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**The Life and Works  
of  
Elliot Lovegood Grant Watson**

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HOPE KYNOCH

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 1987 I completed a Master of Arts degree at the University of Melbourne, the requirements for which were one year's coursework plus a minor thesis. Part of the minor thesis was on Australian literature, in which some of Grant Watson's novels were discussed. This was based on readings of a limited amount of his work available at that time, and with no contact with his family or access to the collection at the National Library, Canberra, or the Dorothy Green collection at James Cook University, Townsville. The present study is a vastly amplified, quite different and altogether new work.

In 1993 during the early course of this thesis I was invited by Primavera Press, Sydney, to write the *Afterword* for *The Nun and the Bandit*, republished following the making of the film by Paul Cox in that year.

I wish to express my thanks to the following people for their assistance to me in the writing of this work.

Firstly, to Paul Brennan of Primavera Press, Sydney, who first encouraged me to continue with my work on the life and works of E. L. Grant Watson, to Professor Peter Pierce of James Cook University, Townsville (formerly of the National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University), and Dr. David Dunstan of The National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, for continual encouragement and valuable assistance, to Josephine Spence, Grant Watson's daughter, who gave me permission to research the Grant Watson collection in The Australian National Library, Canberra, and who has given assistance and encouragement over the years, including kindly sending me family photographs with her permission to reproduce them in this study. Thanks also to Dr. Elizabeth Perkins and Professor Hassall of James Cook University, Townsville, for sending me requested material from the Dorothy Green collection of Grant Watson material, and to Marlene Miles for her assistance in photocopying and despatching the material, and lastly, to Veronica Peek whose careful and expert work in recording the material on computer disk was much appreciated.

## SUMMARY

This thesis gives an account of the life and writings of E. L. Grant Watson 1885–1970, who, as a first class honours graduate in Biological Science from Cambridge University in 1909, came to Australia in 1910 at the age of twenty-four to work with the anthropologist, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, on the Cambridge Expedition studying the marriage customs of the Australian Aborigines. In Australia they were joined by Daisy Bates. While waiting for Radcliffe-Brown to arrive, Grant Watson worked on the Western Australian goldfields and fell in love with the Australian bush. After his two years in Australia spent mostly in the Western Australian bush and on the islands in Shark Bay, he returned to England and, relinquishing a career in science, became a writer. Of his thirty odd books, articles, broadcasts, and a book of poetry, he wrote six Australian novels, a book of short stories and two autobiographies based on his Australian experiences. When he died in England in 1970, all his Australian books had long been out of print. Only a few members of the Australian *literati* had read his books and written about them – most Australian people had never heard of him.

The thesis consists of an introduction, nine chapters and a conclusion. It follows his early life, his family upbringing and his schooling at Bedales, the innovative school, the development of his thinking and the famous people he met during the course of a long life, such as W. H. Hudson, Joseph Conrad and Carl G. Jung – all of whom contributed towards his philosophy. There follows a comparison of his Australian books with those of well-known writers such as Katharine Susannah Prichard, D. H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo*, Havelock Ellis' *Kanga Creek*, Patrick White's *Voss*, Louis Becke's *His Native Wife* and Randolph Stow's *To the Islands*. Comparisons are also made with other Australian writers on the themes of miscegenation and reincarnation. The thesis also discusses his long relationship with Ida Bedford. Her influence on his life is recorded as well as his meeting and marriage with Katharine Hannay with reference to Katharine's unpublished autobiography 'Between Two Worlds'. Reference has also been made to the influence of his mother from his early childhood to her death shortly before the end of the 1914–1918 war. The thesis presents an overview of Grant Watson's life and work, in particular his strong identification with the Australian outback. A selection of his Australian stories has been included as well as a selection of his poems, as Appendices A and B.

# Introduction

*Sit in a room and read – and read, and read the right books by the right people. Your mind is brought onto that level, and you have a nice, mild, slow-burning rapture all the time. This realization of life can be a constant realization in your living. When you find an author who really grabs you, read everything he has done. Don't say, 'Oh I want to know what So-and-so did, and don't bother at all with the best-seller list. Just read what this one author has to give you And then you can go read what he had read, and the world opens up in a way that is consistent with a point of view. But when you go from one author to another you may be able to tell us the date when each wrote such and such a poem – but he hasn't said anything to you.'*<sup>1</sup>

A chapter of J. J. Healy's *Literature and the Aborigines in Australia* (1978) discusses the works of Joseph Furphy and E. L. Grant Watson. In Grant Watson he analyses the image of a writer whose response to the Australian bush and the Aborigines attracted my interest as being more sensitively perceptive and more spiritually aware than other writers on the same theme. "He provides us," Healy writes, "with the spectacle of a writer as dramatically open to the Aborigines as Furphy was closed".<sup>2</sup> "In the first quarter century the Aboriginal presence was not recorded by Australian writers" Healy continues. "This task was left to an Englishman, E. L. G. Watson. Watson was the great outsider of Australian Literature. He was the main recorder of black-white contact in a period which played down this element. Above all he was an alternative voice."<sup>3</sup>

It was not only an alternative voice, but one that claimed my attention as a voice I wanted to hear more of, and which persuaded me to commence a comprehensive search to read his books, which were all out of print.

In his autobiography *But To What Purpose* (1946) written over thirty years after his time in Australia, Grant Watson gave an outline of his life with later chapters on his journey to Australia and his impressions of the Australian environment and the Aborigines; always revealing a mind receptive to nature, its intricacies and its wonders, which he applied to the Australian bush and its effect on people as he experienced it in 1910–12. The rich development of his thinking received a strong impetus when he visited Australia – an experience which, he said later, changed his life. His later studies of analytical psychology, in particular those of Dr Carl G. Jung, enabled him to weave his experiences through a web of psychology into a design of unique ideas and impressions. These were always spiritual, and

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyes, *The Power of Myth*, N.Y., USA: Doubleday, a div. of Bantam Doubleday Dell Pub. Group Inc., 1988, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> J. J. Healy, 'Innocence and Experience', *Literature and the Aborigines in Australia: 1770–1975*, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1978, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> J. J. Healy, 'Grant Watson and the Aborigine: A tragic voice in an age of optimism', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, May 1975, p. 26.

sometimes dazzling, replications of the colourful tapestry of the Australian desert and its spiritual aloofness. Grant Watson used symbolism in his description of the bush, giving it a life of its own with qualities of enticement and rejection, depicting an environment not to be trusted, yet not to be resisted.

Observing as a scientist and absorbing like a poet, Grant Watson took in nature with his every breath. From a mind steeped in the literary traditions of Europe, and with the trained perception of a biologist, his imaginative descriptions of outer experience often revealed a rich inner experience which, at times, threatened to overwhelm the European conventions of his native England. So he wrote: "I can give but a faint impression of this country, it was both a lure towards a future wonder and an ever-present ravishment. I grew increasingly to love and fear its mild aloofness appearing as a symbol of all that civilization has chosen to disregard."<sup>4</sup> Grant Watson walked into the Australian bush with a volume of George Meredith's poems in his pocket. "They were England and the English tradition when I was almost overwhelmed by the strangeness of Aboriginal corroborees, a sheet-anchor in a strange sea, but they remained valid in the face of magic that I was forced to believe in by its strange efficacy."<sup>5</sup> In the use of symbolism describing the desert and the Aborigines, as well as describing his journey through the Australian outback of 1910-12 as both a physical journey and a journey of the mind, Grant Watson anticipated Patrick White's *Voss* (1957) and Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* (1958).

In this study my aim is to carry out a biographical study of the life and writings of E. L. Grant Watson (1885-1970), born in Staines, Middlesex, England, and to follow the development of his thinking and, in particular, his impressions of his experiences in Australia in 1910-1912 where his spiritual reactions to the bush, the Aborigines and the man on the land were impressively different to other writers on the same themes, and which left a lasting impression on his mind - a mind that was extraordinarily open and receptive to the Australian environment.

Although his books have been acknowledged and discussed by a few literary specialists, he is unknown to most Australian readers. His Australian novels and two autobiographies, as well as the book of short stories, were only discovered gradually by travelling interstate and searching bookshelves of rare books in various libraries. The scientific and philosophical books, and the classic nature books were not found until much later. Finally, the unpublished material in the National Library, Canberra was an important guide to the illumination of his thoughts. Then there were the books by the authors who influenced his life and thinking. Among them George Meredith, Friedrich Nietzsche, Joseph Conrad, W. H. Hudson, Walt Whitman, Henrik Ibsen, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; and later in his life, Dr Carl G. Jung and Rudolf Steiner. All these writers needed some researching to broaden my perspective of this author and the development of his thinking. Their influence will be shown in the following chapters.

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<sup>4</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, London: The Cresset Press, 1946, p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62.

Elliot Lovegood Grant Watson (1885–1970) was a young first class honours graduate in Natural Sciences from Trinity College, Cambridge University. He came to Australia in 1910 to work with the anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown on the Cambridge Expedition in Western Australia studying the four-class marriage system of the Australian Aborigines (discussed in a later chapter). He also experienced life on the goldfields at the Bullfinch mine near Southern Cross, and a night's journey by train and buggy from Kalgoorlie, while awaiting the arrival of Radcliffe-Brown who had been delayed in England. At the Bullfinch mine Grant Watson did some work on the goldfields but also collected biological specimens for European collectors to help pay his way on the expedition, which at this stage was lacking in sufficient funds. Later in *Departures* (1948) he wrote of the gold: "I did not think of it as of the power it might give but looked for it as I might for some rare manifestation of Nature".<sup>6</sup> And through the character of Martin in *The Desert Horizon* (1923) he speaks in the same way: "Certainly the gold had its spell but for me it was part of the land, and no aim in itself."<sup>7</sup>

In *The Mystery of Physical Life* (1964) Grant Watson wrote: "Darwin saw evolution as the product of *chance* variations and this, if taken in the larger aspect, is a true finding, yet too simple, if *chance* is not approached in its deeper aspect."<sup>8</sup> In his youth, Grant Watson had been influenced by Nietzsche and his statement, "God is dead, chance rules the world". Later from the *I. Ching Book of Changes* (1960) he found that the Chinese mind seems to be exclusively preoccupied with the *chance* aspects of events. As Jung wrote in his foreword to this classic work: "What we call coincidence seems to be the chief concern of this peculiar mind, and what we worship as causality passes almost unnoticed. We must admit that there is something to be said for the immense importance of chance. If we leave things to nature we see every process is partially or totally interfered with by chance".<sup>9</sup> In *The Power of Myth* (1988) Joseph Campbell writes: "Is there anything in your life that did not occur by chance?"<sup>10</sup> The concept of chance affecting human life occurs in different areas of Grant Watson's writing. He made it a theme in *The Partners* (1933) when Tim Lawson's young wife, Vera, feels that her life has been ruled by chance. In *Departures* (1948) Grant Watson wrote: "*Chance* and good fortune had brought me to this remote spot and at first impact the greater part of my attention was absorbed into the pervading aura of a land that appeared vaster than any I had conceived, and that was as yet innocent of human exploitation".<sup>11</sup>

In the epilogue of *The Mystery of Physical Life* (1964, republished 1992) Grant Watson wrote:

At Cambridge University when working as a student of zoology, I was affected by the prevailing paralysis for it was only too easy to accept the Darwinian theory as

<sup>6</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Departures*, London: Pleiades Books Ltd, 1948, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *The Desert Horizon*, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1923, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *The Mystery of Physical Life*, London: Abelard-Schuman, 1964. Repub. Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1992; Lindisfarne Press, n.y., p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> I Ching, *I Ching Book of Changes*, trans. Richard Wilhelm, foreword C. G. Jung, London: Routledge & Paul Ltd, 2nd impr. 1960, p. xxii.

<sup>10</sup> Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>11</sup> Grant Watson, *Departures*, op. cit., p. 35.

the best possible working hypothesis. The principles of classification filled my mind to the exclusion of the all important reality that nothing was done to help students of biology to an imaginative perception of living things. Only slowly after years did such perception come to me while living with two companions in the wilds of the northern Australian bush, I began in that strange and illuminating atmosphere of solitude and close contact with the impulses of nature to be aware of what might be behind the world of wonder that my senses presented to me.

As his daughter, Josephine Spence, has written, "His two years in Australia, quite shook him out of believing the then purely mechanistic explanation of the phenomenon of evolution".<sup>12</sup> In an earlier letter she had written: "My father was neglected by Australian Literature, and that I find puzzling. Scientifically, his thinking was against the stream, as a naturalist who studied facts he was against the Darwinian theory of evolution as *chance* explaining everything."<sup>13</sup> Later she wrote: "I've been watching a wonderful film on Kakadu. The instincts of animals is a source of constant amazement to me and demonstrably not something that could have 'evolved' by *chance*. It somehow arrived complete or the animal would not have survived – a manifestation of the 'descent of spirit' into matter as my father would say – that it should reflect some inner world in us, I find more difficult".<sup>14</sup>

Coincident with the widening of Grant Watson's perception of the intricacies of nature in the Australian bush, he became vaguely aware of some correspondence within himself which called for further discovery. So he wrote: "Those first few weeks that I spent in the bush were rich, not so much in outer, but in inner experience." And, later, he wrote of "the strange power" of the bush.

In psychological interpretation it is, I suppose, that the mild, innocent and aloof quality of that virgin territory appears as a symbol of the unconscious, as a symbol of all that civilization has chosen to disregard. It is a vast interrogation mark ... questioning itself, and more than consciousness can know of itself, or indeed of life. It says to man: 'Thou insignificant spark, where art thou? How is it with thee in thy soul? Canst thou sustain my vast and indifferent regard? Or wilt thou shrivel into nothingness, rather than listen to my silences?'

So it was that day after day, the bush questioned me, as I wandered looking for beetles. One moment I might be happy enough intent upon my hunt, but the next, the veil of time seemed drawn aside, and eternity gaped in the sun's glare, or in the cracking of a seed-pod.<sup>15</sup>

Here Grant Watson personified the bush in psychological terms, giving it a voice of its own, a voice to be reckoned with; and with which he later came to terms, choosing to sleep

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Grant Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence, dated 3 Mar., 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Josephine Spence, dated 4 Nov., 1993.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from Josephine Spence, dated 10 Mar., 1995.

<sup>15</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 100.

wrapped in a blanket on the ground at a short distance from the camp rather than in the protection of his tent. "And," as he wrote, "be righted in my own esteem and the next day perhaps the bush would speak to me again: 'Fear me, Do not hate me. Do not worship me. Do not resist me, nor presume to look for too long. Look aside, and if you can, accept me.'"<sup>16</sup>

Grant Watson anticipated later Australian authors in his psychological presentation of the Australian bush, as a force to be reckoned with as a symbol of the unconscious. It can be compared with, perhaps, Heriot's journey across the Australian desert in search of his soul in Stow's *To the Islands*; or with Patrick White's explorer-hero Voss, whose geographical journey across the desert becomes at the same time an inward journey of spiritual growth. Although every outward journey he made was also an inward one, for Grant Watson can be seen a more complex interpretation, thematically concerned with man's spiritual nature and presented in terms of symbol and myth; or psychological analysis stemming from his later studies of psychoanalysis and Jung's psychology. In *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* (1983) Jung wrote:

Theoretically, no limits can be set to the field of consciousness, since it is capable of indefinite extension. Empirically, however, it always finds its limit when it comes up against the *unknown*. Everything of which I know, but of which I am not at the moment thinking; everything of which I was once conscious but have now forgotten, everything perceived by my senses, but not noted by my conscious mind, everything which involuntarily and without paying attention to it, I feel, think, remember, want, and do, all the future things that are taking shape in me and will sometime come to consciousness, all this is the content of the unconscious.<sup>17</sup>

For Grant Watson the Australian bush of 1910 was indeed an unknown phenomenon, untouched by the civilization of his European world. The experience of this 'other' world affected him powerfully and he continued to draw inspiration from it throughout the course of his long creative life, drawing up the unknown in his inner world. Impressed by the mysticism and magic of the Aborigines, he wrote reflectively many years later:

As I came to fall under the spell of these people, so many thousands of years distant from our European conventions, so did those same European conventions suffer from an objective devaluation, if I may use such a phrase. I was coming to stand not only three hundred years, but perhaps three hundred thousand years away.

The process went so far during those fifteen months amongst the Aborigines in one place or another that I only just snatched myself back in time to be able to half-believe ever again in the conventions of Europe. I knew magic could kill, and that magic, the man-made bending of the universal powers, could make ill or well. I had entered the animism of the savage mind, and had found within those mystical,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 101.

<sup>17</sup> C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, London: Flamingo, 1983, p. 419.



sympathetic identifications the open doorways to the unconscious. I do not pretend that this was an altogether desirable experience, though I think it has been a useful one, seeing that I was able to balance, at a later date, its strong influence by five years of analytical psychology. It was in a way a unique experience, not so much understood or valued at the time, but valued and partly understood afterwards. It had lifted me, or perhaps sunk me, above or below the orthodox horizon of vision. Through no virtue or merit of my own this accident has happened to me. I have lived for a considerable number of months in the world of magic-sticks and stones, of totem animals, and if I have not actually met and conversed with the Alcheringa animal ancestors, I have become convinced of their existence in the same way in which Dr. Jung is convinced of the existence of the archetypes.<sup>18</sup>

The accounts of Aboriginal magic given by Spencer & Gillen in *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899, reprinted with preface 1938) are brought into relation with Jung's views with some reference to Steiner's theory on primitive man (which will be included in Chapter Three on *magic*). A comparison will also be made between the views on Aboriginal magic of the other members of the Cambridge expedition, Radcliffe-Brown and Daisy Bates, as well as viewing the merging, or otherwise, of the borders between fiction, philanthropy and anthropology in relation to an Aboriginal subject.

Grant Watson's autobiography, *But To What Purpose* (1946) includes much detail of his unforgettable Australian experiences, as well as of his early years in England, and of the aftermath of the deep impressions made by the Australian environment. In 1968, at the age of eighty-three, he wrote *Journey under the Southern Stars*. This included much of the material of his earlier autobiography but is concerned more with the external world than the life history and inner thoughts of the author. Both books reveal characters, incidents and impressions from which the novels were developed. So, in this author's prolific array of books and articles there is an interesting interrelation of characters, events and places with recurring symbolic references to the spirit of the desert, with its attributes of hidden gold, solitude, and vast expanses of dry, arid land. Desert with its dream-like images, bursting at times into a wonder of pink and white – a sea of blossoms and metallic blue butterflies, fragile delicate enigmas mythically linked with the soul. Desert with its whispers of good and evil, its primitive Aborigines, a totemic, animistic, force of mysticism and magic all contributing to – if they succumb – the madness of men, the inevitable 'bush groper', the magic of life as lived beyond the outer fringes of civilization.

Coming to Australia, as Grant Watson did at the age of twenty-four, with a temperament primed for reflection on the contrast between civilized and primitive societies, as well as with Nietzschean philosophy, his direct contact and extended experience with the Aborigines of the North-West changed his thinking. His new point of view can be seen in a little school-book written in 1921 for Phillips' *New-prospect Readers*. Also, an article entitled 'The

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<sup>18</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 108.

Sacred Dance: Corroborees of natives of North-West Australia' was published in consecutive copies of *The English Review* (1930) and the study *Corroboree* was published posthumously in *Descent of Spirit* (1990) edited by Dorothy Green. His short story 'Out There', published first in 1914 in consecutive copies of *The English Review*, tells of a white station manager, isolated from white civilization, taking up the Aboriginal way of life. It was 'strong meat' for English readers of that time, the editor receiving letters of indignation from a number of regular readers, one threatening to cancel his subscription. A. G. Stephens printed most of it in *The Bookfellow* calling it 'an authentic Australian document'. In 1990 it was reprinted in *Descent of Spirit*.

Grant Watson's intensive studies of Jung's philosophical writings and later meetings with him at his home at Küsnacht near Zurich in April 1960, a year before Jung's death (described in detail in Chapter Seven) as well as the discovery of Rudolf Steiner's books, followed by six years of the study of analytical psychology influenced the progress of his thinking and helped him to place his experiences in the Australian bush with the Aborigines into some kind of perspective. As his daughter, Josephine, has written, "The soil was so receptive when he found Steiner and Jung, and that I am sure was largely due to those early years in the Southern Hemisphere."<sup>19</sup>

"The discovery by chance of Rudolf Steiner's *Christianity as Mystical Fact* (1914) by my parents," she wrote, "led them onto finding out more".<sup>20</sup> Grant Watson saw ancient myths as incomplete foreshadowings of the Christian story. He began to look on myths as more important than historical events. The myth, the folktale, and, at a later stage, dreams became progressively more important. Although he gained much enlightenment from this book and from Steiner's teachings, he was never entirely in sympathy with Steiner's way of writing. He was, however, influenced by Jung's psychology, with its insight into the minds of remote and primitive people following his experiences in Africa. Jung's theory was that the *anima* of a man has a strongly historical character as a personification of the unconscious; and to the individual the *anima* is all life that has been in the past and is still alive in him. From his study of Jung's psychology, Watson applies the symbolism of the unconscious to his vision of the desert. Jung has written in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1961): "the soul, the anima, established the relationship to the collectivity of the dead, for the unconscious corresponds to the mythic land of the dead, the land of the ancestors".<sup>21</sup> And Grant Watson wrote: "In psychological interpretation, it is, I suppose, that the mild, innocent and aloof quality of that virgin territory appears as a symbol of the unconscious, as a symbol of all that civilization has chosen to disregard."<sup>22</sup> And today, if one wanders alone in the desert of central Australia amongst primaeval rocks, twisted trees, and mystic silences, one sees how aptly this land corresponds to the mythic land of the dead, the land of the ancestors.

