Three also looks back ironically upon Mark's dismissal from his job in the Government Service in Chapter Two; that this in turn is related to the Chinaman's burial (in the same chapter); which, of course, anticipates Driver's funeral in Chapter Ten, as well as Krater's burial in Chapter Four, and refers back to Kurrinua's self-interment in Chapter One. Obviously, the novel is not so rambling and shapeless as it seems.

This exposition provides a good account of how imagery and verbal echoes function in Capricornia as a "system of references" for a pattern

of interlocking ironies which, in turn, reveals the structure of the novel. We have seen also, in the particular instance of Norman's train journey and Driver's funeral, that this concealed structure embodies a symbolic action. This is so for the entire novel. In the next two chapters of this thesis I shall be concentrating on the extended symbolic action of the narrative. Since this amounts to inferring symbolic meaning from structural principles of interlocking irony, these different aspects of the novel cannot effectively be divorced in discussion. My whole thesis builds upon an awareness of structural ironies to such an extent that they will continue to be illuminated, implicitly, throughout. For this reason I need do no more than briefly mention at this stage that those ironies which, we have seen, are associated with the image pattern of burial and physical confinement, culminate in the image of Tocky's and her baby's bones in the bottom of the broken tank at the end of the novel. But we should also note here that death is ironically related to birth at more than one point in the symbolic action. For instance, the symbolic death of Aboriginal identity that we have observed looks forward to Chapter Twenty-one, "Son of a Gin," in which Norman learns of his Aboriginal background. At that point, as we shall see later, we witness the symbolic death of white identity and, in the following chapter, the birth of Aboriginal identity. The symbolic death looks back ironically upon the title of Chapter Twelve, "Stirring of Skeletons," which foreshadows Norman's learning the truth about his past. But this implicit skeletal imagery also looks forward to the final image of Tocky's and her baby's bones, indirectly linking Norman's symbolic whiteman death/Aboriginal birth with their fate.

Once we have solved the puzzle, posed by verbal echo and image pattern, of how apparently unrelated events do in fact have some bearing upon each other, we can begin to recognize the deliberate deceptiveness

of Capricornia's organization. For example, with knowledge of future events and awareness of systematic signalling we have identified the image of birth associated with Norman's train journey towards a new life with Oscar, and we cannot help realizing that, in its immediate context, it has been deliberately misrepresented. The slaps which Norman receives to awaken him to the fact that he is "alive and with his kind" are administered by "a hard black hand" (59). Thus, the reader who has no knowledge of the following chapter could easily be forgiven for interpreting the symbolic birth as applicable to Aboriginal rather than white identity, although the illogicality and inconsistency of the narrative then becomes mystifying. The technique again brings to mind Furphy's Such Is Life, in which the first chapter seems utterly confusing - except retrospectively, when we have the knowledge of later events. Then, we are able to see that the association of ideas in Chapter One prefigures plot development. Herbert's narrative also demands such flexibility for cross-referencing. As Helen Prideaux writes: "The sprawling formlessness . . is as deceptive as the rambling of Such Is Life."[23] The ironic underpinning of the apparently shapeless narrative constitutes a formal sabotage of social realism, comparable to Furphy's parody of romantic fiction. It seems that Herbert is not at all facetious when he says that his intricate plotting often makes a single reading unsafe for "true judgement" by obscuring the "primary motive" of his composition.[24] In a novel of social satire, however, this represents, for many readers, a betrayal of expectations. The challenge is posed by the possibility of alternative readings of the novel, a possibility which has disturbed many critics who have been unwilling to re-examine their definitions of the novel of social purpose. Can it, for instance, be simultaneously self-reflexive and socially orientated? Or is its necessary objectivity inevitably undermined by the inclusion of a subjective imaginative vision? I shall

return to these important general issues later in the thesis, when the implications of imaginative vision will be more apparent.

The structure of Capricornia has more in common with self-conscious fiction than with the conventions of realism. The novel only seems formless and sprawling because we habitually associate the notion of structure with logical continuity, and assume that "mere association of one thing with another could issue in nothing but haphazard multiplicity."[25] We only need to consider Sterne's Tristram Shandy, in which the self-conscious type of structure made its first appearance, to know that this is not so, and that in fact a novel can be skilfully and delicately constructed, obeying formal laws of its own, without dishing up experience to the reader "like a moulded pudding,"[26] ready for instant absorption. Like Such Is Life, which was greatly influenced by Tristram Shandy, Capricornia's ironic mode of narration insists that a work of fiction develop its own structure from within itself. It may help us to grasp the notion of a structure of this kind if we think of it as endoskeletal, as opposed to the logical and obviously controlled forms of simple linear or circular structures, which we may think of as exoskeletal. It is partly because Capricornia's historical perspective, and the resemblance of its geography to non-fictional geography (the Northern Territory), is so obvious that we can fail to realize that this aspect is only one term of a structural irony. As a world of its own, the novel is discrete, and, formally, it is defined by its internal relationships.

I have said that interlocking ironies create a structure in Capricornia similar to that in Richardson's The Fortunes of Richard Mahony, and, as F.H. Mares has demonstrated,[27] the reiteration of burial images in different contexts in the progress of that book is also integral to the continuous controlling pattern of the ironies. But the interlocking of ironies is a common novelistic device, employed by such diverse writers

as Dickens, Hardy, the Brontes, James and many others. Indeed there is hardly a novelist who does not, at various points in a narrative, rely upon our prior knowledge of something to contradict what he or she asserts of it. Partly it is this which invests a narrative with the element of suspense. Narrative technique naturally tends to exploit the ironic incongruity between expectation and event. When we speak of interlocking ironies as creating a structure for a novel we must be certain that we are not unnecessarily complicating a narrative that simply thwarts expectations. As D.C. Meucke writes: "For the unexpected to be ironic . . . there must be some stress upon or some positive assumption of its unlikeliness."[28] For instance, the title of Richardson's trilogy leads the reader to expect anything but the terrible misfortune to which Mahony is fated. The titles of the separate volumes also are deliberately misleading, except in drawing attention to the underlying pattern of interlocking ironies. Leonie Kramer points to this relation of the major ironies inherent in the titles to the ironic mode of narrative in her introduction to the Penguin edition:

> Australia Felix, the name Thomas Mitchell gave to the colony of Victoria in deference to its fertility, in the end is seen by Mahony as a curse, not as a blessing, and Mitchell's vision becomes Mahony's nightmare. The Way Home is the way to rejection and disillusionment. Ultima Thule, the name Mahony gives to the grand house which acknowledges his material success and at the same time assists his material failure, becomes too a sign for his own mental journey to the utmost limits of endurance.[29]

Similarly, in Capricornia the ironies of events stress the major ironies of the chapter titles. "Grandson of a Sultan" refers to the lie Oscar tells Norman about his racial background in the hope of protecting him from the racism directed at halfcastes of Aboriginal descent. In the chapter of that title, however, Eurasian racial composition is increasingly viewed as a condition akin to "disease" (210). Thus the title sets the stage for the gradual transformation of Norman's identity, as it

exists in the eye of civilized society, which is marked metaphorically by his sea voyage from Batman back to where his roots lie in Capricornia. Soon he is being addressed as "Nigger," and at the last port of call before his destination Saxon Whitely reveals the truth about Norman's background to everyone on board: "'What - Shillingsworth? . . . Why - that must be the son of Mark who killed the Chow. Red Ochre? Yes - that's who he is. Says his mother's a Javanese, does he? Ha! Ha! Ha! Don't you believe it. She was a Capricornian gin!'"(211). The verbal echoes here obviously support the title in looking back upon Chapter Seven, "Clothes Make A Man," where Differ discussed the fate of his own daughter, as well as that of Norman, with Oscar:

> ". . . I'll pretend she's a halfcaste of another race - Javanese or some such race that the mob doesn't know much about and therefore'll respect. She could pass for a halfcaste Javanese. She could pass for a Javanese princess, in fact. Then she could marry well and mix with the best society." (78-79)

Oscar's reply is ironic, in relation to what he later leads Norman to believe about his identity: "But that's cruel - making her live a lie" (79). We have already seen that Oscar first accepts Norman as a blood relation towards the end of this chapter, and that this is prepared for by the symbolic birth in the previous chapter. "Grandson of a Sultan" is linked with that chapter, "The Copper Creek Train," by their common use of a physical journey as a device for transforming the racial image of Norman's identity. The two chapters are linked also with Chapter Twenty-two, "Song of the Golden Beetle," in which a physical journey through the wilderness marks Norman's apparent acceptance of his Aboriginal heritage. The revelation that precedes this in "Son of a Gin" is foreshadowed in "Grandson of a Sultan," and these two titles obviously bear an ironic relation to each other. The ironic connection of the sea voyage with the rites of passage for Norman's symbolic birth as a whiteman in "The Copper Creek Train" is reinforced too by the fact that Whitely's blabbing in

"Grandson of a Sultan" prefigures George Tittmuss's talk with Norman about his father in the following chapter, "Stirring of Skeletons." As I have already indicated, this title looks both back and forward ironically: back upon the symbolic Aboriginal death (accompanying the symbolic birth of the whiteman) in "The Copper Creek Train"; forward to the inversion of these rites of passage in "Son of a Gin" and "Song of the Golden Beetle," which, as I said earlier, will be examined closely at a later stage in this thesis.

The title of Chapter Twenty-five, "Spinning of Fate the Spider," looks back upon the title of Chapter Twenty-two, "Song of the Golden Beetle." The golden beetle is a metaphor for the Spirit of the Land, "voice of the spirit of Terra Australis" (293). In Chapter Twenty-two Norman seems to establish his own harmony with the Spirit of the Land when he is awakened to his Aboriginal heritage. In Chapter Twenty-five, however, we are told that he remained proud of this heritage only "for several weeks" (332), and his sense of equilibrium is totally shattered when he learns finally the true identity of his white parent, Mark Shillingsworth. It is clear from the title of the chapter that the spider is a metaphor for fate, and the implied image of the web obviously represents a trap for the golden beetle. Thus the title of the following chapter, "Death Corroboree," although it obviously refers to Oscar's death within the chapter, also reflects ironically back upon the "birth" of Norman's Aboriginality in "Song of the Golden Beetle." The fact that Norman is unable to join in the Aboriginal Death Corroboree for the man who has been the only real father he has known confirms this, particularly since, if we look back to the precise sounds of the Death Corroboree Kurrinua sings in his mind in Chapter One - "Ee-yah, ee-yah, ee-tullyai - O mungallinni wurrigai - ee-tukkawunni" (7) -, we find that these are echoed in the song that the golden beetle sings in Chapter Twenty-two: ". . . eeyah-eeyah-eeyah - O

mungallini kurritai, ee-tukka wunni wurri-gai, ee-minni kinni tulli-yai - ee-yah-eeyah-eeyah!" (294).

The same verbal echoes appear in Chapter Twenty in the chant of the corroboree which is held after the mustering "to celebrate the victory over the cattle" (265). The following tale is told:

> A black bull charged me - he was a monster - a great black devil - he killed my horse - the blood of my horse - swept over me reeking - I flew at the devil - mad with rage - because he killed my brother the horse - and grasped his horns - and flung him to the earth - and in a storm of dust and blood - broke his neck . . . (265)

But the actual sounds of this chant are the same as those of the Death Corroboree in Kurrinua's mind in Chapter One. It might be argued, of course, that Herbert simply used the same representation for Aboriginal words because he knew that most of his readers would not notice the difference and that those who did would recognize this as artistic license. In view of the whole elaborate system for cross-referencing narrative events that I have already indicated, however, I do not think this view is really supportable. Ket's disruption of the corroboree which follows the "cutting" of the bulls perhaps looks back ironically upon Krater's abortion of the Corroboree of Circumcision in Chapter One. In any case the self-consciousness of the language Herbert uses to describe Ket's arrival creates an irony of its own: the story of the death of a bull is "stopped dead" by the well-known "bully" (266). The sounds of the corroboree also look forward to "Song of the Golden Beetle," where we have already seen they are echoed. In the sense that Ket, as John McLaren says, "represent what, in less propitious circumstances, Norman might have been,"[30] he might be seen as an image of death which foreshadows the ironic implications that undercut Norman's Aboriginal awakening in that chapter. One thing is certain: Ket and Norman are linked by Herbert's patterning of their lives. It is Ket who reveals Norman's true racial background in "Son of a Gin,"

precipitating the state of mind which causes him to break Gigney's arm and be driven from home; who almost succeeds in murdering Norman in the wilderness; and whose testimony provides the police with a possible motive for Norman to murder Frank McLash and so almost leads to his conviction. Ket, of course, is also a halfcaste; and the listing for him in the Dramatis Personae at the front of the book, "Grandson of a Chinaman," looks forward ironically to that identity of Norman which he will be the one to reveal as false: "Grandson of a Sultan."

The image of the web that we have seen implicit in "Spinning of Fate the Spider," in which Norman learns of his father's true identity, is made explicit in Chapter Thirty-three, which is wholly concerned with the fate of Ket. Although this chapter apparently traces his physical journey away from civilization, as he attempts to flee from the punishment that awaits him there for murdering Con the Greek, in fact it charts the inverse movement. Ket is unable to cope with the wilderness, unwilling to accept being socially outcast, so that finally his fate "as a captive of the System" (472) seems to him an attractive proposition. This should remind the reader of Norman's journey in "Song of the Golden Beetle," since the apparent realization of his Aboriginal heritage, and, implicitly, of freedom, is revealed as false in "Spinning of Fate the Spider." The image of the spider's web that is common to both journeys supports the notion that Ket's and Norman's fates are compared rather than, as Brian Kiernan suggests, contrasted.[31] Thus the title of the chapter in which Ket is captured, "Esau Selleth His Birthright," looks back upon "Spinning of Fate the Spider" with heuristic irony, revealing the tragic dimension of his failure to maintain pride in his Aboriginal heritage.

It should now be plain that the patterning of interlocking ironies by verbal echo and imagery, to which our attention is drawn by the major ironies of the chapter titles, creates in Capricornia an elaborately

structured narrative. But the patterning is so unobtrusive that it requires the reader to pay careful attention to apparently trivial detail and to exercise an extremely flexible ironic awareness. Although an extended comparison of Capricornia with Such Is Life is not within the province of this thesis, it should nevertheless be clear that the deceptiveness of an apparently shapeless narrative, and the deliberate misrepresentation of references to the "real" story by placing them in a context where their point seems meaningless because the reader is unaware of future events, provides a firm basis for such an approach. Brian Kiernan has observed, too, that the disordered appearance of the narrative in both novels "conceals the stratagems of a story-teller versed in oral tradition."[32] Thus, in reading Capricornia, we should keep in mind that deception is central to the craft of yarn-spinning. As Neil Mudge notes, many of the techniques by which Herbert promotes "the impression of a colloquially delivered, word-of-mouth yarn in all its artlessness and apparent digression and passing irrelevance "[33] will be different from those used in Such Is Life because Herbert has no unreliable narrator actually participating in the story. We shall see later in this thesis, for instance, that there is a considerable element of play in Capricornia which depends upon the kind of exploitation of the ambivalence of language that I have prefigured briefly in this chapter when discussing Ket's disruption of the Aboriginal corroboree which celebrates the Red Ochre cattle muster.

It should be evident too, however, from my argument in this chapter, that Capricornia has much in common with Richardson's The Fortunes of Richard Mahony. In both of these novels the structure is revealed by a pattern of ironies, to which the reader's attention is drawn by incremental repetition and echoing, as well as by images reiterated in changed contexts which enhance their meaning as the narrative progresses. As Leonie Kramer notes,

this ironic mode of organizing detail "insists upon the inevitability of Mahony's progress towards defeat"[34] even when the external events of the narrative seem to suggest otherwise. In the same way, Herbert insists upon the inevitability of Norman's failure to realize any true and permanent sense of identity. Thus the title of the final chapter, "Back To Earth," in which both the apparent freedom associated with Norman's acquittal and the prospect of his future prosperity are undercut by the bleak reality represented by the bones of Tocky and the baby, picks up a phrase from "Son of a Gin," in which his "vanity was in paradise" until shattered by Ket's revelation of his real racial background: "Norman was soon brought back to earth" (285). As John McLaren writes: "His attempt to find a pattern in life has failed as singularly as his attempt to impose it."[35] The point of referring back to "Son of a Gin" is that there Ket's unveiling of Norman's true identity destroys the false pattern (the tale of the "grandson of a sultan") imposed upon his life by Oscar. Thereafter he struggles to find another image to resolve the ironic dilemma of halfcaste self-consciousness, which remains divided against itself because of its racial focus. Of course, Norman does have an identity, as an individual human creature, but he is unable to realize it because he is deluded by superficial civilized definitions of self based on appearance. In this sense, it is appropriately ironic that his failure to find a pattern to his life should ultimately be revealed to the alert reader by the unobtrusive patterning of an apparently shapeless narrative.

CHAPTER TWO

SYMBOLIC ACTION: HISTORY AND COUNTER-MYTH

On the basis of Capricornia's structure of interlocking ironies Herbert erects a myth. I do not mean myth in the traditional sense of an anonymous and essentially religious formulation of true experience, or in Durkheim's sense of a "collective representation." Rather, I am talking about mythopoesis, the invention of myth by one man as a literary strategy to provide a symbolic action to which the reader responds as figuring universal truths about human experience. My identification of Herbert's myth in relation to irony owes nothing to Frye's theory that "ironic myth" is a manifestation of a modern historical relationship between irony and myth. Rather, it refers to the particular mode of Herbert's myth creation.

The intention in Capricornia seems to have been more myth-breaking than myth-making, as numerous incidental ironies reveal. For example, in Chapter Nineteen, "God in the Silver Sea," the Hallelujah Copra Co.'s materialism undermines the conventional image of the Mission that is presented by the Gospelists' doctrine of self-denial and devotion to the spiritual life. Similarly, Krater's version of national history smashes the traditional image of the pioneer and the settler as hard-working and virtuous, struggling against the wilderness to establish civilization: "He said that it was actually the black lubras who had pioneered the land, since pursuit of them had drawn explorers into the wilderness and love of them had encouraged settlers to stay" (13). Clearly the breaking of one image leads to the making of another. After all, irony is essentially corrective; to measure the falseness of a culture's defining historical images the ironist must supply others. The two perspectives are, of course,

absolutely irreconcilable: the lustful and the virtuous pioneer, the materialistic and spiritualistic missionary. What emerges from systematic iconoclasm is an alternative set of "images" that constitutes a unified mythic vision. This process is in effect the author's redefinition of national history, the creation of a "counter-myth" disputing generally accepted opinion about what happened in our past. Ironically, the mythopoeic impulse is iconoclastic. The "counter-myth" is created by the interlocking ironies which attend iconoclasm.

"Image," as I use the word here, need not have a rhetorical figure. Irony is primarily a way of seeing, and the suitably aware reader will construct his own mental imagery from a structure of patterned ironies. With the terms "corrective" and "corrected" image I am merely attempting to deal with the shifting perspectives of a structure of ironies, and with the associated transformations of the reader's "innocent" perceptions. This chapter in part reconsiders certain ironies already observed; it concerns the inference of meaning from the structural principles they embody. The structure uncovered in my previous chapter inevitably organizes the implicit images which arise from the corrective process of irony. Consider, for example, the following scheme of incidental ironies and related imagery.

Ned Krater is Capricornia's pioneer of white civilization, and in many ways, as we shall see, its archetype. By the time he arrives on the Yurracumbunga coast, its Aboriginal inhabitants, "having only heard tell of the invaders from survivors of the neighbouring tribe of Karrapillua, were come to regard whitemen rather as creatures of legend." Hence, when Krater "suddenly materialized for them," his naturally "carroty" complexion blazing as with fire in the light of dawn, he is immediately perceived as a mythic incarnation: "a devil come from the sun" (3). In the manuscript there is no reference to "monsters of legend," but the perversity of Krater's

personification of myth is ironically signified: "They found their own invader real enough" (MS 3). Just as dawn heralds the mythic conception of Munichillu, dawn will announce the shattering of that myth: the death of Krater in Chapter Four.

The ironic linking of these incidents has already been noted. The corrective image for Ned Krater as the immortal devil is the "merely mortal" man (40). He is also reduced from the heroic stature of "supermen who had come to stay and rule" (4) to a pathetic level, a victim of his own delusions of grandeur. It is clear that this corrective image is representative, "for Krater's Anglo-Saxon will . . . could not realize that it was inextricably in the grip of death" (39). His presumption that he is racially superior has led to a naive belief that the mythic status ascribed to him by his "inferiors" is an incontrovertible fact. His final insanity is an ironic consequence of that self-consciousness "His violence and the fragility of his victims were only fancies of his dying mind" (39). His delirium sees him diminished still further, apparently less than "merely mortal," a pathetic and crazed creature. The absolute degree of his diminution is strikingly confirmed in the final sentence of the episode: "The crocodiles, being respecters neither of persons nor of devils, came and rooted him out and devoured him as soon as they discovered where he lay" (40). The crocodiles are monsters in fact, rather than in legend, and it is therefore apt that they expose Krater's mortality. This powerful realism is the final stage of the corrective process of irony.

A major aspect of Capricornia is its concern with images of self-definition. We noted in the previous chapter that Norman moves through a series of masks, each inadequate to sustain a sense of identity. The struggle of Norman's father, Mark Shillingsworth, also centres on the question of what constitutes true identity. Here again the ironic mode

forces the reader to readjust his mental image of Mark throughout the novel.

The reader's attention is first drawn to Mark as potentially a major, perhaps the central, character. His rebellion against society, its affectations and trivialities, seems to signify the only possible direction out of absurdity. Herbert enlists the reader's sympathy accordingly, juxtaposing Mark's questioning of social norms with Oscar's acceptance of them, his impulsive zest for life's experience with Oscar's calculating and career-orientated opportunism. The mental image we have of Mark is of the individual opposed to the depersonalizing rationalism of ordered white society. But no clear-cut judgement of Oscar and Mark, even at this early stage in the novel, is possible. One cannot really condone Mark's drunken sprees and wild behaviour, despite their positive value in being ranged against the cold-hearted order that Oscar seems to represent. Mark's inebriated perception that "'shperience is the milestonesh of life'" (18) must be seen in the ironic context of the funeral which inspires it.

There is the unsettling possibility that Mark's romanticism is terribly misguided, indeed perverse. As we saw in the previous chapter, the idea of taking part in a simple funeral appeals to his romantic nature, a point which the manuscript made even more explicit than the published novel. His response to that "adventure" subsequently becomes the basis for a new attitude to life, which may be judged either in terms of a desire for heightened experience or as self-justified debauchery. Of course, Mark is constantly fluctuating in these early chapters between the freedom of Flying Fox and the security of social acceptance that Port Zodiac offers to a person like Oscar, who is willing to sacrifice his individuality. Nevertheless, initially he seems to promise, if not the triumph of the individual, then at least an admirable struggle towards that goal. All

hope of individual integrity, however, is lost when he murders Cho See Kee. The racist and materialistic motivation for that crime casts Mark irrevocably in the image of white society, a social man.

Herbert's complexity as a writer is such that the conflicts embodied in Capricornia are not always easily reducible to their polarities. Roughly we can align society with self-righteousness, materialism, pragmatism and conditioned (or civilized) responses, as opposed to the individual's world of self-indulgence, the imagination, freedom and natural instinct. But the reader's sympathies are cleverly manipulated, for example, between Mark and Oscar, so that the distinctions become blurred. Often, then, the reader's mental imagery consists of the double-exposures of irony. As Allan Rodway writes, "Irony is not merely a matter of seeing a true reality beneath a false, but of seeing a double-exposure (in both senses of the word) on one plate."[1] Thus the corrective process of irony invites an activity which must end in impossibility (for you cannot reconcile the polarities of irony). Yet this is not necessarily a negative process. Furbanks' comment concerning mental image-formation, although specifically focused on metaphor, holds too for irony: "It is the activity which matters, an activity which may often be a question, not of forming mental images, but of trying and failing to."[2] The opposition of Mark and Oscar is a case in point. Herbert's manipulation of our sympathies leads us to presume that social and individual man are reconcilable. Yet we can never quite manage this, and in trying we become victims of irony ourselves. There is little value in a work that is totally baffling - thankfully Capricornia is not. Irony may seem confusing, if we persist with the futile task of reconciliation, where otherwise it is essentially heuristic.

> The greatness of the novel exists in the range of attitudes, experiences, ideals, it can organize and hold in stable equilibrium, rather than in any didactic message that can be

> deduced from it: the true "meaning," perhaps, of the novel would be the statement of this equilibrium in abstract terms - an impossible task, if a paradox in life is a contradiction in logic.[3]

This is what F.H. Mares says of The Fortunes of Richard Mahony; but it is equally true of Capricornia. The structure examined in the previous chapter will now serve to discover the reality it shapes. Capricornia's narrative, as we have seen, does not only operate at the rhetorical level. We will perceive a deeper meaning as we proceed to interpret the novel in terms of the interlocking ironies of its structure. The mental imagery stimulated by the corrective process of these ironies is to be seen as implicit in the interpretation which follows. So we will uncover the symbolic action of the narrative. Let us consider two incidents central to such an understanding of the novel: Mark's introduction to Black Velvet and his murdering of Cho See Kee.

The island setting in which Mark encounters the beautiful young lubra contributes to the symbolic nature of the action. It is useful to consider Flying Fox in the context of a literary convention which has particular symbolic associations. Traditionally, such a setting provides a microcosm removed from society and enables the writer with a social purpose to analyse the nature of man and to assess the achievements of civilization. The strategy allows a measure of objectivity, and its tradition extends from almost the genesis of the novel as a form, with Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, right up to modern works such as Golding's Pincher Martin and Lord of the Flies. From the beginning, too, the isolation of the island has cast it as a device for developing the theme of freedom and imprisonment as ambivalent, because relative, concepts - Shakespeare's play, The Tempest, is a noble example. The island of Flying Fox functions within this tradition. Mark is neither shipwrecked nor confined to an island. Yet, initially at least, his vacillation between Nature and Civilization leaves him all the more confused as to his proper

place and role.

The symbolic identification implicit in Mark's perception of Flying Fox was explicit in the manuscript: "This was Arcady to Mark" (MS 46). Associated with his notion of Arcady is a conception of freedom, and an anticipation of adventure on the high seas that would be equally at home in a romantic adventure novel such as Ballantyne's The Coral Island or Stevenson's Treasure Island. Mark has made Flying Fox a symbol of romance before he ever goes there, with himself as the romantic hero. But there are, of course, obstacles to be overcome before he is free to enter this environment. He is refused leave from his employment in the Government Service, and rebuked for his "offences" against its "Rules and Regulations for the Conduct of Officers" - namely, his "Indulgence in Drunkenness and Low Company" (13-14). For the time being, Mark must remain in Port Zodiac, unfulfilled:

> So Krater's lugger, which was called the Maniya - after a lubra, some said -, sailed without Mark. Mark watched her go. And his heart went with her, out over the sparkling harbour, out on to the Silver Sea, leaving him with nothing in his breast but bitter disappointment.
>
> (14)

In the early part of the novel Mark represents an attitude, best expressed in Byron's poem The Island: Christian and His Comrades (1823), which derives from European responses to the exploration of the Pacific: the courageous sailor's longing for golden tropical islands. Mark never experiences the love-idyll with a voluptuous native girl that Byron's sailor does. Since Byron's poem, however, the love-idyll on a tropical island has passed into a tradition of popular romance, and it is perhaps not surprising that in the very first instance of Mark's acquaintance with the island of Flying Fox he will encounter a beautiful young lubra:

> The girl was comely, Mark thought, a different creature from the half-starved housemaid. But his thoughts were at the moment as turbulent as his heart. A true combo would have thought her even beautiful. One who was observant and aesthetic would have gloated over the perfect symmetry expressed in the curves of the wide mobile nostrils and arched septum

> of her fleshy nose, would have delighted in her peculiar pouting mouth with thick puckered lips of colour reddish black like withered rose, in the lustrous irises and fleckless white-of-egg-white whites of her large black slightly-tilted eyes, in her long luxuriant bronzy lashes, in the curves of her neck and back, in the coppery black colour of her velvet skin and its fascinating musky odour, and might have kept her talking in order to delight in her slow, deep, husky voice, or laughing in order to delight in the flash of her perfect teeth and gums and the lazy movements of her eyes.
> (17)

Herbert's presentation of Mark's seduction stresses the gin's classical perfection and symmetry, rather than her sexual charms. The undercutting of the sexual aspect is subsequently confirmed by the author's omission of any reference to the sexual union; the potential sensationalism is utterly denied, and we are left only with the essential artistic significance. It is perhaps ironic that, because he cannot properly make himself understood in pidgin he is offered a lubra when in fact he is trying to buy a spear, an object which is a conventional phallic symbol of fertility. The prose is carefully contrived, however, with impersonal pronoun and subjunctive mood, so as to convey the aesthetic interpretation of her beauty and sensuality as hypothetical, at least with regard to Mark's own awareness. Although the Romantic conception of the gin is not incompatible with the romantic character of Mark, there is a sense of authorial intrusion. The conditional and impersonal nature of the perception might also be explained in terms of the division in Mark's consciousness between social and individual self-justification:

> Mark was trying to excuse himself for seeing beauty in a creature of a type he had been taught to look upon as a travesty of normal humanity. He was thinking - would the Lord God who put some kind of beauty into the faces of every other kind of woman utterly ignore this one? (17)

His civilized prejudices have already been shaken by the quality of the Aboriginal artifacts he is shown when he first arrives. Herbert uses the confrontation of Mark and the gin to expose fully the racist

assumptions of civilized white society. The strategy is in this sense similar to the literary convention developed by the eighteenth century verse-satirists: the noble savage becomes a stock figure, a device with which to attack the morals and manners of civilized society. But Herbert's handling of the cultural confrontation is not nearly so mechanical, nor so simplistic. There is the Romantic sensibility to consider.

The aesthetic interpretation of the gin's beauty is clearly in Romantic perspective, a projection from Mark's perception of her natural environment as Arcady. She is a symbol of her environment, of the perfection of Nature, and, like Byron's Tahitian princess, an incarnation of an artistic ideal: that man and Nature be one. In terms of symbolic action, then, Mark's physical union with her begins to take on great significance.

The manuscript version of the encounter left no doubt that Mark's own consciousness, not authorial intrusion, was responsible for the Romantic interpretation of the gin's beauty:

> Mark met the lubra's eyes. Her eyes were beautiful. She smiled. Her full lips parted slowly, revealing a wide mouthful of perfect teeth. She spoke a word or two in her own tongue in a slow deep husky voice. Mark was enthralled, he a handsome man, at heart an artist, lover of beautiful women.
>
> (MS 115 verso)

Here we see in Mark the figure of the artist. This is significant, since, in the published novel, there are occasional apparently passing references to his imaginativeness, his inventiveness and his romanticism, mostly frustrated. We have already observed, for example, that he is attracted to Flying Fox in the first place by the Romantic notion of freedom and adventure on the high seas. But this leads to his introduction to Black Velvet, to the birth of Norman and the subsequent dissolution of his romance with Heather. It is appropriate that "going combo," a symbolic

enactment of the Romantic ideal, should be utterly unacceptable to the civilized society of which that action is also a sharp critique. Socially, Mark's romance with Heather is acceptable, if not so potently symbolic. But it is subverted by Heather's confusion of Romantic idealism with morality. The knowledge that he has experienced the sexual favours of a lubra turns Heather away from Mark to a social vision according to which he is not an individual at all, but a low social type, "'a - a combo'" (359). Much later she begins to realize that the values of human homogeneity should predominate over those of racial discrimination, as indeed they do in circumstances of sexual attraction. "'All men are comboes one way or - another,'" she tells Norman. "'What's difference black lubra or white?'" (359). Yet she wants to reform the individual. We are told that Mark "always backslid" from "loving her unselfishly and hence [from] coming almost to know himself" (127). Self-knowledge in Capricornia depends on forging a link with the Spirit of the Land, a Romantic conception which is beyond Heather. She wants "to save" Mark from "his worst enemy, himself," and to rescue him from the Spirit of the Land which, in her view, "curses . . . his life" (127).

His inventiveness is just as frustrated as his Romanticism - "owing to the perversity of Nature" (52). The effectiveness of the machine which he builds to draw electricity from the tide is undermined by the fact that "the tide was usually not running when the light was most required" (52). Consider too Mark's attempt to improve the inferior house that he and his brother are forced to take for social reasons when they first arrive in Port Zodiac:

> Mark, who was inventive, fitted up on the wide front verandah a punkah of both beautiful and ingenious design, which worked automatically when the wind blew, that is when its working was not required.
>
> (10)

Herbert juxtaposes this with Oscar's attempt to improve the house:

"Oscar took a smelly native from the Compound and converted him into a piece of bright furniture that made up for the defects of Mark's machine . . ." (10). The manuscript had made the point of the juxtaposition even more explicit: "Oscar, whose imagination functioned in a different way, took a smelly native . . ." (MS 18). But the point concerning Mark's imagination is nevertheless embodied in the published version.

In the manuscript, even Mark's drunkenness was a sign of his imaginativeness. Consider, for example, the narrator's qualification of Mark's admiration for Booze Artists: ". . . the part of a man which gets drunk is his imagination, . . . the better the man carries his drink the duller his mind is" (MS 19). Here Herbert defines the Booze Artist as a man who drinks because he lacks will-power but who, in doing so, liberates his imagination, "which no amount of drink can pickle into insensibility nor any amount of strength of will control" (MS 19).

It might seem that this argument has little bearing on the published novel. But we should not dismiss immediately any reference to imagination simply because at first sight it does not seem sufficiently serious. One reason for careful consideration is that there is enough evidence scattered throughout the published novel to connect the characterization of Mark with a theme concerning creativity. Another reason, as my first chapter has shown, is that apparent simplicity can be deceptive. I have already referred to Kiernan's argument that Capricornia is related to an oral tradition whereby the story-teller deliberately conceals his stratagems. Within the novel the bivouac tableau in Chapter Twenty-four, where Mark, Norman and Andy McRandy are captivated by Henn's rendition of Waltzing Matilda, is particularly revealing. We are told that the folk-song is genuine: "'That's a song peculiar to a tribe of people y'know, one't expresses their feelin's'"(330).

We are also told that it embodies the Spirit of the Land. As Neil Mudge perceptively notes, this folk-singing around the camp-fire is "perhaps the nearest the book approaches portrayal of white men sharing feelings which, however palely, reflect the Aboriginal cultural outlook as presented elsewhere in the story."[4] It is also significant, then, that in the early stages of the novel we see that the oral tradition is largely created by Booze Artists:

> These men were very popular among workingmen . . . fellows who can drink continuously without getting drunk, or at least not as drunk as youthful Mark got on a single bottle of beer, and very amusing yarn-spinners and musicians and singers. (11)

The explicit association in the manuscript of imagination with inability to hold one's liquor seems contradicted here in the published novel by the fact that the Booze Artists are musicians and yarn-spinners who drink <u>without</u> getting drunk. Yet Mark, who, as we have seen, has a romantic imagination, gets extremely drunk very easily. Herbert seems not to have thought this out consistently, and it is probably just as well that the manuscript's explicit conceptualization is omitted, although the differentiation of Mark from the Booze Artists remains confusing because the oral tradition which they foster is given such significance. In any case, Mark is "accepted as a brother" (11) after his contribution to the amusement, a true tale about his family background. His reason for telling the tale, however, is his desire for acceptance, rather than for any intrinsic enjoyment. It should be obvious that he simply cannot decide whether to attempt an escape from society, or to forget such romantic ideals so as to enter into the security of social acceptance. On a symbolic level Mark represents the dilemma of the Romantic imagination torn between the ideal of individuality and the actuality of common humanity, between the isolation of freedom and the comfort of the social bond. Is it any wonder, then, that his creativity, like his romanticism,

is frustrated? Indeed, as he approaches Flying Fox and the peak of his quest for individual freedom, there is something ominous about his joining the chorus of the Booze Artists' song:

> Oh don't you remember Black Alice, Ben Bolt,
> Black Alice so dusky and dark,
> That Warrego gin with a stick through her nose,
> And teeth like a Moreton Bay shark,
> The villainous sheep-wash tobacco she smoked
> In the gunyah down by the lake,
> The bardees she gathered, the snakes that she stewed,
> And the damper you taught her to bake -
> (15)

This caricature offers a contrast with the beauty and perfection of the young lubra Mark encounters on Flying Fox. Against the artistic idealism of the latter perception is ranged the whole of Mark's social conditioning, as appropriately prefigured in the song. Thus, as we have already noted, he tries "to excuse himself for seeing beauty" in an Aboriginal creature: "Mark did not heed. He was staring at the lubra's feet which were digging as his were" (17). Again, the manuscript was more to the point: "Mark did not heed. Of course a woman's beauty lies in the eyes of her lover. Mark was too shy to look at her" (MS 25). It is clear that he is divided, that a distinction is being made between the individual and the social man. Ironically, Mark's seduction represents the anticlimactic peak of his quest for freedom and individual meaning. This was partly the significance of the original chapter title: "Chaining Slaves to Make a Freeman." Unconsciously, he remains a social animal even on the threshold of personal freedom, unable to contemplate the ideal of beauty which, on one level, the lubra represents.

Because he is unable to transcend the division between social and individual self-awareness, Mark's sexual union with the gin does not realize the potential symbolic union of the artist with his ideal of Beauty. Norman is never portrayed as embodying the beauty and perfection, nor as possessing the artistic identity, that are given to Prindy, the

halfcaste in Herbert's later novel, Poor Fellow My Country. Indeed, Norman might be viewed ironically as the ultimate symbol both of Mark's creativity and its frustration, the child who is neither one thing nor the other, a nonentity, and to whom Mark cannot truly behave as a father.

Of course, Norman's mother is not the same lubra with whom Mark originally "goes combo." But the symbolic significance of that first sexual encounter is pervasive. Because she represents her native environment, the symbolic failure of the sublimated artist figure is more specific: it is the inability of the Romantic imagination to achieve its ideal of unity with Nature. Significantly, thereafter Mark seems to lose his idealism and even his individuality. To understand this we must see the incident in its narrative context, and we must relate the symbolic action to the structure of interlocking ironies.