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<sup>19</sup> Letter from Josephine Spence, April 1995.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Jung, *Memories, Dreams & Reflections*, op. cit., p. 216.

<sup>22</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 100.

Grant Watson dealt with the psychological effect of the Australian wilderness on the European imagination many years before this became a theme in the books of other writers such as D. H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo* (1923), *The Boy in the Bush* (1924) (co-written with Mollie Skinner), Patrick White's *Voss* (1957) and Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* (1958), which will be discussed later in this study. The spiritual distinction of the desert with solitude as its central theme, emerges as the force that exerted a power over the lives of all Grant Watson's characters, a power he felt himself in his two years in the Australian bush and which influenced his writing to the end of his life. This commenced with his first novel, *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914), published at the age of twenty-five, based on his experiences on Bernier Island in Shark Bay, W.A., and extends to his final published autobiography, *Journey under the Southern Stars* (1968).

Among the Australian critics and thinkers who have been receptive to the writing of Grant Watson, H. M. Green was one of the earliest. In *An Outline of Australian Literature*, Vol. 1 (1789-1923) (1961) he wrote:

The novelists of the countryside and those who deal with the adventurous and unusual are linked by Elliot Lovegood Grant Watson (England) (1885-). To include with native-born writers and those immigrants who adopted the country as their own, a writer who spent only a couple of years in Australia may seem at the first glance absurd but on reading that large part of Watson's fiction which is set in the country the absurdity disappears.<sup>23</sup>

H. M. Green proceeds to compare Grant Watson's writing with such Australian writers as Mrs Aeneas Gunn, Myrtle Rose White, Ernest Favenc, Katharine Susannah Prichard and Barcroft Boake.

Life in such country as the desert country of Australia may be dealt with in either of two ways. The first is a matter of practical common sense: the writer aims at a simple record of facts, though it may of course be a human and very interesting record. The second way is concerned mainly with the intuitive imagination: the writer makes it his business not so much to compile a record of facts, though incidentally it will of course be his business to record them, as to get beneath the surface of the facts; he conveys what he thus perceives by re-creating imaginatively the mood that the facts produce in him, filling it with suggestion and in some cases reinforcing the suggestion with direct statement. Watson does this.<sup>24</sup>

This gives his work a distinction the other writers lack. Of the other writers mentioned Prichard makes the nearest approach. In her *Coonardoo* (1929) there is a compatibility with Grant Watson's attitude towards the land and the Aborigines. "Watson," H. M. Green

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<sup>23</sup> H. M. Green, *An Outline of Australian Literature*, vol. 1 (1789-1923), Melbourne, Sydney, London: Angus & Robertson, 1961, p. 648.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 649.

continued, "in spite of his short experience approached much nearer to the secret. In doing so he followed the road of the mystics, and only those who walk that road can accept literally what he has to say; but there remains in any case the fact that no writer has translated so effectively the moods of 'The Tomorrow', the Never Never."<sup>25</sup>

H. M. Green was probably the earliest and most perceptive critic of Grant Watson's work, without having had access at that stage to the broad scope of his writings. Unless the reader is able to recognize the signposts of the underlying spirituality of Grant Watson's thinking – linking together the fine threads of his intellectual development and the purity of his perception of nature – one might gloss over his novels and criticize faults of dialogue or syntax or simplicity of style compared with, for example, the complex brilliance of Patrick White. The theme of Grant Watson's Australian novels, H. M. Green described as:

The effect on men and women of isolation from the civilized world. Man has constructed for himself a framework of observances, compulsory or merely habitual within which he lives; if he steps outside that framework he does not merely relapse into barbarism, or even savagery, but ceases to be man as we know him, becoming either less or in some way more. That is what is meant by the saying that in solitude man becomes either a beast or a god, and Watson's novels are illustrations of the fact.<sup>26</sup>

This is particularly true of *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914), written at a critical time of his life from first-hand experience of the drama enacted on the isolated Bernier Island, North-Western Australia, where the only inhabitants were the staff of the hospital and the sick and diseased Aboriginal patients. The book was favourably commented on by Joseph Conrad, to the extent of thirty-five pages of constructive criticism, for which Grant Watson was invited to the master novelist's house to discuss the book personally before publication. Further details of this meeting are given in Chapter Six.

In 1970 H. M. Green's wife, the poet and critic Dorothy Green, who had become interested in Grant Watson through her husband's account of his work in 1961, published an essay in *Meanjin* (1970) 'The Daimon and the Fringe-Dweller', republished in *The Music of Love* (1984). In this essay she wrote of Grant Watson as "one of the most imaginative and perceptive writers to visit Australia, his books have never received the attention they deserve."<sup>27</sup> She referred to Patrick White's *Voss* (1957) where the explorer describes to the poet the strange spiritual attraction of a country whose centre is a vast desert, whose future he sees as a "purely metaphysical one". Yet though, she said, *Voss* is perhaps the finest of the novels which attempt to celebrate this attraction, it is not the only one to do so and certainly not the first. "Unfortunately the books of E. L. Grant Watson, written in the twenties which

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 648.

<sup>27</sup> Dorothy Green, 'The Daimon and the Fringe-Dweller', *The Music of Love*, Melbourne: Penguin Books Aust. Ltd, 1984, p. 127.

spotlighted this strange spiritual attraction in a highly sensitive manner have been allowed to go out of print."<sup>28</sup>

It is true that copies of Grant Watson's novels are difficult to find, having long since been out of print. Only one of his Australian novels has recently been reprinted, *The Nun and the Bandit* (1993), by Primavera Press as a result of a film made of the book by Paul Cox. Having been sent a possible film script from Don Lowe – a writer in Greece, who discovered an old copy of the book in a secondhand bookshop in Athens – Paul Cox was not inspired initially. But when he received a copy of the novel from Grant Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence, he found himself "drawn into the intoxicating landscape of a true visionary." "The film of *The Nun and the Bandit*", he wrote, "is not faithful to the novel but, I hope, faithful to Grant Watson's spirit and his unique faith in the land."<sup>29</sup> "His all embracing passion," continued Paul Cox, "has seduced me into filming another of his novels, *Priest Island*" (1940) which he renamed *Exile* and which was premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in 1994. "Grant Watson would approve, I am sure," he continued. "Like all true exiles, he searched for human identity through Nature and thus found God."<sup>30</sup> Both films are now available on video but these are not the first films made of Grant Watson's Australian novels. *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914) was made into a film in 1919 by Waldorf Photoplays Inc. It was well reviewed in August 1919 by *Exhibitor's Trade Review*, *Motion Picture News*, *Motion Picture World* and *Wid's Film Daily*, and by the *New York Times* (on 3 August, 1919). Recent attempts by Primavera Press to trace the film have failed.

It is true, as Dorothy Green has written, that "Watson's novels present a surface of simplicity that is almost ingenuous, and for this reason alone they are likely to be dismissed by a taste which favours a tortuous complexity of language and an unshakeable belief in the sole reality of the objective world."<sup>31</sup> Perhaps H. M. Green was right when he wrote, "Grant Watson followed the road of the mystics and only those who walk that road can accept literally what he has to say." Dorothy Green carried out twenty years of research on this little known writer, and finally succeeded in compiling selections of his writings in *Descent of Spirit*, published by Primavera Press in 1990. Her plans to write a biography of Grant Watson's life and works were truncated by her death in 1992.

As long ago as 1927, J. H. Wood, in his article, 'Random Reflections' in *Through the Window* wrote: "Speaking of the Australian novel, I am impelled to raise my voice interrogatory-wise and ask why there would appear to be a conspiracy of silence regarding the work of E. L. Grant Watson. When anyone is counting the tale of Australian authors, or pieces of worthwhile fiction about this country one may scan the list of names in vain for any of this author's books".<sup>32</sup> However, in *The Literature of Western Australia* (1979) edited by

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Cox, Book to Film, *The Nun and the Bandit*, Leichhardt: Primavera Press, 1993, p. 309.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Dorothy Green, 'The Daimon and the Fringe-Dweller', op. cit., pp. 127-47.

<sup>32</sup> J. H. Wood, 'Random Reflections', *Through the Window: A window cleaner's view of the world*, Melbourne: Fraser and Jenkinson, 1937, p. 495.

Bruce Bennett, Veronica Brady and Peter Cowan, Grant Watson's novels have been given good coverage. In this publication, Brady and Cowan wrote:

E. L. Grant Watson found an interest in this scene earlier than most – indeed he might lay claim to being the pioneer. The Western Australian country, the land itself, made an immediate and deep impression on Watson. Its individuality and strange power – a power he recorded as destroying some who could not come to terms with it – influenced his writing from the beginning. His awareness of the landscape, and its influence on people is clear in his novels, as is his recognition that the novel had to do more than mirror landscape, or devote itself to tales of adventure. It is in this sense that his work is in advance of most of his fellows of the 1920s in Australian writing, and certainly of those concerned with Western Australia for a much longer period.<sup>33</sup>

The editors continue with a full discussion of his novels set in Western Australia with the comment that "Watson is more aware of the levels of behaviour and motivation of his characters and is able to reveal them more deeply than most of those writing in or about Western Australia during this period of rather coy reticence".<sup>34</sup> The novel at issue was *The Desert Horizon* (1923) but the same comment could be made in relation to all Grant Watson's Australian novels.

Again in *Westerly* (1980) Peter Cowan has compared Grant Watson's Australian books with Lawrence's and M. L. Skinner's *The Boy in the Bush* (1924), claiming that Grant Watson's strong view of the country emerges as unquestionably his own, and enunciated before the publication of *The Boy in the Bush*. In 1994, the University of Western Australia Press published *Daughters of the Sun*, edited by Bruce Bennett and Susan Miller, a collection of short stories from Western Australia in which Grant Watson's 'White and Yellow' was included. This story first appeared in Grant Watson's collection of short stories *Innocent Desires* (1924). Peter Pierce, as editor of *The Oxford Literary Guide*, included documentation by Bruce Bennett and the Western Australian Working Party of the places in Western Australia where Grant Watson and Radcliffe-Brown worked with the Aborigines in 1910–12. In 'A Concern for Landscape' in *Westerly* (1980) Peter Cowan continued his discussion of Grant Watson's Australian books:

The impact of an early Australian landscape preoccupied him over many years, resulting in a series of unusual novels which have no real parallel in their time. Grant Watson may finally have laid to rest his long concern with the Western Australian landscape. *The Nun and the Bandit* (1935) is the last of the novels. Considering how much they have to offer it is very strange how little they seem to

<sup>33</sup> Peter Cowan and Veronica Brady, 'The Literature of Western Australia', *Westerly*, no. 1, 1980, p. 65.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59.

be known, novels that seem to be not so much forgotten by Australian readers as never discovered.<sup>35</sup>

It is puzzling that having been published in the USA and UK and reviewed widely in those countries, Australian readers of the twenties and thirties were not made aware of this English writer writing so perceptively of their own country. Some interest has been created in recent years with the 1992 reprinting of *The Mystery of Physical Life* and *The Nun and the Bandit* in 1993 bringing forth some interesting reviews. However, this film was not released for general viewing in the theatres, although it is available on video through Roadshow.

Commenting on the observation that some of Grant Watson's Australian stories were described by English readers as crude, violent stories of the Australian bush, Grant Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence, replied that she agreed, but added that all were based on real situations and characters he came in contact with or heard of during his two years in the Australian bush. "The world was very different," she wrote. "I mean the respectable world at the time he was writing, and he had little respect for people who shunned the dark side, and yet from that dark side did he not always see the possibility of light?"<sup>36</sup> This he illustrates in such novels as *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914), *The Desert Horizon* (1923) *Daimon* (1925), *The Partners* (1933) and *The Nun and the Bandit* (1935). In *But To What Purpose* (1946) Grant Watson devoted a whole chapter to 'The Quest of the Shadow', or to the dark side of life – that side of life which we all naturally wish to hide and cover up, quoting from many of the modern psychologists, Freud, Jung, Grodek and Kohler, and, in particular, Goethe's *Faust*. In *Departures* (1948) Grant Watson wrote: "The Sunlight and the Shadow are defined one by the other. We may forget – and it would seem that, in our social contacts, we are often urged to forget – that this is in the pattern of things."<sup>37</sup> From this concept Grant Watson developed the novel, *Shadow and Sunlight* (1920) written from his experiences in Fiji in 1912. Grant Watson believed, with Jung, that it is impossible and undesirable to separate the good from the evil. Only by becoming familiar with the shadow side of our own natures will we be able to know how to deal with the evil in the world. This became the theme in *The Nun and the Bandit* (1935).

His spiritual reaction to the Australian bush was something that went so deep he was able years later to express it in compelling psychological terms. Of his first few weeks in the Australian bush at the Bullfinch goldmining camp, he wrote:

There were times when I was frightened, but never too frightened to control myself. Death never stared threateningly at me. Already I seemed in a way to be familiar with this unfamiliarity, this unknown monster which whispered to me, "I am the indefinite mother of good and evil. I transcend all things and am less than all

<sup>35</sup> V. Brady & Peter Cowan, 'A Concern for Landscape', *Westerly*, no. 1, 1980, p. 39.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Josephine Spence to the author, Feb., 1993.

<sup>37</sup> Grant Watson, *Departures*, op. cit., p. 122.



things. I am the fullness and the void. I am both death and life. I am love and love's murder. Look not upon me too long.

Then I would turn away and seek the camp, and familiar human things, and be righted in my own esteem; and the next day perhaps, or some days later, the bush would speak to me again: "Fear me. Do not hate me. Do not worship me. Do not resist me, nor presume to look for too long. Look aside, and *if you can*, accept me."<sup>38</sup>

The recurring theme of opposites which he followed in his novels can be seen in this passage. His observations in his work as a field biologist led him to reflect on the extraordinary symbiotic relationships which develop so often between the most unlikely organisms bringing them into a delicate harmony. His hypothesis that apparent opposites including 'good' and 'evil' complement one another can be seen through his writing, particularly in *The Nun and the Bandit* (1935). One unnamed critic in *The Illustrated London News* (1935) concluded a review with these words: "*The Nun and the Bandit* leaves a haunting impression, partly because of the superb setting of the final scene, and partly because it is a book in which harsh discords compose an arresting harmony".<sup>39</sup>

In all areas of Grant Watson's writing – in his nature books, his autobiographies and his novels – the theme of opposites appears, as a principle. This principle he maintains is almost always ignored in what passes for practical and common sense politics, where most men and all governments assume their actions, being well-intended, will flower and fructify in righteousness. Evolution, progress, enlightenment are clichés that we accept as valid coin. Such concepts ignore the inevitability of the ebb that follows the flow. This doctrine of opposites emanates partly from Grant Watson's study of Jung, who as a youth was influenced by Goethe's *Faust*. It was Jung's mother who during his school years said, "You must read *Faust*." "It poured into my soul a miraculous balm," he wrote. " 'Here at last' I thought, 'is someone who takes the devil seriously' ".<sup>40</sup> In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1983) Jung wrote: "The conflict between the opposites can strain our psyche to the breaking point, if we take them seriously or if they take us seriously".<sup>41</sup>

Grant Watson was an admirer of Karen Blixen's writing. He referred to her "fairy stories" as presenting several levels of understanding together with hints of a primal mystery. "They are as clear as spring water from a rock, but the reader must look for sign-posts to guide at her subtle symbolism." In one of her stories, she lets her beggarman, the 'shadow' of the Prince of Teheran, say, as sage and prophet: "Life and Death are locked caskets, each has the key to the other. Life would be intolerable were it not for Death."<sup>42</sup> In his Australian novel, *The Palmers* (1933) published in the USA as *Lost Man*, Grant Watson used an epigram by Euripides – "Who knows if life is not death and death life?" and as Sam faces death in the desert, he welcomes it now realizing "Life was more horrible than death". The

<sup>38</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>39</sup> *The Illustrated London News*, 1935.

<sup>40</sup> Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 367.

<sup>42</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, 'To This End', unpub. autob., ch. 14, p. 227.



mystical quality in his descriptions of the Australian bush is preserved from vagueness by his rigorous scientific training. The themes of anthropology, sex and violence are played out on the fringe of civilization remote from the centres of industrial civilization with the bush and the desert taking the leading roles. With solitude as the central personal problem of the novels, Grant Watson is concerned, in large part, with exploring the truth or falsehood of Nietzsche's statement – "In Solitude Man becomes either a God or a beast".

As well as writing books, Grant Watson was a broadcaster, having given a series of talks on the ABC on Herman Melville, including readings of extracts from his poems. An article on Melville's *Testament of Acceptance* was published in *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 6 (1933) pp. 319–27. An admirer of Melville, Watson wrote of his travels in Egypt and on his poem 'Clarel' (1876) written after his visit to the Holy Land. Watson believed that more than any other creative poet since Shakespeare, Melville strove to look deep into the origin of life, and so, of good and evil. It was the evil that fascinated Melville, and in *Mardi* (1849) in *Moby Dick* (1851) and in *Pierre* (1852) he traced its source in different patterns. "In this," Grant Watson continued, "he anticipated the leaders of the New Psychology, and there is no negative region of the soul, where Freud or Jung or any of their followers have explored, that Melville has not penetrated."<sup>43</sup> Questions from 'Clarel', Watson thought, bore directly on his own voyage of discovery, "if it may be so dignified, and on the root problems of the present nihilistic revolution."<sup>44</sup> In *Mardi*, *Moby Dick* and *Pierre*, he found anticipation of Freud, Adler and Jung. Grant Watson's own travels through the Egyptian desert recorded in *But To What Purpose* (1946) provided him with the research material for his novels *Moses Lord of the Prophets* (1929) and *Moonlight in Ur* (1932), the latter a tragic mythical story of unrequited love.

In the scientific foreword of *Descent of Spirit* (1990) Dr E. J. Steele, of Wollongong University has written:

Grant Watson is a rare breed, a 20th century polymath and renaissance man. He has few peers; the closest would be two thinkers at least a generation his junior, viz. The great writer and philosopher, Arthur Koestler and to a lesser extent, Dr. Lewis Thomas, medical biologist and recent director of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Research Institute in New York City. His greatest gift (which Koestler and Thomas also shared) is his 'accessibility' – he is a superb writer of English prose which he uses to great effect in describing the wonder and beauty of biological adaptations. His knowledge in these areas of natural history is wider and deeper than that of most present day biologists.

His detailed descriptions of adaptive behavioural phenomena (both structural and functional) are scientific in their precision yet, because of his literary skill, they

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<sup>43</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

evoke that feeling of wonder largely missing in the way Biology is taught and researched today.<sup>45</sup>

This sense of wonder illuminates much of Grant Watson's writing, his subjects ranging from the vast strangeness of the Australian desert in 1910–1912 with the "subtle yet penetrating psychic aura of the Australian tribesmen" of the North West, and the effect on men and women living far from the centres of civilization; to the delicate nature books of the English countryside, classics of their kind. From the gentleness of the English countryside, he takes us to the myths and violence of Egypt, contrasting the Egyptian desert with the Australian desert, "Innocent and open-eyed"; "A secret bitterness was here, a tang of pain and cruelty and some added intoxication, some enigma unsolved. How was it Moses found God in this land, while I found only Nature and myself?"<sup>46</sup>

In a letter to Dorothy Green, Grant Watson's wife, Katharine, wrote: "I am still finding more books that would have interested Peter" (as he was called by his family and friends) "and I wish I could get his comments. They are all following his line and give many examples of 'Where science stops, but life transcends'. They give endless cases, but no conclusions – they cannot can they, give an answer?"<sup>47</sup> which comment, coincides with the title of Grant Watson's book *The Mystery of Physical Life* (1964). And today another expatriate Englishman, Paul Davies, Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Adelaide and winner of the prestigious Templeton Prize for his popular work on time and other great questions of the universe, writes: "The whole point of science is we don't have to rely on human imagination or intuition which is so limited. We can leave all that behind, common sense included, and let the equations take care of it all".<sup>48</sup> Interviewing Paul Davies, the journalist Penelope Debell wrote: "One of the great paradoxes for scientists working at the cutting edge of the physics of time is that personal experience collides daily with what science holds to be true".<sup>49</sup> So that even today, 'Where science stops but life transcends' remains a paradox for scientists such as Paul Davies. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, formerly Professor of Philosophy at Teheran University and director of the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy reveals in his book *The Encounter of Man and Nature* (1968)<sup>50</sup> a wide and deep knowledge of Western science, and of the almost forgotten Christian tradition of the unity of man and nature, and of man's trusteeship of the earth. He lists Grant Watson among distinguished modern scientists who defy Darwinian dogmas, and refers to his books.

Grant Watson's ideas as a scientist and philosopher were far ahead of his time. In his essay 'The Butterfly and the Ant' published with a selection of essays in *Descent of Spirit*

<sup>45</sup> E. J. Steele, scientific foreword, *Descent of Spirit*, ed. Dorothy Green, Leichhardt, NSW: Primavera Press, 1990, p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from Grant Watson's wife, Katharine, to Dorothy Green, 27 Aug., 1975.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Davies, *The Age*, 27 Mar., 1995.

<sup>49</sup> Penelope Debell interview with Paul Davies, *The Age*, 27 Mar., 1995.

<sup>50</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The spiritual crisis of modern man*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1968. In Dorothy Green (ed.), *Descent of Spirit*, Sydney: Primavera Press, 1990, p. 34.

(1990) he raised many questions now coming to the fore in biology: the idea that evolution can take place in relatively short periods of time; the notion of the complementarity of opposites; the conviction (shared by the philosophers Seyyed Hossein Nasr and E. L. Wilson) that man's mental health and his very humanity depend on a sacramental and symbolic relation to the natural world; and the acceptance of the fact that man is part of the web of being, not the arrogant observer of it for his own short-sighted ends.<sup>51</sup> In his book *Biophilia* (1984)<sup>52</sup> Wilson insisted on the necessity for fusing the scientific and spiritual approaches to the understanding of nature. Yet Watson practised this method all his life and advocated it a few years before his death, in *The Mystery of Physical Life* (1964). For this study, the metamorphosis of the butterfly – which is dramatically described in 'The Butterfly and the Ant' in *Descent of Spirit* (1990)<sup>53</sup> – is significant in the way he refers to it in relation to the stages of his own life, from the inexperienced youth who came to Australia in 1910, and his subsequent unforgettable experiences in the Australian bush for the next two years, followed by his return to England and the gradual development to maturity through the turbulent love affair with Ida Bedford and the following crash and gradual recovery resulting in a complete restructure of his life and thinking.

In his unpublished autobiography 'To This End' Grant Watson wrote:

As a boy I lived in a waking dream, in vague and mystical participation with the English countryside; my particular and actual interest in the world that was not myself, and yet was incorporate in myself. They were fascinating objects strangely endowed with wonder. Years later when I wandered, day after day, week after week, looking for and collecting all kinds of insects in the solitude of the West Australian bush, the influence of those vast and arid plains brought to me, and indeed pressed upon me, the feeling of a Presence which I was forced to think of as God without Man. This impact was, in early days an ordeal that needed all my resistance to withstand ...

This influence so vague, so terrible and so alluring surrounded the mining camp where I was given hospitality. Some men could not sustain it as well as I did, though for those who lived long in the bush, it became an all compelling attraction, a bond master from whom they could not escape. Newcomers often succumbed.<sup>54</sup>

One such person who could not escape was the character, Gilbert, whom Grant Watson described as a "strange and yet most attractive companion, and if ever man could come near to representing what the Australian bush represents, then Gilbert was that man. His humanity had been sifted by so long an experience as to be almost elemental. He was *the bush*

<sup>51</sup> See in particular Nasr and E. O. Wilson, *Biophilia*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984, in *Descent of Spirit*, op. cit. p. 34.

<sup>52</sup> Wilson, in *Descent of Spirit*, op. cit. p. 34.

<sup>53</sup> Grant Watson, *Descent of Spirit*, op. cit. p. 34.

<sup>54</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', unpub. autob., ch. 1, p. 1.

incarnate."<sup>55</sup> It seemed for Grant Watson that all the features of the Australian bush were combined in the human form of the character of Gilbert, who appears in *But To What Purpose* (1946), *The Desert Horizon* (1923) and *Daimon* (1925) – "As red as the dust amongst which he moved. He did not often wash; he wandered like a tramp from place to place, carrying his few possessions, followed by his dog, a man of education, sixty years old, he had spent the last twenty years in the bush and now described as a typical 'bush groper', he would never leave it."<sup>56</sup> For Grant Watson himself it was different as he wrote: "It was probably my early, long periods of search in the New Forest for white Admiral and Purple Emperor caterpillars that enabled me to survive, and ultimately to fall in love with that land of dry mulga bushes, blazing sunshine, and indefinable allure".<sup>57</sup> Grant Watson, too, became captive to the allure of the Australian bush but not in a destructive way as he had heard of other newcomers, but in a way that inspired his thinking for the rest of his life.

So what was Grant Watson's life all about? He wasn't fixed on any ideas. His strength was in discovery – his life was a process of discovery. As a trained zoologist and field biologist, his perception was illuminated by a sense of wonder at nature's intricate life patterns. As a naturalist in tune with spiritual energies, he fused his scientific knowledge with a spiritual approach. The theme 'where science stops but life transcends' runs like a *leit-motif* through his work. Although trained as a scientist, Grant Watson could always see nature rising above the equations. This follows from Jung's epigraph written at the beginning of Chapter One in *The Mystery of Physical Life*: "Science stops at the frontiers of logic but nature does not – she thrives on grounds as yet untrodden by theory". He didn't have a set purpose, he just flowed through an ever enlarging voyage of discovery, a discovery of the mind as well as of nature.

In this study my aim is to guide the reader through Grant Watson's voyage of discovery, to highlight the impressions of his Australian experience and to draw some comparisons with other contemporary writers especially in regard to the land and the Aborigines, with the object of placing him within the historical and literary context of his time. My belief is that Grant Watson has been inadvertently neglected or overlooked by Australian readers and that his work deserves full recognition in the canons of Australian literature. In his use of symbolism in reference to the Australian desert country as a symbol of the unconscious and the Aborigines as a mystical force, identifying a possible means of interpretation of the mystery of the land, he preceded other more famous writers who later wrote on similar themes.

In this regard Grant Watson was a pioneer in Australian writing. As he wrote in *But To What Purpose* (1946) "I had entered the animism of the savage mind and had found within those mystical sympathetic identifications the open doorways to the unconscious". As well, of the Australian desert country he wrote: "The mild innocent aloof quality of that virgin territory

<sup>55</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p 101.

<sup>57</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', ch. 1, p. 1.

appeared as a symbol of the unconscious as a symbol of all that civilisation has chosen to disregard".<sup>58</sup> And again, "The innocent and wide-eyed country remained as it had been from the beginning as was until now, the possession of some pre-human spirit which still broods over it.". Yet he also wrote: "I had the sufficient business of adapting my inner being to this mysterious newly-discovered universe that was so unspeakably old."<sup>59</sup> As Grant Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence, has written: "Realists may argue that it is very old – nevertheless the quality my father found was 'virginal'."<sup>60</sup> I believe this is true yet he also describes it as "unspeakably old". Perhaps it is true that as in Spenser's *Faerie Queen* nature can be seen as both very young and very old.<sup>61</sup>

Grant Watson's writing reveals a deep concern for what he could see, in 1910, was happening, and would continue to happen, to the land and the Aborigines. He was able to perceive and describe the unique fauna and flora of the Australian landscape with not only the knowledge of his scientific training, but also with a continual sense of wonder and delight persuading us to share his wonder. This is particularly so in his enthusiasm for all the wildlife both in the sea and land at Bernier Island off the north-western coast of Australia, which contrasted with the compassion he felt for the dying Aborigines who had been forcibly rounded up and isolated on the island.

Finally, we may regard Grant Watson as a man ahead of his time. The ideas which emerge from his writings, particularly in his autobiography, *But To What Purpose*, were prophetic of those arguments of environmentalists, 'greenies', feminists and defenders of the rights of the Aborigines, and who support the preservation of their land and culture at the present time. Following the Primavera Press publication of *Descent of Spirit* (1990) which is a compilation of a selection of Grant Watson's work, a journalist, John Larkin, wrote: "The restless spirit of E. L. Grant Watson still roams the solitary Australian landscapes he loved so much. He will not leave even though he has lacked recognition. Most Australians have never heard of him, let alone realized that he was one of the most important writers to visit here. But he is connected inextricably to us because his voice speaks so clearly and deeply of things to do with the spirit of this ancient land."<sup>62</sup>

This is the first objective study of Grant Watson's life and work to be written since the author's death in 1970. It would not be complete without giving some account of his nature books and his poetry. Dorothy Green has compiled a study of a selection of his nature essays in *Descent of Spirit* (1990) – which leaves only his poetry. It has not been my intention to provide a critical study of Grant Watson's poetry; I have included a selection of the poems as an appendix as I believe they are an important further dimension to Grant Watson's life and work. In order to tell the story of Grant Watson's life and work it has been necessary to quote

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 100.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 102.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from Grant Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence, 9 Mar., 1994.

<sup>61</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Mutability Canto 7.13 quoted in *The Mystery of Physical Life*, ch. 4, 'The Creative Word', p. 173.

<sup>62</sup> John Larkin, 'Paul Cox takes on a literary legacy', 'Review', *The Sunday Age*, 6 Dec., 1992, p. 10.

extensively from his novels, autobiographies and letters. Grant Watson is still not a well-known writer. Many of his books are long out of print and some material to which I have had access has not been published. A study of this type of material has been necessary in order to see the man's life and work complete.

This study follows the development of Grant Watson's thinking from his early youth, guided by a mother who instilled in him a great love of nature as well as of literature, to his later studies of psychoanalysis and Jung's psychology. In following the direction of his life and writing, I have quoted from those Australian writers and critics who have discovered Grant Watson's Australian books, as well as the film-maker Paul Cox who produced films of two of his books in 1992-1993. As well as discussing his Australian books, some reference has been made to his classic nature books, his broadcasts on Herman Melville and his poetry written in later life – but the strong emphasis is on the lasting effect of the Australian bush on his writing. I have also written of the development of his love for Ida Bedford, the woman who with his wife, Katharine, formed the enduring emotional triangle of his later life. Reference has been made to the strong influence of his mother from his early childhood to her death shortly before the end of the 1914-1918 war.

Chapter One deals with Grant Watson's early life, school and university days, in particular his experiences at Bedales, the innovative school under the direction of the headmaster, John Haden Badley. Chapters Two, Three and Four describe his experiences as part of the Cambridge Expedition with Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and Daisy Bates in Western Australia and on Bernier and Dorré Islands in Shark Bay, as well as his later travels around Australia and to Fiji, returning to England via Canada. Chapter Five describes his return to England and resumption of his love affair with Ida Bedford, followed by his disastrous trip to India to find her, and the ultimate crash of his hopes of rescuing her from a desperately unhappy marriage. Chapter Six follows with a description of his change of direction, from a career in science to living the Bohemian life of a young writer in London, and the publication of his first Australian book, *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914) and his short story 'Out There', which appeared in *The English Review* (1914). There follows the death of his mother in October, 1918 after a long illness, and reference to her strong influence on his life. Chapter Seven describes his meeting and marriage with Katharine Hannay, their early married life moving around the English countryside and the writing of his Australian books, as well as the regular visits to an analyst in London. There is the birth of their first daughter Bridget and her puzzling illness throughout her early childhood, finally precipitating Katharine into writing to Ida who has returned to England, and asking her to visit them with the hope that it would help both her husband and the ailing child. Thus begins the eternal triangle of Katharine, Peter and Ida, lasting until Ida's death in 1967 at the age of eighty-nine. The meeting for three days with Jung at his home at Küssnacht in 1961 is recorded here. Chapters Eight and Nine deal with comparisons of Grant Watson's Australian books with those of Australian writers, especially on the themes of the Aborigines and the Australian bush, miscegenation and reincarnation. The conclusion is a summing up of Grant Watson's spiritual empathy with nature, both in

such diverse areas as the English countryside and the Australian bush, an unusual insight into and empathy with the culture of the Australian Aborigines and their knowledge of the desert, as well as the dedication of the men of the land. Finally there is an expression of his fears for the future of mankind and the universe, following the horror of the atom bomb and the danger of the gradual destruction of the natural environment by man. His belief in a spiritual metamorphosis in man both in the larger body of humanity and in our individual souls – a great human metamorphosis – was inspired quite early in his career by his study of biology, and became increasingly significant throughout his work.



# Chapter One

## The Early Life of E. L. Grant Watson

Born at Staines, Middlesex, England in 1885, the elder son of a barrister, Reginald Grant Watson – Peter, as he was known to his family and friends – was brought up mainly by his mother, his father and younger brother having died in 1889. He was influenced by his mother's passion for Darwinism, which she had absorbed from her late husband.

Grant Watson's mother, Lucy (née Fuller), was the thirteenth child of a large and prosperous family. Her father, Francis Fuller, had been a farmer's son, who had inherited and, for a short time, farmed a large estate in Surrey. He later became very successful when the railways were being built, negotiating the sale of land between land owners and railway companies, and subsequently being employed by the Great Western Railway Company. He had a strong belief in progress, including the building of railways, the development of steamships, and his own grandiose ideas for the education of the people. He prospered exceedingly, amassing a considerable fortune, was a personal friend of Gladstone and of the Prince Consort, and was one of the instigators of the Great Exhibition of 1851.<sup>1</sup>

Grant Watson's mother was his favourite daughter, but only in his later life did he find time to take her for long walks and rides, during which he taught her the names of birds and trees, giving her a lasting enthusiasm for the wild life of the English countryside. Her elder sister Geraldine also had a strong influence on Lucy, having undergone in her adolescence a religious conversion. She exerted enough sway over her younger sister to force her to become a compulsively religious teenager. "Fortunately," Grant Watson wrote in his autobiography, "it did not prevent her from going to dances at 'The Star and Garter' where she met my father Reginald Grant Watson and heard about Charles Darwin and his *On the Origin of Species*."<sup>2</sup> His father, however, was not dogmatic in his new creed. There were many other writers on his shelves. He also went to church and knew his Bible well. Perhaps, as Grant Watson later came to acknowledge, there was a middle way, and that science and religion were not so far apart as they then seemed. The engagement lasted for five years until his father was able to support Lucy in marriage.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fuller, one of the three promoters of the Great Exhibition of 1851. Born at Coulsdon in Surrey, 10 miles from Epsom, saw the Derby run every year from 1821–84. Surveyor of the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway for 25 years. He was associated with many successful railway schemes. For his services in connection with the Great Exhibition he was offered but declined the honour of knighthood. He afterwards took a prominent part in the formation of the Crystal Palace. He was a keen sportsman but also was interested in the education and elevation of the masses and devoted much time and money towards that object. Obit., *The Times*, 11 June, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, London: The Cresset Press, 1946, p. 3.



When Grant Watson was born in 1885, his father was then manager of a London insurance company. He rented a large house in St. Mark's Square, entertained a good deal and spent all the money he made. He had an appreciation for expensive guns and fishing rods – he rented a shoot in Sussex – and bought a good many books. In all this he seemed fully justified but Grant Watson's maternal grandmother thought him extravagant. She used to shake her head and declare that "No one should drink port or champagne before midday lunch".<sup>3</sup> Across the road from St. Mark's Square was the northern entrance to the Zoological Gardens. Peter was a regular visitor with his mother. It was then that his mother began his early training in natural history, teaching the names and habits of some of the striking and attractive animals and birds to the small boy dressed in a black velvet suit with large silver buttons.

In 1887 a second son was born, and lived only two years. Following his death it was decided Lucy should take a long sea voyage to visit her husband's cousin in Tasmania. Grant Watson recalled memories of walking with his mother in the Australian bush. Again, she drew attention to all its creatures, unafraid as she was of snakes, which were common. She thought, reasonably, that if they were left in peace, they would do no harm. For the young Grant Watson these were times of unclouded happiness until the news of his father's sudden death, following the contraction of typhoid fever in Naples, reached them in Tasmania. While embarking on the homeward steamer at Melbourne, Lucy was thrown from the gangway by a freak accident, and was only saved by being able to clutch onto chains at the side of the ship and hang there until rescued by a sailor. Realizing she, too, could have so easily met her death, she felt her life had been saved for a purpose. From that time on, she gave her son a devotion so intense and single-minded, that though it made for an exceptional sympathy, it also made life for both more painful than their circumstances demanded.

Mother and son returned to find the house in Regents Park, which had been let, had been damaged. Their prospects were poor and there was nothing left of their previous comfortable style of living. Not lacking in courage, Lucy Grant Watson moved to a small house at Godalming. Although her lifestyle was considerably reduced, she was loyal to her upbringing and tradition, and determined to occupy the station of life into which "it had pleased God to call her". She would always dress for dinner, even though there was only the maid's milk and potato soup on the menu.<sup>4</sup> Peter was sent to the preparatory school of Charterhouse when he was seven but the natural history ramblings with his mother continued, and his powers of observation grew sharp. Lucy taught him about nature and about God, and how the two were closely akin. On Sundays when other people were going to church, they took their long country walks. He remembered his mother saying, "God is there in the open, not in churches, nor hidden by priests in a dark box. He is in the wind, in the wheat, in the songs of birds and in the works of men."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

Grant Watson's sense of wonder in all the tiny creatures of the world of nature was developed to a rapture of appreciation that he never lost during his long life. In this way he was brought up to be a naturalist, which was what his mother believed his father would have wished. At the same time his mother's sister, Geraldine, now a nun, preached to him in long tedious interviews in which she talked about God and the catechism and his duties as a member of the Christian church. On one occasion, escaping from one of these 'jaws', he ran into his mother's room and kicking his feet in the air, shouted derisively, "Oh dear, holy spirit of God!"<sup>6</sup> His mother laughed knowing that what had been poison to her would leave him untouched. She taught him a simple Christianity. Christ was the divine man, Christ was the human expression of divine love, and through love only did there come a knowledge of life. In his room, at the head of his bed, there was a crucifix and under it the words "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends". At the side of his bed was a photograph of Darwin, and under it was the text: "Labour, Art, Worship, Love, these make men's lives".

"Darwin was never presented as a great scholar," wrote Grant Watson, "but always as a great lover of nature, and because of nature, of God. He was the high-priest of my mother's religion, and it was not till years after that I discovered him for myself as a great scientist."<sup>7</sup> The nineteenth century was barely half-through when Charles Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species* (1859). The deep-reaching implications of this great work were not so much that man was a natural development from lower forms of life, and that he was the descendant of an ape-like ancestor, but that he was a *chance* product of the *chance-made* pattern, in which all living things disposed themselves. In later years, Grant Watson saw Darwin's thought and theory as revolutionary in that they discarded all but a purely mechanical process in operation.

Chance variations, so he maintained occurred in all directions, both in directions unfavourable to the environment, and in directions favourable to the environment. Those which were favourable would by natural selection survive, those which were unfavourable would perish. According to this view, the idea of a Creator became superfluous. Darwin far more than Nietzsche was the 'murderer of God', yet because he himself was sprung from the established order, and was an English gentleman, and a man of the cultural tradition, he did not so fully realize as did Nietzsche, that, by his theory of man's mechanical and chance-directed evolution, he was transvaluing all existing values of good and evil.<sup>8</sup>

Such thoughts, obviously, were not developed by his mother, who in assuming full responsibility for her son's education rejected the advice of her sister for a more orthodox education. Having little sympathy for – and even a considerable aversion to – the curriculum

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

of the English Public School, she sought something more in accord with what his father would have wished.

Although he spent his early years at a boarding school, Grant Watson saw his mother each day, as the school was close to their house at Godalming. His mother's influence was, therefore, still dominant. On holidays, she took him to London for visits to the Natural History museum, and for Peter even the outside of the great building, adorned with stones carved in the effigies of animals and plants, shone with the glamour and romance of evolution. Day after day they went in eager comradeship from one show case to another. But in spite of so much wonder and delight for Peter, there was one note of discord. At that time the statue of Darwin was halfway up the stairs. When they drew near to the statue his mother made him take his hat off as a sign of reverence. He was always afraid other boys might notice and laugh. He protested, but it had no effect and he was reprimanded for daring to go his own way, to have a point of view of his own when "she was making me go her way and not my own. This ritual seemed almost as unnatural to me as would have seemed the kissing of St. Peter's toe."<sup>9</sup>

It wasn't long before Mrs Grant Watson became dissatisfied with her son's preparatory school as "smacking too much of the System". Instead, she selected a school at Petersfield, called Bedales, run by an idealist, John Haden Badley. The headmaster's whole fortune, his whole energy, were given to the furthering of a way of life which would make for the betterment of mankind. One great point in the school's favour was that there was no compulsory chapel. A tradition of physical hardihood had, in the first three years of the school's life, already been established. This was no refuge for weaklings, but a stern training to teach the survival of the fittest. The school itself in those first years had to struggle hard. The boys who were to grow into the desired superior race of men were for the most part low, rough fellows of distinctly inferior types. What part of the idealism that did appeal to them was the doctrine of hardness, especially when applied to those weaker and more sensitive than themselves.