When Mark is unable to contemplate the beauty of the young gin freely, he focuses instead on her companion. But he sees him just as falsely, with the same preconditioned perception of civilized man. Despite his social conditioning, however, it is not the morality of "going combo" that Mark condemns, but rather that of placing a material value on human existence. Nevertheless, a dramatic irony stems from the reader's recognition of a fact that Mark fails to realize (but which Herbert makes obvious): the procurer's morality is whiteman's morality, forced upon the Aboriginal from "The Coming of the Dingoes." We noted in the previous chapter how the reader is meant to reflect that, retrospectively, such materialism represents a predictable stage in the whitemen's demoralization of Aboriginal society. Thus, when Mark, despite his contempt, takes advantage of the procurer's morality, he is behaving not merely as an opportunist but as a social man. In doing so he sets the stage for his own equation of human and financial value: the murder of the

Chinaman for money. That incident involves the same equation: "Be a man - a whiteman - go take the money now!" (121). The interlocking ironies of these events support the major irony in the title of the chapter in which Cho See Kee is murdered: that is, "Fe Fi Fo Fum" suggests "the blood of an Englishman." Although the title obviously refers to the death of Jock Driver, it may also have some ironic bearing on Mark's murder of the Chinaman, an event which virtually signals his own symbolic suicide. Subsequently he falls from the status of a major to a minor character, takes on the false identity of Jack Ramble, and ends up marrying Heather more out of gratitude and resignation to being a social man than from any of the old personal feelings of romance. As Neil Mudge writes: "All that talk at the stormy wedding feast of debt, honour and imposition heralds the re-emergence of the respectable European world of conventions and 'noblesse oblige' into which . . . Mark is now entering."[5]

Condensed like this, the essential form of the Mark Shillingsworth narrative seems almost a parody of the Romantic quest. Given the Romantic conception of the lubra, Mark's seduction in Chapter Two is central to this whole symbolic structure. Bernard Smith writes that originally the "romantic savage" was a symbol for life conceived as a voyage, "a continuous movement towards an ever-receding goal."[6] Certainly a parody of the triumphant Romantic quest is part of the symbolic significance of Jeremy Delacy's narrative progression in what Herbert calls "my ONE TRUE NOVEL, POOR FELLOW MY COUNTRY."[7] The conscious projection of the one novel into the other recommends Capricornia, in Herbert's view, as having more to it than has been realized. At the same time, it must be admitted that he sees each of his novels in terms of its projection from the preceding work, all contributing finally to his "magnum opus," Poor Fellow My Country. Here, however, I am concerned briefly with that final novel, and only

insofar as, retrospectively, it seems to throw some light upon the symbolic action of Capricornia.

In Book Two of Poor Fellow My Country Jeremy Delacy undertakes to walk from Newcastle to his home at Lily Lagoons - "to walk it out of my system,"[8] he says - but he ends up taking a train as far as Brisbane, and from there an aeroplane. This journey of purification seems parodic in relation to those epic ones which function as metaphors for rites of passage in novels such as Voss and To the Islands. Keneally writes: "Because Voss is more than a mere penetrator of the interior, he is meant as a Messiah and a myth as well in a country that lacks both."[9] Despite Jeremy's more human destiny, on the very first night of his journey he has a vision of his shade in the form of a huge blackman. The implication at the end of Book Two, then, is that he has truly succeeded in identifying with the land and its native mythology. He seems to have achieved the prophetic status of a Heriot or a Voss. But by the end of Book Three Herbert has moved beyond this to reveal the tragic falseness of Jeremy's identification with Aboriginal mythology (and hence with the land), and the invalidity of his prophetic status. Earlier heroic visions of him are finally seen as tragically inaccurate. He fails in his role as a moral authority: advising Prindy too late about Charada (love-magic), when he is already under Savitra's spell; allowing his white morality to assert itself so that he cannot behave as Prindy's elder, but rather becomes his murderer; and, ultimately, being unable to reconcile Aboriginal mythology and white morality to any meaningful frame of reference for thought and action. Thus Jeremy is unable to provide the "culture system" that would allow the European consciousness in Australia to transcend the spiritual void with which, as the national literature testifies, it has been traditionally obsessed. Yet such was the hope that, at the end of Book Two, he seemed to signify. Writers such as White and Stow

impose upon the Romantic quest structure a didactic purpose that is far from the individualist ideal of Romanticism. Their novels become cultural symbols, myths that will bind all Australians together in common faith. On the other hand, Herbert has written, in Poor Fellow My Country, the tragedy of the Romantic sensibility in Australia: the myth to which the imagination aspires is, in practical terms, unattainable.

We see that tragedy prefigured in Capricornia, as I have already demonstrated, in the destiny of Mark Shillingsworth. At the time of its composition Herbert was not so familiar with Aboriginal mythology. Thus Capricornia's expression of the failure of the Romantic imagination is given a different form. Norman's whole life in quest of self-knowledge, as a halfcaste, is symbolic of the same impossibility that we find in Poor Fellow My Country, the impossibility of ever reconciling Aboriginal and white attitudes to self and society. Then, too, Norman is, in this symbolical sense, a creature of a failed Romantic vision. As we have already seen, Mark's imaginative identity is in a state of decline after he is unable to transcend his sexual exploitation of Black Velvet by a more meaningful vision of creativity and unity. Herbert himself did not have such a vision until after he had written Capricornia, when he decided to found a Euraustralian League (see pages 166-67). He was to give this same vision to Jeremy Delacy in Poor Fellow My Country:

> "Have you ever thought what the Australian nation would have been like if the pioneers had succoured their hybrid offspring . . .?
> . . . We'd have been a Creole Nation . . . unique . . .
> . . . that is a created people, a new people." [10]

The emphasis on creativity in this argument is in line with a dialectic between sex and art that runs through all of Herbert's major work. Consider, for example, his statement, in a letter to Kylie Tennant (13/6/56), concerning the meaning of the novel he was in the process of writing, Soldiers' Women, which he has acknowledged as "a conscious projection" from Capricornia:

> To me it is more than a novel, rather an allegory through which is introduced this profound opinion of mine, which opinion, I truly believe, could eventually affect humanity's progress as profoundly as 'The Origin of Species' . . . indeed, I conceive of it as a necessary corollary to Darwin's great revelation . . . for with destruction of our illusion that we are created in the image of God we are lost, because that illusion is crude expression of the truth instinct in us that God-like perfection is surely the High Destiny of our Species . . . and we have become apes with the apes we are so close to in creation . . . and our one hope is to face the reality that what limits the ape is the fact that procreation is the be-all and end-all of his existence now and forever, whereas we have that divine capacity for sublimation of gross urges which will make us master not only of Earth that spawned us along with all other forms of life out of a chemical reaction, but of our entire corner of the Universe at least, with surely the power to render it back into Chaos when we have used it to the full, which is the power of Gods.[11]

I am not concerned here to argue the merits or defects of this curious logic. Two points are, however, relevant. First, this dialectic, idiosyncratic though it may be, shows that Herbert would not be averse to the artistic stategy of providing a godless people with a myth, or, in his own terms, with "a symbol of the god-like perfection which is surely Man's destiny." Voss provides such a myth. But it is the process for erecting the symbol that is arguable, as for Herbert it must be "true" - that is, not contrived. Keneally has observed a general weakness in his own "ritualistic fiction," as well as in that by Stow, White and Porter (in The Tilted Cross): "a heavy-handed inevitability" imposed by an author labouring "under a weight of ritual necessity."[12] For Herbert, if Man's transcendence of animal nature is to achieve a state of harmony with his universe, then, in an Australian context, the ordering of chaos had to mean the reconciliation of the white and the black man. The Aboriginal is a living symbol, for Herbert, of this harmony. Thus the Aboriginal holds the key to the whiteman's spiritual future, and the artist must focus on the resolution of racial conflict if he is truly to symbolize the ascent of Man.

Second, the distinction Herbert makes between sexual indulgence and the capacity to order the chaos of life may be seen as relevant not

only to Soldiers' Women but also to Capricornia. A dialectic between art and sex holds the key to another level of symbolic action, particularly that initiated by Mark's seduction. As I have already argued, that incident does not signify the reconciliation that Jeremy Delacy's vision of miscegenation (falsely) prophesied. Mark's failure to sublimate his "gross urges," to realize the natural beauty of the lubra in aesthetic terms by translating contemplation into creative rather than destructive action, undermines his Romantic potential for a Higher Destiny. (In this sense, the subjunctive mood of the narrator's description of the lubra, in terms of classical perfection rather than sexual allure, may be seen as representing a creative action which is ironic in relation to the sexual action of the character. Mark's sexual action is symbolically lacking in any quality of creative harmony, as the chaotic self-consciousness of Norman, its issue, reveals throughout the novel.) That is, Mark's failure to reconcile and transcend the implicit racial polarities of the situation represents, on a personal level, the lost opportunity for identification with the land. In terms of symbolic action, then, the incident may be seen as a re-enactment, in an Australian context, of the Fall of Man and the subsequent loss of Eden. Thus the lubra represents a challenge of the same order as that which Poor Fellow My Country presents to Jeremy Delacy in the form of his black shade. Each of these incidents, too, represents the anticlimactic peak of the respective character's Romantic quest for freedom and self-knowledge. Whereas Jeremy has the illusionary status of a messianic figure at that point, Mark's failure is much more immediately apparent. We might consider Mark, as indeed Jeremy by the end of Poor Fellow My Country, as a "pseudo-messianic" figure.

Before I go on to elaborate upon the meaning of that identification of Mark, a digression seems worthwhile. I have dedicated a good deal of my discussion to one particular episode of Capricornia in

order to suggest that Herbert's polemical concern with the halfcaste is integrated with a symbolical conceptualization related to both sexual and artistic creativity. If I have not been so much concerned with the polemical thesis, it is because, as I said at the very beginning, that is obvious. I do not underestimate Herbert's views on racial prejudice; but, at face value, they need no explication. (I shall be examining Herbert's attitude to the Aboriginal in more detail in the final chapter of this thesis.) The artistic significance of Capricornia is more intricate. If we turn our attention temporarily from Herbert's first to his last novel, however, we shall see that, far from being of minor significance, the tension between art and sex represents a dialectic for the shaping of symbolic action which reaches its height of expression in Poor Fellow My Country, but which nevertheless has its roots in Capricornia.

Herbert displays a much greater knowledge of Aboriginal society and mythology in Poor Fellow My Country than he does in Capricornia. Yet even in the later novel meaning is embedded in the tensions of its separate polarities: between black and white culture, art and sex, myth and reality. These are interrelated. Early in Poor Fellow My Country Herbert stresses that the wonder of existence belongs only to the Aboriginal and that it is this which gives him his sense of belonging.[13] Civilization, he argues, has sacrificed its sense of wonder to rational investigation and scientific achievement. Art, myth and magic have always been intricatel interwoven in uncivilized societies, and Herbert embodies this realization in the novel - for example, in the relationship between the magical Pookarakka and the musically talented Prindy. Such conceptualization is linked with the novel's central theme of identity, both socio-cultural and individual. Whereas white culture alienates the individual, setting up a self-destructive conflict between rational and irrational perception, Aboriginal culture manages to integrate the individual into tribal society

by accommodating the irrational in its spiritual system of belief. Such integration, as Laurie Hergenhan points out, involves "the attempted preservation of powers of mind akin to the artistic, the magical, irrational powers that can keep man in touch with the marvellous in his own existence and in all existence."[14] Civilized society has divorced art from reality. Monsignor Maryzic tells Father Glascock: "'Ritual is Art. . . . In religion Art reach [sic] its highest form because it is selfless.'"[15] For Jeremy, however, religion based in Rome or in London is unacceptable, being unable to give a sense of meaning or of wonder to the Australian experience. But he gains much satisfaction from the practice in his home of Jewish ritual, which, ironically, has no country of its own. It gives him a vital link with art, inherently connected with the sense of wonder, and so revives his faith and strength to seek fulfilment through Aboriginal mythology. Clearly, Jeremy's struggle for meaning is intricately connected with artistic vision, and may in fact be explained as the struggle of the artist-figure to attain a "higher reality," to recreate himself through his art.

But Jeremy's fatal flaw, dialectically opposed to his artistic identification, is his sexuality. Significantly, Aboriginal manhood, initiation into the tribe's spiritual mystique, "is proclaimed with the Circumcision, a symbol of castration."[16] A show of strength is required of the initiate, to which "continence in sexual matters is paramount."[17] Further, Herbert tells us that sex has little to do with the Aboriginal view of creativity: "according to aboriginal understanding of genetics . . . copulation has no part in it."[18] Birth is a purely spiritual matter. The price that Jeremy must pay for his spiritual development from the ritualistic art of Judaism is "the loss of his never-found bride," Rifkah.[19] On the other hand, Father Glascock, whose name is caricaturistic, does make love to Rifkah, and subsequently loses not only his artistic appreciation but also his faith in his own spiritual values. The relationshi

from which Jeremy gains strength, those with Rifkah and his halfcaste wife Nanago, are significantly non-sexual. This points to his partly unconscious attempt to behave according to the laws of relationship that govern Aboriginal society, and to his deep desire to define his existence according to its system of belief. Such an identification is aborted, however, when he submits to the love-magic of Aelfrieda, "the enchanted one." When Jeremy makes love to her he is robbed of his creativity. Following upon his seduction, Jeremy's vision of his Aboriginal shade can only imply a false identification with native culture. Long before the ending of Book Three we learn that Jeremy must die, for, as he explains to Fergus, inability to pass the ordeals associated with Aboriginal initiation means death.[20] The title of Alfie's book, "The Last Australian," is ironic. Significantly, when Jeremy visits her to express concern about the truth of the book, he is almost castrated. This symbolic castration is very different from that of the Aboriginal rite of circumcision. With tragic irony it signifies exclusion rather than initiation, annihilation rather than creativity. Jeremy is unable to identify with one culture and is cast out of the other. Ultimately the symbolic castration signifies absolute alienation, in a manner similar to the castration episodes that dominate Faulkner's work.

With the benefit of hindsight from Poor Fellow My Country it is possible to see that in Capricornia Herbert was already developing the same curious dialectic between art and sex. In both novels its ramifications extend beyond the fate of the character with whom it is most directly concerned. Mark's merely sexual union with the lubra, which, as we have seen, fails to realize the aesthetic union of the imagination with its ideal, denies not only him but also Norman any "Higher Destiny." Andy McRandy indicates Norman's potential, after observing his contrivance for a permanent water-supply at Red Ochre:"He called him a genius

pounded him on the back, hugged him, told him that he would become the leading man of the country . . ." (312). But, like his father, Norman never realizes his potential. The denial of the idealism potentially symbolized by Mark's sexual union with an Aboriginal lubra is connected with the similar denial of the halfcaste's symbolic potential for reconciliation and transcendence of racial conflict. This same dialectic is extended and re-defined much less curiously in Poor Fellow My Country. Jeremy Delacy's failure to adopt the Aboriginal mode of conduct required for initiation prefigures the novel's final revelation of the incompleteness of his identification with the indigenous mode of being. This revelation is embedded in the symbolic action of his subversion of Prindy's actual rites of initiation, an action which at the same time denies the boy his own potential. He dies as a halfcaste, his Aboriginal initiation being incomplete. Jeremy's tragedy - his death as neither one thing nor the other, as an outsider in relation to both white and Aboriginal culture - reflects the fate to which he compels Prindy.

There is more to the art/sex dialectic in Capricornia than the one incident I have discussed already, Mark's introduction to Black Velvet, although that is probably the most significant example. Peter Differ is another artist figure, and, like Mark, the father of a halfcaste. When he dies he is in the process of writing a book which, he feels, should be concerned with Black Velvet and "going combo," with the halfcaste as a social responsibility. But such a book is apparently unacceptable for publication, as Herbert himself was to find when he tried to publish Capricornia. "'No fear!'" exclaims Differ, "'I've learnt long ago that I'm expected to write about the brave pioneers and - Oh bah! this dissembling makes my guts bleed!'" (82). Apparently, the fiction of romantic illusion is connected with socially destructive sexual behaviour.

Differ's daughter, Constance, is unfortunately inspired to welcome the sexual advances of Humboldt Lace from reading a romantic novel called The Hybiscus Flower, apparently similar in its presentation of the love-idyll in the South Seas to Byron's poem, The Island. This proves to be a false image, for Connie's life is subsequently nothing but tragedy: a loveless marriage founded on falsehood to shield Lace from social responsibility, alienation, prostitution, and finally death in the Compound from gonorrhoea and consumption. We should realize that, in relation to their initial romantic idealism, the narrative progressions that I have indicated for both Mark Shillingsworth and Connie Differ point to Herbert's parodying of the quest of the Romantic imagination for a higher form of truth than actuality. This is an important point, and one to which I shall be returning at a subsequent stage in my argument. In the meantime, if Norman is to be seen in typological relation to Mark, we should examine the significance of art and sex in his life.

Let us consider Norman's attitude to Tocky when he encounters her in the wilderness. His one desire is "to play the faun to this nymph" (378). His ancitipation of the sexual experience is transmuted into artistic terms. To appreciate this we need to realize that for some time prior to the encounter Norman has been in the habit of referring to "The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám"as a source of wisdom to help interpret his experiences. We first learn of his attachment to this work of art when he arrives at the Melisande. He occupies much of his time there "browsing over several books he had brought with him, amongst which was the Rubáiyát cast aside by Marigold, which pleased him greatly" (340). The book had originally been given to Marigold by her admirer, Stanley Steggles, whom, at the time, she had scorned. But that was before her discovery that her mother was "a wanton" and her aunt a gin (275). Consistent with the tension between art and sex throughout the novel, she seeks consolation first in

the Rubáiyát, but then, failing to find it there, in the snaring of Steggles by cunning sexual allurement:

> . . . the Riddle of the Universe . . . seemed inconsiderable compared with this complicated business of her own. Deciding that Omar made mountains out of molehills and then procrastinated over shifting them, she gave him up in disgust . . . . But the beef-baroness was dead - long live the niece of a blackgin! The proud heiress to broad acres had suddenly become heiress to the Shillingsworths' dirty past, and a very ordinary and lonely little girl. And the scorned Stanley Steggles . . . had suddenly become her heart's desire.
>
> (275)

Marigold becomes "obsessed" with her own desire to win Steggles, as a means of wiping out the significance of her family history. But there is powerful irony in her rejection of artistic and acceptance of sexual means, for this, as we have already seen, is the dialectic by which her "dirty past" is determined in the first place. In juxtaposition to his sister's attitude, Norman is deeply impressed by the Rubáiyát. She takes to "studying her man" (276), he to "studying the Rubáiyát" (366). The difference is between reality and the fiction of romantic illusion which, as we have seen, destroys Connie Differ.

Norman's perception becomes conditioned by Omar's "advice about the Riddle of the Universe." For this reason, when he encounters Tocky in the wilderness, he is "set on the idea of playing the faun in Arcady" (30). In artistic terms, the experience that seems offered is one of innocence. The manuscript heightened this impression by having Norman mutter to himself the twelfth stanza of the Rubáiyát immediately upon hearing the single female voice singing a hymn - that is, before he even perceives the identity of the singer:

> Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,
> A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse - and Thou
> Beside me singing in the Wilderness -
> And Wilderness is Paradise enow.

But Tocky, whose experiences in love have all been "too brief and practical" (384), has no idea of playing the nymph to cater to her lover's imaginative

conception of their relationship:

> Their difference of opinion on that score brought about their first quarrel. The second was brought about by Tocky's inability to appreciate the beauty and wisdom of stanzas quoted from the Rubaiyat, and Norman's inability to stop quoting them.
> (380-81)

In any case, once Norman has made love to Tocky his vision of innocence can no longer be maintained: "The joys of Arcady soon palled on Norman. His nymph, he found, was not the amusingly artless and sweetly amorous creature he had taken her for, but a shameless little fool" (384). The love-idyll is soon transformed. Tocky calls Norman "a snake and a dingo and a yeller barsted" (384). Previously he has tried to involve Tocky in his vision of Paradise by reading to her stanzas of the Rubáiyát. But now, seeking to disentangle himself from the relationship, he weaves his own fiction: "He explained, drawing solely on imagination and merely to impress her with the importance of his errand, that the reward on the heads of Frank and Ket was a thousand pounds" (384-85). He now describes the wilderness to her not as Paradise, but as a country "swarming" with "debil-debils" and "monsters." The nymph is similarly transformed:"lying smoking under the Morning Star, delighting in the sweet virginity of dawn, he thought of that harlot Tocky and of the trouble of having to part with her a second time" (386). As in the case of his father's encounter with the beautiful young gin, Norman's artistic vision evaporates when idealism fails to be translated into actuality. For Herbert, the imagination's transcendence of actuality, its attainment of a higher meaning and a more noble truth, depends upon the sublimation of sexuality.

Despite racial differences, Mark and Norman are of the same mould. As we have seen, both personalities are essentially imaginative. Each has an irresolvable contradiction in his self-consciousness that retards his imagination. In Mark the conflict is between the social and the individual man, in Norman between Aboriginal and white identity. Their

imaginations are unable to overcome the practical circumstances of their existence. The same desire to escape that prompts Mark to go to Flying Fox leads Norman to the Rubáiyát:

> He had often to make reference to the Rubaiyat to throttle down regret. He tried quoting the Rubaiyat to Heather to stop her scolding him for having been a fool. She said by imbibing such stuff after such behaviour he was doing nothing more wise than dose himself with hair-of-the-dog.
> (374)

The analogy that Heather uses here tends to associate Norman with a type that she undoubtedly encounters all the time in her profession as a bar-maid - the Booze Artist. My previous discussion of that type should make it obvious that the implication of her analogy is that Norman's recourse to the Rubáiyát is imaginative self-indulgence, and, in her terms, a failure to face the facts of life. Although the judgement may be apt, since, as we have seen, the fiction of romantic illusion seems unable to offer its readers any guide to reality which does not lead to disappointment or disaster, Heather reveals the same lack of sympathy for the romantic and imaginative sensibility here that she has already displayed in rejecting Mark.

Norman's contrivance for a permanent water-supply at Red Ochre also looks back upon his father's electric-power plant, revealing the same inventiveness, and the same attitude to Nature as a force to be harnessed. He is "intensely interested" when shown "the decayed remains of the electric-power plant" (313) built by Mark. Norman has plans for an electric-power plant at Red Ochre. But his "masterpiece" (279, 312), unlike Mark's invention, proves successful in practical terms, and is hailed widely as a work of "genius" (277, 312). This is the only instance where Norman's imagination is not opposed by the practical circumstances of his life, and may have more to do with his southern education than his artistic sensibility: "This contrivance of Norman's was very simple, one about which the most remarkable thing was the fact that no-one had thought of it before" (278).

In any case, the imaginative potential that is suggested to the reader by Norman's early "masterpiece" proves to have been a false expectation, contrived deliberately by the author as a point of reference by which the subsequent diminution of the character can be measured. In the episode in the wilderness with Tocky his imagination is obstructed by his more pragmatic considerations of the situation.

Despite Norman's reading of the Rubáiyát to interpret experience, the morality of his conduct in relation to Tocky is parallelled in the most unimaginative character of Frank McLash. The point of comparison is implicit in Herbert's use of the same romantic language to describe McLash's expectations, despite the fact that his interest in tracking Tocky is purely sexual and exploitative:

> . . . Frank McLash was riding quietly up the Jinjin towards Tocky's camp, unaware of the existence of the camp itself, but well aware of the fact that Arcady was near at hand, since it was the little footprints of a dryad he was following. (390)

The romantic associations are ironic in relation to McLash's character and his intention. In contrast, too, Norman is not a murderer; and rather than methodically tracking his prey he stumbles upon Tocky's camp with the "thought of flight . . . uppermost in his mind" (378) - that is, until fear is overcome by a romantic apprehension of the situation. But this does not undermine the point of comparison. After all, Mark, like Norman, was romantic and imaginative; but he is also a murderer. There is a direct association between Mark and McLash at this point in the narrative. Both are fleeing from justice. They are planning to escape from the country together. Although Mark is unaware of McLash's crime, his reason for flight is much the same - fear of being apprehended for murder. Herbert covertly identifies Norman as a type figure, in relation to Mark Shillinsgworth, by the comparison between his and Frank McLash's conduct towards Tocky. Thus Norman is not merely trying to find his father in the

wilderness, he is symbolically following in his footsteps.

McLash and Ket are obviously the "snakes in Arcady" to which the chapter title refers. But, at a deeper symbolic level, it may also refer to Norman's love-idyll with Tocky as a re-enactment of the Fall of Man. The incident looks back upon Mark's first encounter with the beautiful young lubra, which can be seen to have the same symbolic significance. The two sexual episodes are key incidents for uncovering the symbolic action of the novel. Both Mark and Norman are denied human development because their conduct betrays the implicit mode of being imaginatively required by the god-like author for their self-fulfilment. It is thus that Adam fell - and Mark and Norman are subsequently denied their heroic potential and reduced to a meaningless existence. Mark is unable to reconcile social and individual identity to become the whole man; and Norman is unable to transcend the black and white polarities of the halfcaste to accept his humanity. We have already noted the meaninglessness of Mark's marriage to Heather, as opting for social security and repaying a debt rather than achieving self-fulfilment or romantic reconciliation. Norman's final legal victory is similarly ironic. It seems to imply social recognition at last. But he is faced with the skeletal remains of Tocky and his own child when he arrives back at Red Ochre, a powerful revelation of the utter meaninglessness of his triumph.

By establishing a typological relation between Mark and Norman, and a biblical model for their "fall," I am moving towards the identification of Capricornia's symbolic action as mythopoeic. We should not forget the framework within which Herbert plots the symbolic action, that of the historical saga. His characters are tools for his redefinition of Australian history. Capricornia's mythology resides in the historical implications of symbolic action. We have already seen that the reader's awareness of that symbolic action depends upon his recognition of the novel's structure of

interlocking ironies. The historical implications begin with the pioneer, represented by Ned Krater. He establishes the typological pattern which Mark and Norman are made to follow.

Ned Krater occupies a position at the outset of Capricornia's symbolic action as the original "invader." In terms of the novel's surface of plot and character development his role is brief. But this can be misleading; in terms of a deeper structure his significance cannot be overestimated. It is instructive to view the function of irony in the novel as directly associated with the legacy of Krater. Long after his death, after "Flying Fox as Flying Fox had ceased to exist" (244), he provides an ironic commentary on the inherently corrupt behaviour of Capricornia's white inhabitants. This is confirmed, for example, by Herbert's use of the phrase "Shade of Ned Krater" in the manuscript to signal stylistically points of reference for irony. As I showed in my previous chapter, this phrase was used at key points in the manuscript to remind us of Krater's rejection of Aboriginal mythology, a fact which is implicit in his failure to realize the natives' identification of him as a"creature of legend"and in his destruction of their social order. The inference to be drawn from the structure of ironies in relation to this point is that Krater's actions effectively deny his race a spiritual homeland, access to Aboriginal mythology being henceforth inconceivable. (In the earliest variant of Chapter One in the manuscript this is explicit. Krater refuses the natives' request that he be initiated before he is allowed the use of their women.) We begin to recognize Mark, in relation to Krater, as a type figure. Krater remains structurally significant as the pervading spirit of infection that haunts the novel, an archetype of decay to be identified with the undercutting irony. It is his influence that is responsible for Mark's defection from society, his "going combo" and therefore, ultimately, for the birth of Norman. In terms of the

structure of interlocking ironies Mark's introduction to Black Velvet looks back upon Krater's sexual abuse of the natives in Chapter One. Here again the common setting of the island of Flying Fox is deliberate. The significance of the symbolic action embodied in the structure of ironies is that Mark's failure to achieve the spiritual union of the individual with his environment is prefigured in Krater's death, which reveals the falseness of his adoption into the indigenous mythology. Krater's violence and destruction cancels the opportunity for racial coalescence, and symbolically predetermines the failure of the Romantic imagination to achieve its ideal union with Nature.

The art/sex dialectic, then, begins with Krater's violation of the social order of the Yurracumbungas, a system which strictly regulated sexual relationships:

> The tribes of the locality were divided into family sections, or hordes. When a man or men of one horde visited another, it was the custom to allow them temporary use of such of the womenfolk as they were entitled to call Wife by their system of marriage.
> (4)

As we have already observed, the Yurracumbungas originally welcomed Krater, "thinking that he would become one of them and teach them his magic arts" (4). Because they identified him with "magic arts," the natives "thought him above wanting" a lubra, and so, although he was "a guest and a qualified person," did not offer him one. Krater not only asked for their most attractive lubra but, as we have seen, insisted also upon the same privilege for his "unqualified" black crew. Faced by a mythic creature, "bellowing and firing his revolver," the Yurracumbungas were "appalled by their impotence." Krater ignorantly failed to realize that "the granting of such a privilege to them would mean violation of the traditions, the weakening of their system, the demoralisation of their youth" (5). Similarly, in the next chapter, Mark too is ignorant of Aboriginal social custom, resenting the materialist morality - ironically, as we have seen, inherited

from "The Coming of the Dingoes"- and yet at the same time taking advantage of that morality. As I have already argued in my own previous chapter, when the native "procurer" asks Mark for a bag of flour in return for the sexual favours of his lubra, the reader is meant to reflect that, retrospectively, such materialism represents a predictable stage in the demoralisation and disintegration of Aboriginal society. Krater's sexual exploitation of the Yurracumbungas in Chapter One is like the stone thrown into a pool, its significance radiating throughout the novel, and throughout history as Herbert sees it. That significance is opposed to creativity. Krater's archetypal status is ironically defined as early as Chapter Two, where the typological relationship between himself, "the good Capricornian," and Mark, who has in him all "the makings of a good Capricornian" (14), is first established. Herbert's timing is significant - the hint is given just before the anticlimactic peak of Mark's quest for individual meaning, his sexual encounter with the young lubra, when Krater is tempting him to Flying Fox for the first time.

By Herbert's terms, then, a man is a product of history, and cannot divorce himself from his past. He might struggle for personal meaning, as Mark does, but the failure of that struggle is predetermined by history. It is not just history that gives Capricornia its sense of inevitability. The Australian natural environment is a subversive presence constantly thwarting civilized man's plans for the future. In the Wet Season cotton plantations and railway constructions are washed away, while the Dry Season exerts a psychological influence to call a halt to work. Krater's actions in Chapter One establish, on a symbolic level, the whiteman as an alien in a hostile land. Mark's experience with the beautiful young lubra proves the irreversibility of history and confirms the whiteman's alienation. His imaginative sensibility makes his situation worse by giving him an

awareness of not belonging. But the whole white Australian civilization is inevitably affected. Once the irreversibility of history has been established, and the alienation confirmed, Herbert's acknowledgement of the power and hostility of the Australian environment leads him to an Augustinian perspective. There is a dim outline of something like a dying god that emerges from the author's vision of the disintegration of a civilization which sees itself as so superior that Krater, its archetype, thinks himself immortal. The process of degeneration is ironically charted on the surface of the novel by the increasing influence of materialism on the attitudes and destiny of both Mark and Norman. Herbert establishes a typology in the novel with Krater, and then traces it through national history with Mark and Norman, to its symbolic conclusion with the death of Norman's child. In this sense Herbert's characters are mere puppets, devices with which the author can redefine Australian history.

We can now perceive how Capricornia's symbolic action is mythic. The symbolism, as I have already implied, is more apparent where the dramatic irony is more overt - for example, when the dingo is dying: "Krater's Anglo-Saxon will . . . could not realize that it was inextricably in the grip of death" (39). But the reader recognizes the failure of Anglo-Saxon will. Krater is unable to stop the Aboriginal Death Corroboree. His belief in his own superiority and immortality are merely the delirious "fancies of a dying mind." The titles of Chapters One and Four, "The Coming of the Dingoes" and "Death of a Dingo," point to the symbolic nature of Krater's death, otherwise merely dramatically ironic in a long narrative barely begun. Recognition of the mythic element, however, depends upon a flexible ironic awareness whereby the bearing of one incident upon another can be recognized retrospectively. For this to be possible, as I said in the previous chapter, Capricornia needs re-reading. The narrative strands are drawn together through the recurrence of certain images and metaphors,

in each case recognizable, but nevertheless particularized - what Yeats called the exaggeration of metaphor into mythology. We shall see in the next chapter how metaphor expands into mythology. But the same function of drawing together the strands of the narrative is served also by the cross-referencing of narrative events, and, as we have seen, the same recognition operates despite each incident's particularity. If such a strategy seems unclear it is because many of the signposts to cross-referencing, particularly those that are self-consciously stylistic in the manuscript, were omitted from the published novel.

The connection between a structure of interlocking ironies, symbolic action and mythopoesis should now be clear. While the typology for characterization is activated by the interlocking of ironies, the framework of the historical saga enables that typology to be developed through four generations. This implies a mythopoeic attitude to history. The myth is conveyed by a series of symbolic tableaux, each representing a phase of national history. Healy notes, for example, that Chapter One is a "symbolic tableau of invasion," and that the first few pages of the novel represent "the phase of black-white contact which had absorbed the energies of nineteenth-century treatments of the Aborigine."[21] But Herbert's ironic attitude towards history as progress is seen in the ordering of the tableaux. The first section of Chapter Three symbolizes the initial stage of settlement. Historically, then, it looks forward to that phase of history which, in the symbolic structure of Capricornia, it looks back upon. Chapter Two presents the subsequent "ludicrous forms of behaviour which accompany the imposition of white civilization."[22] Similarly, we do not encounter the missionary phase in the history of black-white contact until Chapter Nineteen, although we then learn that "The Gospel Mission had been established many years, so long in fact and thoroughly that the island had been changed out of recognition" (245). "Mars and Venus in

Ascendancy" presents, as a form of madness, Australia's participation in World War One. But the meaningless loss of life continues in the immediate aftermath of the war with the absurd deaths of Joe Ballest and Mick O'Pick. The title of the chapter presenting this period of history, then, is a deliberate misnomer - "Dawn of a New Era." These and other symbolic tableaux are linked by the structure of interlocking ironies, rather than by any chronological and linear development. The whole action signifies, through the individual character's narrative progressions, Herbert's version of the movement of national history.

We have already noted, in our consideration of the dialectic between art and sex, that this movement is presented largely in terms of man's relation to the land. Richardson had published Australia Felix in 1917, the Proem of which ended with the powerful and highly sexual image of the land as a seductive woman, the victim of the "unholy hunger" of the invaders, on whom she takes revenge:

> Now, she held them captive - without chains; ensorcelled - without witchcraft; lying stretched like some primeval monster in the sun, her breasts freely bared, she watched, with a malignant eye, the efforts made by these puny mortals to tear their lips away.[23]

The image here is of a cruel surrogate mother, rather than a belle dame sans merci. Five years later D.H. Lawrence used the image of the prostitute in Kangaroo to describe the whiteman's treatment of his country: "The Australian just bullies her to get what he can out of her and then treats her like dirt."[24] Margriet Bonnin rightly points out that this image reaches "a highly developed form"[25] in Capricornia. It is Herbert's depiction of the beautiful young Lubra as a Romantic symbol of the land that enables this development. Thus the way in which Mark's special principles overcome his personal vision of her beauty embodies the same conflict that we find in Oscar's attitude to Red Ochre:

> Jasmine had said that he worshipped property. It was true. But he did not value Red Ochre simply as a grazing-

> lease. At times it was to him six hundred square miles where grazing grew and brolgas danced in the painted sun-set and emus ran to the silver dawn - square miles of jungle where cool deep billabongs made watering for stock and nests for shouting nuttagul geese - of grassy valleys and stony hills, useless for grazing, but good to think about as haunts of great goannas and rock-pythons - of swamps where cattle bogged and died, but wild hog and buffalo wallowed in happiness - of virgin forests where poison weed lay in wait for stock, but where possums and kangaroos and multitudes of gorgeous birds dwelt as from time immemorial. At times he loved Red Ochre.
>
> At times he loved it best in Wet Season - when the creeks were running and the swamps were full - when the multi-coloured schisty rocks split golden waterfalls - when the scarlet plains were under water, green with wild rice, swarming with Siberian snipe - when the billabongs were brimming and the water-lilies blooming and the nuttaguls shouting loudest - when bull-grass towered ten feet high, clothing hills and choking gullies - when every tree was flowering and most were draped with crimson mistletoe and droning with humming-birds and native bees - when cattle wandered a land of plenty, fat and sleek, till the buffalo-flies and marsh-flies came and drove them mad, so that they ran and ran to leanness, often to their death - when mosquitoes and a hundred other breeds of maddening insects were there to test a man's endurance - when from hour to hour luke-warm showers drenched the steaming earth, till one was sodden to the bone and mildewed to the marrow and moved to pray, as Oscar always was when he had had enough of it, for that which formerly he had cursed - the Dry! the good old Dry - when the grasses yellowed, browned, dried to tinder, burst into spontaneous flame - when harsh winds rioted with choking dust and the billabongs became mere muddy holes where cattle pawed for water - when gaunt drought loafed about a desert and exhausted cattle staggered searching dust for food and drink, till they fell down and died and became neat piles of bones for the wind to whistle through and the gaunt-ribbed dingo to mourn - then one prayed for the Wet again, or if one's heart was small, packed up and left this Capricornia that fools down South called the Land of Opportunity, and went back and said that nothing was done by halves up there except the works of puny man.
>
> (68-69)

In the next generation, represented by Norman, the attitude to the land seems to have become one purely of capital investment. One might have expected the halfcaste, having some Aboriginal blood, to move toward the opposite polarity, an aesthetic appreciation of the land. But the major irony of the final chapter, "Back to Earth," confirms the advancement of the materialistic attitude. This supports the incidental irony: Norman is

saved from losing his property by the prospect of a boom in the beef industry. In keeping with the novel's structural strategy, this incident looks back to the previous cattle boom in Chapter Sixteen. At that point Capricornia regains its Philippine beef market because "The bovine beasts of Argostinia . . . were stricken with foot-and-mouth disease" (200). The relevance of the narrator's comment then extends beyond that specific incident in time: "Prosperity is like the tide, being able to flood one shore only by ebbing from another. Good times came to Capricornia when bad times went to the Argostinian Republic" (200). The boom at the end of the novel is a consequence of "terrible earthquakes in Argostinia" (508-9). Thus we are deliberately referred back to the first boom. We should be reminded, then, that "It might all have been a well-planned jest" (203), that we should not trust appearances. The first incident should have taught the reader that, although "No catch [is] apparent" (200), reality is not accommodating. We are entitled to project these implications forward to enhance our understanding of the novel's conclusion. Our frame of reference will be symbolic action. Thus the pattern which the first boom signifies is this: prosperity, madness, death. The madness is not to be taken literally, but symbolically, signifying the intoxication of the population by material success. The people have put their faith in their material circumstances. Death is the consequence, as the conditions favourable for the cattle boom are also perfect for the malarial anopheles mosquito. The symbolic pattern embodied here becomes significant, regardless of incidental detail, when we realize that it is the same pattern which is initiated with the fate of Ned Krater. He too places his faith in material circumstance, presuming from the life he leads that he is, as the natives believe, immortal. Finally he is unable to accept death, as his will fails, and he is driven to madness. We see the same pattern again behind the cotton boom:

> Patriotism for profit! The very pursuit in which the Propagandists themselves were occupied! Thus Capricornia, freest and happiest land on earth, was dragged into a war between kings and queens and plutocrats and slaves and homicidal half-wits, which was being waged in a land in another Hemisphere, thirteen thousand miles away.
>
> (93)

The inevitable outcome of the cattle boom at the end of the novel, then, is prefigured, at least in symbolic terms, by the structure of interlocking ironies. The cries and laughter of Mark, Norman and Heather upon news of the boom are the sign of madness, and we should really expect death to follow. Most significantly, the whole symbolic action of the novel puts forward a myth depicting the decline of a civilization in the throes of materialism and madness. This is the pattern on which Herbert bases his redefinition of history. My analysis of the wave of financial booms throughout the novel offers a paradigm of the mythopoeic process. For the novel to end with the death of a baby and the advent of a boom is a tragically apt culmination of that mythic vision of the disintegration of civilization.

It is worth noting that the boom was integral to Herbert's strategy from the early stages in the novel's composition. Consider, for instance, this fragment from an early draft of Chapter Three in the manuscript:

> In Australia there once was a band of transplanted cocknies who in their natural intolerance of elbow-room used periodically to urge other people to go North and fill the empty spaces. "That Wonderful Country going to Waste!" they would cry "Fill it with Millions, Millions and Millions more! Go North Young Man and find your Heritage![4] Now and again a few young men would heed. Thus now and again the settlement of such places as Capricornia would boom. The result was always the same, a few more tons of roofing and fencing brought to rust in the wilderness, a few more tons of timber to feed the termites, a few more men to learn the lure of Black Velvet.
>
> (MS 29 verso)

This reads like the first paragraph of a novel, rather than of its third chapter, despite the original heading which appears above: Chapter Three,

"Chaining Slaves to Make a Freeman." One is tempted to speculate that it may have been the first paragraph of Black Velvet. Its major significance, however, lies in its prophecy of the disintegration of civilization as an inevitability, and in its making explicit the model of the boom which Herbert was to use implicitly as a structural device to convey that inevitability.

The boom, then, gives us the historiographic model for Herbert's mythopoeic process, which may be described thus: an upward curve initiating promise and hope which then falls away to evoke a sense of loss, and of chaos, dropping down ultimately to a point of non-existence. With this model in mind we may attempt a definition of Capricornia's myth.

When Ned Krater "suddenly materialized" in Chapter One his status was that of a messiah. He is perceived by the Yurracumbunga tribe as a "creature of legend" who will teach them his "magic arts." After their initial fear has been overcome the natives welcome him as a kind of prophet of a golden age. He is resplendent "in all his golden glory" (4). There is perhaps a dramatic irony here, however, for the reader conditioned by Western religious and literary tradition immediately recognizes the fire symbolism associated with Krater, and the destructive potential of his "magic arts," as signifying the Satanic archetype of negativity. In any case, Krater soon shatters his Aboriginal mythic conception by violating tribal traditions and subsequently, as the natives realize, weakening the social order. When he meets their resistance with death and destruction his messianic status is inverted: we can see him then clearly as a pseudo-messianic figure. In this way, too, might the myth be defined, for Krater, as we have seen, is the archetype of its typology. His diminution from false pretensions of immortality to madness and a "merely mortal" death encapsulates Herbert's mythic vision of the

decline of civilization. The myth structure of Capricornia, then, is pseudo-messianic. By this I mean that it is an inversion of the biblical messianic cycle of redemption which Frye sees as the archetypal myth structure for Western literature. There is no permanently redeemed world at the end of Capricornia, and, rather than liberating his people by leading them to their spiritual homeland, Krater ensures that they will be permanently alienated from their environment. The inversion of the archetypal structure for redemption is exactly as we have already observed in Capricornia: a movement first up, then down. Mark and Norman enact this same movement that is initiated by Krater, each being diminished by the action through which he passes to an absolute negation of his potential. Each figure advances the pattern of pseudo-messianic mythology a generation further through history.

Andy McRandy urges Norman to adopt a role as deliverer of his people, to help raise the Aboriginal to "a place of honour." We have already noted that, on a metaphysical level, Norman symbolizes also the potential salvation of the white race, the halfcaste being a blood link with the Aboriginal and his heritage of the land. If Norman could waken the white people of Australia to their responsibility to educate the Aboriginal, to grant him citizenship and human rights, he would be doing both races a service - for, as McRandy tells him, "'your Old People'll be recognized as our Old People too'" (327). But Norman fails as a prophet. The reader should have anticipated this from early hints in the novel, such as the sarcastic allusions to the discovery of Moses in Chapters Five and Six: "'He - he's not really mine, you know. I - I found him in the bush?' 'In the bulrushes, eh?' asked Jock, and winked at Chook" (49). The evasion of responsibility Mark displays here is echoed by Joe Ballest when Norman is brought to him by O'Pick, who found him in a railway truck:

> Ballest sat up on his bed and stared for a while, then said in a surly tone, "Where'd you get that?"
> Smiling broadly Mick replied, "I found the little divil in a thruck."
> . . . . . .
> "Bah - found it in the bulrushes!"
> "In a thruck I said."
> "In the bulrushes! Take it away man, take it away. You can't unload your brats on me."
> (67-68)

The purpose of these allusions is twofold. The first is to provide a larger historical context for persecution in order to deepen the symbolic significance of parental and social rejection of the child. In this we see the seeds of a theme which Herbert would develop in Poor Fellow My Country: the parallel between anti-Semitism and Australian racism with regard to the Aboriginal. Perhaps the broader context of the allusions implies also that theme of the spiritual homeland which we have already noted, for the second purpose is to raise the issue of, and simultaneously to deny, Norman's prophetic status.

If we see Capricornia's mythopoeic structure as an inversion of the archetypal pattern of redemption, we must also see it, in its Australian context, as an inversion of the mythopoeic structure of His Natural Life. Clarke, like Herbert, seeks to redefine Australian history. Although the specific point of focus in each novel is different - the convict system in one and the halfcaste problem in the other - the mythopoeic process is the same. The motives, however, are fundamentally opposed. The rites of passage of Clarke's mythic hero, Rufus Dawes, are based on the archetypal cycle of redemption. Brian Elliott writes of Clarke:

> He preaches no revolution but his book is a sermon nevertheless; its preoccupation is to examine some basic notions of human nature and to see them in their Australian setting. Man - the older morality - had planted the convict in this landscape like the serpent in Eden, and corrupted it. The Australian problem, then, was to overcome the evil, put it by forever, and - without being unrealistically optimistic - make scope for civilized human emotions, love, charity, honour and decency.[26]

At the end of His Natural Life the hero returns to Europe, not as the

convict Rufus Dawes, but as Richard Devine. His rebirth from the convict system of Hell into humanity is to purge the colony of the guilt upon which, historically, it is founded. But there is a trick in the device - Devine, like the heroes of the earlier colonial romances, must return to Europe. The salvation, which is to be symbolic on a social level, does not come from within the colony. We can detect the operation of a symbolic action for redemption even in Clarke's revised version of the novel, For The Term Of His Natural Life. The death of Dawes, with the implication of his spiritual union with Sylvia, has the same symbolic significance that we later find in the deaths of Heriot and Voss: the sacrifice that will purge the demons which haunt the human spirit and desecrate the environment. On the other hand, Capricornia's mythopoeic redefinition of history emphasizes the evasion of guilt as the failure of our civilization and demonstrates most effectively that the demons are still with us. Clarke and Herbert can be seen as presenting complementary aspects of an Australian mythology - with Dawes as the national literary archetype for the messianic, and Norman Shillingsworth for the pseudo-messianic figure. As J.J. Healy writes, Norman is presented as "the test case for the restored order of the land itself."[27] His failure is ultimately measured by the progression and conflict of certain metaphors which we shall examine in the next chapter. But the pattern of his degeneration is preconceived: typologically, by the lives of Ned Krater and Mark Shillingsworth; historiographically, by financial boom and recession.

My argument in this chapter has been fundamentally opposed to the stance of the "myth-critic," who sees myth as necessarily divorced from history. That view relies on the assumption that myths can only be inherited, not invented. But, as K.K. Ruthven argues, "surely a myth is initially as much the work of an individual as a ballad or an epic poem:

somebody has to supply the raw material which others may then add to or alter."[28] Indeed it is in this way that the Bible originated, although such a historical view, according to Frye, who is one of those myth-critics mentioned above, is a lower form of criticism:

> the "higher criticism" . . . seems to me to be a purely literary criticism which would see the Bible, not as the scrapbook of corruptions, glosses, redactions, insertions, conflations, misplacings, and misunderstandings revealed by the analytic critic, but as the typological unity which all these things were originally intended to help construct."[29]

This argument in itself can be useful, and I had it in mind when I defined Herbert's pseudo-messianic myth as an inversion of the biblical structure for redemption. But it should not lead to a blind spot which causes the critic to perceive literature simply as myth and purely as the product of history. The presence of the author surely complicates the process.

In Capricornia the typological characterization and symbolic action constitute a method for mythopoesis - not the myth itself. That invention is precisely Herbert's redefinition of history. The myth cannot be isolated from historical process, which is largely its subject.

This kind of myth is best seen in its modern context. Mircea Eliade writes:

> The chief difference between the man of the archaic and traditional societies and the man of the modern societies with their strong imprint of Judaeo-Christianity lies in the fact that the former feels himself indissolubly connected with the Cosmos and the cosmic rhythms, whereas the latter insists that he is connected only with history.[30]

Here we have an implicit connection with the ironic attitude which characterizes the modern period of literature. It is precisely modern man's sense of alienation, his sense of incompatibility with his environment, that leads to an existential position on irony - what is called General Irony. Muecke traces the development of this cosmic ironic awareness to "the decline of the 'closed ideology' . . . the fading out of

God as the supreme authority."[31] It is from this philosophical starting-point that writers such as White, Stow and Keneally have launched their fiction, in an attempt to create a myth that will transcend the spiritual vacuum. But, as Keneally himself notes, the mythopoesis is weakened by the author's imposition of a heavy-handed inevitability upon the narrative. This means that the reader remains suspicious and is reluctant to accept the myth's validity beyond its fictional context. It seems a personal myth. We are forced towards the critical stance whereby history and myth are divorced. But the inevitability of Capricornia is not so heavy-handed; the ironic, unlike the ritualistic, structure is able to grant mobility to the reader's mental imagery. The reader's awareness of the ironies allows him to correct initial interpretations of events when they are proved untenable by other events, and, in a sense, both the author and the reader participate in creating the fiction. The ironic work of literature is perhaps the least didactic form and therefore relies most heavily on the reader's participation in the creative process. Because Capricornia is not burdened by ritual necessity we do not suspect its myth as being merely personal, simply embodying the author's private fantasy. We grant it social relevance. This is also partly because of the novel's dual conception as both an imaginative work of art and a medium for expressing a polemical thesis. Its imaginative vision is tied to recognizable history, the reinterpretation of which has as much to do with social responsibility as individual introspection. Herbert's own "engagement with the subject," as J.J. Healy puts it, is "an essential part of it."[32] We accept Capricornia myth more readily because it seems to hover between the private world of the individual imagination and the public world of social reality.

CHAPTER THREE

METAPHYSICAL METAPHOR: "THE ABYSS AND THE SAFETY FENCE"

The mythological narrative of Capricornia is marked out by the conflict and progression of certain metaphors. We have already observed the outline of something like a dying organism that emerges from Herbert's vision of the disintegration of civilization. The fate of Ned Krater, as the fictional archetype of civilization, encapsulates the process of this mythology. But the movement from life to death is suggested throughout the novel by metaphor: the kangaroo, the dingo, the crow, the skeleton. Even when these images are technically descriptive rather than metaphoric they still bear a metaphorical burden. We may think of them as thematic symbols embodying the tension and progression on which the symbolic action of the mythological narrative depends. They are, in the sense of Tindall's terminology, "metaphysical metaphors," symbolic in themselves and as elements of a symbolic structure.[1] Specifically, they are national emblems, the significance of which is immediately recognizable, at least by the Australian reader. Indeed in the revision of the manuscript almost all references to myths or customs not specifically Australian were deleted.[2] For example, originally in the description of the hurricane which heralds Norman's birth Herbert had alluded to Greek mythology: palms, which in the published novel merely "bent like wire" (23), tossed their "streaming heads like gorgons in the throes of death" (MS 48). Negatively, such omissions occasionally rob Capricornia of an extra level of meaning. In this case, although flashes of lightning reveal "a vision of madness" (23), deletion of the allusion to gorgons takes away much of the implication of death from the description. Thus the symbolic pattern that we have already observed throughout the novel - prophetic birth, followed by madness and then death - is obscured at this point. The ironic linking of Norman's birth

with Krater's insane death, and the typological significance of the association, must go temporarily unrecognized. Positively, the deletion of all allusions to foreign mythology ensures that the mythological world of Capricornia is uniquely Australian. In this sense the revision reveals Herbert's affinities with the Jindyworobak programme for an Australian poetics: "to free Australian art from whatever alien influences trammel it, that is, bring it into proper contact with its material."[3] Like the Jindyworobaks, Herbert sought to exorcise all inappropriate elements of conventional vocabulary, conceptualization and allusion inherited from a literary tradition that was English rather than Australian. But his vision was more complete, more self-contained, a vision of mythic totality which did not require any other system than its own. Unlike the Jindyworobaks, Herbert did not draw upon Aboriginal mythology, at least not in Capricornia.[4] The elements of its myth are the emblems of the Australian experience as perceived by the non-indigenous imagination. Herbert did not have the same hopes that lay behind the Jindyworobak literary philosophy. He felt that the time for hope was past and that the degradation of the halfcaste, whom even the Jindyworobaks failed to recognize as a concrete symbol of their artistic ideal, signified the loss of any chance for truly and meaningfully annexing white to black culture. Hence, the whiteman would remain alienated from the Australian environment. The emblems which the European imagination extracts from this experience, not surprisingly, add up to a vision of death (the litter of bones) that is motivated by an awareness of the hostility of the environment (the dingo and the crow). My purpose in this chapter is to examine the function of these national emblems as "metaphysical metaphors," as the elements of a symbolic structure upon which the mythological line of Capricornia's narrative depends.

Within the first three pages of the novel Herbert indicates the basic metaphorical terms which will be used throughout to represent the

Aboriginal and the whiteman, and to deepen the significance of their conflict: "When dingoes come to a waterhole, the ancient kangaroos, not having teeth or ferocity sharp enough to defend their heritage, must relinquish it or die" (3). The significance of metaphor is bestowed upon this analogy by the titles of Chapters One and Four, "The Coming of the Dingoes" and "Death of a Dingo." In the same way the metaphorical implications are extended beyond the immediate context of the analogy. We have already seen that the patterns of symbolic action and the typological relation of characters developed throughout the novel are epitomized in the first four chapters.

Herbert's choice of the dingo to represent the whiteman is particularly apt. As an image firmly established in the national consciousness, the dingo immediately signifies a ferocious marauder. The action of Chapter One proves Ned Krater equal to this image. We have already observed that Krater himself is a symbol, the archetype of his race, and that the narrative in the first chapter represents the pioneering phase of national history. The dingo, then, is not only symbolic in itself. The metaphor is part of the symbolic structure, rather than simply supplementing it. The kangaroo compliments the dingo as a metaphysical metaphor. It has always seemed the best emblem to represent the Spirit of the Land, even to the early colonial writer Barron Field:

> Kangaroo, Kangaroo!
> Thou Spirit of Australia,
> That redeems from utter failure,
> From perfect desolation,
> And warrants the creation
> Of this fifth part of the Earth,
> Which would seem an after-birth,
> Not conceiv'd in the Beginning
> (For God bless'd His work at first,
> And saw that it was good),
> But emerg'd at the first sinning,
> When the ground was therefore curst; -
> And hence this barren wood!

In Capricornia the desecration of the land by the whiteman is a logical extension of precisely this alienated consciousness. Retrospectively we know that it was the European vision, conditioned by a different environment, which caused such poets to conceive of Australian landscape as a corrupted Eden. According to Capricornia's redefinition of history, the whiteman was the agent of corruption. As we have seen, the pseudo-messianic myth in the novel is largely based on iconoclasm, which particularly focuses on the whiteman's history and society. It is therefore interesting that the symbolic element chosen by Herbert to oppose the whiteman in this mythology is the one emblem of the land which the Australian poetic imagination, in perhaps its first moment of metaphysical reflection (albeit crude, shallow and garbed in wit), had selected as redemptive. Despite the pseudo-messianic myth applied to the whiteman's history, there is a theme of transcendence in Capricornia which, as we shall see presently, is associated with the metaphysical metaphor of the kangaroo. More obviously, however, the metaphor employs the traditional significance of the kangaroo as a hunted animal.

Chapter One quickly establishes Krater as the leader of the "hunters" and Kurrinua as the "hunted" (6). Kurrinua should be regarded as the Aboriginal cultural archetype that complements Krater as the archetype of white civilization. I have already demonstrated how the phrase, "Shade of Kurrinua," functioned as a stylistic pointer for cross-referencing in the manuscript in much the same way that "Shade of old Ned Krater" does. But the fate of Kurrinua in Chapter One is central to the novel's symbolic structure also in another way: it establishes the identification of the Aboriginal as a hunted species. The analogy for cultural conflict in the early pages of the novel - the kangaroos threatened by the dingoes - embodies the same significance. Generally, the kangaroo, then, is a metaphysical metaphor. Like the dingo, it is symbolic both in itself and as an element in symbolic structure.

The marsupials which drink at the billabong on Flying Fox in Chapter Three extend the significance of the kangaroo and dingo metaphors in symbolic structure. In keeping with the original analogy of the coming of the dingoes to the waterhole, Krater has settled "some little distance" from the billabong. We are told that, "thanks to Krater's good sense in helping the natives to preserve the game" (22), the island abounds with marsupials. But Krater's motive for the preservation is entirely rational, and is therefore in juxtaposition to the Aboriginal motive, which must partly be as expressed in the kangaroo analogy: "to defend their heritage"(3). The marsupial's only value to Krater is as food. The reference to "game" recalls the theme of the hunted animal initiated by Kurrinua's fate in the same locale in Chapter One.

Krater's utilitarian attitude to the flora and fauna of Flying Fox, and the whiteman's treatment of the Aboriginal, must be seen in the context of the exploitation of the land. We have already noted that the Aboriginal woman is a symbol of the Spirit of the Land, and that her prostitution symbolizes the whiteman's corruption of the environment. The sexual metaphor is intricately linked with the theme of the hunted animal: "Krater evidently lived for Black Velvet. . . . He said that it was actually the black lubras who had pioneered the land, since pursuit of them had drawn explorers into the wilderness . . ." (13). The association is also embodied in the narrative events which actually depict the pioneering. Kurrinua is hunted down, as we have already noted, after his organization of an unsuccessful attack in response to the invaders' sexual abuse of the tribe's women.

As the offspring of a whiteman and a lubra, Norman's relation to the land must be ambivalent. His halfcaste identity necessitates his metaphorical representation as partly dingo and partly kangaroo. Hence, when Mark returns to Flying Fox in Chapter Four, we learn both that Norman has the look of a hunted animal and that he has grown up with the local tribe's dogs. The fact that the natives call him Naw-nim, "which was

their way of saying No-name," is revealing: "The name No-name was one usually given by the natives to dogs for which they had no love but had not the heart to kill or lose. It was often given to halfcastes as well"(40). The dogs are "no-more dingo" (67), living in a kind of halfcaste state between wild life and domestication. For a short time Mark behaves as a true father to his son, being "smitten with remorse" for his "foul neglect." As Norman's health and appearance improve in response to this human treatment "his eyes lost their hunted-animal look." Throughout his association with the semi-dingo dogs, then, he has had the look of the hunted animal instilled by the tribe's racist treatment of him. Ironically, that look, as we know from the kangaroo metaphor, characterizes the Aboriginal. When he is treated humanly, Norman's eyes shine "like polished black stones over which golden water flows" (41), and we sense in them the true "ancient heritage" of the kangaroo, the Aboriginal link with the land.

Perhaps Mark's affection for the child flows from his own need for a sense of belonging, particularly after Heather's rejection. In any case, his paternal interest in Norman gradually fades because he takes "as a mistress a halfcaste girl named Jewty who would not have the child in the house" (42). The influence of Ned Krater, who originally persuaded Mark that Marowalla was not carrying his child, continues to operate through Jewty. She is one of Krater's children. At the end of the chapter Norman is once more the "associate of niggers' dogs," from which he"learned to steal as he learned to use his limbs" (42). This association with dogs "no-more dingo" is now a sign of his degeneration from the human standard to which he has been raised. Norman is fated to grow up as a halfcaste, "half in the style of the Tribe and half in that of their dogs" (42).

The next chapter, "Heir to All the Ages," was originally titled "Losing a Litter of Pups." The reference here was obviously to Mark, who liberates himself from all responsibility for Norman by an agreement with

Jock Driver: "native-labour" (51) in return for a "foster-father" (54). One of Norman's canine associates travels with him as far as Caroline River Siding, where his railway car is uncoupled from the train. Driver continues his journey, drunk and insensible to the loss of his so-called foster child. Norman's presence at the siding is announced with reference once again to the dingo. His mournful wailing is misapprehended by Mick O'Pick as the cry of a dingo (67). At this point the metaphor for the whiteman appropriately prefigures the "whitewashing" of Norman that begins in the following chapter, "Clothes Make a Man," when he is adopted by Oscar "as a Shillingsworth of the blood" (88). From the time of this somewhat ironic adoption until his discovery that he is a halfcaste Norman should be identified with the image of the dingo that introduces this period of his life, throughout which he identifies himself unquestioningly as a member of the white race:

> Norman was dressed in fresh whites, glossy as mother-o'-pearl. His double-breasted coat hung open, showing a beautiful fresh white tunic-shirt. And the creases of his trousers were like knife-blades, his socks of finest silk, his shoes tan patent-leather, his hat a spotless topee, his poise imperial. (223)

His attitude may have its source in his belief that he is the grandson of an Eastern potentate. He is given this explanation of his colour in the hope that it will be more acceptable to white society than the truth. But, ironically, the imperialism he displays in his condescending attitude to Fat Anna and Tocky, when he returns to Capricornia after twelve years in the South, is characteristic of the whiteman. "'You all-same,'" Tocky tells Norman, "'You talk all-same whiteman'" (230).

An awareness of the dingo as Capricornia's principal metaphor for the whiteman, and as the emblem of his racism and imperialism, is necessary in order to understand the meaning of Tim O'Cannon's life and death. The significance of O'Cannon's fate cannot be overestimated. It provides a major point of reference for considering the meaning of Norman's life and Tocky's death, and so the meaning of the whole novel. Certain images

associated with Norman and Tocky first occur in relation to O'Cannon. These images link the characters' lives thematically and unify the symbolic structure of the work. At the same time, by relating each character to an over-all symbolic structure, the images embody the tension between the characters and direct our interpretation of their individual progressions. For this reason we need to consider Tim O'Cannon's life in detail. The key to understanding his life is the final phrase associated with his death, which has been a stumbling-block for many critics: "Oh, death of a kangaroo for a Sergeant Major!" (199). If we are to see the relevance of O'Cannon's fate to Norman and Tocky in terms of symbolic structure we must interpret that phrase. This, then, is the immediate purpose of the following detailed exposition of O'Cannon's life: to interpret the culminating metaphor of its symbolic action.

Although we do not realize it at the time, Peter Differ provides a key to understanding O'Cannon's character before we are even introduced to his puzzling behaviour: "'Look at Ganger O'Cannon of Black Adder Creek with his halfcaste wife and quadroon kids, a downright family man - yet looked on as as much a combo as if he lived in a blacks' camp'" (82). The ironic circumstances of O'Cannon's life are that he is a man of high principles, of human charity and dignity, who is at the same time "utterly despised." Differ tells us that only "casual comboes are respected" (83). As family men, both O'Cannon and Differ seem the direct opposite of the casual combo such as Frank McLash, who tracks Tocky through the wilderness as a dingo stalks its prey. The very name, Differ, implies the character's departure from the social norm. But O'Cannon is not so easily distinguished. His life is a paradox. He hovers uneasily between loving his daughters "as dearly as ever a father did" and despising their mother "because it was she who was responsible for his children's colour" (160). The conflict between humanism and racism is embodied in him. Certainly he recognizes the injustice of racial prejudice: "'Native hospital! Gawd, anyone'd think

a nigger got sick different to a whiteman - sort of in the Native Fashion. And there's a native cemetery too. Gawd-strewth, I'll bet there's colour-sections in the whiteman's Heaven and Hell!'"(183-84). He is even willing to stand up against the inhumanity of racism, as when Ma Blaize obstructs his efforts to save Connie Pan. An argument erupts when Ma Blaize learns the identity of the dying woman:

> "You said a woman."
> "Well - dammit?"
> "Don't swear at me, Sir! Conny Pan's a halfcaste - and a halfcaste's a lubra."
> "Oh have it your own damn way," bawled Tim. "Have it any damn way you like. But I say there's a woman here dyin', a woman to be considered as much as any other in the land." (180)

Yet he despises his own wife, Blossom, as "crassly stupid," because she insists on preserving beliefs associated with her native heritage:

> Why - for years he had been telling her that the earth spun round in the light of the sun: and still she went on believing that a new sun was made every night by devils over Skinny River way, who pitched it into the sky at about half past six each morning so that it landed in the Copper Creek country at about half past six at night. . . . And then, because she believed with the natives of the district that if a woman killed a snake she would give birth to a monster, she took pains to leave the pests alone, so that the house, being in a region over-run with snakes, was often like a reptilarium.(160)

O'Cannon's sympathy for the Aboriginal is directed from a superior position. His humanism has a streak of paternalism which removes any possibility of his truly conceiving of a brotherhood of man, and his inner conflict between racism and humanism spills over into a paradoxical political outlook. On the one hand, his belief in equal rights for Aboriginal and white people leads him to a socialist way of thinking. He calls his mule Kaptilist and addresses his work-mates as "feller wage-slaves" (197). On the other hand, he decides that the most practical way of "whitewashing" his children, in order to ensure their future security, is "by enriching them, making them owners of a huge combination cattle-station and cotton and peanut plantation . . . 'Rich people have no colour,' he used to say" (162). Despite the motive to protect his children, O'Cannon's materialism should not be seen in a simple context of humanism.

At Black Adder Creek he hopes to establish a "hive of industry" which will also be a "centre of envy" (162). His materialism signifies his inability truly to disengage his mind from the basic tenets of white society which retard his humanism. Both his failure to sympathize with his wife's mythological beliefs and his materialistic strategy for "whitewashing" his children signify a commitment to rationalism, on which white society bases its existence. But this same society, as we have seen in the case of Mark Shillingsworth, denies the fulfilment of the individual. We shall see that Herbert uses metaphor to link this dilemma with the theme of black-white conflict. Let us consider the specific context for one aspect of the absurdity of O'Cannon's life, so that we may begin to see the whole dilemma in proper perspective - that is, to appreciate the significance of his materialism in terms of metaphor we shall briefly consider Herbert's presentation of materialism in general.

Throughout the novel the whiteman's materialism is seen as an act of extreme self-indulgence, opposed to the ethic of self-sacrifice involved in the conception of a brotherhood of man. The exploitation of the Aboriginal for financial gain by the missionaries is revealing in this sense. The fortune of one man depends upon the ruin of another. In Capricornia this logic governs the fate of races and nations: "Prosperity is like the tide, being able to flood one shore only by ebbing from another" (200). Herbert's presentation of materialism often calls forth the image of the dingo. During the boom period of cattle "madness" the author intrudes suddenly upon his description of the bloody business of loading steers for export to exclaim: "Oh where is the carnivore that mauls its meat more savagely than man!" (217). The implication of the dingo here is obvious. The image was also suggested earlier in the novel when Peter Differ drew attention to the same connection between the whiteman's materialism and barbarism. He observes that "sheer animal greed . . . is the chief character of the average creature of the races

of the Northern Hemisphere" (79). On the other hand, the Aboriginals "are a very ancient race who have had the advantage of living in small numbers in a land that supplied their every need," and who, according to Differ, were therefore "able to overcome the sheer animal greed." This allowed the Aboriginal to follow the "code of simple brotherhood which is the true Christian one." Differ also observes that this code, "the recognized ethical one of civilization," is not practised by the whiteman because "civilized people are still too raw and greedy to be true Christians" (79). O'Cannon's strategy to protect his children, seen in the context of Herbert's general presentation of materialism, is open to suspicion as a self-justifying rationalization of his own deep-rooted desire to achieve financial success. It may well be part of the novel's strategy of interlocking ironies that the same phrase which describes O'Cannon's vision of future prosperity, "hive of industry," is later used to describe Red Ochre when not a single man has remained immune to the money-making madness induced by the cattle boom. In any case, Differ's comments are revealing in relation to O'Cannon's retarded humanism. His materialism identifies him as a product of the history of his race, and in this sense his humanism symbolizes the individual's attempt to step outside history. The metaphor associated with his racial inheritance, with the "sheer animal greed" of materialism throughout the novel, is the dingo. We will encounter the opposing metaphor, the kangaroo, in association with his humanism. The kangaroo, as we have already observed, is a metaphor for the Aboriginal, and we should note at this stage that there is a link between O'Cannon's humanism and the native "code of simple brotherhood."

The paradoxical attitudes and behaviour which express O'Cannon's inner discord are based upon the opposing metaphors of the kangaroo and dingo which represent the novel's central conflict between the black and the white man. In this context we should see O'Cannon's capability for "true unselfish voluntary sacrifice" and his irrational "lust for homicide"(92)

in relation to the respective racial metaphors. The particular conflict is revealed by his divided loyalties, on the one hand to his family and, on the other, to his heritage. As "a creature of the races of the Northern Hemisphere," his commitment to the war-effort stems from a desire to defend his heritage and essentially signifies his loyalty to British imperialism. Until he becomes "an agent of the Propagandists" the only agitation for national involvement in the European war is from "imperialistic papers imported once a month by the mail-boat from the South" (91). O'Cannon is "the instigator of the madness" which grips the people of Capricornia despite their geographical displacement from the war-zone and their lack of concern for the issues involved. It is not by mere coincidence that the Propagandist activities of O'Cannon are described in terms which link him semantically with the canine species: "Then a war-monger, or Sooler, as such people were called in the locality, made his voice heard in the land. . . . People began to listen to O'Cannon, who went round hounding mercilessly" (92-93). His loyalty to British imperialism is counteracted, however, by his commitment to his family: "Countless times he all but sooled himself into khaki. But much as he loved that cloth he loved his children more.. . . and he was only too well aware of what their future would be should he desert them" (92). Given the implicit metaphoric association of the dingo with his activities as a Sooler, his family ties should be seen in relation to the opposing metaphor of the kangaroo. The part-Aboriginal blood of his children is a link, at least potentially, with the Spirit of the Land. This link will be seen as less and less tenuous as we proceed to examine the kangaroo as a metaphysical metaphor in relation to the whole symbolic structure of O'Cannon's life. For most of his life, however, the temporary resolutions of his inner conflict reaffirm his identity as a whiteman and, metaphorically as a dingo.

The conflict of national interests symbolized by khaki cloth and O'Cannon's children again arises in Chapter Twelve. This time, however, he opts for self-indulgence rather than self-sacrifice, placing his own interests above those of his family and hence aligning himself with the dingoes:

> The Great War was ended; foe was embracing foe; but the Ethiopian had not changed his skin, and therefore was still contemptible.
>
> Tim was hurt. His family was as keenly interested in the war as any in Australia. He had conducted his house as a sort of garrison throughout the war. His children knew more about the map of Europe than they did of their own country. The elder ones had helped to feed the guns with cotton. If what he said was true, the younger ones were begotten simply to provide the guns with that other kind of fodder if the Nation's need went on. And all were trained to make the Last Stand that at times had seemed imminent during the latter stages of the war. This was known to everyone in Capricornia. Hence he had thought his family might not be scorned for once. He was hurt, deeply, but not for long. The occasion was too great to allow of waste of feeling on petty battling. He found a place for the humble ones on the back veranda, from which they could see what went on inside; then, with the Federal Flag he had bought to fly at the Last Stand, he went within, and soon, for all his love of them, forgot them. (147-48)

He again forgets his family when Frank McLash arrives home from the war, indulging his imagination in the exploits of the veteran: "That night Tim got drunk again and fought in the war with Frank, and so again the next night, and the next; and for the first time in all the years that he had been a father he did not go home for the week-end" (158).

The image of the dingo is most explicit in O'Cannon's life when his racism surfaces most violently - that is, when his daughter Maud runs off with Cedric Callow. Blossom's humanist view of her daughter's elopement has an undeniable poignancy because she has been the butt of racism all her life. But her husband is totally unable to sympathize with her way of thinking:

> "Oh listen Tim - you no onnerstand. If Maudie lose dat lovely boy must her heart break -"
>
> "You lunatic - d'you think he'll stick to her?"
>
> "No - but if her heart can live happy lil while no matter die. Cos she have pick de flower, Tim. No matter flower die if she have pick an' love it for a lil while, dear Tim -"
>
> "Shut up you filthy bitch! He'll chuck her away like

> rubbish when he's done with her. She'll finish in a nigger's camp. Oh my Maudie - my little girl!"
>
> "She come back, Tim, she come back to mumma," Blossom sobbed. "More better losim man when he get tired. More better she go with him time he love her. What chance she got, poor pretty dear, for gettim good hubin, Tim? Before I tink dat Cedric he gittim tired two t'ree day an' go away. I not tink he wanner take her wid him. So I let her go to pick de flower, Tim - Oh!"
>
> Tim silenced her with a blow on the mouth, shouting, "Shut your dirty mouth, you barsted. Call yourself a mother, call yourself a woman, call yourself a human critter? Artch!" He spat in her bleeding face. "You nigger thing - you barsted - you - Oh God Almighty you - Oh Christ you fiend!" (166)

At this point, ironically, Blossom is portrayed as sensitive and human, while O'Cannon is presented as the fiend. But it is the form of the demonic figure which is most revealing: a ferocious albino dingo, with suitably blackened fangs:

> His face was as white as paper and furrowed with great vertical lines and bristling with greying whiskers. His eyes were red and blazing, his scant hair flying in the wind, his broken black teeth bared like a snarling dog's. (167)

This devilish figure of the dingo looks back to the pseudo-messianic archetype of Ned Krater in "The Coming of the Dingoes." As we have already observed, when Krater hunts down Kurrinua he establishes a thematic context for black-white conflict in terms of the hunter and the hunted. O'Cannon's "long and exhausting search" for the lovers must be seen in this context, and thus not only looks back upon Krater's hunt in Chapter One but also forward to Frank McLash tracking Tocky through the wilderness.

A stylistic pointer to the linking of the three incidents is the fire imagery associated with each. We noted that it was Krater's "blazingly. carroty" complexion that caused the natives to identify him as "a devil come from the sun" (3). They even call him Man of Fire. The pseudo-messianic association with fire is never so strong, however, as when Krater has hunted down Kurrinua and is about to murder him: "At his appearance the east flamed suddenly, so that the sand was gilded and fire flashed in his beard" (6-7). Much later in the novel Frank McLash has a similar imagistic association with fire. After following Tocky's footprints through the bush to her camp-site, he tries to force his way into her tent during a raging storm, roaring "'S rainin' like hell!'" (395). When she feels his"hot breatl

in her face" Tocky shoots him, and as he staggers away into "chaotic darkness" she is left staring "into a great irregular fire-rimmed patch of darkness, the hole in the net burnt out by the rifle's flash"(395-96). The next morning McLash is nowhere in sight: "Where was he? Where was he? Where was he?"(397). When Tocky finally discovers his body it seems almost to glow like the blazing hair of Munichillu, Man of Fire: "Meat-ants were swarming over him, making him appear to be woolly with red hair" (399). Although Tim O'Cannon's appearance is not described by images of fire his insensitivity is displayed when he deliberately allows a lizard to burn to death. This sacrifice can be seen in symbolical relation to Krater's murdering of Kurrinua.

> The night passed, slowly for the hunters, all too swiftly for the hunted. No hope now of escaping by canoe. The hunters had dragged the vessels high. But Kurrinua might swim if he could not walk, swim by way of the sea to the passage and the mainland. Surely he had less to fear from crocodiles than from Munichillu and his men. Still he dared not leave the hollow while the hunters prowled the beach, because they would find the wide track of his crawling before he could reach the creek. (6)

O'Cannon unwittingly points to the similarity between his own and Krater's insensitivity, and between the fates of Kurrinua and the lizard, when he comments: "'Well he should have had the guts to take a flyin' leap out of it before the fire got too hot'"(170). O'Cannon traps the lizard in flames when he is building the campfire, and then proceeds to punctuate his inquisition of the lovers by addressing casual comments to the reptile as it slowly burns to death. By this device Herbert simultaneously heightens the dramatic tension and draws attention to the analogy. The sacrifice of the lizard places the conversation in a thematic context for interpreting the marriage to which the lovers are compelled by O'Cannon: freedom or imprisonment? life or death? In this context the marriage is a civilized version of the dingo's ambush of kangaroos at the waterhole: a trap. The lizard's fate confirms the ironic overtones of death in the chapter's colloquial title, "A Shotgun Wedding." O'Cannon may not be acting in his

daughter's best interests. As a device, the lizard also establishes a dramatic irony. O'Cannon is unaware of the contradiction in his attitudes demonstrated by the juxtaposition of his lack of concern for the lizard with his genuine interest in his daughter's future. But the marriage which he organizes for his daughter is also a significant "whitewashing" of himself. The image of the white dingo points to this. Given that O'Cannon is a social outcast, and that his whole family is regarded as contemptible, it is certainly ironic that his daughter's wedding should turn out to be "by far the most successful civilized social event that ever took place in Capricornia" (170).

We have already seen that the metaphors associated with Norman trace his development up to Chapter Twenty-six from a hunted animal to a whiteman in the image of the dingo, with a brief period in between as simply human. Tim O'Cannon's life moves in the opposite direction, the metaphorical progression being from a dingo to a kangaroo. The image of the savage white dingo in Chapter Thirteen represents the extreme point of his movement towards civilization. By the end of the next chapter, "Peregrinations of a Busybody," his paternalism is no longer a negative force against humanism, being transformed into human action when he adopts Tocky. The metaphorical implications of the dingo are noticeably absent even from the beginning of the chapter. Indeed there is an element of prophecy in the sudden appearance of a family of kangaroos corresponding in number to O'Cannon's own family: "A kangaroo leapt off the road and thud-thud-thudded into silence. A family of kangaroos, same number as the O'Cannons and about the same size, bounded ahead through a cutting" (175). The presence of the kangaroo in the place of the dingo is related to the presentation of a different vision of the land. O'Cannon is no longer alienated from his natural environment by the deluding utilitarian attitude he had in the previous chapter, "fine pictures, much too good to be true, like those of Black Adder as a sort of market-garden in the midst of an unconquerable wilderness" (162).