So to Bedales Peter's mother decided to commit him at the age of ten years. "There was no mistake, I soon found out about the hardness, nor was there any mistake about the idealism,"<sup>10</sup> wrote Peter in his autobiography, *But To What Purpose* (1946). Of the Headmaster, Badley, he wrote:

On Sunday evenings there was a religious service of a non-denominational kind. Prayers were read with great impressiveness, and the weighing of his words and his clear utterance held me in painful suspense. This man was to be feared and respected; it would be impertinence to love him. Yet looking back, I now knew that I

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

wanted to love him. He was like Christ, and King Arthur and a Roman Senator all in one. I would gladly have had him as an image of the father I had lost.<sup>11</sup>

It was the aim of Bedales to give an all-round generalised human education in place of early specialization, which was at that date still prevalent in public schools. Power and aptitude were to be put before mere knowledge, and to develop harmoniously the body and the mind was considered more important than to gain honours in education. Besides doing the work of the classroom, the boys were to be brought up to turn their hands to all things – to make beds, clean toilets and windows, cultivate gardens, make chairs and tables, milk cows and make butter.

At the Sunday evenings church services, a wide and non-specialized Christian ethic was taught; Ruskin, Walt Whitman and Plato figured in these as largely as readings from the Bible. In sending her son to so unorthodox a school, Mrs Grant Watson broke with the traditions of her family. Letters of remonstrance did not deter her from her decision. About this time Peter's grandmother came to live with them and she contributed £100 a year towards expenses of the home. At eighty years of age she wore black, and a white lace cap, and was severe but kind, considering her grandson "a spoiled little boy and going to school would do him good". She was still active and robust and went hunting with her grandson for moths and caterpillars, thinking nothing of climbing stiles in their cross-country rambles.

The house at Godalming was given up and a move made near to the new school to a house with a large garden and a three-acre field. However, Peter was not allowed to enjoy his new home, but was sent off to boarding school where he and the other juniors endured relentless bullying from the older boys, starting off with the soap pill treatment each evening at bed time and continuing with cold showers in freezing winter, and early morning runs where, if one dropped behind, a vicious swipe on the legs with a switch was administered by one of the older boys. Meanwhile the headmaster, Badley, continued to impress Peter, who viewed him with a mixture of awe and reverence. Subjects usually considered dull, such as English grammar, he could bring alive. The other masters also made a lasting impression on his mind. The teaching, he thought, better than in most schools because it was less systemized and more chance directed. There was a feeling of experimentation which gave zest to the teachers themselves. However, apart from becoming keen on reading and learning how to read novels during class, Peter confessed he was put up from form to form mainly because of his age and size. This natural and inspired resistance to education he believed served him well, as his mind remained fallow and unspoiled by emulation.

Peter's first year contained much misery, with the constant bullying of older boys, of which his mother was never aware. He went through a stage of continual apprehension following horrified astonishment, becoming cowed and abject without pride or courage. Castor oil was substituted for the soap pill, and every device of cruelty was exaggerated immensely. The purpose, in Grant Watson's view, was the same as the concentration camp: to

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

reduce the victims to below the level of normal humanity. Jews, in particular, were bullied worse than others. Their very meekness and inbred apprehensiveness laid them open to assault. Meanwhile Peter was grateful for their presence, for the persecution of the Jews made it easier for smaller boys to escape the cruelty. As a result of this rough treatment nearly every boy grew into a potential bully, for it was an unconscious reaction to pass on to others what they had received. Such a one was 'Pig Head' who had been bullied in his time and now was beginning to bully on his own account. Pig Head cried at night because he was sorry for what he had done. He hated bullying but got carried away and could not help himself. For this he hated himself. "Are there not thousands of 'Pig Heads' in the Reich and in other countries?"<sup>12</sup> is the question asked by Grant Watson in his autobiography, *But To What Purpose* (1946). In distant hindsight the resemblance between the school and the Nazi or Fascist regime was not difficult for Grant Watson to see.

At the top, and responsible for everything – both the good and the bad – was a leader possessed of an inflated idealism. It wasn't on the same level of beastliness as in Germany or Italy, but there was a resemblance. His experience taught him men are much the same both in their goodness and badness.

Grant Watson saw the greatest evil about the school was the purity cult – so high that all suffered, not only from suppression of their natural curiosities and sensations, but from downright repression. 'Smut' of any kind was so awful a falling away from the ideal, that many hardly envisaged its possibility. Of Badley, the historian James Henderson wrote:

There was a distinctly Puritan streak in him and, although his convictions were passionate, his emotional life seemed to be kept in check almost to the point of repression. His sense of humour was robust rather than sophisticated, the warmth of his personality coming through most clearly in his teaching. As he spoke of Socrates or Jesus, Buddha or Shakespeare, insight and scholarship seemed to kindle within him, and he captivated his listeners, old and young. Badley had a clear view of man's purpose in living, namely to discover and cultivate his spiritual nature: the cardinal point in his educational philosophy was that all children, if properly nourished, can learn to attain a similar realization.<sup>13</sup>

Grant Watson looked back on this school experience, and asked himself – what did he get from it all? Many difficulties, from which he was partially rescued by a long course of analytical treatment; many difficulties and no doubt some advantages too. When Fascism and Nazism raised their head in Europe, he knew them for what they were.

There was, however, one compensation for Peter in the rare and extraordinary freedom which could be enjoyed during half holidays, when he was able to explore the countryside with a friend who had the same enthusiasm for hunting out insects and all kinds of living things. There were also long glorious Sundays when they were completely free, provided the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> James L. Henderson, *Irregularly Bold: A study of Bedales School*, London: Andre Deutsch Ltd, 1978, p. 21.

headmaster signed their leave slip. As time passed Peter became gradually and imperceptibly ever more infected with the idealism of the headmaster, John Badley, and those in authority under him. From so strong an influence, it took him more than thirty years to free himself. The advice he would give to the younger generation is: "Beware of all ideals which would seek to impose a rigid order on human conduct, and, if you must, at any time, sup with idealists, even the most plausible, use a long spoon".<sup>14</sup>

Peter's mother, perceiving his unhappiness, did not take him away but she did engage a tutor for the summer holidays. Although the coaching was not all it was expected to be, the young Cambridge graduate was a keen boxer and he taught Peter, so that at school he was no longer persecuted. Instead, Peter fought his way from featherweight to heavy-weight, winning them all. He grew to love his Cambridge tutor who also wrote poetry, and who changed Peter into a self-respecting and self-confident boy.

The introduction of girls to the school was a move made by the headmaster in an attempt to stop the bullying, of which he was mildly aware. Peter became attracted to a girl, Dahlia, as did many others. Looking at books together in an empty classroom was very soon stopped by the purity regime, practised by one of the masters in a misguided attempt at a lecture within the walls of his study. Although Peter was defiant in refusing to have his friendship stopped, Dahlia was also lectured, and being an amenable little girl, she took heed. His efforts to retain the friendship while being teased and baited by his fellow students lasted almost a year, finally ending in his defeat.

Looking back on how the boys suffered in that experimental co-education, Grant Watson saw that the tone of sexual 'purity' was as fantastically high as ever. Natural adolescent promptings towards discovery and sensation, were not only suppressed but deeply repressed. The thought of what was, after all, the natural relation between men and women, was for them unthinkable, and the natural energy which might have found outlet in conscious and controlled desire was pushed back into the unconscious; there to find whatever devious paths it could towards an outlet.

Only many years later in the course of an analysis did I get a picture of my inner orientation at that time, and in an almost comic way found it to correspond to the fantastic pattern, suggested by Freud, of the Old Man of the Primitive hoard and his outcast sons. The Headmaster, that highly cultured, idealistic and all too pure repressor of desires was, of course, the father substitute. We, his sons, lived under the almighty power of Taboo. My own little story was typical, though by no means the most tragic. Other boys suffered more deeply, even to the extent of attempting suicide by arsenic taken in such large quantities that vomiting ensued, almost resulting in death.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 47.

Grant Watson drew the following conclusions from his experience at that experimental school where "they were pioneers, and as pioneers, sacrifices":

The emotional side was over-developed in a high unnatural tension. The sensuous side was forbidden, utterly taboo. If there had been a Fascist party then, how readily would I have become a member. With what compulsive idealism, with what gusto would I have beaten up other boys more happily and naturally balanced than myself. Each one passed on automatically and unconsciously the sickness from which he suffered. Everything is automatically passed on, unless we make a conscious effort to control our conduct. Might not that be part of education, and quite as valuable as the equations, Xs and Ys and the irregular verbs we are at such pains to memorize. Every ill we do to others will inevitably come back as experience to ourselves.<sup>16</sup>

Yet Grant Watson did gain something positive from those experiences: "To this we may add that the good things we receive in kindness, sympathy and love, we may also pass on, and from that school where I lived through so much pain and happiness, I carry the uplifting and progressive influence of one of the masters who then became and has since remained a friend through all my life."<sup>17</sup>

James L. Henderson in his book *Irregularly Bold: A study of Bedales School*, wrote:

A darker and perhaps rather unexpected side of life at Bedales was the degree of bullying that went on among both boys and girls. At its worst during the first thirty years of the school's existence, though even then obviously only affecting a minority, it seems to have disappeared though never completely, in the period between the two World Wars; perhaps it is endemic in any residential institution of children and adolescents.

E. L. Grant Watson (1895-1904), although a reluctant admirer of Badley, was very outspoken about the shadow side of the school's early idealism. In his book, *But To What Purpose* (1946) he refers to his school fellows as 'low rough fellows of distinctly inferior types' and somewhat extravagantly to the regime as that of a concentration camp with tortures such as forcing small boys to swallow soap and to be sat on and trodden on in baths, making them into 'pies'. Yet he admits: "There was a feeling of experimentation which gave zest to the teachers themselves, and if their methods were amateurish and a bit haphazard, so much the better."<sup>18</sup>

Grant Watson's book *But To What Purpose* makes it clear that Badley and his teachers were not fully aware, and yet not entirely unaware, of the bullying that was carried on by older boys on younger and new students at the school.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Henderson, *Irregularly Bold: A study of Bedales School*, op. cit., p. 38. His quotes from *But To What Purpose* do not make it clear that tortures were inflicted by older boys of which Badley was hardly aware.



Later in his book on Bedales, Henderson wrote of the school parliament established in 1917 to provide for a small measure of pupil-participation in the running of school affairs, later turned into the School Council, as a slightly larger measure of self government; and an annual Parents' (not Speech) Day was inaugurated. 'O.B.' (Old Boy) Meetings in the school at the end of summer term became firmly established. "Of one of these E. L. Grant Watson, himself a distinguished but critical O.B., recorded his impressions of 'A consciousness of something which was more than a school, more than a community of present-day men and women: a consciousness of a reality in the past, present and future, which is Bedales . . . We sense a difference from the early idealism. Perhaps it is that the period of pioneering is past and that sacrifice is no longer needed or even thought about.'"<sup>19</sup>

When Peter was thirteen, the idea of reincarnation was first communicated to him. This idea did not come from his mother but from "some book that he had read", and as soon as he had grasped its exciting implications and far-flung vision, he accepted it with instant conviction.

The fact of reincarnation, the travelling from life to life, that was, of course, the great half-revealed secret of existence. I did not presume for myself any definite memory of what I had experienced in other lives, but I remembered that I had forgotten much, and what I had forgotten still faintly glowed behind a veil of mystery. There were people whom I felt I had met before, people I naturally loved, people I hated. From one of the classrooms I could see the branches of the trees swayed by the wind. The memory is vivid of the timelessness of these movements, and I gazed fascinated and wrapped in wonder. Of such a marvel as this I might perhaps one day learn to speak.<sup>20</sup>

With his school friends Peter continued to enjoy expeditions – both in term time and in holidays – into the forests. One boy in particular knew nature more deeply than the others. "He had no use for books, and would have been blank at my suggestion of other lives. This immediate life was sufficient for him, and I have never known any human so like an animal. I loved him as I would love an animal,"<sup>21</sup> Grant Watson would later write. In his view, they shared a psychic attachment, usually preferring to go alone, yet to be within sight of each other. They spent holidays together in each other's territory, his home in New Forest, or Peter's in Sussex.

Sometimes when thus lying on my back, looking at trees and sky when sunshine was slanting, touching with its warmth my face and hands, I would feel a disturbing expectancy. A message seemed communicated from the earth itself, or perhaps some subtle dictate from the lichened oak stems, which rose like columns from close

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>20</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 58.



beside my head; this, whatever it might be made me perturbingly aware of myself; I would sit up suddenly and listen. But I would hear nothing out of the usual, only the song of the robins. Everything was as I had always known it; only the smell of last year's leaves; rising from the crushed earth where I had lain yet I could believe that there had been some communion, not come through any of the senses.<sup>22</sup>

All through Grant Watson's life, he was able to experience this sensitive communion with nature, culminating in some truly spiritual reactions when in 1910-12, at aged twenty-four, he was confronted with the strangeness of the Australian bush and the Aborigines.

At this time he had read Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, in a new edition presented to his mother. He thereupon declared himself an atheist and refused to have anything to do with his confirmation, much to his Aunt Geraldine's consternation and his mother's delight. It was also at this time that his mother became engaged to be married. His future step-father, John Powell, was a thorough-going agnostic; the son of a parson.<sup>23</sup> The couple were married on 9 August, 1900, at Lindfield, Sussex. Towards his stepson he showed a sympathetic and friendly attitude, and Peter loved him as he might have loved his father. At the same time the deepness of his unbelief staggered Peter. He realized that in the clear attitudes of his stepfather's intellect there would be little room for his cherished doctrines of reincarnation. "Where," he questioned, "would be his mother's belief that God and Nature were as one?"<sup>24</sup> So Peter escaped confirmation, although as a price for his "priggishness", as he later confessed, he forfeited an inheritance of four thousand pounds from his Godmother.

When he was fifteen Peter's mother decided that he should go to Germany for five to six months that he might learn the language of science at a more satisfactory rate. His lodgings in Heidelberg were pleasant and he found an agreeable companion in Herr Burn, a Scottish student working for his doctorate. He loved Germany, especially the wild country with its landscape of river and hills, and found much friendliness and hospitality there. One or two incidences were at variance with the easy-going *Gemütlichkeit* of most Germans. Once when he was in a restaurant with Herr Burn a group of German officers came in. There was something not to their liking. Discussion and raised voices ensued. A group of people who were sitting at a table nearby got up abruptly and retired. It seemed the officers had objected to the presence of some Jews. This was a surprise to Peter and reminded him that Jews were the most bullied at school.<sup>25</sup>

The duels he was taken to see by a member of one of the best Prussian corps were held at six o'clock in the morning, and lit by artificial light as it was midwinter with a hard frost on

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> John Clark Powell: son of the Rev. Thomas E. Powell. A former student at Kings College, Cambridge, he graduated in 1883 with his BA 1st class Classics Tripos. He was Assistant Master at Uppingham School from 1889-94 and from 1895-1902. At the time of his marriage to Lucy Grant Watson in 1900, Peter Grant Watson was fifteen years old. During the war years, from 1917-18, Powell was a political intelligence officer.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 54

the ground. Peter was appalled at the horrific wounds received from the heavy swords used in this so-called 'game', and the fortitude of the duellists in being sewn up without anaesthetic on the spot. The year was 1900 and Grant Watson was having his first mixed experiences of Germany and the Germans. He could not make any estimate of the character of these people who could be so friendly, so *gemütlich* and so foolish, but he was glad to return in the early months to his native country, which even at that time the German children were taught to think of as 'the home of the snakes'.<sup>26</sup>

On his return to England Peter began to read the American poet, Walt Whitman, and took it for granted that Whitman also believed in reincarnation. "It was easy to find passages to fit my prejudices, and though I only partially understood his messages, what I did understand I accepted with joy."<sup>27</sup> In an introduction to *Leaves of Grass* (1856) W. H. Trimble has written that there are many indications that Whitman was aware of the doctrine of reincarnation but he does not appear to have deliberately adopted it into his theory of the universe, nor does he appear to have been led away into the absurdities and extravagances of amateur spiritualist investigation.<sup>28</sup>

Consequent upon his peculiar unconventional style of versification, as well as his straightforward utterances on sexual matters, Whitman's little volume *Leaves of Grass* met with no favour from the general reader and the public welcome to the new writer was frigid. Indeed, Whitman was dismissed from his position in the United States Department of the Interior and *Leaves of Grass* criticized by the Hon. James Harlan, the Secretary of the Interior, for being "full of indecent passages".<sup>29</sup> This drew from Whitman's friend and admirer, William Douglas O'Connor, the supportive pamphlet *The Good Gray Poet* (1866). Whitman found strong supporters in England, in the man of letters, William Michael Rossetti, and Mrs Anne Gilchrist, the writer, who, in collaboration with her husband, Alexander Gilchrist, wrote on the life of William Blake. Having heard nothing but ill of the poem, Mrs Gilchrist opened the book with feelings of antagonism. But as she read she became aware of a new and most powerful influence affecting her. "It holds me completely spellbound and I go through it again and again with deepening delight and wonder".<sup>30</sup> Mrs Gilchrist and Rossetti formed the nucleus of a Whitman cult in England which gradually increased in size until the poet's influence among the English literary set was assured. In America and Europe Whitman's work has been eulogized, justified and defended by a large number of eminent as well as obscure writers.

Grant Watson, who in his early life had started with an anti-religious complex but in later years found the idea of religion becoming ever more important in his life, recalled "I could feel the reality in Whitman when he wrote:

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, introduction by G. W. H. Trimble, USA: The Folcroft Press, 1905, reprinted 1970, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp. 76-77.

Each is not for its own sake, I say the whole earth and all the stars  
 are for religion's sake,  
 I say no man has ever yet been half devout enough  
 None has begun to think how divine he himself is, and how certain the future is  
*and*  
 It is a painful thing to love a man or woman to excess, and yet it satisfies, it is great,  
 But there is something else very great, it makes the whole coincide  
 and provides for all.<sup>31</sup>

Such words Grant Watson could accept but when it came to the Church and the church services, he found it not so easy.

Indeed I found very little of what I considered religion there. I could read the gospels with awakening wonder and find in them something magnificent beyond materials, which with continuous hands sweeps and provides for all but I did not find this in the litany or the General Confession. I suppose it was a matter of taste, I preferred the poets to the priests, . . .

And yet, he asked himself, "Might I not be missing something, should I not in fairness give the established in my country a trial."<sup>32</sup> In later life he did indeed try to gain an understanding of the established religion in his attendance at the Rogate church of Rev. Michael Champneys, a man he respected for his culture and refinement, and in whom he had found intelligence and sympathy, but it was no good. He could not find sufficient to satisfy him in the church, consoling himself with a remark made by Dean Inge, who said, "We all need spectacles to see God, just as we need different kinds of spectacles to fit our physical eyesight. Without any question the religion of Whitman was more adjusted to my eyesight than the religion of St. John of The Cross."<sup>33</sup>

On leaving school there seemed little hope for Peter of any form of higher education according to his teachers. His mother's dream for him to be a scientist influenced her decision to get him a job at a museum. His stepfather rescued him from this dreary job and undertook the coaching of Peter in Latin, Greek and logic. During this period he discovered the works of Nietzsche and Bernard Shaw; and Samuel Butler directed his footsteps. It was the writings of Nietzsche that, at this time, having made such a strong impression on Peter, caused the first fundamental breach between his mother and himself. His mother hated Nietzsche. "Don't read him to me," she said. "It's like pouring nitric acid on a caterpillar".<sup>34</sup> But Peter's stepfather gave him his head, and let him enthuse in his own way, only holding him down from his adolescent soarings to Greek Grammar and to the translation of the gospel of St. Luke.

<sup>31</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 227.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

Grant Watson could not perceive what it was that drew him with such intoxicated devotion to Nietzsche, but, looking back, he experienced the feeling that here out of the past was growing the shape of the future. "His apothegms were the hammer strokes to which my soul sounded as a bell". He could not understand why in his small microcosmic life the words of Nietzsche of that time should have seemed so uplifting and meaningful, and that the words of the gospel should have left on his mind so slight an impression.<sup>35</sup> "Although I had not suffered, as had so many of my generation, from what is called a religious education, the story of Jesus had been probably presented in so cliché a manner as to have lost definition, or it may be that I was too young to see its tremendous significance."<sup>36</sup> At the same time he did not think he would have found Nietzsche less stimulating for having understood the Gospels better. "Nietzsche", he thought, "for this generation and for the next most obviously must have his place."<sup>37</sup> The conception of Superman did not at any time appeal to him, but the two great works *The Gay Science* and *Zarathustra* influenced him most.