"Peregrinations of a Busybody" begins with an appreciation of the beauty of the land for its own sake:

> He trundled on, up grade and down, through dripping cuttings where golden catch-fly orchids grew in mossy nooks and tadpoles wriggled in sparkling pools, over culverts where smooth brown water sped over beds of grass, past towering walls of weeds that stretched out leaves and flowers to tickle his face and shower him with dew and touch him - as though he were a flower to be fertilised! - with blobs of pollen. (175)

Although the prose here is contrived so as to imply that the contemplation of Nature is O'Cannon's, we are not really entitled to assign the implicit Romantic sensibility to him. The vision of Nature is the narrator's. The impersonal presentation serves the same purpose as the hypothetical appreciation of the gin's beauty in Chapter Two: it draws attention to the divided awareness of the character involved. It is not that the author is inconsistent in his presentation, but that he is acknowledging the ironic separation of social and individual vision: "He trundled on, up grade and down, keeping one eye on the permanent way, the other on the telegraph . . . looking for defects, but not so sedulously as to miss any passing fancy" (175). The achievement of Herbert's presentation of the natural beauty of the environment in the sentence preceding this is a kind of dramatic irony. It prophesies O'Cannon's union with Nature without at this point directly associating him with the Romantic vision embodied in the narrator's presentation of the environment. The passing leaves and flowers which stretch out, as if deliberately, to shower him with dew perform a symbolic baptism into Nature, while the presence of tadpoles and the reference to O'Cannon as "a flower to be fertilised" seem to prophesy his rebirth. The key to understanding the nature of O'Cannon's rebirth is in recognizing the metaphorical significance of the kangaroo as Aboriginal. The salvation of the Aboriginal spirits of O'Cannon's whole halfcaste family is prophesied by the appearance of the family of kangaroos of the same number and individual size. But such salvation obviously cannot apply to Tim O'Cannon, a whiteman, unless he is somehow reborn.

The machinery for O'Cannon's symbolic rebirth is set in motion by his adoption of Tocky Lace. As a halfcaste child, like Norman, she symbolizes both the Aboriginal blood link with the land and the whiteman's potential for either realizing or negating that heritage. Both children are adopted by whitemen, and it is instructive to view not only Norman and Tocky but also their respective step-fathers, Oscar Shillingsworth and Tim O'Cannon, in relation to each other. This cross-referencing may be obliquely sign posted by the fact that a member of both Oscar's and O'Cannon's family is named Maud, particularly in view of Herbert's obvious attention to the nomenclature of his characters. Certainly there are other links. Norman and Tocky each take the place of a deceased natural child in their adoptive family. In a sense, too, Oscar is responsible for the fate of Tocky and her mother, having refused to adopt Connie Differ as a child despite the plea of her dying father. Oscar's failing and O'Cannon's fulfilment are each determined by their stance in relation to Tocky. She is the true measure of their humanism. We can contrast O'Cannon's persistent efforts on the child's behalf with what Oscar, shortly before his death, tells Norman, "that he had it in mind to locate the child someday and do something for her" (371-72). It is hardly surprising either that Oscar's adoption of Norman is in marked contrast to O'Cannon's adoption of Tocky. Oscar is not at all concerned initially with Norman's welfare and merely tolerates his presence in the hope that an opportunity to be rid of him will soon arise. Even when his attitude gradually softens it is motivated by a sense of family pride rather than selfless humanism: "If he were to grow up to be a cringing drudge like Yeller Elbert or a pariah like Peter Pan, how would fare the half of him that was proud Shillingsworth?" (84). There is a good deal of irony, then, in Norman's adoption into "the Shillingsworth household as a Shillingsworth of the blood" (88). Oscar lies to Norman about his parentage, instils in him a contempt for "niggers," and never stops trying to "whitewash" him generally. He comes to regard

Norman as a son and to be proud of his "genius," but he never gets over the shame of his colour. Consider, then, Tim O'Cannon's adoption of Tocky. Her arrival coincides with a series of tragedies for the O'Cannon family, to such an extent that Tim comes to regard her as "a Jinx or agent of misfortune" (190). Maud and her baby are lost at sea in a cyclone; Molly, the younger daughter, dies in convulsions; and Tommy, "the pride and joy and hope of his father's life" (191), is committed to an asylum after permanently damaging his brain and blowing out both his eyes in an accidental explosion. Yet, unlike Oscar, who experiences no such disaster in the wake of his adoption of Norman, Tim "never thought of getting rid of her. . . . She was not an O'Cannon of the blood, but was of similar stuff, it seemed, in spite of her parentage. That made her valuable as well as beloved" (191). The main point of contrast here is that Norman, being of Shillingsworth blood, holds a terrible fascination for Oscar, his own "personal problem" (84), whereas Tocky is simply a human problem for O'Cannon. Unlike Oscar, he is committed to resolving the problem by his own choice rather than by a blood link. Another significant difference is that O'Cannon values and loves Tocky precisely because she is of different blood and yet "similar stuff" to his natural family. Through her O'Cannon forges an Aboriginal link with the Spirit of the Land, following on from the prophetic image of the kangaroo. Formerly his attitude to his natural children was paralleled by his attitude to the land, the vision of their "whitewashed" future being directly linked with the image of the market-garden in the wilderness. His adoption of a halfcaste not related to him by blood, however, symbolizes the reconciliation of his paternalism with his humanism. The link with the land which he thereby realizes, in loving and valuing Tocky for her self is his spiritual salvation. His death as a whiteman symbolizes his spiritual rebirth as an Aboriginal, an irony which is expressed metaphorically in the phrase "Oh, death of a kangaroo for a Sergeant Major!" (199). Thus the symbolic structure of O'Cannon's life is open-ended, its ultimate

significance being signalled by metaphysical metaphor. But the danger here is that the whole significance is lost if the final phrase cannot be deciphered.

Any author makes certain demands upon his reader, and at this point Herbert has two requirements: first, that we have a general understanding of the symbolic meaning of the kangaroo already established; second, that we have sufficient awareness of the ironic mode of the writing to enable us to recognize the various cryptic clues which signpost the symbolic action. Let us look briefly at some of the antecedent hints that we are given to direct our interpretation of the "death of a kangaroo." The prefiguring image of the kangaroo was strategically timed to appear just before O'Cannon discovers Tocky in the wilderness. He startles so many kangaroos immediately before sighting Tocky that the prophetic hint would be overstated except for its basis in credible naturalistic detail: "more kangaroos, big red boomers and wallaroos and little does with bright-eyed joeys peeping from their apron pockets" (176). The true meaning of O'Cannon's death is foreshadowed in the imagery immediately following the kangaroo pageant: "He came within sight of the Caroline Siding, the whitewashed roofs of which gleamed as dead white against an inky horizon as faces of nuns against black hoods" (176). Here we see that white is the colour not only of civilization but also of death. But the deathly white faces of the nuns are contrasted with the "black hoods" of their habit, the traditional emblem of their spiritual life. The simile, then, implies that the "inky horizon" of the wilderness is a symbol of potential spiritual life beyond a dying civilization. Beyond the open-ended structure of Tim O'Cannon's narrative lies this spiritual horizon, like the Aboriginal islands of the dead which lie beyond the final page of Stow's To the Islands:

> The old man kneeled among the bones and stared into the light. His carved lips were firm in the white beard, his hands were steady, his ancient blue eyes, neither hoping nor fearing, searched sun and sea for the least dark hint of a landfall.[5]

We do not really know whether Heriot reaches the islands, although the metaphysic of physical disintegration, purification and potential spirituality is obvious. A similar conceptualization determines O'Cannon's rites of passage. His progression towards Aboriginal spirituality is ironically charted by the terrible misfortunes which he experiences after adopting Tocky. A key to this is given in the word-play on the ambivalence of "darkened" in the very first sentence of "Machinations of a Jinx": "Much of Tim O'Cannon's life subsequently was darkened by misfortune" (190). This kind of word-usage, depending on a double-meaning as a covert thematic pointer, is typical of Herbert's ironic mode. Certainly there are too many instances of lexical play in Capricornia for their presence to be accidental, particularly when we consider the more obvious forms of verbal irony such as innuendo, overstatement, burlesque, the rhetorical question and praising in order to blame. Less obviously, Herbert exploits the etymological ambivalence of certain words, very often colloquial, to direct the narrative of a kind of imaginative sub-text that exists beneath the surface of the overt polemical fiction. For example, the metaphorical images for O'Cannon's racial conversion are implicit in the progressive irony of his being described first as a "Sooler" and then as being "dogged." Although seven years of disaster are condensed into two and a bit pages, O'Cannon is twice referred to as "dogged" by a Jinx (190; 192). "Sooler" supplies us with the image of O'Cannon as a dingo. But when he is later described as being "dogged" the roles of the hunter and the hunted have been inverted, and in the context of pre-established metaphysical metaphor we should think of him in the image of the kangaroo.

Although Capricornia is virtually two novels, one that is propagandist, a roman à thèse with its focus on non-fictional reality, and the other a more modernist self-reflexive work, neither should be regarded as autonomous. Thus, on the one hand, the lexical play involved in signposting O'Cannon's metaphysical progression cannot help but draw attention to the artifice of

the narrative in general. On the other hand, sleight-of-hand is not appropriate to social protest, and must be concealed if the integrity of the roman à thèse is not to suffer. Here lies a paradox: the rebirth of a whiteman as an Aboriginal can only be artificially contrived; but the serious metaphysic embodied in that rebirth must be perceived as truth rather than illusion. Thus it is partly true, as O'Cannon suspects, that the "agent of misfortune . . . was that descendant of unfortunate people, Tocky" (190). But the Jinx is something of a deliberate misnomer. There is good reason to remind ourselves of the truism that the real source of misfortune is the god-like author: if the rebirth of O'Cannon is not to be seen as counterfeit then his rites of passage must be consistent with the novel's presentation of the terrible misfortune of the Aboriginal people. Another hint that the Jinx is misleading is the fate of George Waistbin: "Mrs McLash put a curse on the man. A week or so later he won £5,000 in the Sturt State Lottery and went down South to live" (193). The imposition of misfortune "for the conventional seven years" is not merely melodramatic for it implies ritual. Traditionally, the number 7, in ballad and folklore of many countries, is used "to describe periods of service, absence, penance, and so on."[6] The supernatural implication of a Jinx, or a curse, makes use of the tradition of ritualistic significance. Despite his "crazed" reaction to the first death, his blaming and mistreatment of his wife, ultimately O'Cannon passes the trial of misfortune: "He was worried for years by the thought that Tocky was the Jinx. But he never thought of getting rid of her" (191). The ritualistic nature of O'Cannon's death is emphasised by its timing: Christmas Eve, immediately after the seven-year trial. He is mowed down by the "special" Christmas train.

The specific point of conversion from whiteman to black, from alienation to spiritual union with the land, is marked by O'Cannon's holy communion with Nature, immediately before his death:

> Tim went outside and sat on a stack of dewy wood to watch the dawn. The Southern Cross was fading. The Morning Star was glittering like a pin's head above a cushion of terracotta cloud. The sky over Skinny River way glowed with the reflection of the devils' furnace. Soon the red was tinged with gold. Trees and palms were silhouettes, those at close quarters faintly green. Slowly the terracotta cloud became brick-red; and then the gold that was in its heart melted and ran out in streams. Along the southern horizon a chain of litmus-violet clouds appeared. A golden beetle droned out of east and sped in pursuit of the fleeting shadows of night. In the west a bank of clouds reared like a mountain of black ice and fleecy snow, in the peaks of which played lightning. Gold spread across the scarlet clouds. Tim's lantern flickered and flucked as though imploring him to douse it before it should be shamed by Light of Day. He ignored it, watching the brave Morning Star, which was staying on to flash defiance at the Usurper. For a minute the world lay golden. Then slowly the gold was dulled - dulled, dulled - till lo! it was shimmering silver. A wave of silver flushed the eastern sky, washed out the Morning Star, washed the gold flecks back to the uttermost reaches of the horizons - washed and washed them, bleached them in a minute; but it could not reach the peaks of the cloud-mountains of the west, where the gold settled, to blaze extravagantly as Youth burns out its goldeness on mountains of experience. Two black birds flapped slowly out to meet the day; and as though their going had to do with it, a golden glow swelled in the east, swelled, swelled, appearing like the halo of a mighty Christ - and Oh! the golden golden sun burst forth and touched the prostrate earth with trembling fingers, touched the hoary head of Tim and blessed him. (196-97)

Dawn is the traditional symbol of birth. Herbert's association of the rising sun with a mighty Christ figure, whose blessing unites man and Nature, has obvious implications of rebirth and immortality. The meaning of O'Cannon's symbolic rebirth is conveyed by his final acceptance of the Aboriginal explanation of dawn, his perception of Nature's forms in silhouette, and the prophetic appearance from out of the east of the golden beetle in pursuit of darkness. Cast out of his own society, O'Cannon finally forsakes his allegiance to British imperialism in favour of "Nature, Queen of Capricornia!"(197) This explains the "death of a kangaroo for a Sergeant Major!". The final stage in ritualistic purification and spiritual union of man and Nature is the land's imbibing of human blood: "Slowly Tim's broken body freed itself . . . its warm blood trickling into the tinkling stream" (199). It is significant that thereafter "Black Adder Creek . . . became a verdant paradise. Grass grew there luxuriantly as nowhere else" (200).

From this examination of O'Cannon's life and death we can conclude that the kangaroo and the dingo are not only the propagandist's terms of analogy for social conflict but also the controlling images for the novel's developing metaphysic. Because this functioning of the novel on two levels has not generally been recognized, those elements of its style unable to be explained in terms of its apparent traditional social realist mode as a roman à thèse have been seen as evidence of a generally misguided literary strategy. Hence the narrative has been called "formless" and the style "uneven". H.M. Green, for instance, obviously failed to realize the metaphysical context of the novel: "The principal defect of a powerful and absorbing book is that its world has been distorted in order to accentuate an indictment of race prejudice and the types that are possessed by it in the far north, so that it presents not a human world but a kind of hell."[7] Vincent Buckley was the first critic to perceive that mistaken assumptions about the novel's theme had led to inappropriate formal criticism. Implicit in Buckley's argument is the charge that critics such as Green had fallen into the trap of intentional fallacy and were unable to see beyond the unimaginative limits which they set for the writer of polemical fiction. Buckley saw the terms of Green's argument as "utterly inadequate" to account for the novel's compelling power:

> . . .they would be defensible only on the assumption that its theme is a specific and remediable social injustice, and that its method is one of social realism heightened by burlesque and leading to certain implicit recommendations; the "burlesque" would then seem a misguided part of a literary strategy undertaken for social reasons. These assumptions seem to me to be mistaken. Capricornia is not merely a social document. Its context is not only social, but metaphysical.[8]

But unfortunately Buckley misunderstood the metaphysical nature of the work. He perceived that O'Cannon is "the crucial and revealing case" for the metaphysical meaning of the novel, but he was misled by the apparent injustice of the character's misfortune after adopting Tocky: "He rescues Connie Differ's child from destitution, and rears her as his own daughter Tocky. He defies authority and practises generosity. Yet it is Tim who

meets the most cruelly arbitrary fate of all; and it is Tocky whose death brings the book to its stark and moving end."[9] Buckley concludes that the metaphysical concern of the novel is "with a cosmic injustice done to all men."[10] In fact, as my preceding argument has demonstrated, the controlling images of dingo and kangaroo, together with occasional parallel plotting and lexical play, point to exactly the opposite: the heterocosmic justice of O'Cannon's fate. Although Buckley fails to recognize that the apparent injustice is really the rites of passage necessary for the spiritual transformation of the whiteman, he does imply some mysterious link between the deaths of O'Cannon and Tocky. We shall see that the links between O'Cannon, Tocky and Norman are embodied by the conflict and progression of images first occurring in "Machinations of a Jinx." But first we should see his fate in the context already established by our contrasting of his adoption of Tocky with Oscar's adoption of Norman.

The contrast between Oscar Shillingsworth and Tim O'Cannon is extended by the different metaphysical significance of their deaths. Whereas O'Cannon is spiritually fulfilled, achieving a symbolic end to his alienation from the land, Oscar's death is meaningless. His spirit is condemned to wander the void:

> The devil of the departed master was everywhere. It stood in empty boots, in hanging clothes, sat in the arm-chair in the dining-room, stood beside the ashy pipe and dusty pouch and misty spectacles, stole among the shadows, moaned in the nor'east wind, flew with ragged clouds across the moon's dead face, wailed in the timber of the river - Kwee-luk! - Kwee-luk! - Kweeee - luk! - I am lost! (373)

There is an element of metaphor in the ragged clouds that fly "across the moon's dead face" which conveys the sense of the dead whiteman's lost soul. Unlike O'Cannon, Oscar did not redeem himself. Although he told Norman "that he had it in mind to locate the child [Tocky] and do something for her"(372), he never did, and words alone cannot conjure salvation. We sense this in the final juxtaposition of incantations:

> No incantation in the Rubaiyat for this.
> O Mungallini kurri-tai! O Great Bunyip! Most Puissant Joss! Almighty God of Abraham! Rest him - rest him! (373)

Two important images which occur just before O'Cannon's death, during his spiritual communion with Nature, are the golden beetle and the pair of black birds. Their reappearance at key points in the lives of Norman and Tocky subsequently confirms their significance to the novel's whole symbolic structure. The image of the golden beetle, in the first instance, seems to herald O'Cannon's rebirth: "A golden beetle droned out of east and sped in pursuit of the fleeting shadows of night" (196). Not until seven chapters later, in "Song of the Golden Beetle," do we learn, however, the full symbolic significance of the image:

> A golden beetle shot into the firelight, for a while dashed blindly round, then settled in a bush, began to sing: Whirrrree - whirrrree - whirrrreeyung - eeyung - eeyung - eeyong - eeyung - eeyahng - eeyah - eeyah - eeyahn, eeyung - eeyong - eeyong - eeyong - eeyah - eeyah - eeyah - eeyah - reverberating droning rising rising in compelling volume into miniature boom of didjeridoo diminishing to momentary pause then rising rising waxing waxing seizing mind compelling limb - eeyung - eeyung - eeyong - eeyong - eeyah - eeyah - eeyah - voice of the spirit of Terra Australis - eeyah-eeyah-eeyah - and Norman, wrapt, with eyes on Southern Cross, took up a stick and beat upon a log - click-click - clickaclick-click - click-click - clickaclick-click - eeyung-eeyung -eeyong-eeyahng -eeyah-eeyah-eeyah -O mungallini kurritai, ee-tukka wunni wurri-gai, ee-minni kinni tulli-yai - ee-yah-eeyah-eeyah! (293-94)

Retrospectively, this symbolism confirms my interpretation of O'Cannon's death. The earlier image of the golden beetle in pursuit of darkness obviously links O'Cannon's mystical experience of Nature with the Aboriginal heritage of the Spirit of the Land. In the later chapter, after the golden beetle's song, Norman "for the first time . . . realized his Aboriginal heritage" (294). In "Song of the Golden Beetle" we find also the same kind of lexical play that earlier signposted O'Cannon's Aboriginal rebirth. Norman has just had the whole basis of his supercilious attitude destroyed by Ket's revelation that his mother was not high-caste Javanese but a blackgin Consequently, on the first night of his journey into the wilderness, just before he hears the song of the golden beetle, we read: "Darkness put an end to his conceit" (293). The context of this word-play is obvious. Repetition of this particular play on "darkness" and of the image of the

golden beetle, in both cases described as "droning," link O'Cannon's metaphysical progress with Norman's journey.

Another aspect of prose style to consider is the repetition of words describing transformation or progression at both moments of heightened awareness. As O'Cannon contemplates the dawn, "dulled," "washed," "swelled," and "bleach" are all duplicated. The same later applies when Norman listens to the beetle, to "waxing" and "rising," the latter duplication itself being repeated after an interval. This kind of lexical doubling expresses figuratively the duality of identity which, in different ways, is central to both O'Cannon's and Norman's experience. This would seem tenuous except for the extent of non-lexical examples of doubling. These are particularly prevalent in "Song of the Golden Beetle," where they provide a context for Norman's ambivalent journey as a vacillation between the poles of his dual racial identity. The non-lexical signposts to this context have been outlined by Neil Mudge: there are two Cockeye Bob storms, two horses making two attempts to cross a flooding river, two unsuccessful forays into the jungle, and two Aboriginal stockmen who finally deliver Norman from his solitude.[11] Obviously it is halfcaste identity which is conceptually at the centre of all this doubling.

Despite similarities in prose technique, and the implicit linking by repetition of lexical play and key images, we should not too readily assume that the conclusion of Norman's journey symbolizes the same metaphysical triumph as O'Cannon's death. Cross-referencing by use of imagery may signal contrast just as easily as comparison, may embody conflict instead of progression, particularly in a work which, as we have seen, is structured by interlocking ironies. For this reason we have to consider not simply the recurrence of a root image but also the relative nature of its inflections.

The second image central not only to O'Cannon's spiritual experience but also to later developments in the novel is the two black birds. But we shall see that when this basic image recurs in "Song of the Golden Beetle" it is significantly particularized. In the first instance, as Neil Mudge points

out, the birds are implicitly the agents of O'Cannon's blessing by Nature:

> Two black birds flapped slowly out to meet the day; and as though their going had to do with it, a golden glow swelled in the east, swelled, swelled, appearing like the halo of a mighty Christ - and Oh! the golden golden sun burst forth and touched the prostrate earth with trembling fingers, touched the hoary head of Tim and blessed him.(196)

This image of the two black birds is echoed by a more particularized image on the morning following Norman's apparent realization of his Aboriginal heritage: "He woke at dawn to see through his mosquito-net a pair of red-eyed crows making furtive examination of the pack-bags" (294). In order to interpre this particular image we need to be aware not only of the symbolic context of the previous appearance of a pair of black birds but also of the associations of an intricate pattern of red colouring throughout the novel. The basic image occurs only three times: at the moment of O'Cannon's spiritual union with Nature; after the song of the golden beetle; and, as the novel's final image, after the death of Tocky and her baby. At the metaphysical level of narrative these are three key episodes. The image of two black birds, then, is an important one. In "Song of the Golden Beetle" the red eyes of the crows must be interpreted within the context of the novel's extended colour patterning. We must therefore digress briefly to consider the colour associations established by patterning.

Here I am only concerned with the associations of red colouring, although there is also a certain amount of silver and gold patterning. These patterns have been illuminated by Mudge in a recent article, "Capricornia: Seasonal, Diurnal and Colour Patterns,"[12] based on the longer unpublished essay already cited. We have already noted the fire imagery associated with Ned Krater in "The Coming of the Dingoes," and also with Tim O'Cannon in "A Shotgun Wedding." The linking of Krater's hunting of Kurrinua with O'Cannon's pursuit of the lovers has also been discussed. At both points the fire imagery is associated with the image of the dingo. Thus we have an implicit connection between red colouring and the white race. A more explicit example is in Norman's reaction to Jock Driver,

associating "the sickening whiteman smell" with his "terrible red presence" (54). Driver is "a North-country Englishman," not "an ordinary Australian" (46), and it is therefore worth recalling Herbert's explanation of his excessive red colouring:

> What troubled Nawnim was his colouring. His mouth was as red as fresh raw meat, and thin-lipped and wide and constantly writhing. Nawnim was used to lean-faced, brown-faced, thin-lipped, small-eyed whitemen. Jock's face was as red as a boiled crayfish, even redder than it usually was in this climate in which it was as foreign as a gumtree would be in his native fogs, because it had lately been put under the blood-rousing influences of salt-wind and grog. The redness of his face set off the blueness of his bulging English eyes and the blackness of his hair and the whiteness of his large prominent teeth. (48)

Jock's colouring is excessive because he is not Australian. But it is obvious from references to "his prominent teeth," his mouth "as red as fresh raw meat," and the exaggeration of his colouring by "blood-rousing influences " that red is associated with the image of the dingo. It is obviously the colour of the whiteman.

There is no point in my tracing the pattern of red colouring through the whole novel. It is sufficient for my purpose to establish its general associations. These are nowhere more significant than in "Clothes Make a Man," where they prepare the reader for Oscar's adoption of Norman. Consider the colour references leading up to that adoption "as a Shillingsworth of the blood" (88). The context for this discussion has already been established by the contrast with O'Cannon's acceptance of Tocky's colour - that is, Oscar's "whitewashing" of Norman. It is for this reason, too, that I drew attention to the prophetic nature of Norman's wailing like a dingo when he first arrives at the Caroline River Siding. The dingo image and red colouring come together when he arrives at Red Ochre: "He wailed all night, set the dogs barking in the camp on the river and the dingoes howling in the bush. . . . The red day dawned on a red-eyed household and on a halfcaste brat who was covered with red wales and regarded with general malignity" (74). The colour patterning in "Clothes Make a Man" signposts the significance of

Norman's adoption as the beginning of a "whitewashing" process. As Mudge observes: "Norman acquires his first identity as an adopted European under a distinctly red shadow."[13] We see Nawnim on his fourth day at Red Ochre "standing in the reddish shadow of a ponciana." He is still wailing, and we learn that the local Aboriginal tribe, unable to stand the noise any longer, has evacuated its camp. Significantly, the cause that is usual throughout the novel for such sudden evacuation is the approach of a whiteman. Unable to pass on the problem-child to the Aboriginals, Oscar "dumped him under the scarlet tree" (75). Finally Norman is placated by the sight of Marigold, "since she was so different from any creature he had seen and clad in garments that amazed him." He spends the day watching her from "under the ponciana tree." Having been pacified in this "reddish shadow," he is immediately subjected to the civilizing process: "Constance taught him to use a knife and fork and spoon, discouraged him from the practice of voiding urine indiscriminately, and made him a laughable suit of clothes" (76).

The "red-eyed crows" in "Song of the Golden Beetle" look back upon the "red-eyed household" in "Clothes Make a Man." But the crows are also part of another colour scheme, patterning the implicit colours of the racial conflict. Throughout the novel's visual imagery black is contrasted with white to suggest not only the objective fact of cultural division but also the subjective distortion of reality by individual characters who embody such division. We have already observed, for example, O'Cannon's perception of Caroline Siding just before he discovers Tocky: "the whitewashed roofs . . . gleamed as dead white against an inky horizon as faces of nuns against black hoods" (176). We know too that, up to this point, O'Cannon has been described paradoxically in terms of an implicit duality of opposing metaphors, the dingo and the kangaroo. His state of consciousness is implicit in the visual imagery. Juxtaposition of light and darkness is obviously associated with the extended colour contrast of black and white. For example, Oscar's contemplation of the moon, and its play of light and

shadow in a garden, moves him to consider the whole racial issue:

> Oscar turned to the garden, smiling. The moon was bursting from a mass of clouds, its light sweeping through the shadows, silvering leaves, flooding the wet and fragrant earth. With his eye on the moon he considered the Colour Question. . . . Was not colour-consciousness merely a form of class-consciousness, of snobbery? he demanded of the moon. (116)

Perhaps Oscar provides us here with another key to the novel. Certainly the connection between class- and colour-consciousness is central not only to the subject but also to the form of Capricornia. The "colour question" is literally embodied in the formal patterning of colour. The white and the red colour schemes interpenetrate, but are consistently contrasted with black colouring. Consider, for example, the colour organization implicit in Norman's first perception of Port Zodiac when he arrives from Flying Fox as a child:

> The Spirit of the Land passed into Zodiac Harbour and went slowly towards the town, revealing to Nawnim one by one the wonders of Civilization. First wonder was an automobile . . . Nawnim heard the strange thing roaring in the bush long before he saw it, and saw the cloud of red dust it was raising. . . .
>
> They crept past the Calaboose. Nawnim stared in wonder at the buildings on the hill and at a gang of black felons working on the road and at a gang of white ones fishing from the cliff. They passed the great Meat-works, which was still more amazing because painted black, whereas the Calaboose was white. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Then came into view the Compound, the Nation's Pride, a miniature city of whitewashed hovels crowded on a barren hill above the sea. Then they passed the hospital, then the Cable Station, then the Residency, then a cluster of neat white houses standing amid ponciana trees that blazed like torches under masses of scarlet blooms. Nawnim's attention was then snatched away from the shore to the jetty, which suddenly appeared from behind a point, standing with red piles high above the fallen water, looking like a crowded flock of long-legged jabiroos. (53-54)

Once the colour associations are firmly established the patterning is not always so obvious. There is a neat irony, for example, in "Clothes Make a Man" when Oscar is offended by a naked blackfellow and so tells him angrily to go and cover himself with a flour-bag (97).

In the final stages of "Son of a Gin" colour patterning reveals the state of Norman's mind:

> Their faces were dead white in the glare. He saw his own dark hand as it stretched out in expostulation.. . .
> . . . Norman stood for a moment, then wheeled about and hastened into the blackness of the hall. At the dining-room door he paused and looked back. White faces staring at the panting white-faced Gigney.. . .
> . . . he set out southward. At the stock-tanks he stopped and looked back at the dim white house. He stared for seconds. Then suddenly he spurred and rode away.
> (292)

The connection between the colour scheme at this point and Norman's subjective perspective was more explicit in the manuscript. There, as he stares at "the dim white house," he is "muttering as he had done a thousand times since New Year's morning, 'White people - white people'" (MS 352). This patterning obviously prepares us for the statement in the second paragraph of the next chapter: "Darkness put an end to his conceit" (293). But Norman's realization of his Aboriginal heritage should not be taken too literally. This is the warning contained in the image of the "pair of red-eyed crows." Mudge notes that the image embodies the interpenetration of two opposing colour schemes, red and black.[14] In the context of the consistent associations of the novel's colour patterning "red-eyed crows" is obviously a mixed metaphor, appropriately signposting the confusion of Norman as a halfcaste torn between white and Aboriginal self-definition.

This image and the "two black birds" in "Machinations of a Jinx" link O'Cannon's spiritual triumph with Norman's apparent realization of his Aboriginal heritage. But the images are different. The "two black birds" express harmony; the "red-eyed crows" embody confusion. Together the two images represent narrative conflict, relating the two incidents for contrast rather than for comparison. Norman's awakening to his Aboriginal identity, if it is truly in contrast with O'Cannon's Aboriginal rebirth,

must only appear to be genuine. By pointing to his confusion, the image of the "red-eyed crows" alerts us to other clues that Norman's development is not all it seems.

There are many such clues throughout "Song of the Golden Beetle." We should pause to consider them here for a number of good reasons. The significance which I have given to the "red-eyed crows" image can hardly be justified unless the narrative context can be shown to confirm it. But we need to relate the image more closely to the outcome of Norman's journey for another reason. Norman's fate is intricately connected with Tocky's, and the final comment on her death is contained in another image of a pair of crows. The common image links not only O'Cannon's rebirth but also Tocky's death with Norman's journey in "Song of the Golden Beetle." Our interpretation of this chapter, and of the crow image within it, is central to an understanding of the ending, and therefore the whole meaning, of the work.

The first clue that Norman's identification with his Aboriginal heritage is superficial and inadequate is in his treatment of the golden beetle. We are told that its song seizes mind and compels limb (293). Thus when Norman takes up a stick and beats a rhythmic accompaniment upon a log he is acting against his will. His attitude when he recovers self-control is revealing: "He dropped the stick. His skin was tingling. He looked at his hand, ashamed. Then he snatched up the stick and hurled it at the beetle. The beetle fled. But for long its song went on." Just before we are told that Norman "realized his Aboriginal heritage" he has "to restrain himself from seeking relief in the Song of the Golden Beetle." We can surmise, then, that the realization is not so much a consequence of his experience in corroboree with the golden beetle, or of communion with the Spirit of the Land which the insect symbolizes, as a mental refuge from "his own black shadow, which he knew without turning

round to see was reared above him, menacing." The shadow is produced by the light from Norman's fire, and we should recall the consistent association of fire imagery with the whiteman: "He heaped up the fire, heaped it up, poked it to make it blaze and crackle, tried by staring into it to burn from his mind his tingling fears" (294). The manuscript is revealing here: he builds up the fire to burn from his mind not only his "tingling fears" but also "the Song of the Golden Beetle and the sudden awful realization that he was part of the Ragtag of Humanity" (MS 354). There is a difference between this and the published realization of "his Aboriginal heritage." In the manuscript he realizes his racial inferiority; and in the published novel he discovers his human dignity. But the revision is deliberately misleading. Word repetition relates Norman's "tingling fears" to his skin, which is also "tingling." Thus, even in the published version, he tries to burn from his mind the fear that he is of Aboriginal descent. Our knowledge of the thematic association of the whiteman with fire reinforces the implicit significance of Norman's staring into the blaze as an attempt to whitewash his identity. It is ironic too that after the presumably liberating experience of realizing his Aboriginal heritage Norman should derive a great deal of pleasure from listening to sounds which suggest the whiteman's restriction of natural impulse: "He was mighty pleased to hear occasionally the clink of hobbles and the clank of the bell. . . ." He hails the horses "as fellows" (294). Superficially, this seems consistent with his apparent Aboriginal awakening. After all, the Aboriginal chant during the corroboree in Chapter Twenty referred to "my brother the horse" (265). But the nomenclature of Norman's fellows is particularly revealing: The Policeman, Juggler and, his favourite steed, False. Civilization and illusion are implicit in this brotherhood, which is essentially opposed to any true identification by Norman with his Aboriginal heritage.

The confusion embodied by the image of the "red-eyed crows" is also suggested by the dream which follows Norman's realization: "that he was lost with some sort of silent nomadic tribe among moving shadows in a valley of mountainous walls" (294). The notion of a lost soul is implicit in this dream, so that it looks forward to Oscar's death, when his devil "stole among the shadows, moaned in the nor'east wind, flew with ragged clouds across the moon's dead face, wailed in the timber of the river - Kwee-luk! - Kwee-luk! - Kweeee-luk! - I am lost!" (373). The "valley of mountainous walls" in Norman's dream has some relation to his actual experience throughout the novel. For example, in Chapter Six rocky walls danced madly, black and white clouds reeled overhead and, as the Copper Creek train carried Norman south, "a red wall leapt at him" (59). This image of imprisonment and its red colour association with the whiteman prepares the reader for the "whitewashing" process of Norman's adoption. But long after he is supposed to have "realized his Aboriginal heritage" red walls are still leaping at Norman. In Chapter Twenty-six, once more on the train heading towards Red Ochre, he watches "the red walls leap at him and the trees go spinning by" (366). Then, after Oscar's death, Norman takes the body up to Port Zodiac from the Caroline River Siding on a flat-top trolley "while red walls leapt at them clanging and trees in a wild corroboree-dance went spinning by" (373). Although such imagery has some basis in realism it also involves an element of subjective distortion of reality by the observer. Norman's dream confirms the psychological basis of the leaping walls. The dream that he is lost "in a valley of mountainous walls" should be seen in the context of the red walls which leap at him throughout the novel, images of imprisonment associated with the whiteman. Even on his journey through the wilderness Norman's apparent freedom is undermined: "paper-barks so closely crowded that their trunks looked from a distance like palings of

a huge white fence" (298).

It is particularly revealing to consider Norman's journey in relation to O'Cannon's spiritual triumph. As we have already observed, O'Cannon is blessed by the sun, which is associated with the image of the two black birds: "a golden glow swelled in the east, swelled, swelled, appearing like the halo of a mighty Christ" (196). But Norman "rode eastward blindly" (295). O'Cannon's rebirth was heralded by the Aboriginal metaphor implicit in his vision of kangaroos. The metaphor is conspicuously absent from Norman's experience: "The fact that he saw no kangaroos . . . was also significant and also lost on him" (297). But the most obvious difference between O'Cannon and Norman is in their relation to the land. There is a profound sense of the reconciliation of man and Nature in the final stages of O'Cannon's spiritual "journey." Death consummates his spiritual union with the land. But Norman's identification with the Spirit of the Land is revealed as terribly inadequate by Nature's obvious hostility towards him. During the first storm we are told that the wind "smote him like a club" and "the deluge flogged him" (299). The "sword-sharp leaves" of pandanus palms entangle his favourite horse, which sustains "deep cuts about the neck" (301). The next storm leaves Norman "blinded, fighting for his breath" (302). The flooding river is described as "the chuckling assassin" (305) and Norman is aware that the water in the grass is "winking at him" and "chuckling" (304). But finally Norman is plastered with "foetid mud," which seems to symbolize his Aboriginal initiation and identification with the land. At the same time, however, this looks forward to the Melisande riot in Chapter Twenty-six, where Jerry Rottgut, described as "lily-white of skin," is drummed out of town "under a shower of mud" because he has been selling a kerosine mixture as bulk rum. At the same time two Government Officers, who are among the special police come to quell the riot, are given "a quiet

rolling in the mud" (365). The ironic linking of the Melisande riot with the final stages of Norman's journey suggests that he is a victim of chaos rather than a symbol of harmony. The "foetid mud" with which he is covered is an absurd irony. The implication of fertility, central to any notion of Norman transcending his confusion about identity, is undercut by the description of the place where his journey ends as "a pleasantly sterile spot" (305).

Finally the absurdity of Norman's appearance is underlined by ironic juxtaposition with the visage of an Aboriginal "painted hideously, white from head to foot, and striped with red and yellow" (306). It is no accident that the native is painted in the colours of the whiteman, as he works for Oscar at Red Ochre. But the appearance of the Aboriginal signals Norman's "day of deliverance" (305). The manuscript emphasised this point by naming the native "Song-Man Moses" (MS 369). This nomenclature is also apparently related to the Song of the Golden Beetle. But the whole point is ironic. He sees the native as his deliverer from the wilderness, rather than from civilization. His journey is in this sense circular, rather than leading to the promised land of his Aboriginal heritage. The false prophetic status of the Aboriginal is signalled by his published name, Bootpolish. This particular nomenclature, with its implicit overtones of superficiality and illusion, looks back to "Significance of a Burnt Cork." That was the chapter in which Norman was born. The ironic linking points to the falseness of his apparent symbolic rebirth in "Song of the Golden Beetle Norman's journey is a parody of what it might have been. The interpenetration of colour schemes in the image of the "red-eyed crows" at the beginning of the journey is echoed at the end in the visage of Bootpolish, a black man painted white. This imagery embodies the circularity of the journey. Originally, the manuscript had Moses (that is, Bootpolish) painted "red all over, even to a bunch of feathers in his hair" (MS 368). This colouring,

as we know, still associates Bootpolish with the whiteman. But the revision allowed the point to be made more directly. Bootpolish is a whiteman's Aboriginal. With him is another native called Muttonhead, "Norman's old friend" (306), who delivered him to Red Ochre in the first place in "Clothes Make a Man." That occasion saw the beginning of Norman's being whitewashed by Oscar, a process which recommences as soon as he arrives back at Red Ochre after his journey in the wilderness. In the next chapter Oscar says to him: "'D'you want people to regard you as a nigger?. . . This's no place for you if you're going to get the walkabout habit.'" Tears roll out of Norman's "black eyes" as he denies his heritage: "'I never, Dad - dinkum. The niggers'll tell you'" (311). Norman spends four months with the natives, but the fact that he speaks of it "as though it were a remarkable achievement" (309) indicates his whiteman's attitude. Norman's journey achieves nothing, and the final significance of "Song of the Golden Beetle" is precisely the confusion which the image of the "red-eyed crows" prophesied:

> "But - but I gotter get back South," gasped Norman. "Or I'll lose me job."
> Muttonhead picked up the rifle and eyeing it said, "More better you stop long me-fella."
> "But I can't -"
> "More better stop. You harcase. Plenty harcase stop longa bush longa blackfella."
> "I - I mean I gotter - "
>
> (307)

The only other image specifically of a pair of crows is the closing image of the novel: the two birds which fly up from the broken tank where they have been presiding over the bones of Tocky and her child. This imagery has generally been perceived as summing up the vision of utter hopelessness which the novel as a whole embodies. Certainly the tragedy is undeniable. When Norman climbs the ladder and looks into the tank at the skeletal remains of Tocky and his unknown child he is staring into an abyss also within himself. His acquittal in the whiteman's court seems

finally to have conceded civilized recognition of his humanity. But his confrontation with the bones in the tank reveals the hollow nature of that apparent victory. Yet the final imagery is not entirely negative. We shall see an element of hope in the conclusion if we consider the "litter of bones" and the two crows in the context of the colour patterning.