From the great mass of incandescent matter so partially assimilated, certain thoughts and questions pricked me to restless consciousness. One in particular seemed to demand the basic reason for existence, challenging me then in the immediate present and on many subsequent occasions. Free *from* what? What does that concern Zarathustra? Clearly thine eye shall answer free *for* what? If such questions could be answered, then surely the great fundamental surge of life and its manifold expressions would be revealed. So I then thought, and still think: From what was I free?

From a dull drudgery in a provincial museum and that by a sheer piece of good luck, and by my stepfather's all-too-unjustified belief in me. Free from the moral atmosphere of the last phase, whatever that may be, which always seemed in retrospect suffocatingly stuffy.

But free *for* what?

For vague hopes of a dreamed-of-love and happiness. That did not seem, however, to answer completely Zarathustra's question. I did not know for *what* I was free. My eye would, to Zarathustra be clouded with doubt and not clear.<sup>38</sup>

His stepfather pushed him hard with his studies and when the examination time came he went with him to Cambridge, discussing his papers with him. The result was success and a place in Trinity College at Cambridge, 1905.

Grant Watson likened his first year to the efforts of a swimmer in a maelstrom. "I kept my head above water and that's all."<sup>39</sup> The full hours he spent in the laboratory after lectures with the demonstrators all to himself, helped him enormously. He was particularly grateful to Professor Adam Sedgwick, who became the most valued, yet the most fearsome, of his

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

teachers. He was invited to tea at his house on Sunday afternoon. So began a "very one-sided friendship. I saw him as the one exceptional man amongst the many able and clever men who gave me of their kindness and their knowledge, and in proportion as he made a sceptic of me, he gave me the capacity for faith. He was a great Triton and I a very small minnow."<sup>39</sup>

During this time Peter was short of money, having to limit himself to a frugal life and a lot of work. However, he did take time off for explorations, canoeing on the upper river with a friend. Meanwhile, he kept up his reading, still striving to interpret the cryptic images of George Meredith's poems, still reading Nietzsche, Ibsen's plays, W. H. Hudson<sup>40</sup> and Joseph Conrad. Jacobsen's *Niels Lhyne* influenced him more than any other novel he had read.<sup>41</sup> In his autobiography *But To What Purpose* he constantly referred to "his much loved Meredith" and in particular his long poem *The Woods of Westerman* (1883).

Meredith's philosophy of Earth satisfied my spiritual hunger, his power of imagery and use of brilliant colour, his close familiarity with the English country were things in which I could bathe and lose myself and be refreshed.<sup>42</sup>

Because the poems were difficult he took the more trouble to understand them, learning thousands of lines by heart including the whole of *The Woods of Westerman*.

He provided a world in which I could seem free from my inhibitions. It was my world and doubly mine in that so few others could understand what he was saying. I remember reading Trevelyan's book on Meredith's poetry and feeling that he had only half understood, he had not entered so deep as I – he had not puzzled for so long over the perplexing broken and seldom completed images. The breath of the Spirit had stirred the surface of my water and I was both the water, and the wind that stirred and the sky reflected in so confused and scattered a manner. If I had any religion in those years, it was centred in my devotion to George Meredith's poetry.<sup>43</sup>

He read George Meredith's novels too but the only one he really loved and continued to love was the burlesque fantasy *The Shaving of Shagpat*. "I glimpsed its hidden meanings and hugged them as a hoard of hidden treasures; and this was no more intellectual priggishness as so much else was. It was my own private concern not shared with my mother, who found the long poems needlessly obscure."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>40</sup> See reference notes on Hudson in footnote 50.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 64. Jacobsen's *Niels Lhyne* probably read in translation by H. H. Richardson (1896) which she titled *Siren Voices* and which she afterwards described as having stirred her as few books have ever done before or since.

<sup>42</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

L. Hergenhahn has written that Meredith's letters show that he expected to be neglected because he had resolved not only to ignore popular methods but to use methods and subjects that were not popular. Even sophisticated Victorian readers had become so used to being guided along a path of smooth narration that they sometimes placed too much value on straightforward detail. Meredith was the first novelist seriously to challenge this ingrained attitude, and to demand added efforts from his readers. He was to be followed by Henry James and Joseph Conrad. Readers found Meredith's novel *Vittoria* unusually baffling, Meredith having bewildered and overtaxed his readers instead of pleasurably mystifying them.<sup>45</sup>

In a statement on Grant Watson's life by the scholar – and Grant Watson's long time friend – Owen Barfield, enclosed in a letter to Dorothy Green, he wrote of their philosophical and literary interests and, of the latter, particularly poetry.

The illuminated patch here, is his enthusiasm for George Meredith and the bright focus of it on *Woods of Westerman* (1883) expounding its meaning and stressing its merits almost line by line. A philosophical poem, it is an allegory in which self, an inflated belief in the importance of one's own personality is the dragon in the woods of life that must be tamed by an evolutionary process into becoming a useful servant of society.<sup>46</sup>

While at Cambridge, biological studies for Peter took first place, although he lived fully in other directions as well, trying to make up for the fallow years at school. He was a member of the student political group, the 'Heretics', and got to know the leaders of left-wing thought. He considered himself a socialist and a thorough-going atheist. With the 'Heretics' he heard Bernard Shaw jibe wittily at the disadvantages of family life. The home was a girl's prison and for the woman a workhouse, he averred. Peter found Shaw amusing but not convincing as he did not give the impression of a fundamental sincerity. There was G. Lowes Dickinson of Kings College for whom Peter had the deepest feeling of regard, and with whom a relationship developed into a life-long friendship.<sup>47</sup> There were the debating societies and the literary societies, and in his second year he was proud to be elected a member of the 'Natural Science Society'. Then there were the Sunday afternoon expeditions in his rich friend Justin's Opal, when he would fill his car with "a mixed bag" and "it was pleasant sitting squeezed tight up against a girl, even if one didn't know what to talk to her about, while Justin raced along

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<sup>45</sup> L. T. Hergenhahn, *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 4, 1964, pp. 637–51.

<sup>46</sup> Letter from Owen Barfield to Dorothy Green dated 16 Oct., 1981.

<sup>47</sup> Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (1862–1932). Humanist, historian and philosophical writer; son of L. C. Dickinson; educated at Charter House and King's College, Cambridge; first class classics, 1884, fellow 1887, lecturer in political science, 1896–1920; publications include *The Development of Parliament during the Nineteenth Century: The Greek view of life* (1896), *Justice and Liberty* (1908) and other dialogues in the Socratic tradition, *The International Anarchy*, 1904–1914, 1926, *After Two Thousand Years* (1930), drafted schemes for and worked actively for foundation of a 'League of Nations', a term he may have invented. Source: *The Concise Dictionary of National Biography* from earliest times to 1985, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, vol. 1, A–5.

the Royston Road at sixty miles an hour." Meanwhile he succeeded in gaining a First in his second year, and in being awarded an Exhibition with a Trinity Scholarship and £40 a year for the remaining two years.

Now he was able to take his work more easily and could do a good deal of outside reading. After the final examination he went, as on preceding years, to Wicken Fen. His companion on this occasion was Geoffrey Keynes, also a keen entomologist. In the misty night they spread their sheets and lit their lights and were fortunate enough to catch three specimens of the rare moth *pallustris*. The next morning they received a telegram telling them they had both got their Firsts. Peter was not only delighted on his own account but glad to have been able to justify his stepfather's goodwill and generosity. With the possibility of several good jobs, or spending a fourth year at Cambridge on his extended Exhibition, Peter hesitated to make a decision as to which direction his life should take. He was reading "with the first great thirst of discovery," not only biology, but philosophy, psychology and modern novels. "Joseph Conrad, who was at that time in mid swing of production, filled me with a desire to travel. I appreciated all his virtues and saw none of his limitations."<sup>48</sup> W. H. Hudson with his two novels, *Green Mansions* (1904) and *The Purple Land* (1885) was, with Jacobsen, most admired and worshipped. *The Purple Land*, in particular, had a profound influence on his life.

Its strange impersonal mingling of romance adventure and utter freedom, made so strong an appeal, that I decided that I too would go to Uruguay. . . . With this end in view, while safely established as a biology coach, I decided that I must seek an interview with the great Hudson himself. On Sunday afternoon he was at-home to his circle of admirers, and this was before the time when he had achieved recognition and success. He was still as poor as literary men are who write for their own satisfaction.<sup>49</sup>

Grant Watson has described how he and his friend were received by the great writer. They were relieved of their coats and hats with a remote courtliness and taken into a room much becurtained, and full of furniture upholstered in black satin. The furniture was of Spanish origin as also was his wife, who sat near a shaded light, sewing, and who took little part in the general conversation. The room was crowded with people; all kinds of admirers of the great man, very much of contemporary London. "All but Hudson, who might be said to be only present there in body and good manners. Surely his spirit was absent, watching, even then

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<sup>48</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



beside some ancient barrow on a heath, communing with the shades of the long-departed prehistoric aborigines of the land."<sup>50</sup>

A journey to Uruguay was only one of the ideas Grant Watson played with at this stage. The fact was that he did not discover a strong working bent for biology, and found little inspiration in the principles of classification. It seemed to him that no one was interested in field biology, or studying behaviour. All living interest was centred on genetics, the linking of genes and the segregation of unit-characters. Although he was familiar enough with most of the published conclusions, he was not drawn into the field of controlled experiments. As he wrote in *But To What Purpose*, he was "more attracted to life as it appealed directly to myself than to biology and in response to a gentle though pertinent hint from a woman that I should not be contented with a safe wages job, I decided that I would go wandering *somewhere*, be free, be free – but what I meant by this I only very vaguely comprehended."<sup>51</sup>

It was about this time in his fourth year at Cambridge that he met Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, who was on a visit to the university. Radcliffe-Brown had recently returned from the Andaman Islands and was, in many respects, a remarkable man, having obtained a First Class Honours degree in Natural Science, then another in Classics, as well as a Fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge. He had taken up sociology, and had become an ardent disciple of Durkheim.<sup>52</sup> Some years previously he had applied to the Indian Government to be allowed to go to the Andaman Islands to study the wild tribes in the Northern Island. On the Southern Island there was a small penal colony ruled by an English Governor. The Northern Island was at that time reputed to be the home of cannibal tribes. It was to this island that Radcliffe-Brown wanted to go. Permission was refused as it was considered too dangerous. He was not deterred, but repeated his application and finally consent was given, if he took an armed guard of Sepoys under the command of a sergeant. Radcliffe-Brown made it clear that he was to be in absolute command. On arrival at the coast of the Northern Island their motor boat put in at the mouth of a small river. Radcliffe-Brown landed and ordered his Sepoys to return to India. Accompanied by only a native cook, he walked into the jungle. He made contact with the natives, and by use of a phonetic system, learned sufficient of their language to be able to communicate. He had, as Grant Watson found out later, an almost magical power with the

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<sup>50</sup> Henry William Hudson was born 4 Aug. 1841 near Buenos Aires, died 18 Aug. 1922, London. British author, naturalist and ornithologist, best known for his exotic romances, especially *Green Mansions* (1904), the strange love story of Rima, a mysterious creature of the forest, half bird and half human. Rima is the subject of the statue by Jacob Epstein in the bird sanctuary erected in Hudson's memory in Hyde Park, London, in 1925. His mother, who died in 1860, fostered his love of nature and he achieved fame with his books on the English countryside. Source: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 11, 1891–1939, pp. 438–40.

<sup>51</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>52</sup> Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred Reginald (1881–1955), anthropologist, was born 17 January, 1881 at Aston, Warwickshire, England, second son of Alfred Brown (d. 1886) manufacturer's clerk, and his wife Hannah, née Radcliffe. He was educated at King Edward's School, Birmingham, and Trinity College, Cambridge (BA, 1905, MA 1909) graduating with first-class honours in the moral sciences tripos. He studied psychology under W. H. R. Rivers who, with A. C. Haddon, led him towards social anthropology. Source: Ian Hogbin, in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. II: 1891–1939, Geoffrey Serle (gen. ed.), Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988, p. 322.



natives in his ability to control any signs of hostility or unrest, and as the months passed Radcliffe-Brown claimed he had made himself virtually king of the Northern Island.

The adventure conveyed to Radcliffe-Brown something of the feeling that the simple minds of the natives had projected. According to Grant Watson, Radcliffe-Brown was, in his own eyes, almost a king. However, when he returned to Cambridge his authoritarian ways did not make him popular. He had, moreover, a custom of staring into the distance when he was not interested in what his interlocutor was saying. "Anarchy Brown", as he was then called – for he had declared himself an anarchist – had a peculiar reputation at Trinity, and in spite of his brilliant career at Cambridge, there were many who looked on him with suspicion. He was too dramatic a personality to fit easily into the conservative life of the college. He often made wild statements but invariably was brilliantly informed on all subjects. "Which of course," recalled Grant Watson, "told against him. He had lived as a primitive autocrat, exercising a beneficent but completely authoritarian sway over the simple Andamese. He was in fact a bit of a superman and one who strove, more consistently than any other man I have met to live consciously and according to a set plan, dictated by his reason and will."<sup>53</sup>

"It is true," Grant Watson continued, that Radcliffe-Brown "sometimes lapsed from his high standard and was led by his inventive genius to fabricate the stories he told, and often it was not difficult to see this invention in progress. This made the scholarly and conscientious distrust him, but I have every reason to believe that these extravagances, which he allowed himself to talk, never once found their way into his published work."<sup>54</sup> Radcliffe-Brown was at this time planning an expedition to North-West Australia, and it was suggested Grant Watson might go with him as zoologist on the expedition. Although the grants he had received were not sufficient to pay Grant Watson's expenses, it was decided that if Grant Watson cared to join him, he could sell any biological specimens collected, and that once out in the field, Radcliffe-Brown felt pretty sure that further funds would be forthcoming, and that he would help in every way. Grant Watson thereupon set about contacting collectors, both in England and Europe, and it was finally agreed that he would accompany Radcliffe-Brown in the capacity of assistant anthropologist, and that he would be free to work on his own account as a zoological collector. Grant Watson was advised by well-meaning friends that he would not be able to stand for a week Radcliffe-Brown's overbearing manner but despite such warnings, Grant Watson liked and admired him for his intelligence, experience and will-power. They spent hours studying maps of North Western Australia, and Radcliffe-Brown related to Grant Watson a great deal about primitive people, lending him many books, including those of Spencer and Gillen.<sup>55</sup> He expounded on class marriage which was to be the subject of the expedition. The more he talked the more Grant Watson fell under his spell. "He was beautiful to behold, and certainly surprisingly well informed."<sup>56</sup> In spite of the adventurous nature of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> W. Baldwin Spencer and F. G. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1st ed. 1899. reprinted with preface by James George Frazer, 1938.

<sup>56</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, p. 84.

the venture, Grant Watson's mother backed him. She met and liked 'Anarchy Brown'. To her he was polite and charming and both his mother and stepfather "fell under his sway".

During his remaining time at Cambridge, Grant Watson saw a good deal of Radcliffe-Brown and discovered how very much the reverse of polite and charming he could be towards those who failed to awake his interest. He was never vulgarly rude, but if he was not interested he did not pretend to be so. Grant Watson thought this was all part of his system of using his time to the best advantage. No time should be wasted according to his conscious plan. Radcliffe-Brown's philosophy as expounded to Grant Watson was that one must cultivate 'style'. He dressed like a Paris savant, faultlessly. He aspired to be conscious of every gesture; and had even thought out the best position in which to sleep. Not on the back, not wholly on the side, and not like a foetus. He pictured himself even in sleep. At times Radcliffe-Brown read poetry aloud, and, according to Grant Watson, he never knew any man to read poetry better. He read Shelley and Keats, and Andre Gide; also he shared Grant Watson's appreciation of George Meredith's poems. Sometimes Grant Watson found his astonishing versatility a bit trying, "but he was always stimulating and always my honesty had to acknowledge his superior achievements".<sup>57</sup> At the time Grant Watson knew him, he had renounced his doctrine of anarchism. "Anarchism was an idea," he said, "the freedom of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the rule of earth. Socialism, that was the best we could achieve, but there were dangers; anything that exalted the state above the individual, that was evil. The Germans he thought, would easily make an ideal socialist state, their virtue of obedience and their vice of authoritarianism fitted them for the task."<sup>58</sup>

Radcliffe-Brown loved the French and he sought to mould himself upon their pattern. In comparison with the cultured discernment of the French, the British were but barbarians and traders, although there were, of course, exceptions. The people of the world should not grow to be antagonistic to one another, but rather recognize that they were divergent and complementary. Patriotism could be a virtue in so far as it was a love of country, but could be a vice if that love were tainted with any hatred of others.<sup>59</sup> These views were expounded to Grant Watson by Radcliffe-Brown in those early days before the First World War as they planned their expedition to Australia.

Meanwhile Grant Watson had met the woman who changed his life and who haunted him for the rest of his days. The meeting with Ida Bedford took place at a Sunday evening service at Bedales, the school where Grant Watson was teaching. She was sitting a few benches in front of him and, he observed, the heavy mass of her gold-tinged hair looped in her neck would have caught any man's eye. As she turned her extreme paleness gave him the impression of withdrawal, and prompted the question: "What right had anyone to exist who was so pale and forlorn. She was like a reflection of a woman in a mirror dimmed by age".<sup>60</sup> Later he learned she was the mother of two daughters who attended the school. Beautiful she

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>60</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, 'To This End', unpub. autob., ch. 5, p. 78.

certainly was but the mirror impression remained with him, and, of course, she was married. However, the summer evening provided a pleasant walk to her flat. Grant Watson was one of the members of the younger staff who had been invited. She was obviously accustomed to being a hostess, and she made a comfortable feeling of at-homeness. The general talk was of the theatre, in particular, Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, which was then running. Grant Watson felt she knew more than any of the young male guests about the hidden motives of Ibsen."<sup>61</sup> At parting Mrs Bedford gave a general invitation to any who wished to return the following Sunday evening. The company and discussion had left her looking far more animated than the mirror-like reflection he had observed before.

Peter made excuses to visit Mrs Bedford's flat at other times and found the quiet atmosphere a pleasant contrast to the incessant activities at school. They shared the same interest in poetry and later Peter introduced her to Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* (1885). Together they questioned and sought the meaning behind some of the most intriguing passages and their conversation and the readings were very exciting for Peter both emotionally and intellectually. These first experiences with Ida Bedford are reproduced in Grant Watson's second Australian novel, *The Mainland* (1917) where the young John Sherman is attracted to the older Mrs Clay, who reads poetry to him and who in turn is happy for his friendship and understanding which is lacking in her marriage.

In the presence of this amazing woman I was taken into the region of light and poetry and, most wonderful, she was with me in thought, and as hungry as myself. I was not boring her? "No".<sup>62</sup>

Bicycle excursions on the North Downs followed in which the couple were able to share their love of nature's wonders.

Controlled by some communication from the woodlands we stood still to listen to the low-toned buzz of insect wings, and to watch hover flies as they poised like tiny stars; then darted again to hang in the air seemingly motionless. From the hover flies our glances turned to look at each other. A rapture caught at my breath. Time passed and Space floated away. The Present had expanded into Eternity and was mysteriously between us. For how long I could not tell, but since we must return to our duration in Time she broke the spell with a slight inarticulate exclamation, and then: "Look down the hill - foxgloves, so many of them far into the distance."

<sup>61</sup> Written in Munich in 1886 when Ibsen was aged 58, *Rosmersholm* is based on political unrest in Norway. It was published by Glydendal of Copenhagen the same year and premiered at the National Theatre Bergen. The general reaction amongst Ibsen's admirers was that the play was obscure and the players were abstract rather than credible human beings. Strindberg, one of the few people to appreciate it, wrote in an essay entitled 'Soul Murder' (*Sjalmord*) "that *Rosmersholm* was unintelligible to the theatre public, mystical to the semi-educated but crystal clear to anyone with a knowledge of psychology." Source: Michael Meyer's review of Henrik Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, London: Hart-Davis, 1966.

<sup>62</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', ch. 5, p. 81.

There they were, rank behind rank, swaying in the light breeze.<sup>63</sup>

At the parting he stood held in wonder, watching her diminishing figure. Something of the woodlands had spoken and a stanza from Meredith's *Woods of Westerman* came to him.

See you so? Your senses drift:  
Tis a shuttle weaving swift.  
Look with spirit past the sense,  
Spirit whines in permanence.  
That is She, the view of whom  
Is the dust within the tomb;  
Is the inner blush above.  
Look to loathe, or look to love.  
Think her lump or know her Flame:  
Shoot your hungers from their nerve:  
Or, in her example, serve.<sup>64</sup>

Grant Watson began to question whether he was in love with her but dismissed the idea. She was married with three children and some years older than himself.

When he told her about his appointment with the Education Board, and asked her opinion, she commented, "You will be quite an important person, and how pleasantly safe!"<sup>65</sup> The flicker of sarcasm was not lost on Grant Watson and possibly influenced his decision to relinquish his appointment in Education and to seek the job with Radcliffe-Brown in Western Australia. Later he wondered if she was encouraged into influencing his decision by the fact that on the other side of the world he could not be that possibly disturbing influence that their present friendship might grow into. "At that age fresh from university, I was in a state of blissful unconsciousness of the ways of the world".<sup>66</sup> When she knew he was going to Australia, Ida relaxed a little from her caution, but for him the barrier of her marriage remained. "Yet the ferment grew and was in both of us else would she have received me so gladly when I walked over the hill to share her breakfast."<sup>67</sup> At the time he was living in a primitive hut on the far side of the North Downs, initially built by its owner, Dr Roberts, for a convalescing patient.

Ida's husband was returning from India in October and Grant Watson, as "a safe and proper subject," questioned her about him and said he would like to meet him. She told him that would never do, they would have nothing in common, "he would not like my visits, in short, he would not like me." She told him that she was married at eighteen years and not very

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

wisely. "Marriages are peculiar,"<sup>68</sup> she said. She would say no more than that her husband had an important post in India and was very clever. Grant Watson could only surmise she was not happy and he recalled his first feeling of shock at the sight of her forlorn appearance at the evening service, as a sign of the tragedy she shrank from.

On their frequent walks and yet more frequent readings and talks together, her sadness was forgotten. She had revealed a gay disposition and her unusually alert participation with nature had made him aware that though he had become a devoted bug hunter in his school days, she was now, as it were, "a lens through which everything was lit with undefined light."<sup>69</sup> The feeling of belonging together that had slipped between us in the woodland had returned at unpredictable times. I did not evoke it, I did not try to, but suddenly it was there, making me scarcely able to breathe, unable to say what should be said."<sup>70</sup> In a mood of confidence she told him she could see things many people could not.

"What sort of things?"

"Elementals that people of old times believed in. Shakespeare called them fairies, spirits of the rocks, of the streams, of the trees, of the air, and sometimes of fire; in sunbeams sometimes."

"May I come to see them too?" I asked.

"In a way you do. None of us see clearly, Blake saw them, and Shakespeare and Spenser. Many of the poets knew. Meredith was quite clear about them; and Browning tells us how Paracelsus saw them in everything . . . and of course the Greeks saw them," and she quoted from Socrates.<sup>71</sup>

Plato meant more to her than the Christian stories although she had been taught their significance at the convent where she had been educated.

We were like children paddling on the shores of an alluring treacherous ocean, yet pretending we were not touched by its compelling waters, but were safely seated, sunning ourselves on nearby sand dunes. For a man who looks back over fifty years and sees that our innocent friendship might be superficially explained by modern psychology as anima; animus projections, so, in part, no doubt, it was. C. G. Jung has postulated archetypes emerging from the deep, collective unconscious and indicating for those who can see them, the skeletal structure of the soul.<sup>72</sup>

Time passed, and when in the Autumn her husband returned, she told Peter he must not come to the house. "He would be frequently away, then she would let him know". This secrecy and subterfuge, Grant Watson found contrary to his nature, but in so far as she represented some

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 88.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

portion of the anima; she was: "She who must be obeyed" – as in Rider Haggard's *She* – and all he cared about was to please her. She must be afraid of him, Peter thought and remembered how she had spoken of marriage as something to be shuddered at. Hitherto Peter had thought of it as "a consummation devoutly to be wished; obviously it could be something different."<sup>73</sup>

When her husband returned Peter left his hut on the North Downs and went to stay with his parents. "At this time," he wrote, "I was reading Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, (1895), and her likeness to Sue Bridehead was convincing." In Sue Bridehead, Peter saw a resemblance to Ida in having the same masochist persuasion, a conviction she should be punished for her guilt. "She had only let me come as near as I had because I had remained so distant and because my almost immediate removal to Australia was assured."<sup>74</sup> There was no letter from Ida and eventually Peter returned to his hut on the hills and defying her command went to her house. By chance her husband was away, and she received Peter with her usual courtesy, but he saw at once she was again the frozen woman of their first meeting. She pleaded that it was not possible to continue their friendship, but after some hours of Peter's persistent questioning she spoke of the misery of her marriage. She had borne it for fifteen years and was prepared to continue for the sake of her children.

Peter saw himself in the role of Perseus about to save Andromeda from her monster, a monster he had never seen, "and I had no Gorgon's head to help me."<sup>75</sup> He wanted to help her and to offer marriage. But she replied she would never marry again, besides she was seven years older than Peter, who was then twenty-four years old. He demanded again to be allowed to speak to her husband, but she refused, saying he was extremely jealous and would become violent. He was even jealous of her women friends. However, she gave him permission to come again when her husband was away, but he must not present any more wild ideas. So they met again many times and many changes were going on within the "unsophisticated caterpillar, histolyses of mind and soul."

There was no-one I could talk to and I had few points of orientation. How could I know anything beyond the illumination that she gave to my world and that when we met a gentle harmony grew in the silences that lay between us. Our several weaknesses continued to make our joy and our anguish. There was always anguish, anguish was the bond that held us, whatever we planned or thought to plan. And always after the return of her husband, she was frozen and despairing, and always the slow melting of the ice was my task. She told me we had met before in other lives, with great pain not to be repeated, but we must go our ways, it was settled as a matter of fate. "Not of Destiny", I said, "Fate is not Destiny". She looked at me long; and in her face I could see her soul.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 92.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Time passed and Peter spent time with his parents, or in London or Cambridge, hearing Radcliffe-Brown's plans for the expedition, and sometimes in his hut on Wheatham Hill. In January he was there for the final farewell. The separation was inevitable, yet for him, "the new adventure beckoned".<sup>77</sup>

Berths were booked on the *S.A. Suevic*, an old White Star liner that went to Australia via the Cape. Radcliffe-Brown had a one-berth cabin as leader of the expedition and Grant Watson had a berth in a dormitory cabin which accommodated ten men, low down in the ship. For this he paid £19. Unexpectedly, a few weeks before the date of sailing, Radcliffe-Brown had to postpone his departure for private reasons. His marriage to Winifred Marie Lyon on 19 April, 1910, was the most obvious reason.<sup>78</sup> Peter, therefore, sailed alone. Later, he would describe his feelings at that time: "I was finding the plunge into the unknown and the severing of close family ties a considerable strain, but felt If I did not go now, I would not go at all". So he decided not to cancel his passage, but to go as arranged, and wait for Radcliffe-Brown in Western Australia. "My mother and stepfather saw me off at Liverpool St. Station. Those moments of farewell were poignant. Already I had said good-bye to another friend whose image was in my heart".<sup>79</sup>

It took time to get accustomed to the mid-ship crowded atmosphere, and to the bugs, of which there was no lack. The vitiated atmosphere was more difficult to accommodate to especially as the 'No smoking' sign was ignored and for the first two weeks the portholes were firmly closed on account of the rough weather. However in spite of the rough seas and the stuffy, crowded dormitory cabin, Grant Watson found the voyage a delight. He took advantage of the hot and cold seawater baths, and the food was good, even though the drinking water was flat and sickly in flavour.

Apart from such minor drawbacks, for Grant Watson life renewed itself daily in wonder, and

Halley's comet was a marvel to behold. Each night as we fared southward, we saw its bending arc above us grow greater and greater. Its head would appear about a fifth of the size of the moon, but more translucent, and its tail was a vast transparent veil, spreading out over an arc, subtending at least a hundred-and-twenty degrees. I would stand on the upper deck star-gazing, and delighting in the soft tropical airs, and the sound of the waters as they swished along the sides of the ship, and all the mixed noises of the life of a ship answered occasionally by the wild cry of some sea bird lost in the darkness.<sup>80</sup>

After leaving the serene West African coastline, the scene was very different with seas so

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>78</sup> Geoffrey Serle (ed.), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 11: 1891-1939, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988, p. 322.

<sup>79</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 90.



rough that the ship at times was lifted so high on its stern, propellers raced in air, then slowly bore up its bows so high, that the ship seemed to stand on its tail. Grant Watson was still able to stay on deck, later recalling moments of strange happiness which came to him when "solitary on the upper deck, clutching a stanchion" he watched the stars spin around him and saw the ship lights penetrating their faint short distance into the night. It was then he liked to "watch the albatross hanging but a few yards from the mast-head on seemingly motionless wings, adapting its pace to that of the ship, so that when the galley-scuttle opened and some refuse was shot forth, it would swoop to the waves and for a while be absent, only to reappear at the same vantage point."

As the weeks passed and they were nearing Australia, excitement grew, though "all the joyous anticipation of the new adventure on a new continent was mingled with regret at the partings. It was strange how attached we had become to our chance acquaintances and towards people for whom our first critical glances had held little charity, we now felt a sincere and warm affection. Addresses were exchanged and promises to write were made – promises never or seldom fulfilled".<sup>81</sup> On arrival at Albany, and after farewells made to fellow passengers, Grant Watson found letters from his mother and stepfather, "though there was absence of another letter for which my heart had waited with expectation".<sup>82</sup>

The train journey from Albany to Perth Grant Watson describes as an adventure and delight.

Everything was different from England, the paper trees with their stumpy ragged stems, the long-haired casuarinas, the scrubby eucalyptus, grevillias of many kinds, and the host of flowering herbs, all communicated a glamour different from the familiar; so, too, did the sound of the bull-frogs croaking in the swamps. These could clearly be heard at the stations where the train halted. The abandoned ecstasy of the 'Cuckoo-burra', and the cawing of the reddish-black crows, the song of the cicadas, and the hum of innumerable insect wings offered a foretaste of the new land.<sup>83</sup>

Perth, a city with trams, shops and overhead wires, had much in common with all modern towns, yet for Grant Watson, it presented a quality of its own, "an immergent vitality; its tough-looking, brown-skinned men and its pale-faced girls seemed if not actually to give a welcome to the stranger, not to repulse him".<sup>84</sup> The temptation to stay, to look and absorb overcame his good resolutions to earn his keep from the start. He booked into St. George's Coffee-palace for a week and was fed magnificently on new types of sea fish, on turkey and fruit and cream, "all for two pounds a week!"

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 92.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



During this time Grant Watson learned much about the Australian animals and bush lore from Giles, the keeper of wild animals at the Perth Zoological Gardens. He was also given useful hints about the collection of insects and before the week was up he had despatched his first tin of two thousand beetles to the collector, Rene Oberture, in France. The arrangement was that for one hundred he would be paid one pound, for any which were of special interest, Grant Watson could name his own price. From Perth, he decided to visit the goldfields with the hope of getting a job of some kind while awaiting Radcliffe-Brown's arrival. The Western Australian Government had offered to members of the expedition a first-class pass on the railways, so he took the night train to Kalgoorlie. On the way he met Doré Doolette, a mine-owner and company promoter, who, on hearing Grant Watson's story of looking for a job while waiting for the leader of a scientific expedition to the North-West, invited him to accompany him on a visit to a small mine in which he had an interest.<sup>85</sup>

Having witnessed a game of poker earlier on the journey in which Doolette had relieved his companions of eighty pounds, Grant Watson remembered his mother's warning when she had told him "The world was full of sharks waiting to eat pigeons," and how they had laughed at her mixed metaphor. "Here, obviously, was one of the greater sharks, and here in my corner one of the pigeons". Grant Watson said he had very little money but was assured it would not cost him a penny, beyond a small initial outlay. "He had better buy some bush clothes, dungarees and a singlet," then with a glance at his head, added, "and have a hair cut".<sup>86</sup>

Doolette went off to his expensive hotel in Kalgoorlie while Grant Watson sought the Coffee Palace. He then explored the town, fitting himself up according to "the national standard". He spent the day relaxing in Kalgoorlie, getting himself red with the dust of the goldfields, accustoming his eyes to the desert and the landscape, made barren by a blazing sun by day, and dry frost by night. The town's water supply was brought many hundreds of miles from the Mundaring Ranges. In the centre of the town was a great garden of tropical luxuriance owned by a wealthy mine-owner and costing twenty pounds a week to water. It features in *The Nun and the Bandit* (1935).<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Dorham Longford Doolette, 1872-1925 as a pioneer of Kalgoorlie, pegged out the rich Golden Horseshoe, Golden Link, Boulder Central and Chaffer's mines for the Adelaide Syndicate. In 1905 he became manager of the Never Never mine at Southern Cross and in 1908 manager of Great Boulder's St. George mine at Mount Magnet. In April, 1910 he had reports of a promising find in the Yilgarn district 35 kms from Southern Cross which later was floated in London as the Bullfinch Proprietary (W.A.) Ltd. with G. P. Doolette as Chairman. Source: R. M. Gibbs, A. McLeary. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Bede, Nairn, Geoffrey Serle (gen. eds), vol. 8, 1891-1939, p. 323.

<sup>86</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>87</sup> Kalgoorlie: Goldmining city 594 km east of Perth on the Great Eastern Highway which began life 17 June 1893 as 'Hannan's Find'. Irish prospector Paddy Hannan found alluvial gold here, at a spot in what is now Egan St. Subsequent discoveries of deep reefs on the Golden Mile of central Kalgoorlie proved to be some of the world's richest, ensuring permanence for the city in contrast to the temporary life of many gold rush towns. There is a statue of Hannan in the city, and the local beer is named after him. The city's name derives from an Aboriginal word for a species of wild pear. Source: Peter Pierce (ed.), Rosemary Hunter (asst ed.), *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 296.

From Kalgoorlie he travelled with Doolette and an Irish companion by night train west to Southern Cross,<sup>88</sup> which in 1910 was little more than a wayside halt. From here they travelled by buggy cross country to Bullfinch, the new mine in which Doolette was interested. Of the journey Grant Watson wrote:

I would have been aware more than I was, but for Doolette's Irish friend, of the wild beauty of the night, the blazing stars in the black sky, the steaming horses and the feathery and ghostly mulga bushes. These would have been sufficient company, but all the time Doolette's friend poured out upon me a stream of dirty stories, and nudged me to make sure that I saw the point, often I didn't, often the point was very blunt. Partly I dozed and partly I wondered at the pervading strange quality of the Australian bush. the night was bitterly cold in spite of all the rugs Doolette had provided and as dawn came so did the sight of many wheel tracks into the camp.<sup>89</sup>

The impressions of that night ride remained with Grant Watson to reappear in 'Man and Brute', a powerful short story published in *Innocent Desires* (1924). On arrival at the camp they found the men sitting on upturned boxes round a camp fire eating large portions of eggs and bacon and mutton chops together with thick chunks of damper washed down by strong tea. Doolette treated the young Grant Watson with great generosity, giving him his own private tent and the hospitality of the camp for as long as he liked. The experience in meeting Doolette and travelling with him to the mining camp and his work in the camp, is dramatized in *The Mainland* (1917) where the young John Sherwin, the son of the stockman in *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914) seeks work and experience on the mainland.

The time spent in the mining camp, as will be seen later in this study, was meaningful for Grant Watson. It was rich not so much in outer but in inner experience. So far as outer experience went, the days presented a pleasant and happy monotony. The waking at early dawn was in bitter cold, with the relished breakfast close to the camp fire. At midday the heat was so intense, it was best to keep under cover. The mine at that time was but a single shaft some twenty feet (6m) deep. About twenty men were at work, all extending to the young Englishman a kindly tolerance of his ignorance of bush ways, while endeavouring to see how many tall stories he would swallow. They found additional amusement in his activities, and, in their times off, would go hunting echidnas. "Those God-damn prickly buggars", as they called them. Of these he had about ten tethered to his tent pegs in order to observe them. They also collected beetles and every kind of insect. He would wander solitary in the bush, but never very far from a wheel-track, having a keen apprehension of how easy it was to get lost.

The simple round however, did not complete his experience. As he wrote in his autobiography:

<sup>88</sup> Southern Cross: former mining town 227 km west of Kalgoorlie and 367 km east of Perth on the Great Eastern Highway, site of the first significant gold discovery in the southern half of Western Australia. Now a regional centre for farmers. Source: *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia*, op. cit., p. 315.

<sup>89</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 98.

There was the bush and all that it stood for, and that was no small thing to cope with. I learned, and before long, how many men were distressed and indeed utterly destroyed by its strange power. A surveyor from Perth shot himself dead on the third day of his bush sojourning. The miners took his death with no great surprise. "It's the bush", they said, "Many men can't stand it. How about yourself you Johnny Englishman?" I had been asking myself that question, or rather the ambiguous, veiled influence of the bush had been asking me.<sup>90</sup>

Gradually the fear of the bush dissolved into awe. After his return to camp for the reassurance of human companionship, the bush would speak to him again and the word 'fear' would take on a theological meaning. "Fear me, Do not hate me. Do not worship me. Do not resist me, nor presume to look for too long. Look aside, and *if you can*, accept me."<sup>91</sup>

These feelings were not then so conscious as they have become for me in these later days, but as their result I came through my crisis, and in some measure learnt to accept those ambiguous prophecies, for towards the end of my visit to the Bullfinch I had chosen to sleep out on the ground wrapped in my blankets, at a short distance from the camp rather than be under the protection of my tent. I liked it better that way, liked to gaze at the stars until my eyes closed in sleep; woke with the false dawn, when all things stir in their slumber; slept again and woke as the sun lipped the horizon, sending its slanting shafts to underline every bush and herb with purple shadow. At such a time the sweet scent of the bush-blossoms would drift lightly in the frosty air.<sup>92</sup>

Wickham, the manager, laughed at him telling him he was already growing into a bush proper, like Gilbert, mad as a hatter. If the bush didn't get you one way it would get you another. As for himself, he slept in a tent, didn't go mooning looking for beetles. Grant Watson was to use this theme in his novels, *The Desert Horizon* (1923) and *Daimon* (1925).

When Doolette returned at the end of the week he was shown the samples of ore-dust from the borings. Great was his excitement when these were washed out under his one critical eye. " 'Holy Jesus, the bloody dish is full of gold!' he exclaimed and seemed to have said everything that could be said",<sup>93</sup> was Grant Watson's comment. Grant Watson was offered a job of washing and assessing the samples, keeping a record for Doolette, and was paid what he thought was "a handsome sum" for a small job. Gold hunger was infectious. Each chose a partner for prospecting and Grant Watson drifted towards the eccentric Gilbert. He was a man of education, sixty years of age, who had spent the last twenty years in the bush. He always slept on the bare ground and was altogether under the exacting dominion of the precious metal. They went prospecting on Sundays and together found a promising vein. Walking back to the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 101.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

camp, Gilbert pulled him up. "Walk slow," he said. "If you walk fast the whole camp will know we've found something and," he added, "Wave your bloody butterfly net".<sup>94</sup> The character of Gilbert appears in *The Mainland* (1911) and something of his character can be seen in Martin of *Daimon* (1925), who also had the gold fever which destroyed his life. Gold is also the theme of *The Partners* (1933) symbolized as "liquid sunlight".<sup>95</sup>

Their find proved to have gold in it and Grant Watson was all for making a claim, but to make a claim cost money. Gilbert was chary of any outlay. "It's not good enough," he persuaded Grant Watson, "unless the railway were out here".<sup>96</sup> So they missed their chance, but had the interest of seeing it sold and resold and sold again at five hundred, a thousand, and twenty thousand pounds. It proved not worth the money ultimately given. Gilbert had been right, but Grant Watson had been right too, if they had taken up the claim they would have sold at five hundred and would have made an "acceptable little sum".

Grant Watson made no money from gold but saved his earnings and collected a tremendous lot of beetles. Bulfinch boomed and hundreds of men poured in from all over Australia. There would be a new township, a second Kalgoorlie. Meanwhile Radcliffe-Brown had arrived and Grant Watson was to meet him in Perth.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 102.

<sup>95</sup> E. L. Grant Watson's *The Partners* (1933) was published as *Lost Man* in the USA.

<sup>96</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 104.



Figure 1 (left): Grant Watson's maternal grandfather, Francis Fuller, one of the founders of the Great Exhibition and the Crystal Palace.

*Photograph by kind favour of Grant Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence.*



Figure 2: Grant Watson's maternal grandmother, Mrs Francis Fuller, photographed with two of her children – one son and one daughter (not identified).

*Photograph by kind favour of Grant Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence.*



Figure 3 (above): Grant Watson's  
parents, Mr & Mrs Reginald  
Grant Watson.

Figure 4 (right): Mrs Reginald  
Grant Watson, neé Lucy Fuller.

*Photographs by kind favour of  
Grant Watson's daughter,  
Josephine Spence.*





Figure 5 (above): Mr and Mrs Reginald Grant Watson.

Figure 6 (right): Lucy Grant Watson with an infant son, thought to be Elliot, called Peter by his family.