The central theme of racial conflict is, as we have already seen, partly presented by contrasting black and white colour patterns embodied in the imagery. The black crows and the white bones can be seen as complementary images incorporating this colour opposition. Thus, at the end of the novel, Norman is confronted by a harsh reality which is an implicit reflection of his own divided self. But obviously we should be concerned with the meaning of Tocky's death not simply for its relevance to Norman's fate. The notion that the final imagery represents the culmination of a cynical and nihilistic vision ignores the positive spiritual value of O'Cannon's death which, as we have seen, is intricately related to Tocky's life. We have seen also that there are two basic levels of narrative in Capricornia: one directly concerned with social protest against racism; and the other illustrating certain metaphysical principles with much greater subtlety. The two are not really separate, as each functions in terms of the same opposition of Aboriginal and whiteman. Certainly, both levels must be simultaneously present in the conclusion of the work if it is to be finally successful in its own terms. The final image of the two crows should be seen in artistic relation to the two black birds involved in O'Cannon's blessing. As we have already seen, the black crows in "Song of the Golden Beetle" suggest the Aboriginal identification of Norman, although this is undermined by the opposing colour of the birds' red eyes. In "Machinations of a Jinx" the crows are associated with the Aboriginal rebirth of O'Cannon by their implicit

involvement in the consecration of his communion with the land. The root metaphor of two crows represents Aboriginal identity. But before we can draw any valid conclusions from this about the final image of the two crows we must also be aware of the general significance throughout the novel of the opposing imagery of bones.

So far as the whiteman is concerned in Capricornia the bone imagery can be seen in the thematic context of "essential form." In 1936, two years after Herbert had written Capricornia, W.B. Yeats pointed to the connection (in the contemporary poetry of Eliot, Sitwell and others) between the persistent image of bones and a preoccupation with the essence of being, with life stripped of all but the final evidence of its existence.[15] This means, as Yeats himself realized, that the symbol itself is contradictory: "horror of life, horror of death."[16] Thus the poet becomes the victim of an ironic universe. We shall see that there is something of this contradiction also in Capricornia. For my present purpose, however, it is enough to realize that the bone imagery in Capricornia is the essential symbol of civilization, according to Herbert's vision of its decline. The iconoclastic process of the novel strips civilization of what Herbert sees as the self-justifying myths of its history until it has only one certainty: death.

Not surprisingly, death is associated with white colouring. For example, when Oscar dies his devil flies "with ragged clouds across the moon's dead face" (373). In "Peregrinations of a Busybody" O'Cannon observes the gleaming "dead white" (176) roofs of the Caroline River settlement. Recall, too, "the sickening whiteman smell" (54) of Jock Driver. The obvious association of white colouring with the whiteman has already been noted. These associations contribute to the pseudo-messianic myth embodied in the representative death of Ned Krater. Civilization is a dying organism. The bone imagery is central to the conceptual linking of

the whiteman with death. The imagery and the associations all come together just before "Song of the Golden Beetle." During a New Year party at Red Ochre, Norman breaks Gigney's arm. Then he notices that the party-guests' faces are "dead white in the glare" (292). We have seen that the outcome of Norman's subsequent journey in the wilderness marks his commitment to white society. It is no accident, then, that Norman's false Aboriginal saviour, Bootpolish, is not only painted white with red stripes but is twice described as having a "death's head face" (306). During the journey Norman had to shoot his favourite horse, False, when it broke a leg. This anticlimactic journey, as we have already noted, is prompted by the previous chapter's revelation to Norman that he is the son of a gin. Given the association of white identity with death, it is ironic that the discovery of Norman's Aboriginal heritage is described as "unearthing the family skeleton" (275). This "unearthing" is foreshadowed by the title of Chapter Eighteen, "Stirring of Skeletons." In that chapter George Tittmuss began to tell Norman about his parents but was prevented from doing so by Heather.

There is no doubt that the skeletal imagery is central to Herbert's ultimate vision of civilization. The police are led to the bones of Frank McLash by "the label of a fruit-tin hanging in a tree" (474), an obvious emblem of civilization. We are told too that bones excite the "Morbid Curiosity" of the whiteman, who sees them as the symbol of "real-life drama." On the morning of McLash's inquest the door-ways of the court-room are "tightly packed . . . with stubborn people come to see the bag of bones" (488). More importantly, the decision by the whiteman's court regarding Norman's fate literally depends upon his position in relation to the bones:

> Then halfway through that morning the Shouter set to work. He took the skull and placed it on top of a pile of books that stood on a chair on the lawyers' table at about the same height from floor as it would have sat if on the late owner's shoulders,

> and placed it so that its pose was what it would be if its owner were standing erect; then he took a long thin stick and thrust it through the bullet-holes, so that it slanted downward, clearly showing that the track of the bullet was something like thirty degrees from the perpendicular, supposing that at the time the skull was pierced it stood as then; then he took the rifle and handed it to Norman, whom he requested to place himself in any position that would being the rifle into line with the stick while yet he held it so as to be able to pull the trigger. Tall Norman braced himself in many positions, all awkward, many fantastic, none suggestive of the fact that he had fired the shot that had caused the holes.
>
> (500-01)

Thus Norman begins to look upon the Shouter "as a Saviour" (503). The colour patterning and its associations all point to Norman's acquittal as signifying the ratification by white society not of his human rights but of his privilege as a whiteman. Before Norman employs the Shouter for his defence "the case looks very black" (496). This lexical play on the ambivalence of "black" points to the court's racist attitude to Norman's case and the likelihood that its decision will be coloured by the view that he is a "nigger" rather than a whiteman. But then the Shouter arrives, "looking redder than ever" (498). On the day of his acquittal Norman appears in court "red-eyed" (500). The redness points to the "whitewashing" of Norman's case. But the fact of his being "red-eyed" on the day of his salvation from the "wrath of Government" (383) also points back to the image of the "red-eyed crows," thematically linking his acquittal with his deliverance from the wilderness. At the end of his journey in "Song of the Golden Beetle" his salvation seemed to be of an Aboriginal nature yet, as we have seen, was really concerned with white identity. Similarly, during the trial, the Shouter presents evidence in Norman's defence which seems to suggest that his final acquittal acknowledges his human rights as an Aboriginal:

> Let us consider . . . he is to some extent what is called a Romantic Liar. And he is inclined to boast and strut; and he has written what he calls poetry, reads a great deal, spends much of his time in dreaming. This is Aboriginal.
>
> (501-02)

Norman's tale to Mrs McLash, that he had seen her son when in the wilderness, is thus seen as both innocent and Aboriginal, an attempt "simply to rouse interest . . . to attract attention to himself" (502). But, as we have seen, the colour patterning suggests that his acquittal is tacit recognition of his white, rather than his Aboriginal, heritage. The most telling link between Norman's deliverance first from the wilderness and then from the "Masters of Mankind" is that in both cases the salvation is false. Bootpolish and the Shouter are both pseudo-messianic figures embodying a false promise of salvation. On both occasions the subsequent narrative proves that Norman's salvation is extremely superficial. We are even told at the time of his acquittal that the conventions of the court are "contrary to humanity" (506). The bones of Tocky and the two crows confront Norman with the black and white symbols of his halfcaste identity. His apparent salvation is thereby revealed to the reader as inadequate. As the court's decision has not recognized his humanity, but rather has "whitewashed" his case, it cannot possibly have helped him to reconcile the polarities of his racial composition.

Despite the symbolic association with the whiteman, the bone imagery must also be acknowledged at the level of realism as signifying the outcome of persecution of the Aboriginal: "All over the land were bone-piled spots where lazy Aborigines were taught not to steal a whiteman's bullocks" (51). The colloquial references to the revelation of Norman's Aboriginal heritage as "stirring" or "unearthing the family skeleton" reflect the whiteman's view of the native: "merely as marsupials being routed by a pack of dingoes" (238). We can see that the imagery of the kangaroo, the dingo, the crow and the bones are all related. As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, these national emblems are the elements of Capricornia's mythology. The dingo and the kangaroo represent the

first stage of racial conflict; the crow and the bones represent its second stage. On the whole, then, the imagery conveys its own inevitability and logic. The crow and the bones are the natural result of conflict between the dingo and the kangaroo.

Death is embodied in the imagery of the crow and the bones. But the significance of this imagery is complicated because the narrative is not transparent. Death in Capricornia is a matter of both social concern and metaphysical significance, and hence its images function at both levels of narrative. The imagery has a fundamental ambivalence. It is partly for this reason that the novel appears to be open-ended. At the realist level of narrative, the crow is presented traditionally as the image of the land's sombreness, and its cry is, as T. Inglis Moore generally observed, "the triumphant voice of the land itself . . . bitter and hostile to man."[17] But, at the metaphysical level of narrative, can we really ignore the spiritual theme associated with the image of a pair of crows?

The key to this understanding lies in recognizing the two crows as a symbol of Aboriginal identity. It is true that the interpenetration of colour schemes in the image of the "red-eyed crows" undercuts the potential significance of Norman's journey as a spiritual triumph of Aboriginal identification with the land. But that does not dispute the Aboriginal significance of the root image. It is the red eyes, not the black plumage, which is, in a symbolic sense, spiritually defeating. In both "Machinations of a Jinx" and "Song of the Golden Beetle" the black birds function within the general colour patterning of the novel to symbolize the Aboriginal. Perhaps Herbert had in mind the colloquial usage of the word "crow" for an Aboriginal. In his book The Australian Language Sidney J. Baker notes the "possible validity" of Willian Hay's references to Aboriginals as "crows" in his 1919 novel, The Escape of the Notorious

Sir William Heans (and the Mystery of Mr. Daunt).[18] There is some evidence of this usage in the manuscript of Capricornia. For example, speaking of the natives in general, Krater tells Oscar: "'Oh they're different to us. Mopin' round like a lotter crows when a whiteman comes near 'em'" (MS 120 verso). Obviously the rationale behind this colloquial terminology is that both the crow and the Aboriginal are black. But there is another common colloquial usage which seems relevant to Capricornia's association of a spiritual theme with the image of the crow. That is the reference to a nun as a "crow." Having been born into a Protestant family, then chosen to be confirmed in the Catholic Church and educated at night classes at a Catholic Brothers College, Herbert could hardly fail to be aware of this colloquial terminology. The rationale for this usage depends on the crow-like appearance of the nun's traditional black habit. We have already noted O'Cannon's juxtaposing vision of the Caroline Siding against the wilderness: "the whitewashed roofs . . . gleamed as dead white against an inky horizon as faces of nuns against black hoods" (176). It is possible that the image of the crow is implicit here in the "black hoods," and that its contrast with the nuns' "dead white faces" foreshadows its spiritual significance. In any case the crow is indirectly linked with a theme of rejuvenation in Chapter Twenty. At Red Ochre's Cut during the castration of the steers we are told that "crows were perched on posts, waiting for the pickings" (258). But Sam Snigger does not throw all the glands to the crows. He saves some for himself, "believing that as food the substance was rejuvenating" (259). By association the crows might be seen as a symbol of restoration. Such an identification is perhaps tenuous in relation to this one instance alone. But it is consistent with the significance of the crows in relation to Tim O'Cannon's rebirth.

At the end of the novel the dual identity of the halfcaste is distributed metaphorically amongst the complementary imagery of the litter

of bones and the pair of crows. The bones are a symbol of the annihilation of the whiteman; the crows are a symbol of the Aboriginal's spiritual life. The white component of Tocky's and her baby's racial composition is represented by the bones at the bottom of the tank, an image of death. But their Aboriginal spirits transmigrate in the form of the two crows which fly up from the bones. The final significance of these crows, then, is as a gesture of transcendence. Herbert has used the image as an Australian version of the phoenix.

The narrative leading up to Tocky's death supports this interpretation of the concluding imagery. It is important to realize that Tocky and Norman are different kinds of halfcaste, one having been "bred as a whiteman" (381) and the other treated, albeit contemptuously, as an Aboriginal. Despite Tocky's misfortunes after the death of her foster-father, having to live first in the Aboriginal Compound and then at the Hallelujah Mission, she never loses her Aboriginal sense of wonder in the way that Norman does. Early in Poor Fellow My Country,[19] Herbert stresses that the wonder of existence belongs only to the Aboriginal, giving him his sense of belonging. In Capricornia, after his corroboree with the golden beetle, Norman "found himself marvelling at the phenomenon of his existence as a creature, of the existence of Mankind, and of Nature's contrariety to Man that made Man's ingenuity essential" (295). But we already know that "Song of the Golden Beetle" is anticlimactic, and we can assume that his sense of wonder is just as brief as his satisfaction in realizing his Aboriginal heritage. On the other hand, what we are told of Tocky is equally misleading: "Poor midget semi-savage Tocky knew nothing of the gods of old" (454). In fact, Tocky's view of life is inherently totemic. She speaks to Norman about her fear that the Wallaby Tribe will seize her in the night and punish her for shooting a wallaby (383). Professor A.P. Elkin describes totemism as "a view of nature and life, of the universe

and man, which . . . unites them [the Aboriginals] with nature's activities and species in a bond of mutual life-giving . . . a relationship between a person or group of persons and (for example) a natural object or species, as part of nature."[20] Tocky's belief that there is a Wallaby Tribe related to the natural species assumes that man is an integral part of Nature, sharing its life-force with all other species. She is obviously more in touch with her Aboriginal heritage than Norman. Certainly she has a much greater appreciation of her natural environment than he does. Nature is a "friend" to Tocky. We have already noted Nature's hostility towards Norman when he is lost in the wilderness. It is revealing to compare that hostility with the rejuvenating effect which Nature has upon Tocky during her long journey on foot from Port Zodiac back to Red Ochre.

> On she went, and on and on, till her feet began to miss the sleepers, tangle in the grass, stub toes on bolts of fish-plates, stagger off the road. One silver creek she crossed, another, and another, all singing sirens' songs to tired feet. At length the feet succumbed, defied their captain, the fearful mind, and staggered down to drown themselves in sweetness. She bathed, drank, stretched full-length on dewy grass to rest a while and listen to her friends the frogs and watch her friends the stars . . .
>
> (455-56)

In the morning Tocky breakfasts "apologetically" on frogs' legs, "with dainty bamboo-shoots, concluding her meal with native goose-berries, a stick-load of sugar-bag honey drawn from a hollow tree, and crystal water" (456). Obviously she is much more at home in the natural environment than Norman. Consider his breakfast in the wilderness in "Song of the Golden Beetle":

> He rose at eight, tired and sodden and stiff, to eat a breakfast of mouldy damper and butter sprinkled fluid from the tin. He had tinned meat and preserved potato-starch, but did not fancy them. For a moment he thought of going out to shoot one of a flock of nuttaguls that were yelling in the river-trees near by. But he could not see the tops of the trees for a mist of steam; and then he could not make a fire.
>
> (300)

The Aboriginal significance of Tocky's pleasant repast of natural foods was originally emphasised in the manuscript, where Herbert has crossed out: "White men had starved to death in the vicinity" (MS 577). The lyrical prose describing Tocky's peaceful interlude, her fortification by Nature for the journey ahead, looks back upon O'Cannon's communion with Nature at dawn before his death. On the same page we learn that she still regards him as her father: "No talk of Norman's or Aintee's could ever convince her that she was not an O'Cannon born." Continuing her journey, Tocky comes upon a gang of fettlers "at rest . . . squatting on haunches among their tools, talking and smoking." They seem to embody a vision of human brotherhood which recalls O'Cannon's humanism and its spiritual reward: "Their voices in the windless golden air murmured like music; and their smoke rose high like incense" (456). The point was more explicit in the manuscript: "their smoke rose high like incense burning to the Glory of Man" (MS 577). Soon after this Tocky visits her father's grave at the ruined Garrison on Black Adder Creek. The grave is marked by "a bare patch on the hillside," since "the fettlers who fashioned it had sterilized the site in railway-style with weed-poison" (456-57). It is worth recalling the Aboriginal name of the "barren spot" which becomes the cemetery of the Larrapuna Tribe in Chapter One: "Mailunga, or the Birth Place." The ironic overtones of birth and death here are linked with Tocky's visit to O'Cannon's grave, since she believes that this was the place of her birth and that he was her father. In the manuscript the "weed-killer" which is used to sterilize O'Cannon's grave-site is arsenic. In both the manuscript and the published novel, the Larrapuna tribe is wiped out by the whiteman's gift of "several bags of flour spiced with arsenic" (3). We know that, despite the barren site of O'Cannon's grave, Black Adder Creek became "a verdant paradise" (200) after receiving his blood. The Larrapuna Tribe perceived "the Birth

Place" as "a sort of Garden of Eden" (3) despite its apparent infertility. Ironically, their bones fertilise the spot. The connection between these incidents points to O'Cannon's grave as a symbol of death-as-birth. It is significant, then, that before her death Tocky visits this place where she believes she was born. The implicit connection between Aboriginal death and birth prepares us for the transcendental ending of the novel. The last thing Norman tells Tocky before he is taken away by the police is to go to Black Angel, an old Aboriginal midwife. The name has obvious connotations of Aboriginal spirituality. Again Herbert can be seen as hinting that Tocky's death should be seen in terms of Aboriginal spiritual rebirth. One more hint was crossed out in the manuscript. The broken water-tank which is Tocky's tomb is situated at the horse-yards. In the manuscript when Norman returned from Port Zodiac the first time, after his father's trial, Tocky was "in the grass behind the horse-yards. . . . . She rose like a ghost and smiled" (MS 580).

Obviously the final transcendental imagery is consistent with all these preceding signals relating to Aboriginal birth and spirituality. Norman's fate is in direct contrast. He has been so "whitewashed" that he is left spiritually destitute. Unlike Tocky, he has no sense of the totemic link between man and Nature. After his journey in the wilderness "he began consciously to doubt the existence of the conventional Divinity in which he had been trained to believe." But he is unable to accept fully the Spirit of the Land, symbolized by the song of the golden beetle precisely because of his conditioning as a whiteman: "he was haunted by thoughts of his debasement" (295). For Norman the final colour symbols of the bones and the two crows signify not hope but despair, not transcendence but imprisonment.

Considering the ambivalence of the concluding imagery the whole

vision of the novel cannot be so bleak as it at first appears. Certainly there is a powerful sense of loss and hopelessness. But at the metaphysical level there is also spiritual faith and a celebration of natural man. This paradox is at the centre of Capricornia. We saw in the preceding chapter that Krater, Mark and Norman are typological characters embodying the novel's pseudo-messianic mythology. The false saviour is a key figure in its inversion of the biblical cycle of redemption: Humboldt Lace, Bootpolish, Rev. Theodore Hollower, the Shouter. But Tim O'Cannon and Tocky do not fit into this pattern. O'Cannon is redeemed, and his redemption is linked with Tocky's spiritual salvation. Herbert's reinterpretation of national history embodies his opposition to the redemptive cycle. But the final symbolic flight of the crows up from the bones of Tocky and her baby must surely be based on that same redemptive cycle which the author has rejected as irrelevant to civilized man. The paradox is of Western consciousness divided against itself. Herbert does not entirely manage to escape the conditioning of those myths which, at the level of social protest, Capricornia seeks to expose as irrelevant. We should recall the contradiction observed by Yeats in the contemporary symbol of bones: "horror of life, horror of death." It is this contradiction which is at the heart of the modern view of the universe as fundamentally ironic, with man as the victim of a universal ironic dilemma. In Capricornia the halfcaste is a victim of a specific dilemma, poised between the irreconcilable poles of white and Aboriginal identity. But he can also be seen as a symbolic victim of the universal ironic dilemma embedded in the novel's tensions: the individual against society, reason against instinct, racism against humanism, art against sex. Of course, the ultimate polarities of an ironic universe are life and death. It is at this point that Herbert recoils. Certainly Camus would have seen the crows sweeping up from the bones of Tocky and her baby as a sign of

irrational hope. It would surely have represented to him a clinging of spiritual faith akin to that of which he accused Kafka. Camus felt that Kafka, when confronted with the ultimate absurdity of the universe which he had created in Metamorphosis, despaired and retreated into an irrelevant romantic symbolism of birth conditioned by Religion. Similarly, the final transcendental imagery of the crows in Capricornia can be seen as a kind of turning back from the pit, a reflex Romantic response to meaningless death.

There is some evidence that the ending as we know it is not what the author originally planned. The concluding pages of the manuscript have been assembled from at least two different drafts, the first hand-written and the second typed. The hand-written section comes to its own powerful conclusion:

> Nibblesome coughed quietly behind his hand, then said "Er - I say Norman - mind putting that into writing?"
> "Not at all" cried Norman.
> While the paper was being produced, Nibblesome said with a smile "Oh - I forgot to tell you. Charlie Ket hung himself in his cell this morning."
> (MS 637)

This would seem to sum up a totally nihilistic vision. Publicly Herbert acknowledges completion of Capricornia in 1934. But in a letter, to his good friend and confidant Arthur Dibley, written in Darwin in 1936, Herbert says: "You never said anything about that final gesture in Capricornia - Cho's telling off the unridable white donkey. And I was so proud of it!" [21] Obviously this is the section which follows Nibblesome's request for a written document. It is the section which culminates in the flight of crows. At some point in revision it seems that Herbert decided to omit Ket's suicide and to add another section dealing with Tocky's death. In this section the tragic impact is softened not only by the symbolic gesture towards spiritual rebirth but also by the comic element embodied in Cho Set Ching's attempt to break in his new white donkey. Of course this is speculative. But finally it does

not really matter whether the last section of the novel was added two years after the original composition. After all, O'Cannon's fate is no afterthought and its conception is obviously Romantic. The fact is that Capricornia embodies a significant paradox. Although the general patterning of the novel is pseudo-messianic, Tim O'Cannon is singled out for redemption. If, as Herbert says, "Art is Nature Seen Through a Temperament,"[22] we should see this contradiction at the heart of Capricornia as embodying a paradoxical view of life as, on the one hand, ironic, and, on the other hand, having Romantic possibilities for reconciliation.

Capricornia's paradoxical vision is provided with a significant historical model by H.P. Heseltine when he writes: "Australia's literary heritage is based on a unique combination of glances into the pit and the erection of safety fences to prevent any toppling in."[23] Indeed, according to my preceding argument, it is apparent that Herbert's novel embodies the very paradox which signifies the essence of Australian literature: Heseltine writes:

> And in that paradox lies the clue to our literary tradition. The canon of our writing presents a facade of mateship, egalitarian democracy, landscape, nationalism, realistic toughness. But always behind the facade looms the fundamental concern of the Australian literary imagination. That concern, marked out by our national origins and given direction by geographical necessity, is to acknowledge the terror at the basis of being, to explore its uses, and to build defences against its dangers. It is that concern which gives Australia's literary heritage its special force and distinction, which guarantees its continuing modernity.[24]

My own thesis is no place to prove the validity of Heseltine's contention about the contradiction inherent in national literary tradition; he does that quite adequately himself. My purpose here is simply to indicate the relation of Capricornia to some of the major works of Australian literature which do embody, in one form or another, the same essential paradox of existential awareness on the one hand and Romantic idealism on the other.

It appears, for example, in Henry Handel Richardson's trilogy, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony, which, as I noted in the first chapter, is partly like Capricornia in design, being similarly structured by interlocking ironies. In the final book, Ultima Thule, we witness the complete disintegration of Mahony's personality. But the charting of his mental breakdown is at the same time a record of his growing childishness. The final page of the second book foreshadows this balanced development when it refers to Mahony as an "absent child."[25] Then, in Ultima Thule, when he learns of an opening for a medical practitioner at Barambogie, which is to become the setting for his final decline, the finely balanced ironies are again portentous:

> ". . . Such a chance won't come my way again. I should be mad to let it slip."
>
> This news rang the knell of any hopes Mary might still have nursed of bringing him to his senses. She eyed him sombrely as he stood before her, pale with excitement; and such a wave of bitterness ran through her that she quickly looked away again, unable to find any but bitter words to say. In this glance, however, she had for once really seen him - had not just looked, without seeing, after the habit of those who spend their lives together - and the result was the amazed reflection: "But he's got the eyes of a child!. . . for all his wrinkles and grey hairs."[26]

She tells him then that he is "all in the dark,"[27] and subsequently the novel's major concern is with his descent into darkness. The final chapter begins: "Thus the shadows deepened."[28] But his growing childishness is implicitly a movement towards birth rather than death, and in this there is a hint of salvation. This reciprocal structure can be seen in relation to our model of the abyss and the safety-fence. The paradox resides in the ambivalence of the journey "into Eternity."[29] Mahony seems to suffer for no purpose and his death has no apparent meaning. But whether death marks an end or a new beginning remains the ultimate mystery of the novel - as it does in life, of course. Since his growing childishness contains the symbolic possibility of renewal, the apparent pointlessness of Mahony's

fate is complemented by the religious significance of suffering as purification: "Oh, what a work it was to die! - to shake off a body that had no more worth in it than a snake's cast skin, Mary could imagine him saying of himself."[30] The final paragraphs of the novel have a similar symbolic potency. "The rich and kindly earth of his adopted country absorbed his perishable body" - but the "open sea," which has been thematically associated throughout the trilogy with Mahony's "vagrant spirit," and which is a conventional poetic metaphor for spirituality, is near to the grave:

> Amid these wavy downs Mahony was laid to rest. - It would have been after his own heart that his last bed was within sound of what he had perhaps loved best on earth - the open sea. A quarter of a mile off, behind a sandy ridge, the surf, driving in from the Bight, breaks and booms eternally on the barren shore. Thence, too, come the fierce winds, which, in stormy weather, hurl themselves over the land, where not a tree, not a bush, nor even a fence stands to break their force. Or to limit the outlook.[31]

We find the same basic paradox, albeit in a very different form, in White's novel, Voss. The central hero must journey into the heart of the land so that he can be "quite literally destroyed by the primal energies which he is obsessed to understand."[32] Since the exploration of the continent is an extended metaphor for a spiritual quest, we sense, behind the apparently pointless annihilation of Voss, the author's contemplation of the abyss. Around this, however, White erects his safety-fence: through the mystical pronouncements of the hero's spiritual bride,[33] and by the false memory of the one survivor of the expedition, we are encouraged to interpret the death of Voss as the final stage of a journey by which man returns into God. Yet the transcendental implications are not so convincing that the paradox - the abyss and its safety-fence - does not remain. Voss is a monumental symbol, cast up in bronze by a rootless race in need of a mythology. The undercutting irony is that White establishes the myth upon a lie, having one survivor return to society to communicate the details of the hero-god's death not as it actually occurred but as it has to be to enable

mythopoesis. Finally Voss is mythologized as a Christ-like figure, but not without dramatic irony: the reader knows that the hero was not in fact speared in the side, and that the myth then is false. The paradox on the one hand embraces the meaninglessness of the explorer's spiritual journey, and on the other hand justifies it as a purifying process enabling salvation.

Traditionally, the paradox of the safety-fence around the abyss has not always taken a spiritual context. It is embodied in the work of any artist who has acknowledged the meaninglessness of existence and yet still attempted to achieve some sense of meaning through his art. Thus we find the paradox in the work of Henry Lawson takes the form of madness, at one extreme, as opposed to the ideal of mateship at the other. Faced with the nothingness which, as Heseltine argues, is Lawson's true subject, his characters have only two alternatives: to be driven mad, or "to take refuge in sociability."[34] In Lawson's stories irony undercuts the ideal of mateship, revealing its inadequacy and fixing the paradoxical vision of the author. Heseltine writes: "It [mateship] was a necessary defence against the kind of experience which most powerfully laid hold of his imagination. . . of horror, of panic and emptiness."[35] The terms of the paradox are not unrelated to the alternatives which Patrick White allows Ellen Roxburgh in A Fringe of Leaves; she must choose between the nakedness and savagery of the reality which she experiences in the bush, and "an alternative of shamed disguise"[36] which civilization represents. She opts for the latter, "a fringe of leaves" to cover the naked reality, a safety-fence around the abyss: "for however much crypto-eagles aspire to soar, and do in fact, through thoughtscape and dream, their human nature cannot but grasp at any circumstantial straw which may indicate an ordered universe."[37] This final sentence of A Fringe of Leaves could well stand as a general explanation for the existence of the paradox I have outlined.

"The pursuit of Romantic idealism . . . together with a knowledge of the experientially extreme," Heseltine writes, "rendered Australian poetry from the outset peculiarly susceptible to those agonies of consciousness which normally characterize the latter stages of a Romantic movement."[38] What perhaps signals the early modernism of our literature is the writer's implicit understanding that the Romantic quest for unity - or, in more modern terms, for coherence - could only be satisfied in art. Yet very few of our writers have been able to adopt, consciously or unconsciously, a post-modernist perspective concerning the nature of art and reality. They have been unable to use their art as an escape route into a world of their own order, because they remained tied to non-fictional reality by an inhibiting awareness of the concreteness of reality. That is to say, they retained, despite their Romantic idealism, an empirical attitude to their art, insisting that it have experiential relevance. Perhaps this evolved originally from the artist's confrontation with the harsh presence of the Australian environment. The relation of the paradox to its environment is implicit in Lawson's view of the bush as "the nurse and tutor of eccentric minds, the home of the weird,"[39] driving the loner, the man without a mate, to madness.

There is more seascape than landscape in Kenneth Slessor's poetry, and yet it probably best of all illustrates the paradox with which the Romantic artist in Australia struggled. Slessor viewed Time as the Destroyer. The quest for Eden was essentially a quest for perfection, which, being fixed, could not be subjected to change without being corrupted. Yet time itself might be fixed, or at least defused, in the heterocosm of the poem, since the poet-as-creator has supreme authority over that word-world. So Slessor sought to concretize time. He became committed to the cult of the concrete image, attempting to fix time by somehow solidifying the poetic images by which it is represented in the word-world. If the poetic image

of time could be given a concrete existence, then the ideal state for which the artist quested in his art would not be a mere abstraction. But Slessor's metaphysical purpose was hampered by his commitment to experiential relevance for two reasons: first, the concretization of the poetic image is inevitably a futile task; second, the moment extracted from flux becomes devoid of inspiration, somehow sterilized by its detachment, like:

> Flowers turned to stone!. . .
> . . . . . .
> Tagged by the horrid Gorgon squint
> Of horticulture.[40]

The concrete image becomes an artistic emblem of false hope. The poem is a fragile and fleeting world in which the poet has ceased to believe even before he completes its creation. Although initiated by the artist's sense of his meaningless existence, the Romantic quest itself becomes meaningless. Hence, when the poet loses faith in the meaning of his own art, when his creative vision begins to disintegrate, he is not merely returning to experiential reality (as Keats does from the visionary world represented by the nightingale) - he is trapping himself into an abyss of meaninglessness. As the poem nears completion the solidity of its imagery seems to evaporate, and the artist is left only to confront the illusion of his own making and, then, the reality of the abyss. For Slessor the creative process itself was the safety-fence; but, paradoxically, he was unable to believe in the reality of his creation.

This apparent digression has been necessary since it suggests that if we reject Capricornia on the grounds of its paradoxical nature, then we are implicitly denying the value of our literary tradition, the major works of which embody the same basic contradiction of Romantic idealism and existential awareness. It was his Romantic sensibility which caused Herbert to fall into the same trap as did Lawson and Slessor, a kind of structural anti-idealism. Slessor's poems are a testament to the futility

of the Romantic quest, placing it in absurdist perspective. Since their over-all structure is a negation of the Romantic ideal, they identify their creator as what might be called a structural anti-idealist. The irony which undercuts the ideal of mateship in Lawson's stories leads to the same conclusion. His obsession with the dark reality beyond the safety-fence of human relations leads to the constant repetition of a negative theme, to an unconscious construction of his own anti-ideal. In debunking the myths about our past, Herbert too inevitably constructs a mythology which runs counter to his own idealism. As I have shown in my previous chapter, this mythology is pseudo-messianic, being based on an inversion of the biblical pattern of redemption. But the end result of such structural anti-idealism is the identification of the novel as an anti-romance. Like Joseph Furphy's novel, Such Is Life, there is, however, a romantic sub-plot contained within and to some extent concealed by an anti-romantic framework. (In Such Is Life there is the story of Nosey Alf, and in Capricornia the narrative concerning Mark and Heather, who, as in all good romances, must overcome apparently insurmountable obstacles before eventually they become united.) Furphy's motivation for this kind of paradoxical structure was obviously much more self-parodic than problematic. But Herbert's obsessive re-interpretation of national history is ironically fuelled by a notion of what might have been, a Romantic nostalgia for the ideal. Critics who have failed to understand this have condemned him for being inconsistent when he launches into those lyrical passages of prose which describe the natural environment. Yet the cynicism and the lyricism are the stylistic manifestations of that paradox which, as we have seen, signals the dilemma of the Romantic sensibility as a permanent condition in our literary tradition. As Dorothy Hewett has pointed out, in relation to modern Australian poetry,[41] cynicism and Romanticism are opposite sides of the same coin: the cynic is the disillusioned Romantic. When Herbert

attempts to describe the land, he is engaging directly with his own Romantic idealism, and from this derives the lyricism of the descriptive passages. Nevertheless, the same idealism is indirectly responsible for the cynicism of the major part of the novel, focused on a civilization which denies that idealism. The stylistic contradiction, then, is another form of the traditional paradox relating to Romantic idealism and existential awareness, and the critical charge of inconsistency therefore seems really to miss the point. Ironically, the unevenness of the writing, its apparent inconsistency of tone, reveals an underlying complexity and unity of theme. It is also directly related, then, to the novel's dual conception.

Where the frames of reference are those of a social reality beyond the novel, Herbert's thesis leads him to an existential vision of the abyss, extending from the pseudo-messianic archetype of Ned Krater to the bones of Tocky and her child. Where the frames of reference are those of the art world itself, of the imaginary land of Capricornia, O'Cannon is redeemed and united in harmony with the land. At this level, as we have seen, O'Cannon's death is a symbolic action for Aboriginal rebirth, conceived and insisted upon by his adoption of Tocky and the subsequent ironic rites of passage. In social terms she is the source of seven years of misfortune; but in imaginative terms she is the key to his salvation. It is useful to consider that seven years' misfortune is the conventional superstition associated with the breaking of a mirror. There is a sense in which O'Cannon's mystical communion with Nature just before his death marks the point where the novel breaks into another dimension, a world of vision akin to that embodied in the highest moments of Romantic perception. At this point, as we have seen, the dingo has become the kangaroo: the predator has become prey. Yet, ironically, the victim is the victor. O' Cannon's death is a symbolic inversion of his life. The shattered

mirror is a particularly useful image to have in mind when considering the paradoxical equation of seven years' misfortune with rites of passage for rebirth, since "Machinations of a Jinx" represents a breaking through - from outer to inner experience, from hollow observation to true vision from life to death - to beyond the looking-glass.

As we have seen, the two key scenes within the novel, O'Cannon's death and Norman's Aboriginal awakening, are ironically linked by the images which they have in common, the golden beetle and the two black birds. Awakening at dawn, after the previous night's revelation of his heritage, Norman spies two red-eyed crows. As I have already argued, the intersecting colour schemes and their associations in "Song of the Golden Beetle" prefigure what should be totally obvious to the reader by the end of the chapter: Norman's so-called "realization" of his Aboriginal heritage is an illusion. Mudge writes: "the end of the chapter is an inversion of its beginning - it . . . turns inside out."[42] But he is wrong to suppose that this structural device is used only once in Capricornia. In fact, the action of this chapter can be seen as a symbolic reversal of the process of inversion occurring in Chapter Fifteen, "Machinations of a Jinx." O'Cannon moves from a world of appearances to a world of true vision; Norman moves from a world of false vision to a world of masks. Consider, for example, the movement from the chapter's first to its last bivouac scene:

> . . . the higher the fire blazed the greater grew his own black shadow, which he knew without turning round to see was reared above him, menacing.
>
> (294)

> he was squatting by a fire . . . when he heard a sound behind, and turned to behold a savage.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The savage was tall, broad . . . painted hideously, white from head to foot, and striped with red and yellow . . .
>
> (305-06)

Norman's movement is from Nature back into society. But O'Cannon moves towards a unity with Nature. If we are to see these two chapters in relation

to each other, as the connecting imagery suggests, then the ironic reversal of the one character's image complements that of the other - which is to say that they are like mirror images, representing symbolic inversions of identity. O'Cannon is white, but an outsider from white society who ultimately gains access to the Aboriginal ethos. On the other hand, Norman is linked to that ethos by his part-Aboriginal blood but is alienated from Aboriginal culture; he is finally granted some measure of recognition as a whiteman when the court acquits him, ironically, for the murder of a whiteman.

Since Tocky is, in imaginative terms, the key to O'Cannon's salvation, it is appropriate that the two black birds associated with his blessing look forward to the two crows which rise up from her bones at the end of the novel. There too the imaginative and the social vision are opposed. The flight of crows represents a final gesture towards the transcendence of the Aboriginal spirit which, supported by the redemption and rebirth of O'Cannon, fulfils the omniscient author's need for a safety-fence to keep him from the abyss to which his social commitment has brought him.

CHAPTER FOUR

"THE SECRET OF CAPRICORNIA": ROMANTIC IRONY AND PERSONAL MYTHOLOGY

The paradoxical implications of ironic incongruity and Romantic reconciliation in Capricornia can be considered in the context of narrative form. Is the novel's structure closed or open-ended? According to the paradox the answer must be both. The final transcendental gesture of the flight of the crows, like Tim O'Cannon's redemption, is a harmonious resolution which, objectively, the general ironist could not fail to see as a sentimental falsification of the modern "open" world. Traditionally, resolution is an indication of the closed literary form. The ironic dilemma involved in Mark's quest for personal freedom, on the one hand, and his attachment to civilized society, on the other hand, is finally resolved by his marriage to Heather. We have already noted that this marriage seems more convenient than romantic. Indeed it has much in common with the conventional ending of Restoration comedy, in which marriage is a device to convey a comforting sense of order in life. Undoubtedly Mark is content simply to relax after his life as a fugitive is ended, although the reader's knowledge that the goal of freedom has been sacrificed undermines any comfort that might have been derived from seeing him united with Heather at last. He is at once a comic and a tragic figure. This in itself is ironic. Tragedy, unlike comedy, expresses a view of the world as disordered, in which harmonious resolution is denied. The ironic mode of Capricornia, by emphasising the incompatibility of all things (life and death, man and Nature, the individual and society etc.), must inevitably imply also the incongruity of comedy and tragedy. In terms of the novel's polemical thesis on race relations, Norman is obviously a tragic figure. But, in terms of the artistic presentation, his situation is also one of black comedy. Perhaps we would do better to

use Frye's terminology to describe the narrative dealing with Norman, as "close to a parody of tragic irony. . . an ironic deadlock in which the hero is regarded as a fool or worse by the fictional society, and yet impresses the real audience [the reader] as having something more valuable than his society has."[1] At least this description encompasses both the comic and the tragic elements of the narrative and still implies the open-endedness of the ironic mode. Of course, Capricornia contains more than one narrative structure, and one might wish to see a particular strand as open-ended while still maintaining that another is "closed." But the whole structure must then be seen as either uneven and muddled or as embodying a meaningful paradox. The former negative view is the one that has been more generally held by the critics. I wish to suggest, however, that the positive view is more correct.

It is largely the blend of irony and Romanticism which accounts for the vitality of the writing in Capricornia. Just as John Shaw Neilson unconsciously exemplified in his poetry the French Symbolist doctrine of painting "not the thing, but the effect that it produces,"[2] so Herbert unconsciously put into practice the theory of Romantic Irony which had been developed in Germany in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth century. In this chapter I shall relate Capricornia to the theory of Romantic Irony, which, as D.C. Muecke writes, was "a (highly generalized) programme for modern literature, a modus vivendi for the writer and for writing in the modern 'open' world."[3] But first the term needs some explanation.

Romantic Irony has nothing to do with conventional concepts of either Romanticism or irony. It is not irony directed against Romanticism. If a general ironic attitude implies that in all things there is a basic contradiction, then Georges Palante is certainly correct when he states: "The metaphysical principle of irony . . . resides in the contradictions within the universe or God."[4] Thus irony, as Weltanschauung, is closely

related to absurdity. Indeed irony primarily deals with the absurd, which "may be taken to symbolize the incurable and chimerical hoax of things."[5] Irony and absurdity are implicitly related. We sense this, for example, in Muecke's definition of Irony of Dilemma: "a man is a victim of an ironic situation precisely because of his confident assumption that he is not in an absurd one."[6] Man is a victim of either universal irony or absurdity (depending on the point of view of the detached observer) precisely because he assumes that he inhabits a rational or moral universe. According to the general ironist, if one is to escape the victimization of universal irony it can only be by accepting that the universe is essentially ironic, in the same way that Camus' L'Etranger accepted its absurdity. That is, we must abandon the concept of a rational or moral universe, must abandon not only hope but also despair, and adopt "a detached position from which we can regard the co-existence of contraries with equanimity."[7] In a sense, however, to adopt this theoretical position is to refine oneself out of existence. This, I take it, was Kierkegaard's objection to the ironic presentation of the universe. Kierkegaard's famous thesis, The Concept of Irony, presented the ironical man as self-defeating. His objection was primarily to Romantic Irony, a concept which developed from the realization that detached acceptance of universal irony was the means to avoid ironic victimization. The prerequisite of Romantic Irony, in terms of artistic awareness, was the destruction of the illusion that art is mimetic. An awareness of the artifice of art, as any student of Shakespeare knows, is not an entirely new development. But the ironist's acceptance of the all-embracing nature of irony is historically complemented by the artist's growing awareness of the double existence of a work of art. Both attitudes are essential to Modernism. Existing at once inside and outside the actual world, art is ironic by its very nature. It exists both at the subjective and the objective level, both in the imagination and as a concrete "object." As Muecke writes,

art is "both an activity and the result of an activity . . . both a communication and the thing communicated, that is . . . meaningful in its relation to the ordinary world and also as pure meaningless existence in itself."[8] This ironic awareness of art allows the artist a means to transcend the ironies of the ordinary world by presenting them in the world of the work of art which, at one level, is not subject to those ironies. By recreating in art situations of general irony, at a point removed from his actual existence, the artist in a sense recreates not only his environment but also himself. By this means he attains personal freedom, transcending yet not denying the general irony of the universe.

Romantic Irony, then, is a fusion of Romanticism and irony. Historically, the theory was "a rallying point for many of the leading ideas of Romanticism."[9] It revitalised Romanticism and ensured its relevance to the modern "open" world. Kierkegaard's objection was that the life of the Romantic Ironist must finally lose all continuity because, having substituted a self-created actuality for the "real" world, "he lives completely hypothetically and subjunctively."[10] But this is perhaps too theoretical; and, in any case, as a Christian, Kierkegaard was committed to a closed-world ideology. It is important to realize that the detachment adopted by the Romantic Ironist was more an artistic strategy than a reality. The artist was not only to be transcendent, but also immanent in his art. It is for this reason that self-consciousness of art was the first step towards Romantic Irony. The artist who is a Romantic Ironist must figure himself in his work with a certain degree of self-consciousness.

The theory of Romantic Irony tended to remain programmatic. Indeed it is difficult to find literary examples, although Thomas Mann's novels come closest to embodying the theory in practice. But the achievements of the theory itself are considerable. These are best summarized by D.C.Muecke:

> It [the theory of Romantic Irony] both saw and answered the basic questions with which a modern Weltanschauung confronts the artist. It recognized, to begin with, man's ironic predicament as a finite being, terrifyingly alone in an infinite and infinitely complex and contradictory world of which he could achieve only a finite understanding, and in his art only a finite presentation, but a world for which he, and particularly the artist, the artist as God since there was no other, had nevertheless to accept responsibility and give it meaning and value. It went on to recognize that implicit even in the artist's awareness and acceptance of his limitations there lay the possibility, through the self-irony of art, of transcending his predicament, not actually yet intellectually and imaginatively.[11]

In Capricornia we find, as has been implicit in my argument of previous chapters, that Herbert's presentation of the world is in accord with the view of general irony. That is, man is the victim of an utterly ironic universe. The extreme degree of the variation between Wet and Dry Seasons is representative of the contradiction at the heart of the world viewed ironically. The opposition of Civilization and Nature is another situation representative of general irony. Already I have quoted (Chapter Two) Oscar's attitude to Red Ochre, to support my argument concerning the conflict in Capricornia between the conditioned principles of the social man and the instinctive responses of the individual. Here I set down that section of prose again, despite its length, because it not only conveys the ironic tension between Civilization and Nature but also presents a vision of man as the ironic victim of the extremes of Capricornia's Wet and Dry Seasons:

> At times he loved it best in Wet Season - when the creeks were running and the swamps were full - when the multi-coloured schisty rocks split golden waterfalls - when the scarlet plains were under water, green with wild rice, swarming with Siberian snipe - when the billabongs were brimming and the water-lilies blooming and the nuttaguls shouting loudest - when bull-grass towered ten feet high, clothing hills and choking gullies - when every tree was flowering and most were draped with crimson mistletoe and droning with humming-birds and native bees - when cattle wandered a land of plenty, fat and sleek, till the buffalo-flies and marsh-flies came and drove them mad, so that they ran and ran to leanness, often to their death - when mosquitoes and a hundred other breeds of maddening insects were there to test a man's endurance - when from hour to hour luke-warm showers drenched the steaming earth, till one was sodden to the bone and mildewed to the marrow and moved to pray, as Oscar always was when he had had

> enough of it, for that which formerly he had cursed - the Dry! the good old Dry - when the grasses yellowed, browned, dried to tinder, burst into spontaneous flame - when harsh winds rioted with choking dust and the billabongs became mere muddy holes where cattle pawed for water - when gaunt drought loafed about a desert and exhausted cattle staggered searching dust for food and drink, till they fell down and died and became neat piles of bones for the wind to whistle through and the gaunt-ribbed dingo to mourn - then one prayed for the Wet again, or if one's heart was small, packed up and left this Capricornia that fools down South called the Land of Opportunity, and went back and said that nothing was done by halves up there except the works of puny man (68-69).

The presence of irony in a universal perspective appears inevitably in the landscape of Capricornia. As we can see in the passage above, it is a landscape of paradoxes, of beauty and yet also hostility. The passage balances pastoral idealization with an ironic recognition of the futility of human enterprise.

I have already drawn attention to another major example of general irony in my earlier discussion of the financial boom as a historiographic model - that is, the economic incompatibility of Capricornia and Argostinia. Since prosperity is "able to flood one shore only by ebbing from another" (200), we can think of the tide as an appropriate metaphor for situations of general irony. Thus Mark, for instance, is the victim not only of specific but of universal irony when his "ingeniously constructed" electrical power plant is rendered useless because, "owing to the perversity of Nature, the tide was usually not running when the light was most required" (52).

There seems little point in laboriously isolating every specific irony when, in the context of the whole presentation, each represents the general irony of Capricornia's world. I am interested in the artist's presentation of the ironies of the universe only insofar as this is potentially the first step towards Romantic Irony. All instances of general irony are epitomized by the racial situation which is the novel's obvious subject. We have already seen that the theme of racial conflict is essential not only at the level of social concern but also to the underlying

metaphysical strategy. As Vincent Buckley writes:

> Although Herbert is centrally concerned with racial injustice, he presents it as one result among others of a fatal anomaly in the ordering not just of society but of the universe. . . . if the "form" of the novel floods and spreads far beyond the limits needed to define a theme of social injustice, it is not that Herbert can't control his own restless imagination, but that such an energetic running-over is called forth by the wider concerns with which his imagination is full. . . . His problem is to give us in the one dramatic presentation a picture of the social facts and his own sense of the disorder in the Universe.[12]

This explanation of the novel's "form" is certainly compatible with my own argument that there is a structure of interlocking ironies. But I do not entirely agree with Buckley that the creative energy behind the novel, its "real emotional impetus," can be fully accounted for in terms of the underlying irony, what he calls "a rejection of any conception of Divine Providence."[13] This is true only up to a point. Obviously my own argument that there is a pseudo-messianic mythology based upon the structure of interlocking ironies is again compatible with Buckley's notion that the source of Capricornia's vitality is its underlying ironic inversion of Christian principles which give life and death meaning. But this is not the mainspring of Tim O'Cannon's fate. In my previous chapter we saw that his death did have a meaning and that it was imaginatively consistent with his metaphysical development in "Machinations of a Jinx." For Buckley, however, O'Cannon has "the most cruelly arbitrary fate of all."[14] Rather than seeing O'Cannon's fate as redemptive, and paradoxically so in relation to the novel's basic "form," Buckley singles it out as the author's most telling expression of "the sense of some basic anomaly in the universe."[15] Having missed the conflict and progression of those metaphors which signpost the meaning of O'Cannon's death, along with the other lexical pointers discussed in my previous chapter, Buckley is unable to move beyond his implicit recognition of Herbert as a general ironist. He recognizes

the artist's presentation of the ironies of the universe in his art - but not as a step towards Romantic Irony, because he does not see that there is an element of Romantic reconciliation in the presentation.

The halfcaste, who embodies the ironic contradictions of the universe, albeit specifically in terms of racial conflict, at the same time is a concrete symbol of potential reconciliation. We have already noted, however, that this potential is not realized. Certainly Norman fails to reconcile the polarities of his halfcaste identity. Even the transcendental symbolism of the crows associated with Tocky at the end of the novel implies Aboriginal spiritual identity rather than equitable reconciliation in human terms. But this does not necessarily mean that, at a personal level, the artist may not imaginatively and intellectually transcend the universal ironies which he has embodied in his artistic presentation of the halfcaste. In this sense Herbert's explanation of the halfcaste aspect of Capricornia's characterization, in an interview with Hazel de Berg taped on July 12, 1961, is particularly revealing:

> I suppose I made my central characters of Capricornia half-caste Aboriginal because through them I feel truly at home in the beloved land. Perhaps identity with these makes my Australian readers feel the same, maybe that's the secret of Capricornia.[16]

If Herbert had allowed his halfcaste characters to transcend the polarities of their divided identities the imaginative reconciliation would have undermined his portrayal of their real plight in social terms, being unacceptable to (or unable to accept) either Aboriginal or civilized society. The ideas which inform the novel are partly exemplified in "that line of humanistic reflection which Herbert builds into Differ, O'Cannon, Furphey and McRandy."[17] J.J. Healy rightly points out that these ideas "are not fully realized" by the unfolding of narrative events;[18] at the end of the novel "very little in social and general terms has changed."[19] But he also tells us: "The true vision of Australia Felix . . . remains possible at an ideological and symbolic level."[20] I suggest this is so because

Herbert, although unconscious of the theory, was writing as a Romantic Ironist when he chose to present the divisions of race and society in the figure of the halfcaste, seeking to transcend the ironies of his situation without denying their existence. The author's own terminology for his motivation, to "feel truly at home" in his country, obviously relates to his specific situation in an Australian environment. But the implicit vision of white Australians as a race lacking a spiritual homeland, so frequently occurring in our modern writing, can be seen as a variation on the existential theme that the whole universe is devoid of meaning. The Australian preoccupation with transcending the void, filling it with the heroic journeys of unique individuals such as Voss or Heriot, has its own peculiar developmental history, and this is convincingly outlined by H.P. Heseltine in his perceptive article "The Australian Image: The Literary Heritage."[21] Certainly we can see Herbert's attempt to create Australia as his spiritual homeland by living through his halfcaste characters in the national literary context. As Heseltine argues: "the finding of a true relation to the land, the very earth, has been the particular concern of every Australian poet from Charles Harpur to David Campbell."[22] But in the wider context of Romanticism, from which, historically, Australian literature proceeds, Herbert's pursuit of oneness with the land is representative of man's quest for a state in harmony with his universe.

We already know that the theory of Romantic Irony revitalized Romanticism, enabling its relevance in the modern world, which had been perceived as essentially discordant rather than harmonious. Theoretically, the artist who was a Romantic Ironist could imaginatively and intellectually liberate himself in his art from the ironies which, at the phenomenal level of his existence, he could never escape. Consider, then, the process by which Capricornia evolved from Herbert's re-writing of Black Velvet. London afforded him a degree of detachment from his Australian subject so that he began to see things quite differently. He saw that the land

was not simply violent and cruel but also very beautiful, and that the people were just as comical as they were bad. More importantly, he began "to paint pictures" accordingly:

> And so it was that a country of my own came into being, which I called Capricornia, and it became realler than reality, and life now became a joy, because I had this world of my creation to live in, with all its sunlight and naturalness and comedy, against the awful background of the chimney pots and sooty sky beyond my narrow little London window.[23]

Detachment apparently led Herbert to the ironical point of view which informs the writing in Capricornia. But the change in his perception can be explained as much in terms of romantic subjectivism as ironic detachment. Before he realized the positive aspects of the Australian environment, Herbert tells us, he "could do nothing with"[24] his novel: "My chief literary expression at the time was writing letters to the papers about what a frightful climate the English had and what a seedy mob they were in consequence."[25] His altered mode of perception with regard to his homeland can be seen ironically as a romantic by-product of this attitude towards his more immediate London environment. It is significant that his own explanation of this changing awareness centres upon the vicissitudes of the tropical Australian climate. He began to see beauty in the harshness of seasonal extremes:

> . . . how Wet Season would come in, with just a cloud or two into an empty blue sky, and then a massing of an army of clouds and a mighty war of the elements, how the land that had been sterile dust, would be emerald with growth and its deathly silence forgotten in the melody of running water . . . how the Wet would pass, with a period of indescribable mellowness . . . and the great winds rise again to break the towering grass . . . all that kind of thing . . . and how the people were really comical, not so bad as mad, as aren't we all?[26]

The psychological connection between this softening of his attitude towards Australia and the hardening of his attitude towards England is obvious. The "block" which had kept him from rewriting Black Velvet was so annihilated by his altered perception that a new novel began to create itself, came pouring from him "in a veritable flood,"[27] and a

new world began to form, in which he could live happily and in freedom.

Such is the goal of Romantic Irony. The implicit relation between ironic detachment and romantic subjectivism in Herbert's own explanation of his creative process may be seen in relation to the romantic concept of irony that was expressed by Thomas Mann:

> Objectivity is irony . . .
> Here you will be startled and will ask yourselves: how is that? Objectivity and irony - what have they to do with one another? Isn't irony the opposite of objectivity? Isn't it a highly subjective attitude, the ingredient of a romantic libertinism, which contrasts with classic repose and objectivity as their opposite? That is correct. Irony can have this meaning. But I use the word here in a broader, larger sense, given it by romantic subjectivism. In its equanimity it is an almost monstrous sense: the sense of art itself, a universal affirmation, which, as such, is also a universal negation; an all-embracing crystal clear and serene glance, which is the very glance of art itself, that is to say: a glance of the utmost freedom and calm and of an objectivity untroubled by any moralism.[28]

If it seems paradoxical that the objectivity of irony is determined by romantic subjectivism this is partly because Mann's theory implicitly relies upon accepting that art itself is essentially ironic, having a double existence, both as the concrete product (object) and the imaginative process (subject). In Capricornia, as we have seen, the conflict embodied in the opposed sensibilities of the Shillingsworth brothers - between pragmatic and imaginative vision, between self-righteousness and self-indulgence - is not easily reducible to these polarities. No easy juxtaposition of Oscar and Mark is possible. The two personalities are inextricably bound together, representing, no doubt, the complexity of the author's own identity. It would be wrong to consider the work wholly in biographical terms. Mark and Oscar are characters in their own right. But, if we consider for a moment that Herbert, partly at least, establishes the ironic opposition of the Shillingsworth brothers to dramatize the obsessive contradicitions of his own consciousness, we can see that romantic subjectivism does indeed give irony its objectivity. Irony is Herbert's method for detaching himself from his own dilemmas. For example, he

overcomes the problem of his alienation from the land through the ironic figure of the halfcaste. At one level, the halfcaste, being partly white, is, like the author, alienated from the land. This allows the author to identify with his character. But the halfcaste is also part-Aboriginal and, according to Herbert's implied strategy, must unconsciously have an indissoluble link with the land. The author's identification with the halfcaste imaginatively allows him this same Aboriginal link with the land. At the same time, the ironist is in a superior position to his character. Unlike the halfcaste, he is not the ironic victim of an irreconcilable racial dilemma, and so his Aboriginal relation to the land is consciously liberating.

The condition for such liberation, as I have said, is that the artist must figure himself in his work with a certain degree of self-consciousness. Tim O'Cannon, who, as we have seen, achieves a meaningful union with the land through his adoption of Tocky, is the best example of the author's figurative existence in his work. As O'Cannon trundled through the wilderness in Chapter Fourteen, just before discovering Tocky and her dying mother, "A shower of white cockatoos fell out of a bloodwood tree, yelling, 'A man - a man - a Disturbing Element!'" (175). It is no coincidence that the title of Herbert's autobiographical work is Disturbing Element. In this later work he explains that "Disturbing Element" is the name which his father would roar at him "in times of household upset in which I was involved":

> I think that in calling me the Disturbing Element, Dad betrayed disturbance in himself caused by a sense of inadequacy as a father, at least for such a son as myself. I feel that the term first occurred to him when . . . I intruded into that Eden in which he had no more responsibility than as a sort of elder son of Eve.[29]

In Capricornia the reference to O'Cannon as "a Disturbing Element" obviously identifies him as an intruder in the Edenic landscape. Travelling along the railway line through the wilderness, he crushes "a

billion ants," and startles humming-birds, cockatoos, brolgas, an admiral lizard, a dozing buffalo and a great number of kangaroos. But the interaction between man and Nature at this point is ambivalent. Apart from the "shower of white cockatoos" which fleesfrom O'Cannon, there is also the baptismal symbolism of Nature to consider as the flowers "shower him with dew and touch him - as though he were a flower to be fertilised!" (175). We have already noted, too, that at this point O'Cannon is confronted with the prophetic imagery of the kangaroo, which, for the reader, signifies Aboriginal identity. The reference to O'Cannon as "a Disturbing Element" is similarly ambivalent. At one level it identifies him as an unwelcome intruder in the natural world; at another level it links him with his creator.

An even closer link between Herbert and O'Cannon is provided by the image of the admiral lizard, presented to the reader by the omniscient author, but also perceived in obviously related imagist terms by the character. As O'Cannon trundles along the railway line he disturbs the lizard, which, the narrator tells us, "loped down the cess-path with arms swinging and iridescent frill flying out like a cape, looking for all the world like a bandy old admiral of days of Drake" (175). In the very next sentence O'Cannon masquerades as the same image when he cries out to the lizard: "Hey - Sink me the ship, Master Gunner, sink her, split her in twain, fall into the hands of Gawd, my men, not into the hands of Spain!" (175). The curious play with point of view here self-consciously signals the connection between the character and the author-narrator.

Through this kind of linking we are able to sense the personal significance for Herbert of O'Cannon's reconciliation and Aboriginal rebirth. Through the character the author is able to transcend the universal irony of man alienated from his environment, to "feel truly at home in the beloved land." On the other hand, as I showed in the previous

chapter, O'Cannon is redeemed through his relationship with Tocky. So, in this sense, what Herbert says is true: he does forge a meaningful relation to the land through his halfcaste characters. But the importance of the autobiographical allusion associated with O'Cannon, as a gesture in the direction of Romantic Irony, was inaccessible to the general reader until the publication of Disturbing Element - twenty-five years after the appearance of Capricornia. (Herbert says too that what is wrong with Disturbing Element is related to the fact that "my interest in myself is only as a character for someone else's story.")[30] Of course he knew when he used the term to link himself with his character that the reader could not possibly grasp its ironic meaning. This allusion, then, must have been a purely private consideration. Herbert says that, even before the publication of Capricornia, he knew that the technique of his composition would be met with critical contempt, and for this reason he always tried to hide the strings of his "bush-made puppets."[31] At one level, he implies, Capricornia is his own private fantasy:

> I grew up . . . looking into people's souls and seeing the truth while listening to their poor lies. Remember that my half-sister told me that even as an apparently dying infant my mother confessed herself as fearing my watchful eyes. What must happen to one like that, except to keep out of the way of ordinary people for fear of upsetting them, and through longing to be of them, to create fantasies so as to live with them in make-believe . . . I took to publishing my fantasies . . .[32]

It is important to realize that here we are essentially concerned with the personal aspect of the work - that is, the relation of the artist to his art. The significance of his linking of himself with the only character in the novel who achieves redemption, and that through a halfcaste character who embodies the ironic contradictions at the heart of the author's universe, is that he personally transcends such contradictions through the Romantic Irony of his art.

What I have said about Tim O'Cannon does not mean that we should think of him as the author's persona, at least not in the conventional sense. The narrative, for instance, is not expressed through the character.

A persona is not necessarily the mark of a self-conscious artist. In many ways Huck Finn is a mask for Mark Twain, allowing him a greater degree of freedom for social commentary than he might otherwise have enjoyed - but we do not think of that novel in the context of self-conscious literature. A persona, then, does not necessarily signal the intrusion of the artist into his art, and so does not necessarily remind the reader that he is confronting a world of artifice rather than the world that art purports to be. But this is the implicit significance of the capitalized description of O'Cannon as "a Disturbing Element": a self-conscious reference to the author's own life which draws attention to the artifice of his art. The lexical play that was pointed out in my previous chapter should also be seen in this context, as contributing to the artistic self-consciousness of the work. We might be tempted dismissively to assign to the level of "private fantasy" the novel's lexical play, since its stylistic signalling of a conceptual development alternative to that realized at the surface in narrative is, as we have seen, of a covert nature. But of course this is evasive and leads us nowhere: we cannot know the nature of any person's "private fantasy"; and, since we cannot enter the author's mind, neither can we gauge his achievement according to his intention. Certainly it is surprising to find a socially conscious artist drawing attention to the artifice of his art, however inconsistently or even unconsciously. The really important issue, then, is this: whether the validity of social protest, and the integrity of the artist's controversial view of social realities, is thrown into question by imaginative caprice. For the moment, however, I shall leave this question in abeyance. It requires a judgement that is only possible after we have cleared our minds of preconceptions based upon the notion that the only acceptable form for the fictional presentation of a social thesis is the rational realist novel. We will do better if we return to this question of potential conflict between imaginative vision and polemical argument

at the end of this chapter, when we will have a clearer conception of Capricornia's form and function. It should be noted here, however, that the double-aspect of Capricornia can be viewed in relation to that principle on which the theory of Romantic Irony was founded: art is essentially ironic, a dialectic fusion of opposites. Friedrich Schlegel, for instance, whose theory of Romantic poetry is credited with having introduced the term irony into modern literary criticism,[33] felt that if art was to truly capture the essential "duplicity"[34] of the universe the artist himself must be in a paradoxical frame of mind: "he himself must be both detached and involved, deeply serious about his art and yet capable of treating it as a mere game, trustful of his deepest impulses and yet full of critical, conscious awareness."[35]

If Capricornia can be seen in terms of Romantic Irony, as I have suggested, we must first be able to see that the author has self-consciously figured himself within his work. Although the autobiographical allusion does not necessarily identify O'Cannon as the author's persona, at other times Herbert does use him, and other characters - most obviously Differ, Furphey and McRandy - as thinly disguised mouthpieces to mediate his own views. On such occasions, to a greater or lesser degree, the credibility of the character is undermined by the transparency of his functioning as a mere device - that is, as a crudely conceived persona. Since I have already established that there is in Capricornia a certain degree of artistic self-consciousness, we are entitled to view as supportive of this fact the presence of an inordinate number of characters who serve sporadically as personae (though I would still maintain that this perception could not have served us as heuristic). In view of the character's sudden transformation from apparent "independence" to puppet-like status, the persona paradoxically reveals not only the author's own social attitudes but also the artifice of his art. We only have to imagine a theatrical equivalent for this mechanical posturing, by placing the character on the

stage in our mind's eye, and it becomes obvious that Herbert's technique engages him in self-parody. That is to say, Herbert's interposed personae constantly parody his own method of narration.

Consider, for example, in Chapter Fourteen, Captain Furphey's views concerning the wretched state of the Aboriginal Compound, the racism, greed and callousness of the whiteman, and the stupidity and selfishness of the government. Although the presentation is not in the first person, these are apparently Furphey's own views as Officer in Charge of the Compound, told in confidence to Tim O'Cannon. The strategy is utterly transparent. The imaginative quality of the fiction is so vitiated by the polemical argument that we sense Herbert's intrusion into the work just as strongly as if he had self-consciously drawn our attention to his presence. If he had done that we would not so quickly fault the artistic strategy - at least, we would not if we were dealing with a non-polemical work of fiction. We might decide, as I have said, that artistic self-consciousness threatens the validity of a social thesis in a polemical fiction. But surely in a sense Herbert does draw our attention to his presence in the character of Furphey, and with some degree of self-consciousness. In view of the general caricaturistic quality of the nomenclature throughout the novel, the Irish Catholic names of Timothy Patrick O'Cannon and Aloysius Furphey are particularly significant. The name of the author may be seen as related to the names of these two characters; he was baptised in the Catholic Church as Alfred Francis Xavier Herbert. Significantly, too, the characters' Irish Catholic names are integral to Herbert's strategy for getting them to talk:

> And he demanded to know Tim's name so that he might report him to the police. Tim gave it. At once the Officer's face changed. He had heard of Tim; but it was not his reputation that softened him; it was his name - Timothy Patrick O'Cannon. His own was Aloysius Furphey. During the evacuation of the hospital, which had begun with force, the raging of them both abated swiftly, so that by the time the gate was passed a blarney-contest was in progress. (185)

Furphey and O'Cannon continue their blarney over a bottle, with their war experiences as the exclusive subject of discussion. There is a definite sense of the self-consciousness of the language the author uses to shift the focus of the reported discussion and have Furphey as a mouthpiece for Herbert's own ideas about Aboriginal affairs: "Then Furphey brought the war to an end, demobilized himself, and came home to the Compound" (185). Such self-conscious use of language can be seen in the context of lexical play established by my previous chapter, which tends to suggest that Herbert's use of interposed personae does involve self-parody, since he is implicitly poking fun at Furphey. The self-parody is confirmed too by the author's development of the serious polemical argument espoused by Furphey out of a "blarney-contest" - that is, out of an obviously less serious argument, more fiction than fact.

It is appropriate here that we return to Schlegel's discussion of irony, since it helps to explain the presence of lexical play and self-parody in Herbert's serious polemical work. According to Schlegel, the artist should treat his art as a serious game. This paradoxical frame of mind is necessary, he says, if the artist is to succeed in embodying the "duplicity" of the universe in his art. We have already seen that Capricornia does embody an awareness of the universe as consistently ironic. It is important that Schlegel arrived at his concept of irony, which was to have such tremendous ramifications for modern literary criticism, in trying to formulate a theory for Romantic poetry.[36] He felt that the Romantic work of art should reflect the "infinite plenitude" of the universe.[37] But the modern discordant world was essentially at odds with Romantic principles of reconciliation. Irony, then, defined by Schlegel as the "consciousness of the . . . infinitely full chaos,"[38] is the Romantic artist's most useful tool, for it gives coherence to chaos. In the ordered world of his own creation the Romantic Ironist draws figures of himself which, imaginatively, allow him a sense of harmony

with the universe. Yet at the same time, paradoxically, he neither distorts nor denies the inescapable ironies of the world which is both beyond and yet embodied in his art. This also is the case in Capricornia. The personal motivation acknowledged by Herbert, to feel "at home" in the land through his halfcaste characters, could be restated thus: to be reconciled with, and thereby to transcend, the ironies of his situation (man alienated from his environment) through the presentation of those ironies (represented by the halfcaste) in his art. In this case, as we have seen, intention is matched by the artistic evidence. Further, Herbert does figure himself self-consciously in his work. The evidence I have presented to support this view has focused particularly on the characters of O'Cannon and Furphey. But there are plenty of other examples. Differ is another of Herbert's personae, and, like O'Cannon and Furphey, his name links him with the author. It implies his uniqueness within the social fabric of the novel, a fact which we associate with his identity as an artist-figure. As such, Differ has learned what the real author knows: that the kind of literature which is socially acceptable, and therefore publishable, is precisely the kind which Capricornia is not. (The fact of Capricornia's publication makes this a further irony.) Thus Differ tells Oscar:

> "Why are there twenty thousand halfcastes in the country? Why are they never heard of? Oh my God! Do you know that if you dare write a word on the subject to a paper or a magazine you get your work almost chucked back at you?"(82)

Herbert's own novel is spared, by the ironical mode of presentation, from the overwhelming sense of gloom which its social thesis must otherwise have forced upon the reader. There is no denying the sobering effect of the novel's serious social ramifications. But the pleasure in reading Capricornia is not so masochistic as to reside wholly in torturing the conscience, at least of the white reader, with guilt feelings. The social tragedy is bearable because the reader is distanced from it by his role as ironic observer, and because it is not simply tragic but

also, at the same time, terribly comic.

In order to appreciate the extent of the blending of tragic and comic perspectives we must be aware that it is achieved by the ironic mode of narration. This is obvious, for example, in the first section of Chapter Ten, which deals with Jock Driver's funeral. There we witness the undertaker, Joe Crowe, hovering about the hospital (like a metaphorical figure of his namesake), waiting to fall upon the corpse; then, his careful disguising of the cheap pine in the coffin as expensive rosewood (by which only the reader is not deceived); his being hurled flat against the driving-seat of the hearse when he crashes in the vicinity of the Lazaret laundry; and, finally, his search for his pipe after it falls into the flooded grave. Herbert's satire of the civilized conventions associated with burying the dead relies largely upon ironic oppositions of appearance and reality. What appears to be expensive rosewood is really cheap pine. Crowe sends word that the funeral must not be delayed, so that the flies will not follow Driver to his grave; but this apparent respect for the dead is belied by his pragmatic practice of not wasting good materials on a corpse - "though it was for that he charged" (126). The pall-bearers carry "glass-covered artificial wreaths" (127), and the mourners pretend "sorrows they had never felt" (128). The extent of the comedy perceived by the reader depends upon ironic awareness. He would miss, for instance, the comic irony in Oscar's objection to Differ's idea that literature should not be dissembling and should confront the social issue of the halfcaste population. "'Why shouldn't such a disgraceful thing be kept dark?'"asks Oscar (82). The absurdity of his objection is conveyed by the lexical play within it. It has the same kind of play as when Herbert writes that O'Cannon's life was "darkened by misfortune" (190), although there it signals a metaphysical rather than a satirical level of meaning. Ambivalence is a form of irony, and without an ironic awareness of the language of Capricornia the reader is unable

to appreciate the significance of this kind of lexical play. H.M. Green, for instance, sees irony only in the novel's satire and so, on the assumption that the whole purpose is satirical,[39] objects to Herbert's deviation from realism

> because in it there is exaggeration as well as over-emphasis by selection, and, incidentally, because of Herbert's nomenclature, which is so crude and obvious that in some cases it produces the effect of a bad joke; not merely the story as a whole but everything in it is made subject to the general thesis, so that one is almost always conscious of the guiding hand of its creator in the background.[40]

Buckley rightly questions the assumptions on which such criticism is based:

> . . . these terms seem utterly inadequate to characterise or account for the book's unmistakable power; and they would be defensible only on the assumption that its theme is a specific and remediable social injustice, and that its method is one of social realism heightened by burlesque and leading to certain implicit recommendations; the burlesque would then seem a misguided part of a literary strategy undertaken for social reasons. These assumptions seem to me to be mistaken. Capricornia is not merely a social document.[41]

It is true, as Green says, that we are almost always conscious of the author's controlling presence. In a different sense, Buckley notes too: "we have throughout large tracts of the book only one effective character, the author himself; for pages at a time we have nothing but Herbert talking, telling, satirising and explaining."[42] This gives Herbert the polemical advantage of great freedom of comment, but it also limits the tonal range of his narration. Buckley writes:

> In this sort of writing the tone of the author's voice is bound to be of crucial importance. Generally, the important or revealing events are narrated in a voice sharpened by a sort of sardonic and anguished scorn which can change quickly into something much more genially sceptical.[43]

Broadly speaking, it is the ironic stance of the narrator which saves the novel from its occasional defects - that is, from the colourlessness which characterizes "tracts where a more workaday narrative tone is called for."[44] Buckley, who is himself a poet and more aware of the subtle nuances of language than most critics, carefully reveals that Herbert has difficulty

with striking the right tone of narrative voice for the performance of "workaday narrative tasks."[45] Yet he does not see this as a crippling defect; and he implies that the narrative is most successful when the language is slightly inflated and the tone is sardonic - that is, when the tone of the narrative voice is compatible with the pomposities of its language, so that these, rather than simply aggravating, reveal the superior stance of the ironist. (Such a stance might be indefensible, were it not a device and a pretence - but the morality of irony is an entire issue on its own, and I leave it for the philosopher.) Presumably, these very characteristics which are the saving grace of Herbert's narrative style must, according to H.M. Green, be responsible for the novel's failing, its distortion of reality in the interests of propaganda. We can easily see the assumption on which H.M. Green bases his argument: that the only proper form for a novel of purpose, even in the case of satire, is the realist novel. Unfortunately, Green presupposes what the purpose of the novel is, seeing it as purely polemical.

The degree to which this presumption limits his perceptions of the novel is obvious when he writes: "Herbert is no stylist: he is not careful enough and has not sufficient feeling for the sound and associations of words to enable him to give fit expression to some of the actions and situations he conceives."[46] I do not intend to argue that Herbert is a superior and sophisticated stylist. We have already noted, for example, that he is not always able to sustain the ironic detachment and sardonic tone which gives colour and vigour to his writing. Sadly, Herbert's social thesis does sometimes triumph blatantly over his artistic awareness. There is no saving grace of self-consciousness in the diatribe by Andy McRandy in Chapter Twenty-four, and no element of parody to excuse the obviousness of his function as a mere device to convey the author's own opinions. Despite these specific failures, what Buckley says is generally true, that the apparent "lack of concern for that academic invention,

'style'"[47] is tied up with the particular problem of dramatic presentation - for the world of Capricornia has to embody Herbert's own sense of disorder in the universe. But this is not to say that he is insufficiently aware of the sound and associations of words. Ranged against Green's judgement is Herbert's extremely convincing impressionistic rendering of colloquial speech, the lyrical passages embodying his love of the land (which push prose towards poetry), and the lexical play. If the essence of literary style lies in finding the mots justes then, at times, Herbert is an extremely good stylist. Consider, for example, the exclamation by Bootpolish when he unexpectedly meets Norman in the wilderness: "Then the savage smiled eagerly and said, 'By cripes - Norman!'" (306). Herbert has the so-called "savage" utter just two words - and "My goodness!" or "Good God!" would not have done - to reveal immediately that he is in fact not a savage at all; or rather, as I have already shown in my examination of the attendant colour patterning and skeletal imagery, that his Aboriginal identity is as skin-deep as his nomenclature implies. Where a word serves a writer equally well for more than one purpose, as in a pun, the critical compliment that he has found the mot juste is most easily supportable - as, for instance, when Oscar tells Differ that the true extent of the halfcaste population should be "kept dark" (82).

Green is obviously unaware of the self-conscious ironies of the language in Capricornia. These might have warned him that the element of burlesque which heightens the novel's social realism is not necessarily a misguided part of the literary strategy, that the purpose is not simply social protest. Yet, if not the realist novel, what critical framework are we to apply? How are we to explain the presence, in a serious polemical work, of lexical play and interposed personae which parody the author's own narration? Why would an artist who seems to demand social relevance for his art simultaneously draw attention to its artifice? It is hard

to imagine any author so incredibly naive that we can confidently dismiss all these issues with the sweeping notion of a misconceived literary strategy. The theory of Romantic Irony, although Herbert was almost certainly unaware of it, allows another way of thinking about these critical problems.

According to Schlegel, the artist should acknowledge the essential paradoxical nature of art by being in a state of paradoxical awareness when engaged in the process of creation - that is, he should be both playful and serious. He should treat his art as a serious game. The relevance of irony to the game aspect of art is best summarized by Hans Eichner, in his excellent chapter on Schlegel's theory of Romantic poetry:

> The romantic poet - as seen by Schlegel . . . claims to know more than the common man, while knowing enough to realize that his most inspired insight is, like all finite things, wholly inadequate . . . The work can never more than partially and imperfectly express the poet's "feeling for the universe"; but by the ironic depreciation of the work within the work - the admission that it is merely a serious game - this deficiency is compensated.[48]

Of course, Herbert is not a Romantic poet. But Schlegel's theory outgrew its original preoccupation with Romantic poetry, and was developed into a whole artistic philosophy, which in fact exalted the novel over all other genres. We have seen that Capricornia embodies in practice many of the elements of art which the theory of Romantic Irony demanded: the presentation of an ironic universe; the artist's figuring of himself in his art; the imaginative sense of reconciliation and transcendence, without denial of the physical impossibility of escaping universal irony. Surely, then, the self-parody in Capricornia can also be viewed within the context of Romantic Irony, since its principal theorist demanded "the ironic depreciation of the work within the work."[49] Accordingly, self-parody might be seen as the means by which Herbert occasionally acknowledges, however unconsciously, that his novel is an inadequate expression of his "feeling for the universe."[50] Self-parody is also the

key to realizing that Capricornia does not really try to establish itself as a work of realism, and that it is therefore unjust to judge it according to that model. The realist novel never assumed that there was any conflict between what Schlegel called "the limitless and the limited . . . the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication."[51] Yet it is precisely this problem that Herbert's "feeling for the universe," the "reality" which had seized his imagination, forced him to confront:

> I live in the thrall of chyringos. There is my Bunyip, the emanation of the Continent. There is the Continent itself, to me like a great beast. Oh I can't expound what is in my heart; or rather I should say I can't do it in a mere phrase or two, nor in a page, nor even in a paltry chapter. The thing is so vast. In reality it is infinite.[52]

But the form of the novel is necessarily finite, and, as I have shown, the apparent formlessness of Capricornia is deceiving. This fact again brings the novel into line with Schlegel's theory that the ideal artistic form should be a synthesis of apparent chaos by underlying order - "the essential characteristic of the Roman is chaotic form."[53] This structural irony can be seen in conceptual relation to the self-parodic element within Capricornia - that is, as pointing to the author's detachment from the terrible reality of his situation, that reality which is embodied at the polemical level of narrative. In detachment lies the way of freedom.