*Photographs by kind favour of Grant Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence.*





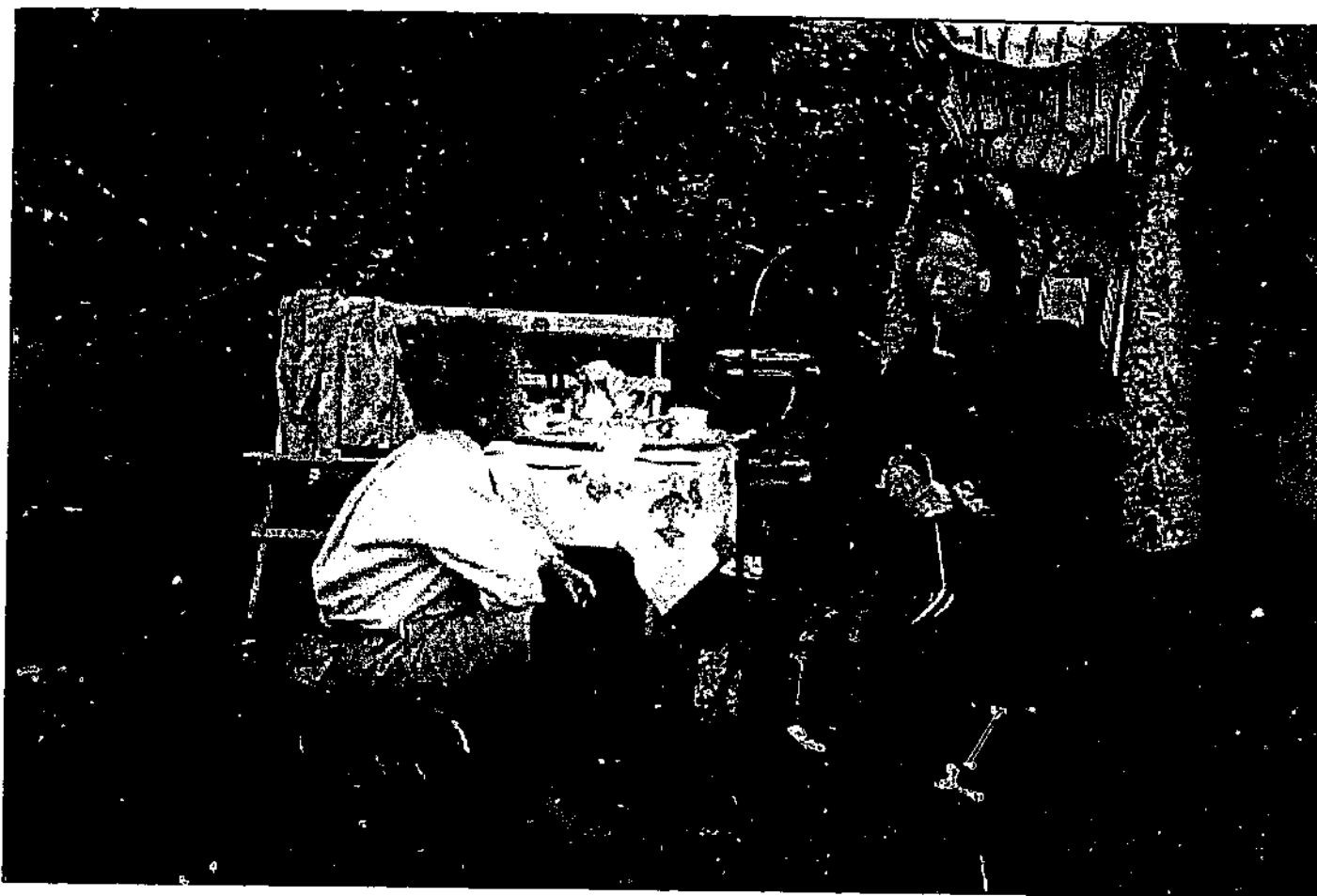


Figure 7 (above): A young E. L. Grant Watson with his maternal grandmother.

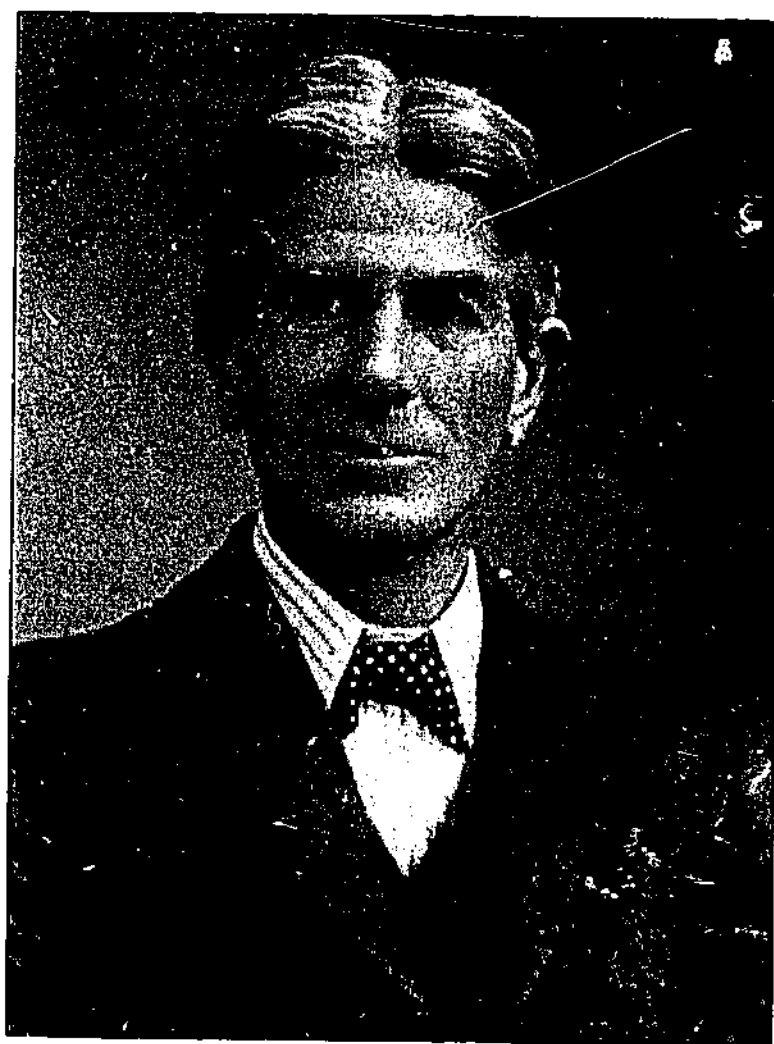


Figure 8 (left): Jack Powell, Grant Watson's stepfather, at about the time of his marriage to Lucy Grant Watson.

*Photographs by kind favour of Grant Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence.*



## Chapter Two

### The Cambridge Expedition

While waiting in Perth for the arrival of Radcliffe-Brown, Grant Watson met Mrs Daisy Bates, who was hoping that Radcliffe-Brown would include her in the forthcoming expedition. Grant Watson wrote: "Mrs. Bates probably knew more about the Australian Aborigines than anyone else alive. She was not primarily an anthropologist, but an enthusiast, who had given all her love and sympathy to these outcasts from their own land."<sup>1</sup>

Radcliffe-Brown was by no means averse to accepting a woman as fellow member. His modern outlook would not repudiate the possibility of women being able to co-operate with men in the field of anthropology, and he was quick to see that Mrs Bates was the possessor of a priceless store of knowledge. The trouble was that Mrs Bates' knowledge, collected through many years of close contact with the natives, was not in a condition that Radcliffe-Brown considered easily available for the ends of science. The contents of her mind, in his estimation, were somewhat similar to the contents of a well-stored sewing-basket, after half a dozen kittens had been playing there undisturbed for a few days. At first he optimistically thought he might disentangle some of that rich medley, but in this he proved mistaken. She was made for his exasperation, as he for hers. "This unfortunate coincidence," wrote Grant Watson, "they neither of them discovered in those early days, and so it was that Mrs. Bates started with us, in spite of there having already occurred more than one of those symptomatic intervals when Brown's eyes had become fixed on distance and Mrs. Bates had talked into the silence. 'A most extraordinary man', she confided in me, and I could see her shaking the feathers of her soul in perturbation. It was not many days before she added: 'And no gentleman, I am sure.'"<sup>2</sup>

In his autobiography Grant Watson wrote that the financial standing of the expedition had become very much stronger since the first landing at Perth. Radcliffe-Brown had given, at the museum at Perth, a free lecture on the Aborigines, and on the purpose of the expedition. After the lecture a certain Mr Sam Mackay had approached him and explained how much he had always felt indebted to the natives for their work for him on his sheep-farms, and that now he thought that here was an opportunity of paying back past obligations, whereupon he wrote out a cheque for one thousand pounds.

In *The Passing of the Aborigines* (1944) we learn that Daisy Bates claimed that it was she who arranged an interview with the late Mr S. F. Mackay, a well-known and wealthy

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<sup>1</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, London: The Cresset Press, 1946, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

pastoralist, and asked him point-blank for £1000 to make possible at least two years of field work for the expedition. She was prompted to do this as Radcliffe-Brown had told her that he had only enough finances for six months and she realized the time was too short for any research of value. The wealthy station owner Mackay appears in Grant Watson's Australian novel, *The Desert Horizon* (1923) as the kindly middle-aged man, whose clothes were thickly powdered with the familiar red dust, and who gave the young Martin O'Brien his first job, fencing his property.

Having arrived at Geraldton on 16 October, 1910, Grant Watson wrote to his mother who, with her husband, had travelled to Perth. The letter contains this description of the boat trip to Geraldton:

The sea was very, very rough and the boat very small and lightly loaded. I was sick so also was Mrs. Bates, which I thought amusing after her stories of adventure on the deep when she and the captain were the only capable mortals aboard. She and Brown are a quaint couple. She talks incessantly and Brown tries, as he says, to think about other things. He is very beautiful in a solar topee. I think he will manage alright though at present he is rather embarrassed by his ignorance of the country and its conditions. He makes up for this however, by talking about hygiene and other obtuse subjects about which he knows a powerful lot, or would have one think so. Tomorrow we are to go to Crowther and see some natives and on to Cue by the night train.<sup>3</sup>

In an undated letter from Geraldton<sup>4</sup> he wrote:

I have so many things to write, so many impressions to record. It is difficult to get away by oneself, Brown does pour himself over one so. I quite like him and get on well with him, but never for a moment can he realize the existence of anybody else. The thought, I think, would be quite new to him.<sup>5</sup>

From Murchison Club Hotel, Cue,<sup>6</sup> came another undated letter:

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Grant Watson at Geraldton to his mother at Perth, dated 16 Oct., 1910.

<sup>4</sup> Geraldton: fishing port on the Indian Ocean 421 km north of Perth on the Brand Highway, formerly Wittacarra, then Champion Bay. The town was established in 1849 on the recommendation of explorer Lieutenant George Grey, whose *Journal of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North Western and Western Australia in the Years 1837, 1838 and 1839* (1841) describe the land around Champion Bay in glowing terms. Source: Peter Pierce (ed.), Rosemary Hunter (asst. ed.), *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 294.

<sup>5</sup> A later letter from Grant Watson at Geraldton to his mother at Perth, undated.

<sup>6</sup> Cue: former mining town on the Great Northern Highway, 79 km north of Mount Magnet and 645 km north-east of Perth, founded in 1892 and named after prospector Tom Cue. It was the first destination of the tens of thousands of diggers who flocked to the Murchison goldfields in the 1890s. By 1895 the town was known as the 'Queen of the Murchison'. Source: Peter Pierce (ed.), Rosemary Hunter (asst. ed.), *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia*, op. cit., 1987, pp. 288-89.

I came right through yesterday to this most desolate place. The ground is hard iron stone and quartz quite hard under a blazing sun. The country is most striking in its god-forgottenedness and carries one on a few millions of years to the time when the world is getting old and dying and no longer able to support life. Or perhaps since it is hot and not cold I should rather be carried back to early time when hot boiling salt seas broke upon bare iron rocks. I do not at present feel in anyway repaid for the long tedious journey and should suspect, few insects. Geraldton was I thought rather pleasant as a town with a beautiful sea in front of it but of drunk men I have never seen so many. Going to bed at night I had to step over two on the stairs and all night through wild drunken cries disturbed me.<sup>7</sup>

The next letter, dated 28 October, 1910, was from Cue:

Tomorrow we go to Sandstone where there is a large corroboree in progress. We shall put our camp close by and hope to be accepted in a friendly way. Here it is pretty hot but we are in very comfortable quarters. Between lectures from Brown on the many subjects on which he possesses an expert knowledge, and tactless and silly questions from Mrs. Bates and the hot weather, I find practice for self control. I get on quite well with Brown though, provided I feed his egoism with instant attention. I find him really capable.<sup>8</sup>

In his autobiography, *But To What Purpose* (1946) Grant Watson wrote:

My position became increasingly difficult. I appreciated the genuine and brave spirit which characterised Mrs. Bates, but unfortunately, she considered herself capable of the leadership of the expedition. Brown was determined that such an issue should never be in question, and he well knew how to use his weapons of silence and aloofness. Beside my liking and sympathy for Mrs. Bates, I had my loyalty to Brown and my growing friendship with him. The situation as the weeks passed, became increasingly difficult. However, things looked hopeful enough as we trekked with our wagon, drawn by two horses, towards the wild unexplored bush where the large corroboree was reported to be about to be celebrated.<sup>9</sup>

Louis Olsen was a Swedish ex-sailor whom Radcliffe-Brown engaged in Sandstone<sup>10</sup> to be a cook and handy-man. There were also two Aboriginal boys, picked up at Sandstone

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Grant Watson at Cue to his mother at Perth, undated.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Grant Watson at Cue to his mother at Perth, dated 28 Oct., 1910.

<sup>9</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>10</sup> Sandstone: former goldmining town 158 km east of Mount Magnet and 665 km north-east of Perth, off the Great Northern Highway, near to becoming a classic ghost town of the outback. The present population of less than 60 persons contrasts with the 6000 who thronged its streets and worked the alluvial gold diggings and deep mines from 1902-1907. Source: Peter Pierce (ed.), Rosemary Hunter (asst. ed.), *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia*, op. cit., 1987, p. 315.

and persuaded to join the party as interpreters, as they had a smattering of pidgin-English. In *Journey under the Southern Stars* (1968) Grant Watson wrote of them:

Although they were reluctant on account of their natural fear of going among strange and possibly hostile tribes, it was entirely due to Brown's almost magical power over these people that they were persuaded. However the prospect of sharing white man's food tempted them.<sup>11</sup>

Grant Watson and Radcliffe-Brown subsequently found that even the wildest of the Aborigines were easy to make friends with. However, they did not know this at the time and took two watch dogs, a spaniel and an Airedale. After some days in preparation at Sandstone, they started for the interior. On their wagon were the tents, stores and the large tank of drinking water, guns, rifles and bedding, a large store of tobacco, pipes and beads as presents for the natives.

Within an hour of leaving the town they were completely swallowed up by the bush, mulga and acacia bushes and stunted gum trees grew from the bare red dust. "The Western Australian bush," Grant Watson wrote:

gives the feeling of being very very old indeed, and is now, as it was years before man was created, old and calm, with few sounds except the buzzing of flies and the whirring chirp of grey grass-hoppers. The voices of the birds do not mingle as in Europe, but each one sounds separate and alive, emphasising the stillness.<sup>12</sup>

Grant Watson continued with the impressions made on an observant European mind of the Australian wild life, describing with great interest and keen observation the various creatures of the Australian bush. He managed to tame wallabies, bandicoots and one large emu which he enticed with a mirror. He also captured some echidnas which, in his efforts to take them back to England escaped from his hotel room by lifting up a loose floorboard, after having managed to shift slightly all the furniture in the room.

The first night in the bush they neither heard nor saw any Aborigines. On the second night they camped near a place where a big corroboree, or sacred dance, was to be held. Their two Aboriginal interpreters told them that several tribes were meeting for the yearly celebration of dances connected with the coming of age of their young boys. Their own tribe was to be one of them. They lived near the station of a sheep farmer, working at odd jobs on the farm and the women helping the farmer's wife with her washing. Although they seemed friendly, they were anxious for Grant Watson and Radcliffe-Brown to pitch their tents between their own tribesmen and a tribe from the Eastern desert with whom they were at feud. During the night the friendly tribesmen squatting around their fires chanting in a

<sup>11</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Journey under the Southern Stars*, London, New York, Toronto: Abelard-Schuman, 1968, p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

monotonous sing-song occasionally showed signs of alarm, pointing into the bush. Grant Watson and Radcliffe-Brown could see no cause for this alarm although their dogs appeared to be overcome with panic, the Airedale finally running away into the bush and the other taking refuge, whining and shivering, in an empty packing case. After dark it was obvious that the country was not so deserted as it appeared. All around they could hear the sound of bull roarers.

For several days they remained in what appeared a slightly unsafe position between the native tribe they knew, and those who never showed themselves; although the other tribes made their presence known by bull roarers at night and by the fear they inspired in their remaining watch dog. Eventually they made contact with the wild tribesmen in an unexpected manner. Walking some distance from the camp they came upon sticks stuck upright in the ground. In trying to avoid what Radcliffe-Brown considered might be a sacred place they came upon twelve tribesmen seated on the ground in conclave. At Radcliffe-Brown's instigation they sat down on the ground 100 yards away not wishing to intrude. After what seemed a long time one of the men came over and began pouring out a stream of words from which it was understood they were invited to the gathering.

Grant Watson admired Radcliffe-Brown's technique in keeping silent and looking intently, searchingly at each man in turn, demanding some sign of recognition and perhaps of friendship. In turn each man gave it, all except one man who remained sulky and scowling. Later they found out this man was deaf and dumb. Radcliffe-Brown then produced a magic stick that had been carved by some other tribe of Aborigines. This produced immediate response, a repeated puffing sound – "puff, puff, puff" – and then a great many words. With a gesture of silence Radcliffe-Brown began to talk slowly in English. "They did not understand his words any more than we understood theirs," Grant Watson wrote, "but the fact of words exchanged made a bridge."<sup>13</sup>

Grant Watson found in Radcliffe-Brown a leader of exceptional ability, who seemed always able to establish with the natives a just and firm relationship, one which was distinguished by its humanity, yet which seldom lacked the objectivity of the scientist. A few days after they had made contact with the Aborigines, Grant Watson had further proof of Radcliffe-Brown's uncanny power. They were walking in the bush when they came on a number of men who, with shouts of defiance, were fitting spears to their throwing sticks, and vibrating them preparatory for the cast. Opposite them were men of another tribe in like position. Without hesitation, Radcliffe-Brown's tall, imposing figure, in his white tropical suit, walked between them and hardly raising his voice, ordered them in English to put down their spears.

Incredible as it may seem, they obeyed. If a fight had been started it might easily have spread to the other tribesmen. His power over these simple-minded men was such that, in very fact, they considered him as returned from the dead. He had in a

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

few days won their confidence through unfailing kindness, never using threat or show of force.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, it was some days before all suspicion of them as white strangers was overcome.

What really established their position was Radcliffe-Brown's knowledge of the complicated marriage system of the Australian Aborigines. Knowing the pattern from book-knowledge, he had the advantage, for they only knew it empirically. Gathering a few facts from them, Radcliffe-Brown was able to deduce a great many other facts, and this was beyond their comprehension. "It placed him in the position of a wise medicine man, or indeed higher, as one who had returned from the happy hunting grounds. Their knowledge consists of genealogies, extremely puzzling to an amateur anthropologist," wrote Grant Watson, "but Brown knew it all as well as the oldest and wisest of the elders. After asking a few simple questions the whole structure of the tribe was revealed to him and he knew who had conformed and who had erred, although these mis-marriages were far removed from the knowledge of the native who was questioned."<sup>15</sup>

"This power," Grant Watson continued, "which we used to full extent was a kind of bluff, but it was extremely effective and secured us an assured position. We had carried, at first, heavy revolvers, but these we discarded for magic sticks concealed in small linen bags. The natives respected these, and would not pass by without some sign of recognition."<sup>16</sup> In his autobiography, *Journey under the Southern Stars* (1969) Grant Watson gave a brief explanation of the complicated marriage system of the Australian Aborigines. Each tribe is divided into two fratres and each fratre into two classes – four classes in all. To avoid unfamiliar names, difficult to remember and differing in different tribes, he called them A, B, C, and D. A and B are one fratre, C and D another. Every man and woman knows from earliest childhood to which class he or she belongs. The system runs close to the following pattern, though there occur variations. An A class man will marry a C class woman. The children will go to the mother's fratre, but to a different class from hers, namely D class. In like manner if members of B marry D, the children will go to the mother's side, but into another class. All possible marriages are known instinctively to every member of the tribe.