However serious Capricornia obviously is, it also has an element of play, which, as we have seen, is expressed specifically through the exploitation of lexical ambivalence but is also more generally conveyed by the sardonic tone and the ironic mode of narrative. We have seen also, in the previous chapter, that there is a work within the work, at the metaphysical level of narrative. The "inner" work implies that transcendence is possible, at least for the character who is a figure of the author. But the "outer" work embodies the opposite view: that the ironies of the universe are irreconcilable and unavoidable. Healy comes closest to realizing this essential paradox when he says that, although the ideas

which inform the novel are not fully realized in it, "out of the anguish of Differ, the fury of O'Cannon, and the disgust of Furphey floats McRandy's vision of an Australia Felix reconciled into a future peaceable kingdom."[54] But I do not agree with Healy that Differ and O'Cannon are, "in the longer perspective, which stretches even beyond the book . . . the forerunners of the just society."[55] This is a false assumption. The "peaceable kingdom" does not exist in the non-fictional future, but in the imaginative present of the work within the work. In terms of real social possibilities there is no "longer perspective" beyond the novel. The only perspective beyond the novel is that which is implied by the symbolism of the litter of bones and the flight of crows when we learn of Tocky's death. The implication is not that the whiteman and the blackman will be reconciled in some "future peaceable kingdom," but, as we saw in the previous chapter, that the Aboriginal spirit will survive and the whiteman will simply perish - for, being alienated from the Spirit of the Land, he has no spiritual identity. Differ and O'Cannon, as figures of the author, represent his own private fantasy of the imagination. They represent Herbert's ideal, as a whiteman, of reconciliation with the Aboriginal world of the spirit, and of entering into a state of complete harmony with the land, which is itself one with the native spirit. This imaginative vision is embedded in the work within the work and reaches its peak of fulfilment in the personal reconciliation of Tim O'Cannon, who dies as a whiteman at the same time as he is spiritually born into a metaphysical state of Aboriginal union with the land. But this ideal vision, although it informs Herbert's social protest, cannot be part of the social reality either as presented in the novel or envisioned in the future. We should not overlook the irony which undercuts McRandy's vision of a future society in which the whiteman and the Aboriginal will live as brothers: his idealism is unconsciously but implicitly based on racism:

> "Listen Sonny, the day'll come in your own time when your Old People'll be recognized as our Old People too, as the Fathers of the Nation, and'll be raised to a place of honour. No exaggeration. There's signs of it now. Twenty years ago they were killin' off the Binghis round here like they were dingoes. The Government didn't mind at all. But the Government'd come down heavy on you if you did it now. . . . The people of Australia are wakin' up to the fact that they've got a responsibility in Brother Binghi. That'll lead 'em to gettin' to know him. And gettin' to know him will lead to gettin' to honour him, givin' him the citizenship that it's to the everlastin' disgrace of the country he's been denied so long, and education, rights as a human bein', and the chance to learn this new system of society that's been dumped down in his country and so far done nuthen but wipe him out. The blackfeller ain't a Negroid type. His colour's only skin-deep. Three cross-breedin's and you'll get the colour right out, with never the risk of a throw-back ." (327-28)

The final sentences here contain an element of racism which must ironically deny the possibility of McRandy's ideal vision ever becoming a social reality.

In the revision of the manuscript all direct references by the narrator to the Aboriginal as a "nigger" - and there were many - were deleted. The racist term remains only in the published novel where it is either uttered by a racist character or qualifies the tone of the narrative voice by that "sardonic and anguished scorn"[56] which Buckley sees as central to the success of the direct narration. This revision might seem to imply that Herbert did not originally recognize his own conditioned racism, but later became aware of it and tried to emend the text of Capricornia accordingly. This is speculative, of course, since we cannot know the intention. On the other hand, since the use of the word "nigger" by racist characters is qualified by the satiric import of the whole novel, we can see those occasions where the racist term is used directly by the narrator in the context of Herbert's self-parody, whether conscious or unconscious. Consider, for example, this usage: "Little Nawnim, worn out in body and mind by buffetings and sights and sounds, at length fell asleep . . . And while he slept the niggers ate his sweets" (60). If on such occasions we mentally substitute "Aboriginal,"

or even "native," for the word "nigger," it is easy to see that the more racist term detracts from the solemnity of the writing. This, I think, enhances the artistic interest at the risk of the polemical integrity of the work - which is no doubt why the direct references were finally deleted, regardless of whether they were originally a questionable oversight or intended as self-parody.

It would not be fair to Herbert to conduct a "witch-hunt" in Capricornia for evidence that he could not entirely eliminate from his own consciousness the racist conditioning of his society. After all, the writing of the novel was in itself a crusade against racism. If indeed there are any racist assumptions underpinning the novel's "philosophy" it is more an indictment of the age than of the author. But, if only for that reason, we do need to re-examine Herbert's attitude to the Aboriginal. I believe that this must inevitably lead to a reassessment of the novel also in artistic terms, since the reason that the author's ideological stance is not easily definable is that its implications are not only social but metaphysical.

Isolating ideology from art can be an extremely complex and even self-defeating exercise, as we will understand if we consider Herbert's presentation in Chapter Twenty-two of Norman's first realization of his Aboriginal heritage. The Song of the Golden Beetle has such power over Norman's will, "seizing mind" and "compelling limb," that his efforts "to restrain himself from seeking relief" (293-94) in it are pathetic. Seeing in this signs of "incipient racism," Michael Cotter writes, in his recent review of Healy's book, Literature and the Aborigine in Australia:

> The point to be noticed here is that Norman, apart from a few years' experience, in infancy, of the Aboriginal community on Flying Fox, has no "Aboriginal heritage" beyond his biological origins. He is, then, seen by Herbert to be "reverting to type" when he feels compelled to seek "relief in the Song of the Golden Beetle. In other words, Herbert's presentation of Norman's psychological motives is underscored by a racist assumption which Healy disregards. Given that disregard, Healy's judgement that Norman "finds an equilibrium of self which reconciles black and white Australia" (164) is questionable.[57]

Herbert's presentation of Norman's Aboriginal awakening is too bald, too apparently contrived, for us not to see the implication of Cotter's argument: Norman's experience is falsified by Herbert's inability to see it through Aboriginal eyes. But if the whiteman's vision is so conditioned how can we possibly know whether Herbert's presentation of Aboriginal experience is distorted? In any case, this is hardly the point. As I showed in my previous chapter, there are covert signs that the incident should not be interpreted too literally, and that Herbert is not so naive as Cotter believes: the image of the red-eyed crows, and its symbolic interpenetration of colour schemes; the fact that Norman is comforted by "the clink of hobbles," which of course restrict natural impulse; and his sense of fellowship with the horses, revealingly named False, Juggler and The Policeman. In all this there is an element of self-parody, by which Herbert compensates for any deficiency in capturing the "reality" of Norman's experience. Herbert is more concerned with the truth behind the experience, a truth which he conceives not simply on a social plane but also as metaphysical. The Golden Beetle is a symbol of the Spirit of the Land. This is what Cotter forgets - as does Healy. Norman's experience is a spiritual one, though he may not know it, and signifies a communion with the Spirit of the Land. In other words, according to Herbert's conception, Norman's Aboriginal heritage goes beyond what Cotter calls his "biological origins," being also a spiritual inheritance of the land. Herbert's notion of making his own spiritual relation to the land through his halfcaste characters relies implicitly upon the understanding that their spiritual identity is Aboriginal - and must be so, since they can inherit nothing spiritual from their white ancestry. This is something which is beyond rationalization. Indeed Herbert would have it that the whiteman's lack of faith, his spiritual emptiness, is related to his sacrificing his sense of wonder to rational investigation and scientific achievement. Thus, although the notion of

fulfilment as oneness with Nature is loosely based on Romantic principles, Capricornia is in a sense beyond the dogmatic kind of criticism levelled at it by Cotter. What is demanded of the reader is the same that is required in South Africa, if the separate cultures of that country are ever to merge: "something analogous to the artist's breadth of understanding, sympathy and intuition."[58] My basis for this comparison is the thesis presented by Kevin Magarey's article, "The South African Novel and Race": that the denial of particular cultural traditions for particular racial groups is "no help to either literary criticism or race relations."[59] The argument between Cotter and Herbert is essentially one of acculturation opposed to inherited Aboriginality. (I use this term because the Australian vocabulary lacks a word like "Negritude." We cannot use that word because the Aboriginal is not a Negroid type; but the concept is just as central to the question of race relations in Australia as in South Africa.) The apartheid policy of the South African Nationalist Party is based on the idea of inherited culture. But I do not believe that the concept is necessarily racist. A belief in inherited culture may equally find expression as a desire to protect and preserve cultural traditions. In their absolute exaltation of the "group characteristics" of inherited culture the South African Nationalists "forget that the members of groups are individuals, and human."[60] Although Herbert obviously believes in inherited culture, he is no segregationist. He favours acculturation precisely because he recognizes the value of the Aboriginal tradition, its cultural inheritance of the land.

The reappraisal of Herbert's attitude to the Aboriginal is a much more complicated matter than Cotter seems to recognize. Nevertheless, he is correct to deny Healy's claim that Norman finds, through his Aboriginal awakening, "an equilibrium of self which reconciles black and white Australia."[61] Healy apparently sees Norman's experience in the wilderness as prophetic, symbolically signalling the emergence of a new society where the blackman and the whiteman will live in peaceful

co-existence. Norman returns to a Red Ochre which, according to Healy, "has become a utopian island of tolerance and peace."[62] But this interpretation ignores the many hints, pointed out in my previous chapter, that Norman's realization of his Aboriginal heritage is hopelessly inadequate, and that he remains torn between the poles of his halfcaste identity. It is a curious prophet-figure, too, that rides "eastward blindly" (295) in an attempt "to put a barrier between himself and the hated world" (295-96). Christmas Dinner at Red Ochre, we are told, is "a halfcaste dinner" (408) for the convenience of mixed Oriental and Occidental company - "and thus the twain were brought together for once at least" (408). But Norman is not so committed to the ideal of peace and harmony that he will not allow the "island" at Red Ochre to be contaminated by the intrusion of an outsider. The fact that the Uninvited Guest is his father serves to underline the complexity and instability of human relationships. Norman gives Cho Sek Ching "'a big cheque and a lot of blarney'" to get rid of him. "'Hi tink you too muchee whiteman all-same'" (416) Cho tells him. If there is a lesson here it is that where individuals are involved, as of course they must be, any solution to "group" or race dilemmas can only be impermanent. The ideal, being absolute, is impossible. There can be no "longer perspective" stretching idealistically "beyond the book." Differ and O'Cannon may have "the sanction of principle behind them,"[63] as Healy says, but they are individuals - and that only in part, since they are figures of the author - certainly not "forerunners of the just society."[64] Healy implies that the "line of humanistic reflection"[65] built into Differ and O'Cannon and Furphey is given the force to carry it into a dimension "beyond the book" by McRandy's social theorizing. He writes: "out of the anguish of Differ, the fury of O'Cannon, and the disgust of Furphey floats McRandy's vision of an Australia Felix reconciled into a future peaceable kingdom."[66] But Healy fails to realize that McRandy's philosophy betrays

the true meaning of acculturation, revealing itself as an unconscious but implicit demand on the Aboriginal to become "European." His vision of the future ideal society calls for the disintegration of Aboriginal identity and tradition, as symbolized by the removal of skin-colour by successive cross-breeding. This certainly belies Healy's notion that the novel predicts "a future peaceable kingdom" where the blackman and the whiteman will be reconciled. It is quite obvious that Herbert's denigrating view of white culture, and his great respect for Aboriginal tradition, prevents him from favouring a policy of assimilation - and that is all that McRandy's vision offers.

Close examination reveals that McRandy's attitude to the Aboriginal is not quite the same as his creator's. Yet the initial impression created by his polemical diatribe, that he is a mouthpiece for Herbert, is too strong to be wholly dismissed. This poses a problem. McRandy's implicit policy of assimilation must be seen as parodying, whether consciously or unconsciously, the policy which he makes explicit on Herbert's behalf: "'No tellin' what we could learn off him if we could get him to trust us with his knowledge. No tellin' what he would've become if he'd had the luck to pick up from other races as much as we'" (326). We might see this particular self-parody in the general context of Herbert's satire and of those other elements of self-parody already observed. But, of course, we cannot really know whether self-parody was intended, and it seems equally possible that Herbert had simply not fully formulated a consistent attitude to the Aboriginal. The same paradox of assimilation and acculturation is implicit in Herbert's correspondence, where he outlined his hopes for the Euraustralian League:

> Do you know what I've been dreaming of doing? Why, no less than dreaming of teaching the Aboriginal race to accept citizenship and win a place in the nation, an honourable place, so that they may cross with the invaders and enrich the new nation with their blood. Already I have founded a Euraustralian League, the members of which are halfcastes

> and quartercastes whose blood is pure Aboriginal and European, the aim of which is to teach pride of race to these people and to teach others to honour them and ultimately to found a Nation.[67]

Herbert realized that respectability would be forced upon cross-breeding if the practice became sufficiently widespread. But this in turn required greater respect for the Aboriginal. Ironically, the means by which Herbert envisaged the Aboriginal gaining respect was a civilizing process. He does not see that this initial phase of assimilation precludes the real possibility of acculturation by making the Aboriginal over into the European image. Certainly this contradicts the ideal implicit in teaching "pride of race." Herbert may equally have been unaware that McRandy's talk of assimilation parodies the ideal of acculturation symbolized potentially by Norman. Yet it is fitting that McRandy directs his propagandist opinions at Norman, since he is the novel's test-case for acculturation, and his failure to reconcile the black and white constituents of his identity ultimately symbolizes the loss of that ideal, the loss of Australia Felix.

McRandy is not the only persona who expresses an attitude to the Aboriginal that contradicts the author's own ideal of acculturation. Peter Differ, for instance, favours a policy of assimilation, civilizing the native by compulsory education. "'Consider how long it took to civilize our own race.'" he tells Oscar. "'Our condition is the result not of a mere ten years of schooling, but of ages. See that the Binghis get the same'" (80). But Differ does not simply contradict the author's attitude. Nor does he present one side of the paradox of acculturation and assimilation that we have observed in Herbert's own correspondence. Rather, Differ's attitude embraces that same paradox in toto, for he not only favours the civilization of the Aboriginal but also perceives racial characteristics as inherited: "'Study the Binghi, Oscar, and you'll find he's a different man from you in many ways, but in all ways quite as good. Study him, and you'll discover

that dominant half of the inheritance of the halfcaste you despise'" (81). This confirms the conceptualization behind the final symbolism of Tocky's bones and the flight of crows, that the Aboriginal spirit is dominant in the halfcaste identity. But Oscar puts to Differ the opposing theory that was in fact popular at the time of Capricornia's publication, that the Aboriginal was a dying race:"' Well it's not much use worrying about 'em now. They're dying out!"(80). Differ argues: "'What - with thousands upon thousands of 'em still in this country and many yet never seen a whiteman? . . . Ah! - what you have just said, Oscar, was said twenty - fifty years ago too!'" (80). Here again the persona confirms the symbolic interpretation of the novel. One of Capricornia's major ironies is its symbolic inversion of popular contemporary theories of civilization in progress and Aboriginal culture in decline. It is civilization which is portrayed as the dying organism. The trappings of progress become the symbols of disintegration. The railway, a frequent symbol of progress in frontier fiction, is washed away in the Wet Season, and the subsequent 223-Mile Smash puts an end to all thought of further construction. The inevitability of disintegration was made quite explicit in the first paragraph of Chapter Three in one of the manuscript drafts:

> Now and again the settlement of such places as Capricornia would boom. The result was always the same, a few more tons of roofing and fencing brought to rust in the wilderness, a few more tons of timber to feed the termites, a few more men to learn the lure of Black Velvet.(MS 29 verso)

The land has a "depraving" influence on the whiteman, and his disintegration is more than physical. This is testified by the death of Ned Krater, the archetypal whiteman, who is unable to will his own immortality and so dies a madman. We may juxtapose the whiteman's fate with that of the Aboriginal. Although physically he may appear to be a dying race, he survives spiritually in union with the land, and must therefore outlive the whiteman. It is appropriate that Kurrinua, the

archetypal Aboriginal, dies "buried . . . to the neck" (6). As I have said, the spiritual survival of the Aboriginal gives a perspective of hope "beyond the novel." But this perspective is purely imaginative, and does not entitle Healy to his vision of reconciliation. The sense of hope is not relevant to the whiteman. Yet it does apply very personally to Herbert. The halfcaste is part white, which allows Herbert's identification with him. This gives him imaginative access to the Aboriginal spiritual heritage, a sense of belonging to the land itself, since the halfcaste is viewed as dominantly, and spiritually, Aboriginal.

This strategy poses a moral problem. Let us assume for a moment that Herbert's policy of acculturation is not betrayed by an initial phase of assimilation. The presentation of the whiteman is so denigrating that his cultural "tradition" seems to have nothing of any value to contribute to a merging culture. This leaves one with the uncomfortable sense that the whiteman is the only party who will gain from the acculturation. In this sense, even at the metaphysical level, Herbert's attempt to achieve a personal link with the land through his halfcaste characters can be seen as a form of racial exploitation. Indeed, this imaginative strategy is paralleled in a physical sense by McRandy's notion that "a feller aint been in this country unless he's tried Black Velvet. And that's a fact" (314). The overtones of braggadocio here are racial as well as sexual. Herbert's own belief that a man cannot <u>be</u> in Australia unless he has linked himself with the Aboriginal cultural "tradition" relies implicitly upon the same claim that McRandy makes. McRandy's sexist and racist comment reflects ironically on Herbert's own preoccupation. Later, in what may be seen as an attempt to translate the imaginative strategy of <u>Capricornia</u> into concrete terms, Herbert explicitly advocated miscegenation as a means by which the whiteman might gain the Aboriginal spiritual homeland:

> Truly, I've come to envy these Halfcastes their heritage, so much so that, for all my love of the soil and all my pride in being born of it, I must confess that I'm simply an invader and that there is no hope of my ever being able to claim the right to live in this land unless I infuse my blood into the Aboriginal race.[68]

We should not, however, be too dogmatic about this moral issue. Although I have accused Herbert of imaginative exploitation, since the Aboriginal is a device of the mind, serving the author's personal mythology, Capricornia is most apparent as a novel of social protest. Generally it has been perceived as the first major Australian work written against racism and on behalf of the Aboriginal. It would be difficult indeed to believe that Herbert had no social purpose whatsoever, and we cannot really doubt the sincerity of this aspect of his motivation. What we must decide, however, is whether the very personal element of the novel, the metaphysical quest which the author built into it, finally compromises that social purpose.

Without wishing to deny the author's real concern for the plight of the Aboriginal people as "part of the scheme of things, men and women to be considered like all the others."[69] The native must be seen in aesthetic terms as a metaphor for the Spirit of the Land. Indeed, Herbert has denied that his main concern in the novel was with the Aboriginal: "I am essentially an observer of life, not a reformer. The hideous condition of the blacks I described was designed only as background to a story of which the deep motive was the father-son relationship."[70] A psychoanalytical approach to the novel tends to confirm this claim. By a technique of what Heseltine calls "the prismatic fragmentation of personality,"[71] the complexity of the author's own identity is embedded in the father-son relationships of Oscar and Mark with Norman.

In his monograph on Herbert for the "Australian Writers and their Work" series, Heseltine investigates the author's claim concerning the

"deep motive" of Capricornia, and he discovers that, once the hint is accepted, "the whole book takes on an emotional coherence, a pattern of tension and resolution, which makes many conventional ideas about its disordered sprawl inadequate and beside the point."[72] The emotional cohesion is provided by the "psychological sub-structure"[73] which Heseltine proceeds to explicate. He notes, for instance, that "the whole plot of Capricornia revolves around the double destruction of Norman by his father, Mark":[74] first, by disowning him as a son; second, by his reappearance after years of hiding, which leads directly to Norman's trial for murder. Heseltine attempts to place this kind of sub-structure in the symbolic context of Herbert's relation to his own father by signifying the various autobiographical details built into it. For example, about Mark's rejection of Norman he writes: "It is movingly appropriate that this first demonstration of paternal rejection is completed by a train journey, the very activity in which Herbert's own father most obviously displayed his male potency."[75] He notes too that Mark embodies the qualities which Herbert believed he and his father shared - particularly, an impatience with mannered society and a natural enjoyment of immediate physical experience - and that, by the time Mark and Heather are finally married, she has been transformed into the kind of woman with whom the author felt his own father was most at home: "Mother was also not Dad's natural choice of women. I saw the type he liked and who liked him, the jolly waitresses of the railway refreshment rooms and dining cars I'd seen him playing up to when riding his engine with him."[76] But the psychoanalytical approach, interesting though it may be, has its pitfalls, and Heseltine himself notes that "it might also be said to have only a tenuous connection with literary criticism."[77] Herbert greatly appreciated Heseltine's "criticism" for its penetrating observations concerning the relation of his art to his life. Yet correspondence subsequent to the monograph's publication implicitly reveals the inherent danger of falsifying a writer's life in

attempting to read his mind through his art:

> You were wrong in supposing that I was dominated by my father. Rather was I dominated by reluctant contempt for him. . . . I have a strange contempt for myself, too, perhaps connected with that I started with in respect to poor old too-human Dad. My interest in myself is only as a character for someone else's story. That is what is wrong with Disturbing Element. It should have been done by someone else.[78]

To be fair, Heseltine spends little time on psychoanalytical investigation of plot and character, rather utilizing that approach simply as a means to introduce his discussion of the theme of true identity in the work itself. The critical strategy is entirely appropriate, since the novel embodies Herbert's "explication of personal obsession into imaginative concern."[79] The fact that Norman is a halfcaste represents, as Heseltine perceives, "a crucial step"[80] in this creative metamorphosis. If, as Herbert says, the Aboriginal condition was intended merely as the background for his own personal drama, it would seem that the more he attempted to come to grips with his sense of alienation the more profound, the more existential, he realized exile to be.

The writing of Capricornia became not simply a way for Herbert to work out his relation to his father but also a mythopoeic process by which he could re-create Australia as his spiritual homeland. Thus, in 1961, when asked to prepare a definitive statement for the national archives, he said:

> I have been asked to say why I wrote Capricornia. I wrote it in London of all places, sitting shivering in a garret through the horror of an English winter. What moved me more than anything, I remember, was a vast yearning for my sunny native land, its spaciousness, its rugged beauty, its freedom. My spirit seemed to go home like that of the exiled blackfellow who cries "Poor fella my country!"[81]

This later explanation of the creative impetus for his first novel is probably coloured to some extent by the ideas which he had at the time for his final novel, Poor Fellow My Country, which in many ways is a reconsideration of the territory already charted in Capricornia. Yet Herbert still does not emphasise social protest as being central to his

intention, and still does not even mention his awareness of the Aboriginal's degradation. He does conceive of art as instrumental, but in personal rather than social terms. The concept is unconsciously Jindyworobak: creative writing offers the whiteman a key to unlock the Aboriginal mystery of the land. Herbert's metaphor for his own spirit as an exiled blackfellow, and for the writing of Capricornia as an Aboriginal homecoming, is implicitly the same image upon which the Jindyworobaks based their literary programme: that is, Australia is a mythological world, which the artist might enter and make his own by uttering the words that spring from the land into his consciousness. Thus, Capricornia does not so much resemble the Northern Territory as re-create it, and, in doing so, initiate Herbert into creative harmony with it. As we have seen, Romantic Irony constituted his unconscious method: the presentation of an ironic universe, both cruel and beautiful, and the placing of himself in the new world of his art. At the imaginative level of its existence, as process rather than product, the art world is not subject to the ironies of the exterior world. Thus, by placing himself in the world of his art - itself a re-creation of the ironic world - he transforms himself from being a victim of general irony to being an individual immunized against ironic victimization. Specifically, he becomes the blackfellow spirit, out of exile. The method may differ, but the essence is Jindyworobak: the Romantic quest for spiritual harmony with the land, the whiteman's quest for a Dreamtime of his own, the search for a heritage. We can see Capricornia, then, in relation to the Jindyworobak creed, as stated by Brian Elliott: "We enter a mythological world, but it is our own. We take possession of the magic that is our own. We are initiated men."[82] As late as 1961 Herbert wrote to Ian Mudie, one of the principal Jindyworobak poets: "Although I've never met you, I feel you are a man after my own heart."[83] But Herbert had learned from his abortive experience with the Australia First party in the 1930s neither to place

his faith in any movement nor to adopt any exclusivist position, be it political or literary. The writer's creativity could become subservient to a literary programme in just the same way that the individual's political views can be dominated by party ideology. Herbert never announced publicly any affinity with the Jindyworobaks. He would have been sceptical of their theorizing and psychologically confined by their manifesto, despite the fact that he would have probably agreed with its basic points. His affinity with the Jindyworobak ethos and his separateness from their literary programme are best understood in relation to what follows the section quoted above from his statement for the national archives:

> One might even go to the extent of believing that the Aboriginal shades of the ages, lacking medium of reincarnation through the vanished tribes, as the Aborigines believe, live again in us: not that this is my belief, really, I have too deep a reverence for the miracle of life to dream of creating dogma to solve its mystery.[84]

Here we have a contradiction: the imaginative solution to the whiteman's alienation from the land; the rejection of that solution as contrived and therefore distorting reality. This can be seen in relation to Heseltine's paradoxical model of the abyss and the safety fence. The Jindyworobak belief that cultural annexation could be mythopoeic, that the Aboriginal spirit could live in the whiteman as it does finally in Tim O'Cannon, represents the safety fence. But the transfiguration is in purely imaginative terms - since the birth of the Aboriginal spirit depends upon the physical death of the whiteman and the mingling of his blood with the land - and the personal mythology Herbert builds around it is buried below the surface of the novel. This indicates a concession to reality which the arch Jindyworobak Rex Ingamells would never have been prepared to make. (Flexmore Hudson, although aligning himself with the Jindyworobak movement, was less naive, stating that he found the Alcheringa myth of the Dreamtime both "unpalatable and unprofitable.")[85] Together the two levels of Capricornia partly reflect the Romantic dilemma of the author: on the one hand wanting to realize the spiritual metaphor of

inner and outer landscape, to become "one" with the land; and on the other hand being forced by conscience to acknowledge that his alienation is determined by his biological and cultural inheritance of the whiteman's desecration of the Aboriginal, perceived as the "animating principle"[86] of the mystery of the environment. As we have seen, the poles of imaginative vision and social reality are not only manifested in the tonal shift from lyricism to cynicism but are also embodied, specifically and metaphorically, in the narrative by the opposing fates of Ned Krater and Tim O'Cannon, the one dying the "death of a dingo" and the other the "death of a kangaroo."

Herbert's own statements about the nature of the writing convey the ambivalence of his artistic attitude. We have already noted (see page 149) that he describes his composition as private fantasy. One could be forgiven, then, for thinking that he is describing another writer altogether when he writes to Patrick White:

> . . . to you the written word is primarily artistic expression, whereas to myself it is merely a tool for use for a practical purpose, namely to effect social reform. While you are essentially an artist, practising for art's sake, I am a revolutionary, using art to plead my case.
> . . . You have to be native to this mysterious Continent to be involved in its mystery, to be haunted and tortured by its indigenous ghosts and those wraiths of our alien past which with their intrusions are forever complicating the matter. It is for the native-born - the <u>non</u>-indigenous indigenes - that I have written always.
> . . . You have publically called this country the "hand of my Fate." I think "of your Destiny" would be truer. It is the natural background for your artistry by reason of the circumstances of your association with it. Had that same association been with Peru or Papua, the world would still have had the consummate artist, Patrick White. But had I been born anywhere else but in about the worst part of this hostile-to-alien continent, into a community in which the leg-irons still clanked loud in memory and the timbers of immigrant ships still groaned and the simple savage who had been dispossessed of it was still being hunted as a pesky animal, I should have become the scientist or engineer that it is my natural bent to be - "Frustrated Fitter," as I like to call myself in my seemingly great success. While it is the "hand of your Destiny," as a place to live and to write in, its mass is the very substance of my being. I live as close to it almost as a blackfellow. "Dear face that holds so sweet a smile for

> me, Were you not mine, how dark the world would be!" But unlike the blackfellow, I am not bound to it by an umbilicus of primitive unreason. The alien rational part of me demands that I share my hunting-ground with all mankind. Hence, the social reformer, the revolutionary . . . the making of the Writer.[87]

The two writers are the one. I believe that in creating his own private fantasy, the imagined world of Capricornia, Herbert discovered his true role as a social reformer. When the artist figured himself in his own imagined world, which was inevitably based to some extent on the non-fictional world - Capricornia is in a sense the Northern Territory - he was ironically forced more and more to confront the truth of his existence as an individual in society. His discovery that art might be used for social reform evolves from his instinct for fantastically re-creating the world. The novel, then, breaks through the looking-glass, moving beyond private fantasy to universal reality. The impulse to fantasy had to be modified as the emerging novel outgrew its purely personal conception as a therapeutic process. The Aboriginal seems to have come forward in consciousness, enabling Herbert to consider the reality of exile more objectively, although the subjective element remained the imaginative base from which the fiction sprang. That is to say, the indigenous "wraiths of our alien past" began to intrude and complicate the matter:

> I went to commune with the Spirit of the Land, but found something much more urgent to give my attention to - the unutterable misery of its custodians. Since then the cause of the Aborigines has dominated my life. Perhaps unfortunately, I sought to present their cause through literature. Being by nature painstaking, I was forced to subdue much of my feeling in the matter so as not to interfere with my art. I struggled in this literary phase until about 18 months ago, when, despairing of ever being able to do what I wished with words, I decided to apply myself to deeds.[88]

It could easily be thought that Herbert is describing here the writing of an entirely different novel to the one of which he said that its deep motive was the father-son relationship. But Capricornia is two novels in one.

Obviously, there is the polemical novel, in which the author presents the cause of the Aboriginal and satirizes the whiteman. There is also a more subtle and personal novel, concerned with the Romantic quest of Xavier Herbert for unity of self and natural environment. Yet the two novels are, of course, inseparable. They share the same terms: the Aboriginal is not only the victim of the whiteman's cruelty and greed in the polemical novel, but also a kind of Romantic icon of the personal quest for a meaningful relation to the land. The halfcaste is also of central though different importance to each novel. Norman and Tocky are obviously victims of the whiteman's exploitation - indeed they are both products of the sexual exploitation of the Aboriginal. But the halfcaste is also an embodiment of the Romantic ideal, a key with which the artist might imaginatively unlock the land. The Romantic quest depends upon the halfcaste's dual identity to provide the author imaginatively with a blood link with the Aboriginal, and therefore with access to the Aboriginal heritage of the land. But there are several polarities here. Miscegenation is the solution in ideal terms, but it seems to be a disaster in real terms.

As the crucial element of the novel's symbolic structure of the Romantic quest, the halfcaste is a "metaphysical metaphor." That is to say, like Donne's metaphor for sexual union - "And in this flea our two bloods mingled be" - it is characterized by apparent incongruity in the service of harmony. In real terms, as presented in the polemical novel, the halfcaste is the issue of socially destructive sexual exploitation, representing the rape of the land. In imaginative terms, however, the halfcaste is a concrete image of inspiration for the individual's quest for the Jindyworobak Dreamtime. The two identifications are apparently incompatible. In this sense, the novel as a whole is not ultimately so concerned with social analysis as it at first appears to be, but rather with imaginative synthesis:

> . . . because the very nature of our [novelists'] calling is overcoming the crushing realities of life by re-creating it in worlds of our own . . . and though I've never squibbed the unpleasant in my writing, I've dealt with it with the idea of making positive out of negative . . .[89]

The logic of the whole symbolic structure by which Herbert justifies his imaginative reconciliation with the land - figured, as we have seen, in Tim O'Cannon's experience - is based upon the initial premise that the halfcaste resembles the Romantic ideal of unity. At the heart of the novel, then, is a metaphysical conceit: the translation of the morally reprehensible act of sexual exploitation into a symbolic action for the creation of a new and more satisfying reality. We might just as well question the morality of this conceit as that of Donne in attempting to persuade a virtuous maiden that her sexual union with him would mean no loss of honour. We are asked to believe that somehow the imaginative process of art is beyond moral judgement.

But the parameters of Capricornia face not only inward, self-reflexively, but also, far more obviously, outward to the non-fictional world. As much of this thesis has been concerned to point out, the novel is at one level art for art's sake and at another level art for society's sake. Can we truly suspend our moral judgement when the novel exists not simply for its own sake, when indeed the polemical thesis of the novel calls upon us to question our own morality? Capricornia could be described,after all, as Herbert's moral history of Australian society. The novel emphasises the social protest rather than the imaginative vision, so that even when we do focus on the more covert symbolic structure our attention is directed towards its ingenuity rather than its plausibility. But how are we to divorce our heightened moral awareness from our perception of this structure? The halfcaste carries a metaphorical burden which ironically calls into question Herbert's own idealism. We might ask, for instance, whether his imaginative treatment of the halfcaste, as a vehicle to carry him into contact with the Aboriginal mystery of

the continent, is not merely an artistic sublimation of the same kind of exploitation as that in which McRandy indulges:

> "There's sumpen terrible fascinatin' about a lubra all right. . . .I reckon it's because you can't get to understand what's goin' on inside their pretty 'eads. . . . They say a feller aint been in this country unless he's tried the Black Velvet." (314)

The structural irony of Capricornia, its metaphysical conceit, forces the morally aware reader towards this kind of judgement of its author, as the victim of his own ironies.

I have said that Capricornia embodies a Romantic quest to realize, if only imaginatively in the artistic heterocosm, the spiritual metaphor of outer and inner landscape. This implies that we might see the form of the novel in the same way we do White's Voss, as metaphorical, the physical narrative having some spiritual equivalent. The semi-allegorical nomenclature encourages an approach to the novel as extended metaphor. On the other hand, I have said also that the Romantic impulse to unity is opposed by the presentation of the whiteman's heritage as brutal and corrupt. The repressed figure in the personal drama is the repressor in the public drama. Thus, the metaphorical interpretation of the novel, although revealing, is not finally supportable. Chapter Three of this thesis showed how images of external landscape - the dingo, the kangaroo, the crow, the bones - function as metaphors that are central to the metaphysical direction. As metaphors, they must to some extent aesthetically integrate the polemical and the metaphysical aspects of the novel. Yet, as in Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, a roman à thèse where chapters containing the story of a particular family during the Great Depression are juxtaposed with philosophic interchapters, the specific and the collective aspects of Capricornia, its private and public dramas, do not ultimately appear to unite and merge in a single impression. Rather, Herbert's polemical thesis and imaginative vision are in conflict, and the whole structure appears to be paradoxical. That is to say, the

whiteman's exploitation of the Aboriginal betrays the Romantic idealism built into the novel; but the unavoidable subjectivity of that idealism, and of the imaginative vision based upon it, threatens similarly to undermine the polemical thesis. For instance, if we extend the implications of Herbert's imaginative idealization of the halfcaste back to the polemical thesis, miscegenation must be seen as an ideal means for translating a Utopian vision of a creole nation into a social reality. (Between the composition and the publication of Capricornia, while Superintendent of the Aboriginal Compound in Darwin, Herbert did in fact arrive at this conclusion, as we have already seen from his correspondence.) But he inevitably undercuts that social ideal by depicting miscegenation, in real terms, as the whiteman's sexual exploitation of the Aboriginal. Even the most sympathetic characters undercut the ideal of acculturation. Differ and McRandy, as we have seen, unwittingly reveal their real hope as assimilation. The circularity of this argument is unavoidable: if we turn these implications back upon the imaginative vision of the novel they threaten to make it meaningless.

Since the polemical novel is obvious, the artistic conflict I am suggesting here presents itself finally in terms of what is apparent and what is concealed in the novel. In a recent article, "Capricornia: Recovering the Imaginative Vision of a Polemical Novel," I suggested that the basic revision to which Herbert subjected the novel, partly under the guidance of P.R. Stephensen, made its imaginative vision less apparent. My main purpose in that article was to reveal that "the narrative was altered dramatically from what Herbert originally envisioned, and at the same time to point out that the essence of that imaginative vision has not really changed."[90] For example, different sections of the manuscript present us with two opposing images of Mark Shillingsworth: as a sly businessman who ruthlessly exploits the natives of Flying Fox for his own profit; and as a sympathetic and handsome man who is "at heart an

artist" and a lover of Beauty. But, as I have shown in the second chapter of this thesis, the paradoxical nature of Mark - as both "imaginative" and "romantic," yet desperately in need of social acceptance - is subtly insisted upon in the published novel. Thus, although his personality has been diluted by the revision, its extremes moderated, he still embodies the essential conflict of the novel: between social reality and Romantic idealism. Herbert was aware I think that in order to be effective social protest must be perceived as relevant to reality "beyond the novel," necessitating the submergence of the subjective element.

Finally, then, the polemical thesis threatens the imaginative vision much more than the inverse is true. But this is primarily because the polemical aspect is more obvious. The artistic form and significance is obscured by any attempt to read the novel purely for its social or historical value. If Capricornia is ultimately to be confronted according to its own terms of presentation, it must be seen as a roman à thèse, obviously polemical but equally imaginative. In these terms, a critical awareness of the paradox of its objective and subjective vision - the abyss and the safety-fence - is essential for an understanding of the whole work. Behind that paradox there is the Romantic dilemma of the artist, escaped only by means of the imaginative leap which Herbert makes with the transfiguring death of "a Disturbing Element," Tim O'Cannon. It is entirely up to the reader whether he too is willing to make this leap beyond the paradoxical structure of the novel, beyond its universal ironies. But it does seem that if we refuse to grant this affirmation of faith then we align ourselves with the awful anti-idealism of the society depicted within the novel. On this decision depends whether Capricornia is broken in half by its paradoxicality, or whether it survives its structural faults, as Huckleberry Finn does, by virtue of its mythology.

We should keep in mind when making this vital decision that the novel is a remarkable attempt to synthesize personal fantasy and impersonal reality: Herbert is deliberately sabotaging the most reliable form of the roman à thèse, realist fiction. Being riddled with paradoxes, it is anything but a rational realist novel. Rather, it is an experimental work, in which, as Helen Prideaux writes, "the apparent lack of control is a deliberate relaxation of structural limits which allows the author to explore freely all aspects of life."[91] Whether or not Herbert managed to create a form capable of integrating aesthetically his polemical thesis and imaginative vision is debatable. More important in any case are the implications of his formal sabotage of social realism, which constitutes for many readers a betrayal of their expectations of social satire. What Stephen Gray has said in relation to William Plomer's Turbott Wolfe, another novel embodying a polemical thesis against racism in an experimental form, and which caused great controversy when published in South Africa in 1926, is, I believe, equally true of Capricornia:

> An alternative type of fiction implies an alternative world view - and, for that matter, an alternative society, racial charter, human marriage, and so on - and, the real point, an alternative sensibility. The failure of many critics to begin to confront this issue is an index of their inability to respond to the work in the work's own terms.[92]

CONCLUSION

> Now, the work of every writer contains a set of implicit equations . . . And though he be perfectly conscious of the act of writing, conscious of selecting a certain kind of imagery to reinforce a certain kind of mood, etc., he cannot possibly be conscious of the interrelationships among all these equations. Afterwards, by inspecting his work "statistically," we or he may disclose by objective citation the structure of motivation operating here. There is no need to "supply" motives. The interrelationships themselves *are* his motives. For they are his *situation*; and *situation* is but another word for *motives*. The motivation out of which he writes is synonymous with the structural way in which he puts events and values together when he writes; and however consciously he may go about such work, there is a kind of generalization about these interrelations that he could not have been conscious of, since the generalization could be made by the kind of inspection that is possible only *after the completion* of the work.
>
> (Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*)[1]

The polemical motivation of social protest is part of the whole structure of *Capricornia* and, whatever the author's original conscious intention, cannot be denied. But if we are to generalize about the structural interrelations of values and events in the novel, an exclusive socio-historic interpretation is inadequate. The implications of imaginative vision cannot properly be ignored. The equation of "statistical" with "symbolic" is behind the logic of the above epigraph, which in fact advocates a critical philosophy of literary form as "symbolic action." Early in this thesis symbolic analysis of the Mark Shillingsworth narrative disclosed a trend which seemed unrelated to the social thesis: the physical urge of sexuality is dialectically opposed to the creative urge of the imagination. The explicit and implicit references to Mark as "romantic," "inventive" and "imaginative" before his sexual exploitation of the young lubra, and their absence after that incident, point out the general direction of the whiteman's destiny in the novel: a movement away from intellectually conceived creative potential, through its denial by

physical acts of false fulfilment, to a meaningless and ultimately destructive reality.

This is the essence of the pseudo-messianic myth that was illustrated in the second chapter of the thesis. We saw that its archetype is Ned Krater. He is initially perceived by the natives as a superhuman "creature of legend" associated with "magic arts," and as therefore qualified for the sexual privileges which they thought him to be "above wanting." Rather than realizing the potential nobility of his destiny, he demands the most attractive lubra, allows the tribeswomen to be "ravaged" by his unqualified crew and murders the headman who leads the subsequent rebellion. The typological relation of characters extends from Krater, through Mark, to Norman. He tries to apply the Arcadian idealism of the Rubáiyát to his sexual experiences with Tocky in the wilderness, but ends up regarding her as a "harlot," thereby repeating the transformation of awareness that was implicit in his father's seduction by a young lubra early in the book.

This symbolic action that was uncovered by examining the art/sex dialectic cannot be divorced from the racial theme. After all, the social ideal of acculturation that, as we saw in the final chapter, Herbert seems to have in mind, the creation of a new race, obviously depends upon miscegenation. Within the novel, however, the ideal and its necessary means are incompatible: what is required, as Herbert himself later came to realize, is "the faculty literally to disembody ourselves." If modern man is not to be doomed by his striving in the rut of sexual fulfilment, if his evolution is to be as Herbert idealizes it, "firstly intellectual (hence collective)," then he must "be able to reproduce his species without recourse to rut. . ." Thus Herbert came to see that Science held the solution, the key to realizing on earth "the dream of a Kingdom of Heaven."[2] This, Herbert tells us, is the conceptualization behind

Soldiers' Women, apparently a "conscious projection" from Capricornia. But, as we have seen, the key to salvation in Capricornia is imaginative rather than rational or realistic, artistic rather than scientific.

The pseudo-messianic myth denies the validity of a scientific solution to the demoralization and retrogression of mankind. Faith in science is implicitly associated with the conventional myth of progress which is disputed by Capricornia's redefinition of history, as we saw in relation to the historiographic model of boom and recession, a model of human futility. We are told in the novel that the "perfect state" is the Aboriginal one, and that the "intricate" and "machine-worked system" of civilized society which is characterized by "sweat and worry and sinfulness" is the consequence of birth control. Of course, this is only Andy McRandy's opinion, but it is consistent with the dialectical association of sexual indulgence with false fulfilment, with the creation of "intricate systems that all become obsolete after a while and have to be changed with painful reconstruction" (325). Of course, the illusion of progress is linked with the whiteman's desecration of the land, for which, as I have shown, his sexual exploitation of the Aboriginal is a metaphor. Ironically, it is this hostility towards the environment, supported dialectically by its sexual metaphor, which threatens the whiteman with destruction. Thus the train, a traditional symbol of progress in the frontier novel, is responsible for much of the death. However, imaginatively, Herbert is unable to confirm the nihilism that develops from his redefinition of history. Tim O'Cannon is the novel's only approximation of a hero, and, although his defiance of the world is not successful in practical terms, he is personally redeemed for his sins as a whiteman by his adoption of the halfcaste Tocky. His triumph is metaphysical rather than social. After his death, not only Tocky but his whole family ends up in the Aboriginal Compound. But, as we have seen,

O'Cannon himself is rewarded with spiritual salvation. That is to say, finally he is not only outside the pseudo-messianic mythology but dramatically opposed to it. This antidote to nihilism is conceived of imaginatively rather than rationally, and has no social relevance as a real solution to the incompatibility of acculturation and miscegenation, of the ideal and its necessary (but ironically subversive) means. The imaginative solution is for the whiteman to become disembodied and spiritually reborn as Aboriginal. But the symbolic rites of passage for O'Cannon's rebirth must be presented ironically, as "machinations of a jinx," if the social reality as Herbert sees it is not to be Romantically misrepresented. This is the essence of the paradox which I have explored in the two central chapters of the thesis. The archetypal false saviour, Ned Krater, pioneers the whiteman's descent into the abyss; Tim O'Cannon provides an imaginative defence against that apparent historically predetermined inevitability.

The paradox of salvation and nihilism in Capricornia represents, in terms of the artist's awareness, the dilemma of Romantic idealism and an existential sense of the world as meaningless. The two chapters in this thesis which frame my discussion of the paradox are linked: the first examined in detail the structuring of narrative according to ironic principles; the last explained the novel in terms of Romantic Irony, the theory that such an ironic presentation of experience in art is the first step towards resolution of the Romantic dilemma. The world of Capricornia is apparently disordered, meaningless, absurd, ironic; but within it is the spiritual triumph of O'Cannon, the reconciliation of one unique individua with his natural environment. Since the alienation of the whiteman from his environment is, for Herbert, the major irony of a generally ironic universe, O'Cannon's achievement symbolizes the realization of the Romantic dream of cosmic unity. The significance of Romantic Irony is in relation

to the personal element in the work: the author transcends the ironies of his situation by figuring himself in the world of his art, which, because it exists not merely as a created product but as an imaginative process, is in a sense beyond those ironies which it nevertheless must present if the work is not to be false. Herbert, as I have shown, exists imaginatively within the novel in the figure of Tim O'Cannon, a "Disturbing Element." The transfiguration of O'Cannon symbolizes the imaginative recreation of the artist himself, and the process of Capricornia is in this sense Herbert's initiation into a creative harmony with the land from which, in his real situation, he finds himself alienated.

Capricornia, then, can be read in different and incompatible ways, which leads me to the conclusion that it is in fact two novels in one: a public drama, in which we see the world as Herbert does, absurd and ironic; and a private drama, in which the artist creates his own world and achieves through it imaginative and intellectual freedom from the ironies of his existence outside it. The public drama is the polemical novel, which visualizes the abyss, and its final image of loss and despair is the bones of Tocky and her baby. The private drama is the personal novel, which concerns the artist's transcendence of the abyss, so that the final skeletal imagery is complemented by a symbolic gesture of freedom as the crows fly up from the bones. In this context, the Aboriginal is a metaphor for the Spirit of the Land, and the halfcaste is a device for Herbert both to explore the terrible ironies of his situation and yet to overcome these by identifying with the part-white figure, whose disembodied spirit is Aboriginal. Thus, as we have seen, the image of the two crows arising from the halfcaste skeletons at the end of the novel is linked with the image of the two black birds associated with O'Cannon's Aboriginal transfiguration.

The whole structure of Capricornia is ironic, both in its detailed organization of narrative, as the early argument of the thesis demonstrated, and in the duality of public and private drama. The world of the fiction is bounded by both mirrors and windows: the author's transcendence of universal ironies relies upon the mirroring capacity of the novelistic "unit" to create a discrete world; but by its social concern it must also face out to external reality. This is the essential paradox of Romantic Irony which is embodied in Capricornia, and it accounts for the stylistic juxtaposition of lexical play (the internal reflections of the word world) and realism. The apparent shapelessness of the novel is dictated, like that of Such Is Life, by the author's view of experience as disordered. But, just as the superficial impression of Furphy's work proves deceptive, the subtle association in Capricornia of one thing with another issues in a pattern of ironies which demonstrates the underlying structure of the novel's own reality.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. H.M. Green, A History of Australian Literature: Pure and Applied, Vol. II: 1923-1950 (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1961), p. 1122. This opinion that Green published in 1961, in a section of the History comparing Herbert to Penton (under the heading "Novels of Purpose"), is essentially the same one that he expressed when he briefly reviewed the novel when it was first published ("Australian Literature, 1938," Southerly, I, 1 (September, 1939), p. 39). But it is possible that Green had formed his opinion of Capricornia even before the novel's publication. Included amongst Herbert's correspondence 1934-37 in the National Library of Australia (Herbert Papers, MSS 758, Series 3) is the following note, undated, in Green's hand-writing:

> Capricornia
> by Xavier Herbert.
>
> Shows distinct literary ability - would be a contribution to Australian Literature though not a great one - should enjoy some of the same sort of success as Brian Penton's Landtakers - same quality book to some extent. Both are evidently out to impress, but exaggerate and convey a false view of life. They aim at being powerful, cuttingly realistic; and at times they are these, but I think they would be more effective if they stuck closer to truth and were written less with an eye to the reader. Good stuff in them, all the same.

This note is contained in a University of Sydney envelope; Green worked from 1921 to 1946 at the University's Fisher Library. His specialized knowledge, as Clem Christensen notes, qualified him as virtually the only authority on Australian literature at least as late as 1940 (Clem Christensen, "H.M. Green," Overland, 83 [April, 1981], p. 61). At the time of Capricornia's publication he was active in building up the Fisher Library's holdings of Australiana and had begun to lecture on Australian Literature at the University of Sydney (when the subject was still virtually untouched). It would not have been surprising, then, if P.R. Stephensen (or Angus and Robertson, when the typescript was later submitted to them, after P.R. Stephensen & Co. had gone into liquidation), when contemplating the publication of the novel, had solicited Green's opinion of it. Certainly, criticisms were received before actual publication; Herbert's correspondence of the period refers to the adverse opinions of a number of unnamed critics. One of these seems remarkably close to the view expressed by Green even much later in his History. In the top left hand corner of the page containing Green's actual comment Herbert has written: "'Fe Fi Fo Fum' [the title of the ninth chapter]. He read only 9 chapters." It seems likely that Green reached his initial conclusion about the novel, which was to remain essentially the same throughout his critical writings, on the strength of his reading only one quarter of its chapters. This was possibly in mid-1936, when Stephensen again received the novel from Herbert - partly in the form of the galleys which had been set up by

P.R. Stephensen and Co. before the company's liquidation, and partly in typescript - at which time he cut up the galleys, put them into page form, and sent them out to potential backers. Since they probably did not receive the whole novel, this might explain why Green read only nine chapters.

2. Vincent Buckley, "Capricornia," Meanjin Quarterly, XIX, 1 (March, 1960), p. 13.

3. Brian Kiernan, Images of Society and Nature: Seven Essays on Australian Novels (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 86.

4. John McLaren, Xavier Herbert's Capricornia and Poor Fellow My Country, Essays in Australian Literature (Melbourne: Shillington House, 1981), p. 7.

5. Ibid., p. 9.

6. Neil Mudge, "Xavier Herbert's Capricornia: Image, Theme and Structure" (unpublished M. Litt. thesis, University of Queensland, 1977), p. 1.

7. Ibid., p. 2.

8. Xavier Herbert, "The Writing of Capricornia," Australian Literary Studies, IV, 3 (May, 1970), pp. 208, 210.

9. Xavier Herbert, interviewed by Elizabeth Ridell, February 16, 1975, Government Archives Television Interview. Transcript in Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature, University of Queensland, Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83.

10. Leon Gordon, White Cargo: A Play of the Primitive (Boston, Mass.: Four Seas, 1925).

11. Ibid., p. 41.

12. Xavier Herbert, Capricornia (1938; rpt. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1949), p. 4. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in the text.

13. Gordon, White Cargo, p. 46.

14. Xavier Herbert, Capricornia MS, National Library of Australia, Herbert Papers, MSS 758, p. 120 verso. See also my article, "Capricornia: Recovering the Imaginative Vision of a Polemical Novel," Australian Literary Studies, X, 1 (May, 1981), in which I discuss the content of this fragment in the context of the novel's revision, relating it to other fragments of drafts and to the published novel as a whole.

15. Gordon, White Cargo, p. 29.

16. Letter, Xavier Herbert to Russell McDougall, June 8, 1979, in my possession.

17. See Herbert, "The Writing of Capricornia," p. 213:

> Despite what has been said by people who don't know anything at all about that part of the book's history, Capricornia was

> shown to only one publisher in England in that form. I took the massive typescript to Jonathan Cape, where there was a man I knew, one Gilchrist Thompson, who had shown more interest in "Black Velvet" than anyone else . . .

The reference here to contrary opinions applies most obviously to P.R. Stephensen, the original publisher of the novel, who later wrote:

> It was one of the most amateurishly presented typescripts that I have ever seen, and thoroughly "dog-eared," as the author confessed to me, after being rejected by 11 London publishers. ("How I Edited Capricornia," The Bulletin, March 15 1961, p. 33.)

18. Letter, P.R. Stephensen to Xavier Herbert, July 14, 1933, Mitchell Library, Sydney, P.R. Stephensen Papers, MSS 1284, Box Y2141.

19. Craig Munro, "Some Facts about a Long Fiction: The Publication of Capricornia," Southerly, XLI, 1 (March, 1981), pp. 82-104. Munro certainly establishes that Herbert received verbal editorial advice from Stephensen, pointing out that the author's main evidence for denying any significant assistance was the fact that Stephensen never put pencil to the manuscript. But Herbert claims also that he had to tell the story to Stephensen, who could not even make time to read the script; of course, Stephensen disagrees. Although Herbert admits that Stephensen later did make suggestions "here and there," after hearing sections from a new typescript which had been revised on the author's own initiative, he says "I could enumerate them on my fingers" ("How Capricornia Was Made," The Bulletin, March 8, 1961, p. 51). In reply, Stephensen writes: ". . . a Chinese abacus would have been more helpful" ("How I edited Capricornia," p. 34).

20. Craig Munro, "Inky Stephensen, Xavier Herbert, and Capricornia: The Facts about a Long Fiction " (unpublished M. Qual. thesis, University of Queensland, 1977), p. 23. The article by Munro cited in my previous note is a revised and abridged version of this thesis.

21. Munro, "The Publication of Capricornia," p. 86.

22. J.J. Healy, Literature and the Aborigine in Australia 1770-1975 (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), p. 291.

23. Ibid., p. 154.

24. Adrian Mitchell, "Fiction," in The Oxford History of Australian Literature, ed. Leonie Kramer (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 124.

25. Brian Elliott, "Xavier Herbert," in Commonwealth Literature, ed. William Walsh, Great Writers Library (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 111.

CHAPTER ONE

1. D.C. Muecke, The Compass of Irony (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 218.

2. Ibid., p. 218-19.

3. Xavier Herbert, "The Agony - and the Joy," Overland, 50/51 (Autumn, 1972), p. 65.

4. Muecke, The Compass of Irony, p. 219.

5. Ibid., p. 31.

6. Russell McDougall, "Capricornia: Recovering the Imaginative Vision of a Polemical Novel," Australian Literary Studies, X, 1 (May, 1981).

7. Letter, Xavier Herbert to Professor Manning Clark, February 17, 1980, Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature, Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83.

8. "The Colour Question," Sydney Morning Herald, February 18, 1938, p. 5; "A Great Australian Problem: Our Half-Caste Population," Daily Advertiser (Wagga Wagga), February 26, 1938, p. 4; "Capricornia: The Aboriginal Question," The Publicist, November 1, 1937, p. 5; "Problems of Aborigines Outlined," Mercury (Hobart), March 5, 1938, p. 8. Reviews of Capricornia.

9. John McLaren, Xavier Harbert's Capricornia and Poor Fellow My Country, Essays in Australian Literature (Melbourne: Shillington House, 1981), p. 12.

10. Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Rinehart, 1953), p. 6.

11. McLaren, Xavier Herbert's Capricornia and Poor Fellow My Country, p. 2.

12. Neil Mudge, "Xavier Herbert's Capricornia: Image, Theme and Structure " (unpublished M. Litt. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1977).

13. Ibid., p. 2.

14. The point was implicit in F.H. Mares, "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: A Reconsideration," Meanjin Quarterly, XXI, 1 (March, 1962), pp. 64-70, but was made explicit by Leonie Kramer in the Introduction to the Penguin edition (1971), p. xx.

15. Mares, "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: A Reconsideration," p. 64.

16. Henry Handel Richardson, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony : Australia Felix (1917; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 286.

17. Richardson, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: Ultima Thule (1929; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) p. 119.

18. Richardson, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: Australia Felix, p. 351.

19. Mudge, "Capricornia: Image, Theme and Structure," p. 5.

20. Ibid., p. 6.

21. Ibid.

22. Mares, "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: A Reconsideration," p. 67.

23. Helen Prideaux, "The Experimental Novel in Australia. Part I: Xavier Herbert's Capricornia," Prospect, III, 2 (1960), p. 13.

24. Letter, Xavier Herbert to Professor Manning Clark.

25. Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel, p. 83.

26. Ibid., p. 84. Much of the impetus for my ideas in the first part of this paragraph comes from Van Ghent's chapter on Tristram Shandy, pp. 83-98.

27. Mares, "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: A Reconsideration," pp. 67-69.

28. Muecke, The Compass of Irony, p. 32.

29. Leonie Kramer, Introduction to Henry Handel Richardson, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. xx.

30. John McLaren, Xavier Herbert's Capricornia and Poor Fellow My Country, p. 10.

31. Brian Kiernan, Images of Society and Nature: Seven Essays on Australian Novels (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 84.

32. Ibid., p. 82.

33. Neil Mudge, "Capricornia: Image, Theme and Structure," p. 5.

34. Leonie Kramer, Introduction to Henry Handel Richardson, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony, p. xx.

35. John McLaren, Xavier Herbert's Capricornia and Poor Fellow My Country, p. 12.

CHAPTER TWO

1. Allan Rodway, "Terms for Comedy," Renaissance and Modern Studies, VI (1962), p. 113.

2. P.N. Furbank, Reflections on the Word "Image" (London: Secker and Warburg, 1970), p. 9.

3. F.H. Mares, "The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: A Reconsideration," Meanjin Quarterly, XXI, 1 (March, 1962), pp. 69-70.

4. Neil Mudge, "Xavier Herbert's Capricornia:Image, Theme and Structure" (unpublished M.Litt. thesis, University of Queensland, 1977), p. 14.

5. Ibid., p. 45.

6. Bernard Smith, European Vision in the South Pacific 1768-1850: A Study in the History of Art and Ideas (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 251.

7. Letter, Xavier Herbert to H. Heseltine, January 12, 1974, Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature, Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83, File 33.

8. Xavier Herbert, Poor Fellow My Country (Sydney: Collins, 1975), p. 1089.

9. Thomas Keneally, "The Australian Novel," The Age, February 3, 1968, p. 22.

10. Herbert, Poor Fellow My Country, p. 53.

11. Letter, Xavier Herbert to Kylie Tennant, June 13, 1956, Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature, Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83, File 33.

12. Keneally, "The Australian Novel," p. 22.

13. Herbert, Poor Fellow My Country, p. 20.

14. Laurie Hergenhan, "An Australian Tragedy: Xavier Herbert's Poor Fellow My Country," Quadrant, XXI, 2 (February, 1977), p. 65.

15. Herbert, Poor Fellow My Country, p. 1339.

16. Ibid., p. 1305.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., p. 20.

19. Ibid., p. 1109.

20. Ibid., p. 1305.

21. J.J. Healy, Literature and the Aborigine in Australia 1770-1975 (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), p. 161.

22. Ibid.

23. Henry Handel Richardson, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: Australia Felix (1917; rpt. Hardmonsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 8.

24. D.H. Lawrence, Kangaroo (1923; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), p. 88.

25. Margriet Rolanda Bonnin, "A Study of Australian Descriptive Writing 1929-1945" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Queensland, 1980), p. 382.

26. Brian Elliott, Introduction to Marcus Clarke, For the Term of His Natural Life (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973), p. xxviii.

27. Healy, Literature and the Aborigine, p. 162.

28. K.K. Ruthven, Myth, The Critical Idiom, 31 (London: Methuen, 1976), pp. 70-71.

29. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 315.

30. Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return, trans. Willard R. Trask, Harper Torchbooks (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p. vii.

31. D.C. Meucke, The Compass of Irony (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 128.

32. Healy, Literature and the Aborigine, p. 161.

CHAPTER THREE

1. William York Tindall, The Literary Symbol (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press [1960]), pp. 60-62.

2. For other notable examples of deletion of non-indigenous allusions, see Capricornia, p. 12. At that point in the MS, Mark decides that "comboes" are not so despicable:

> . . . not that he was disposed to be any more debased than most men, but called to mind the cannibals of the South Seas who eat human flesh because their domains provide no other red meat to satisfy their strong and carnivorous appetites, and realized that the taste for cannibalism may be sharpened by the fact that the meat is savoured.
>
> (MS 20)

See also Capricornia, p. 60, where Norman, "worn out" by the experience of his first journey by rail, falls asleep. The MS has:

> It is said that the Aztec Indians, who possessed vast wealth and enormous determination not to part with it, while undergoing torture at the hands of covetous Spaniards, used to sleep while the torquemader reheated his pincers.
>
> (MS 87)

3. Rex Ingamells, Conditional Culture (Adelaide: F.W. Preece, 1938), quoted in Brian Elliott, ed., Introduction to The Jindyworobaks, Portable Australian Authors (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979), p. xxvii.

4. Herbert had learned much more of Aboriginal customs, mythology and languages by the time he came to write Poor Fellow My Country, ample evidence of which is contained in the novel. Capricornia is apparently informed by personal experience only. (From childhood in North-West Australia, the author had been acquainted with semi-civilized Aboriginals, and he later made several expeditions into "myall" country as a prospector.) But Poor Fellow My Country, apart from being even more obviously autobiographical, is the product of considerable research. For instance, Herbert wrote to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies on March 11, 1969, requesting bibliographical information on the languages of certain Aboriginal tribes. The research officer referred him to the following items:

> Tryon, D.T. "The Daly River Languages: A Survey," Papers in Australian Linguistics, no. 3 (1968), pp. 21-45.
> (Pacific Linguistics, Series A: Occasional Papers no. 14.)
> [pp. 27-45, comparative word list of 95 words including Wagoman language.]
>
> Parkhouse, T.A. "Remarks on the Native Tongues in the Neighbourhood of Port Darwin," Royal Society of South Australia. Transactions, XIX (1894-95), pp. 1-18.
> [pp. 17-18, vocabulary of Djauan (approx. 80 words).]
>
> Capell, A. "The Classification of Languages in North and North-

West Australia," Oceania, X, 3 (1940), pp. 241-72.
[p. 270, comparative list of 20 words including Gunwinggu.]

Basedow, Herbert. "Anthrolpological Notes on the Western Coastal Tribes of the Northern Territory of South Australia," Royal Society of South Australia. Transactions, XXXI (1907), pp. 1-64.

Stanner, William E.H., "Notes on the Marithiel Language," Oceania, IX, 1 (1938), pp. 101-108.

See: Letter, Mrs. B. Craig (Research Officer, Bibliographic Section, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Affairs) to Xavier Herbert, Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature, Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83.

In 1970 he also wrote to Beatrice Davis, with whom he had continued to correspond since her editing of Soldiers' Women, requesting a copy of Baldwin Spencer's Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia (London: Macmillan, 1914). See: Letter, Beatrice Davis to Xavier Herbert, July 28, 1970, Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature, Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83, Angus and Robertson Correspondence File 26A.

To be fair, Capricornia's concern with the native should be seen in the context of its time; only in the 1930s did popular interest in the Aboriginal begin to emerge, mainly as a result of the publications by descriptive writers such as Duncan Kemp, Ion Idriess, and Ernestine Hill. But Capricornia's publication was timely because, at its most obvious level of meaning, it was a serious assessment of the problems of halfcastes and Aboriginals. As Margriet Bonnin notes: "Much of the descriptive writing showed an esoteric interest in the more heroic, exotic and sensational aspects of the aboriginals and their benefactors and persecutors. . ." ("A Study of Australian Descriptive Writing 1929-1945," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Queensland, 1980, p.292). The most serious and influential work of the period was A.P. Elkin's The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them, which was published in the same year as Capricornia, four years after Herbert had first drafted the novel. The publication of this anthropological work marks the beginning of Herbert's serious interest in reading about the Aboriginal. In his correspondence of the time he expresses love for Elkin as a man of great understanding, and even talks of approaching him in the hope of securing the position of Patrol Officer for Aboriginal Affairs in the Northern Territory. (See Letters, Xavier Herbert to Arthur Dibley, undated, National Library of Australia, Herbert Papers, MS 758, Series 3, Correspondence File 6.)

5. Randolph Stow, To the Islands (1958; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 208.

6. Lowry C. Wimberly, Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1959), p. 328.

7. H.M. Green, "Australian Literature, 1938," Southerly, I, 1 (Sept., 1939), p. 39.

8. Vincent Buckley, "Capricornia," Meanjin Quarterly, XIX, 1 (March, 1960), p. 13.

9. Ibid., p. 20.

10. Ibid., p. 13.

11. Neil Mudge, "Xavier Herbert's Capricornia: Image, Theme, Structure" (unpublished M.Litt. thesis, University of Queensland, 1977), p. 41.

12. Neil Mudge, "Capricornia: Seasonal, Diurnal and Colour Patterns," Australian Literary Studies, IX, 2 (October 1979), pp. 156-66. This article is a revised and abridged version of the thesis cited in the preceding note.

13. Ibid., p. 162.

14. Mudge, "Image, Theme, Structure," p. 40.

15. W.B. Yeats, ed., Introduction to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse (1892-1935) (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. xix-xxi.

16. Ibid., p. xxi.

17. T. Inglis Moore, Social Patterns in Australian Literature, Perspectives in Australian Literature (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1976), p. 166.

18. Sydney J. Baker, The Australian Language (2nd ed.; Sydney: Currawong, 1966), p. 26.

19. Xavier Herbert, Poor Fellow My Country (Sydney: Collins, 1975), p. 20.

20. A.P. Elkin, The Australian Aborigines: How To Understand Them (1938; rpt. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1954), p. 133.

21. Letter, Xavier Herbert to Arthur Dibley, undated [1936], National Library of Australia, Herbert Papers, MS 758, Series 3, Correspondence File 6.

22. Ibid.

23. H.P. Heseltine, "Australian Image: 1. The Literary Heritage," Meanjin Quarterly, XXI, 1 (March, 1962), p. 40.

24. Ibid., p. 49.

25. Henry Handel Richardson, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: The Way Home (1925; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 269.

26. Henry Handel Richardson, The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: Ultima Thule (1929; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 41.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p. 172.

29. Ibid., p. 274.

30. Ibid., p. 272.

31. Ibid., pp. 278-79.

32. Heseltine, "Australian Image: 1," p. 47.

33. Patrick White, Voss (1957; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p. 386. At the moment of Voss's death, Laura Trevelyan, miles away, but in an agony of sympathy, cries out: "'How important it is to understand the three stages. Of God into man. Man. And man returning into God.'"

34. Heseltine, "Australian Image: 1," p. 42.

35. Ibid., p. 41.

36. Patrick White, A Fringe of Leaves (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), p. 392.

37. Ibid., p. 405.

38. H.P. Heseltine, ed., Introduction to The Penguin Book of Australian Verse (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 34.

39. Henry Lawson, "The Bush Undertaker," in Henry Lawson: Selected Stories, ed. Brian Matthews, Seal Australian Fiction (Adelaide: Rigby, 1971), p. 80

40. Kenneth Slessor, "Five Visions of Captain Cook," Poems (1944; rpt. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1963), p. 68.

41. Dorothy Hewett, "Across the Border and Tomorrow Morning: The Romantic Dilemma of the Modern Australian Poet," paper delivered at the Australian National University, Second Conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, May 16, 1979.

42. Mudge, "Capricornia: Image, Theme and Structure," p. 39.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 48.

2. Stéphane Mallarmé, quoted in A.R. Chisholm, ed., The Poems of Shaw Neilson (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973), p. 15.

3. D.C. Muecke, The Compass of Irony (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 214.

4. Georges Palante, "L'Ironie: étude psychologique," Revue Philosophique de la France et l'Etranger, Tome LXI (February, 1906), p. 153, quoted in Muecke, The Compass of Irony, p. 120.

5. Morton L. Gurewitch, "European Romantic Irony " (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Columbia, 1957), p. 11.

6. Meucke, The Compass of Irony, p. 113.

7. Ibid., p. 114.

8. Ibid., pp. 163-64.

9. Ibid., p. 182.

10. Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Irony, trans. Lee M. Capel (London: Williams Collins, 1965), quoted in Muecke, The Compass of Irony, p. 242

11. Muecke, The Compass of Irony, pp. 214-15.

12. Vincent Buckley, "Capricornia," Meanjin Quarterly, XIX, 1 (March, 1960) p. 14.

13. Ibid., pp. 16-17.

14. Ibid., p. 20.

15. Ibid., p. 21.

16. Xavier Herbert, interviewed by Hazel de Berg, July 12, 1961. Tape in National Library of Australia, MS 88. Transcript in Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature, Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83.

17. J.J. Healy, Literature and the Aborigine in Australia 1770-1975 (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), p. 166.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. H.P. Heseltine, "Australian Image: 1. The Literary Heritage," Meanjin Quarterly, XXI, 1 (March, 1962), pp. 35-49.

22. Ibid., p. 37.

23. Xavier Herbert, "The Writing of Capricornia," Australian Literary Studies, IV, 3 (May, 1970), p. 212.

24. Ibid., p. 211.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., p. 212.

27. Ibid.

28. Thomas Mann, "Die Kunst des Romans," a lecture delivered at Princeton University in 1939, printed in Altes und Neues (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1953). Translated by Hermann Salinger as "The Art of the Novel," in The Creative Vision: Modern European Writers on Their Work, ed. Haskell M. Block and Hermann Salinger (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), p. 88.

29. Xavier Herbert, Disturbing Element, Fontana Books (Melbourne: Collins Australia, 1976), p. 19.

30. Letter, Xavier Herbert to Professor H. Heseltine, January 26, 1974, in Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature, Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83, File 33.

31. Letter, Xavier Herbert to H. Heseltine, January 12, 1974, in Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature,Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83, File 33.

32. Ibid.

33. René Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950, Vol. II: The Romantic Age (4th ed.; London: Jonathan Cape, 1961), p. 16:

> "Friedrich Schlegel introduced the term irony into modern literary discussion. Before, there are only adumbrations in Hamann. Schlegel's use of the term differs from the earlier purely rhetorical meaning and from the view of tragic irony in Sophocles which was developed early in the 19th century by Connop Thirlwall. Schlegel's concept was taken up by Solger, in whom it first assumed a central position for critical theory and for whom all art becomes irony."

34. Friedrich Schlegel, "Athenaums-Fragmente," in Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, ed. Ernst Behler in collaboration with Jean-Jacques Anstett and Hans Eichner, Vol. II: Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1796-1801), ed. Hans Eichner (Munich-Paderborn-Vienna: Ferdinand Schoningh, Zurich: Thomas-Verlag, 1966), p. 162. There is apparently no English translation of this work available; but it is quoted in translation in Hans Eichner, Friedrich Schlegel, World Author Series (New York: Twayne, 1970), p. 70 - in which Eichner also outlines the theory of the novel put forward by Schlegel in the "Athenaums-Fragmente

35. Hans Eichner, Friedrich Schlegel, World Author Series (New York: Twayne, 1970), p. 70.

36. Schlegel's theory of Romantic poetry is outlined in Eichner, Friedrich Schlegel, pp. 44-83, and in Wellek, The Romantic Age, pp. 5-35. Wellek warns that although "the famous 'fragment' (No. 116) of the 'Athenaeum' which defines romantic poetry. . . . has been made the key for the interpretation of the whole of romanticism. . . . Schlegel uses the term 'romantic' in a highly idiosyncratic way which he himself very soon abandoned" (pp. 12-13). This justifiable scepticism does not, however, undermine the foundations of my own argument, since I am concerned with Schlegel's concept of Romanticism only insofar as it may be understood from the theory of Romantic Irony, which evolved from and transformed that concept. As Wellek writes: "Schlegel's poetic ideal takes on much more concrete meaning if we examine his demands for irony. . ."(p. 14).

37. Eichner, Friedrich Schlegel, p. 70.

38. Friedrich Schlegel, "Ideen," in Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, Vol. II, pp. 256-72 (see n. 34), quoted in English translation in Eichner, Friedrich Schlegel, p. 73.

39. H.M. Green, A History of Australian Literature, Vol. II: 1923-1950 (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1961), p. 1122.

40. Ibid., p. 1126.

41. Buckley, "Capricornia," p. 13.

42. Ibid., p. 15.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Green, A History of Australian Literature, p. 1129.

47. Buckley, "Capricornia," p. 14.

48. Eichner, Friedrich Schlegel, p. 72.

49. Ibid.

50. Schlegel, "Athenaums-Fragmente," in Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe Vol. II, ed. Eichner, p. 131; quoted by Eichner in translation in Friedrich Schlegel, p. 72

51. Schlegel, "Lyceums-Fragmente," in Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, Vol. II, p. 108; quoted by Eichner in English translation in Friedrich Schlegel, p. 72.

52. Letter, Xavier Herbert to Arthur Dibley, undated (approx. 1935), National Library of Australia, Herbert Papers, MS 758, Series 3, Correspondence File 4.

53. Schlegel, "Lyceums-Fragmente," p. 1804, quoted in Eichner, Friedrich Schlegel, p. 64.

54. Healy, Literature and the Aborigine, p. 165.

55. Ibid., p. 166.

56. Buckley, "Capricornia," p. 15.

57. Michael Cotter, "Sounding Out the Autochthonous," review of Literature and the Aborigine in Australia 1770-1975, by J.J. Healy, in SPAN, 11 (October, 1980), pp. 48-49.

58. Kevin Magarey, "The South African Novel and Race," Southern Review, I, 1 (1963), p. 28.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., p. 37.

61. Healy, Literature and the Aborigine, p. 164.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid., p. 166.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., p. 165.

66. Ibid.

67. Letter, Xavier Herbert to Arthur Dibley, March 24, 1936, National Library of Australia, Herbert Papers, MS 758, Series 3,Correspondence File 6.

68. Ibid.

69. Letter, Xavier Herbert to Arthur Dibley, undated [1936], National Library of Australia, Herbert Papers, MS 758, Series 3, Correspondence File 6.

70. Xavier Herbert, "A Town Like Elliott," The Bulletin, March 31, 1962, p. 23.

71. Harry Heseltine, Xavier Herbert, Australian Writers and Their Work (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 12.

72. Ibid., p. 11.

73. Ibid., p. 13.

74. Ibid., p. 12.

75. Ibid.

76. Xavier Herbert, Disturbing Element, Fontana Books (Melbourne: Collins, 1976), pp. 17-18.

77. Heseltine, Xavier Herbert, p. 13.

78. Letter, Xavier Herbert to Professor H. Heseltine, January 26, 1974, Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature, Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83, File 33.

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80. Ibid.

81. Xavier Herbert, interviewed by Hazel de Berg, July 12, 1961. Tape in National Library of Australia, MS 88. Transcript in Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature, Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83.

82. Brian Elliott, Introduction to The Jindyworobaks, Portable Australian Authors (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979), p. xvii.

83. Letter, Xavier Herbert to Ian Mudie, January 26, 1961, Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature, Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83, File 33.

84. Xavier Herbert, interviewed by Hazel de Berg, July 12, 1961.

85. W. Flexmore Hudson, "A Prophet in his Own Country," Jindyworobak Review 1938-1948, ed. Rex Ingamells (Melbourne: Jindyworobak, 1948), p. 84.

86. Brian Elliott, "Xavier Herbert," in Commonwealth Literature, ed. William Walsh, Great Writers Library (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 111.

87. Letter, Xavier Herbert to Patrick White, February 11, 1979, Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature, Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83, File 33.

88. Letter, Xavier Herbert to Arthur Dibley, undated [1936], National Library of Australia, Herbert Papers, MS 758, Series 3, Correspondence File 6.

89. Xavier Herbert, "The Agony - and the Joy," Overland, 50/51 (Autumn, 1972), p. 65.

90. Russell McDougall, "Capricornia: Recovering the Imaginative Vision of a Polemical Novel," Australian Literary Studies, X, 1 (May, 1981). [Page numbers unavailable at time of typing.]

91. Helen Prideaux, "The Experimental Novel in Australia, Part I: Xavier Herbert's Capricornia," Prospect, III, 2 (1960), p. 13.

92. Stephen Gray, "Turbott Wolfe in Context," in William Plomer, Turbott Wolfe, ed. Stephen Gray (1926; rpt. Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1980), pp. 197-98.

CONCLUSION

1. Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 18.

2. Letter, Xavier Herbert to "The Management," undated, Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature, Sadie Herbert Collection, MSS 83, File 26A. Although the addressee is not specified, it is obvious that this letter was written to an American publishing firm in 1955, when Herbert was having difficulty securing a publisher for "Of Mars, the Moon, and Destiny" (later to become Soldiers' Women). Apparently, Appleton-Century, who had published Capricornia in America but were unwilling to accept the new novel, suggested an alternative publisher. The three-page letter is more than a statement on Soldiers' Women, since in it the author is concerned to inform the prospective publisher of the values and philosophy which inform his work.

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