In *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899) Spencer and Gillen wrote of the kinship system of the central tribes, known as the classificatory system. The intention of the system is to prevent the marriage of near kin, of which the central tribes, in common with all the other Australian Aborigines – and many other primitive people in other parts of the world – have a great horror. The central tribes attained the desired object by the simple device of bisecting the whole tribe successively into two, four or eight exogamous subdivisions. The effect of the first bisection is to prevent the marriage of brothers and sisters. The effect of the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

second bisection is to prevent the marriage of parents with children and the effect of the third bisection is to prevent the marriage of certain cousins with each other. "It is hardly too much to say," wrote James Frazer in the preface to the 1938 edition of their book, "that no social institute whether among savages or civilized people, bears on its face the imprint of its intention more clearly stamped than the classificatory system of the central Australian Aborigines."<sup>17</sup>

During the early times Grant Watson and Radcliffe-Brown spent with the natives they were hard at work making vocabularies. With the help of their native interpreters, they made lists of what they considered essential words, some three hundred of them. From these vocabularies they could write down the equivalent Aboriginal words, with these words they used English auxiliaries, and were able to communicate with the natives.

The corroboree (described in Chapter Eight) to which they were invited made a lasting impression on Grant Watson. It finished with eleven dancers set in two rows, soot-blackened, with white patterns of clay up and down in stripes, blotches and rings; round their faces were *waniga*, and at knees and wrists tufts of feathers.

These were animal ancestors, the *alchuringa*. In the light of the blazing woodpile, they danced stiff formal dances, dramatizing mythological events. Their movements were deliberately unnatural, each gesture designed to convey an inward esoteric drama. As soon as the flames subsided, the dancers withdrew, the bull-roarers ceased their droning and the corroboree, for that night was over. Dawn was breaking; the darkness had been vanquished. For three weeks the natives had been preparing the ground, fashioning the *waniga*, and in a few minutes the ceremony was completed; yet in that short time, the prehistoric had been brought into the present. The groups of the separate tribes had been welded into a single organism by the chthonic forces communicated to the dancers.<sup>18</sup>

In a letter to his mother dated 29 October, 1910, from the camp near Sandstone, Grant Watson wrote:

All goes well here, we have a delightful camp in the driest spot I have ever experienced. So far the work has not been very hard as the natives have had to be won over and this is a slow job, especially as the police are raiding them for tribal murder and for syphilis. I have a very nice little kangaroo dog pup which one of the natives gave me, a mark of great favour. We call him "do-do", the native word for dog. Photography is difficult where the ground is three inches deep in fine red dust. Did I tell you that we saw a very fine corroboree. I will send a written description of the interesting experiences to you and I want you to send them on to

<sup>17</sup> W. Baldwin Spencer & F. J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, preface by Sir J. G. Frazer O.M. St Martins St, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1938, p. ix.

<sup>18</sup> Grant Watson, *Journey under the Southern Stars*, op. cit., p. 35.



Mrs. Bedford. I have asked her to keep them for me for future copy. On Sunday we are going out after kangaroos. Brown and I read and discuss in the evenings and Mrs. Bates goes to bed. He has brought a Shelley and reads very well though rather affectedly. He is splendid with the natives and there is no doubt he is no coward. We have had some wonderful experiences which will follow in a day or two.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately the research on the four-class marriage system of the Australian Aborigines was interrupted by a dawn raid made by the Australian police, in a futile attempt to secure some tribal-murderers, who were supposed to be at the corroboree. "Some ten or twelve white Australians were riding through the camp, firing off their revolvers at the native dogs, and shouting and swearing in quite a cinematographic manner. Natives were making off in all directions". One unfortunate ancient native was brought in, his arms twisted behind his back by his captors. He did not look a murderer and he protested he was not, but he was carried off to be put in jail in Sandstone. After the police departed, Radcliffe-Brown lifted the flap of his tent, and out from the interior there emerged two of the suspected murderers, who had taken refuge with their white-man-friend whom they declared was "close up along-side-of-God".<sup>20</sup>

As it was now impossible to carry on their research, most of the natives having fled, Radcliffe-Brown decided to go to Bernier Island in Shark Bay<sup>21</sup> on the North-West coast of Australia where there was a lock-hospital for venereally infected natives. Here a large number of Aborigines would be collected who could be interrogated. This seemed to him the best thing to be done in the circumstances. Mrs Bates was opposed to the plan, maintaining that the natives would return, and elected to stay at the camp to wait for them. It seemed to Grant Watson that she did not believe that Radcliffe-Brown would be so ungallant as to leave her alone and he urged her to go with them, but her pride was touched. Already she was beginning to hate Radcliffe-Brown, which was not tempered by the misfortunes which came upon her, and for which neither she nor Radcliffe-Brown were responsible.

In a letter dated 31 October, 1910, to his mother from Oroya Palace Hotel, Sandstone, Grant Watson wrote:

Our plans have been most horribly upset by a number of most unfortunate happenings. We were comfortable camped in the midst of the natives when first there was a police raid made in the hope of catching certain tribal murderers, then a wretched man came here who is collecting diseased natives and he insisted on going through the camp and kidnapping some half dozen individuals and inspecting all of them with the result that all the camp was horribly disturbed and excited, and connected our stay in the neighbourhood with the raids. All hope of work was consequently impossible and we have therefore decided to go to Dorré and Bernier

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Grant Watson at camp near Sandstone to his mother at Perth, dated 29 Oct., 1910.

<sup>20</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> See footnote p. 70.



Islands where we know there is a large number of Aborigines collected at the lock hospital. I am sending a photograph of our Sandstone camp. Our plans are to go from here today, sleep at Mt. Magnet,<sup>22</sup> then Brown and Louie go to Geraldton and I go to Cue to fetch some things we left there. I then join Brown at Geraldton and we go if possible, up to Dorré Island by a sailing schooner.<sup>23</sup>

Grant Watson described the lock-hospital on Bernier Island as having been established by the West Australian Government with the most admirable intentions. The problem of syphilitic and otherwise venereally-infected natives had to be dealt with. White men had brought diseases to the race with little or no resistance to infections, and which were as yet unknown in this part of Australia.

The idea was to collect all possible cases, and isolate the men on Bernier island, and the women on Dorré Island, two uninhabited islands which lay some thirty miles from the mainland in Shark Bay. Here hospitals were built, and a doctor was appointed to travel from one island to another, assisted by nursing staff and a stockman who cared for the few sheep and cattle on the island and assisted the doctor in other ways. "The method of collecting the patients was not either humane or scientific," wrote Grant Watson.

A man unqualified except by ruthlessness and daring, helped by one or two kindred spirits, toured the countryside, raided the native camps, and there, by brute force, 'examined' the natives. Any that were obviously diseased or were suspected of disease were seized upon. These, since their hands were so small as to slip through any pair of handcuffs, were chained together by their necks, and were marched through the bush to the coast and there embarked on an ancient lugger to make the last stage of their sad journey.<sup>24</sup>

At the islands a competent young doctor was in charge. "His story," wrote Grant Watson, "I have written with little deviation from the actual events in my first novel, *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914). On the outermost fringes of civilization the bonds of restraint are likely to be loosed, and thus it was we found them in the process of that loosening when we landed on Bernier island."<sup>25</sup>

The Government cutter *Shark*, an old though well-built ten-ton craft had been put at their disposal, sailed by an ancient mariner who went by the name of 'Henrietta' and who was "the very image of a Daddy Neptune, of large girth and ample beard, watery eye and

<sup>22</sup> Mount Magnet: former goldmining town 566 km north-east of Perth, on the Great Northern Highway, one of the oldest on the Murchison goldfields, now an important regional centre serving the pastoral industry of the Murchison region. E. L. Grant Watson's novel *The Desert Horizon* (1923) describes the railway from Geraldton to here and the opening scene of his later novel *Lost Man* (1934) is also set in a railway carriage on the Geraldton-Mount Magnet Line. Source: Peter Pierce (ed.), Rosemary Hunter (asst. ed.), *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 288-89.

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Grant Watson at Sandstone to his mother at Perth, dated 31 Oct., 1910.

<sup>24</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

enormous feet, which through exposure to salt water and sunburn for so long were two or three times as large as normal feet".<sup>26</sup> On arrival at Geraldton from Sandstone, the members of the expedition made the acquaintance of Henrietta and the *Shark* but had to wait several days until Henrietta was in the mood for a journey to the islands.

He was a 'wet bob' if ever there was one, genial and good tempered, and not to be hurried. He drank deeply and often, and on many occasions was sunken in a drunken sleep from which nothing could waken him. He was assisted in his island-journeying by a small sailor called Tony, who was a great fisherman, and who invariably cooked the fish he caught in plain sea water, and served them, scales and all, without any accessories.<sup>27</sup>

The journey was a delight for Grant Watson, the blue sparkling sea, the sense of adventure, "the plunge to the unknown" had echoes of Conrad.

The sight of acres of sharks' fins and huge turtles, that lifted their shell and weed-encrusted carapaces out of the transparent water and with enormous sighs, greeted them, to sink again with upbubbling into the depths. Also there was Henrietta to listen to. He knew all the coast from Carnarvon<sup>28</sup> to Wyndham and talked with a rare salt flavour to his words and chuckled at his own stories as his great feet splayed the decks, and were themselves wonders of biological interest. He was glad enough to let us sail the boat while he sat in the shade of the cockpit and let drop, as occasion offered, his wisdom.<sup>29</sup>

Landing by dinghy through the quickly fading light in a small cove to the south-east of the island, Radcliffe-Brown, Louis, Grant Watson and their two dogs unloaded their camp beds and other essentials and pitched camp on the sand to avoid the ants on Henrietta's advice who said, "they were terrible bad inland". They cooked their supper in the dark over a fire of dry seaweed and flotsam while all around swarmed multitudes of quick-running crabs which scuttled in long echelon formations, lifting their stalked eyes like periscopes and flapping them back into their appropriate grooves at any alarm".<sup>30</sup> Next day they made their way up the coast to the ~~the~~ bay where they disembarked with the help of the resident stockman who, as well as looking after the sheep and cattle kept on the island, also kept order amongst the Aboriginal patients -- which he did roughly but not with undue brutality as he was sympathetic to their plight. He was also running considerable risk of infection. All of this is dramatized in *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914). Establishing camp half a mile from the hospital, they dug

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Carnarvon: coastal town 902 km north of Perth on the North West Coastal Highway. Source: Peter Pierce (ed.), Rosemary Hunter (asst. ed.), *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia*, op. cit., 1987, p. 286.

<sup>29</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

out ants nests and filled them with hot ashes, thereby keeping the ants nests in check but still having to hang up their boots and clothes to tent poles to prevent them from being eaten. Even their toe nails were attacked while they slept. Grant Watson found life very pleasant on the island, in spite of the ants, centipedes, ticks and scorpions. They worked under a large awning where they interrogated the patients and gained refreshment from swimming in the clear blue sea, where – in spite of sharks – they swam following Dr Hicksey's example. He maintained sharks were timid creatures and would turn away if he splashed his cupped hand on the water. Besides there were shoals of fish for the sharks to eat.<sup>31</sup>

Bernier Island, eighteen miles (30 kms) long, and never much wider than a mile (1.7 kms) across, was uninhabited except for the hospital's occupants. To the west the Indian Ocean sent its great rollers smashing on a wide shelf of submerged reef. "Here at low tide," wrote Grant Watson, "were marvellous pools each one a tropical aquarium. On the western shore were sheltered beaches of yellow sand where the running crabs ran to and fro like armies."<sup>32</sup> Here "the days and weeks passed to the rhythm of good health and hot sunshine". Even though the shade temperature at midday was recorded at 115°F (46°C), the dry wind made it endurable.<sup>33</sup>

The staff of the hospital consisted of Dr Steel, the matron, three nurses and a young man who was the doctor's assistant. The stockman lived in a hut of his own. Life on the island was a pleasant contrast to the inconveniences of the bush. Besides having their own separate tents there was a large double fly-sheet under which there were tables and chairs, where the work was done. Following the early morning dip in the clear and beautiful waves they worked on the genealogies; then another bathe and a return to the mid-day meal, which Louis had prepared, mainly consisting of fish they had caught the previous day. In the afternoons they worked again. The evenings were spent in conversation and wandering about the island. Grant Watson wrote that he learnt a great deal, but not very much about his companion, Radcliffe-Brown, who was reticent when speaking about himself. He knew that the month's delay in joining the expedition was due to his leader having stayed to be married. Radcliffe-Brown, however, never spoke of his wife. Only twice during the fourteen months the two men were together did he address a letter to her, and that on only a half sheet of paper. He did, however, tell Grant Watson, when they got to know each other better, about a

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<sup>31</sup> Adventurer, buccaneer and author William Dampier sailed into Shark Bay in 1699 in search of water and firewood. The first Englishman to see the bay, he named it for its many sharks. Once a quiet backwater, this extraordinarily beautiful region is now Western Australia's premier tourist destination. Shark Bay was inscribed as a World Heritage Area at the end of 1991. The region contains an outstanding example of stromatolites, the oldest form of life on earth. The rich and varied wildlife of the Shark Bay area includes five of Australia's twenty-six species of rare and threatened mammals. Its marine fauna is renowned. Humpback whales, dugongs and green and loggerhead turtles populate the waters of the Bay and tourists flock to see the bottlenose dolphins at Monkey Mia. Source: Paul Raffaele, 'Shark Bay', *Australian Geographic*, April-June 1989, pp. 54-75.

<sup>32</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Russian princess he had met at Cambridge, to whom he had been engaged. Both he and his princess were avowed anarchists but not of the violent, bomb-throwing type, confounded with socialism or communism, as propounded by Lenin and Trotsky and founded upon Marxian dialectical materialism. Anarchy, which widely embraced the idea of personal freedom, was the exact opposite of dialectical materialism, which rejected all personal freedom. "During several evenings as we sat looking out over the beaches," wrote Grant Watson in his unpublished diary, "listening to the cries of the oyster-catchers and the sea-eagles that circled above us in the darkness, feeling gloriously remote not only from Australia but from Europe and our earlier lives, Brown propounded the theory of anarchism."<sup>34</sup>

In an undated letter to his mother, Grant Watson wrote: "It is indeed a heavenly place with such a wonderful sea of everchanging colour, there is splendid bathing and we are always in sound of the sea." Later, on 25 November, he told her in another letter: "This life on an island in a warm sea has taken hold of me. There is nothing for it now but the South Seas, but of that when we meet." And on 4 December: "We have been expecting the boat for a week and are keen to move on to Dorré Island. I have all sorts of plans for the future and owe an eternal debt of gratitude to Brown in having shown me the possibilities of the world. I will tell you my plans when we meet." However, in a letter dated 22 December he wrote: "We expect to be back in Perth sometime at the end of December. I shall have I hope a week at least with you when I get to Perth and am looking forward to it though I thoroughly enjoy the present, it will be so nice to be out of the sand and to have a bed – a bed and sheets sound like heaven."<sup>35</sup>

In *Journey under the Southern Stars* (1968), Grant Watson described in more detail the wild life and insects on the island. The wallabies came fearlessly into their tents at night, scampering about and playing games under their camp beds. As there was no fresh water in streams or pools on the island, they drank sea water. Mosquitoes bred in the rock pools, snakes and lizards adapted to living in sand. Ticks, scorpions and ant lions were in abundance. The frontier between land and sea, always so rich with life, was in the tropics a source of delight and discovery to the naturalist. At night the sea turtles came up to lay their eggs, a clutch of from eighty to a hundred buried in the sand and there left to hatch. When the little turtles hatched out, they had to make a dangerous journey back to the waves. "On this island," he wrote:

where no conventions need to be observed, and where indeed many of the bonds of European civilization soon become loosed, I spent four happy months, during which time I felt myself grow closer to nature than I had ever been in England. I taught my skin how to resist the burning sun, and was soon able to go about with only a folded towel about my waist and a pith helmet on my head.

<sup>34</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, 'To This End', unpub., Book 2, ch. 5, pp. 89-91.

<sup>35</sup> Letters from Grant Watson at Bernier Island to his mother at Perth, dated 25 Nov., 4 Dec., 22 Dec. Year not stated, possibly 1911.

A new sense developed, a rich experience that can only be had by men who live in warm climates.<sup>36</sup>

Mrs Bates finally arrived, very tired and very cross, for she had had a terrible time. She had stayed for some days at Sandstone then had been forced to follow, first to Geraldton, then to Carnarvon. At Carnarvon, the yearly race-meeting was in full swing. Every house, every bed, every chair was occupied. There were crowds of drunken, swearing men, and this was no place for a lone woman. Henrietta, the skipper of the government cutter, was in a blissful state of continuous intoxication. Nothing on earth, or from heaven, would move him till the end of the races. He drank and slept and drank again, and Mrs Bates had to live how and where she could, sometimes on a table for the night, when she was lucky. When at last the races were over and Henrietta was sober enough to sail the *Shark* they had the worst crossing on record. Thirty-six hours of being tossed and buffeted on a small boat, wet through all the time, and very seasick. "This undeserved suffering," Grant Watson wrote, "was put down to Brown's account. It must have been galling, also to find us so comfortably established and happy in our work. There followed an ever-widening estrangement."<sup>37</sup>

On 14 December Grant Watson sent a letter to his mother from Dorré Island – he omitted the year on these last letters but it would have been towards the end of his stay on the islands – "I am still very tired as I had no sleep on account of the wind which banged my tent about all night". Such a violent wind storm, a 'cockeyed Bob' was dramatized in *Where Bonds Are Loosed* coinciding with the violence between the doctor and the stockman. "The time at Bernier," he wrote:

was most delightful and every day seemed to bring some new excitement, either turtle spearing or a fight with a sting-ray or a shark. The bay is just swarming with sharks of all sizes and we always have to take a harpoon or a tomahawk out bathing with us. There are a lot of flies here and I am ever so glad of your veils. Brown didn't make half out of the things that he might. His first touch of the water is a bathe at tea time. I am always in before breakfast, before lunch and often before tea. At present Brown's mental attitude is such that everything he doesn't know is not worth knowing and everything he cannot do is not worth doing. Such things he has no interest in. His rudeness to Mrs. Bates is perfectly appalling, as he says he tries to think of something else when she is talking.<sup>38</sup>

Of her experience on Dorré and Bernier Islands, Daisy Bates wrote in her book:

Dorré and Bernier Islands: there is not, in all my sad sojourn among the last, sad people of the primitive Australian race, a memory half so tragic or so harrowing, or

<sup>36</sup> Grant Watson, *Journey under the Southern Stars*, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>37</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Grant Watson at Dorré Island to his mother at Perth, dated 14 Dec.

a name that conjures up such a deplorable picture of misery and horror unalleviated, as these two grim and barren islands that for a period, mercifully brief, were the tombs of the living dead. The hospital was well equipped with a skilful bacteriologist and a matron and two nurses.<sup>39</sup>

She learned much of infinite value in vocabularies and customs and pedigrees and legend. "The scientists," she wrote, "I think, made intermittent headway". Because the Aborigines thought Grant Watson and Radcliffe-Brown were policemen, she recounts how she told them they were her sons. "Your two sons," they asked, "why are they afraid of us?" The answer was obvious. She described how Grant Watson was physically ill one day after taking a photograph of a patient. "However, they helped him to collect shells and insects and obligingly sang some of their Aboriginal songs into Professor Radcliffe-Brown's phonograph. He, in turn, regaled them with 'Peer Gynt' and 'Tannhauser' and 'Egmont' to which they listened politely." There is a hint of feminine retaliation underlying Daisy Bates' recounting of her reference to "the two scientists". She concluded by saying: "Upon the ghastly experiment of Dorré and Bernier Islands it is not good for me to dwell. Not very long after our visit, the costly hospital project and the islands of exile were abandoned. On his return to England Grant Watson made them the fantastic setting of a novel, *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914) a story of illicit love with a background of horror and heartbreak and unutterable woe."<sup>40</sup>

Daisy Bates stayed with the Cambridge Research Team for nearly a year, travelling backwards and forwards to the mainland. "On every journey I became postman of a score or so of letter-sticks (*bamburu*) the crudely marked piece of wood that is the Aborigines' only attempt at a written language, saying little, and that only by signs, but carrying loving wishes and assurances to wives and husbands and friends." The saddest memories of her life were of "those wind-swept isles of woe where she became 'Kabbarli'. In 1911 the Molokai was mercifully vacated. 'Cockeyed Bobs' and willee-willees have long ago blown all its griefs and graves away."<sup>41</sup>

It can be understood why relations on Bernier Island became difficult, in particular, between Daisy Bates and Radcliffe-Brown, considering their backgrounds. Yet both had a compassionate attitude towards the Aborigines. Grant Watson reports that "Brown was invariably gentle and just towards the natives who were his study, and was regarded by them as a black man resurrected from the happy hunting-grounds of the dead. He was gentle and considerate towards those who fell within the sphere of his concern; for those who fell outside that sphere, he had no regard whatsoever." "I can well understand," Grant Watson

<sup>39</sup> Daisy Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, London: John Murray, 1944, 1947, 1949, p. 101. Extract reprinted in *The Age*, 3 June 1989.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

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wrote, "the exasperated woman who found cause to hate him and who so often declared that he 'was no gentleman'."<sup>42</sup>

Grant Watson maintained that Radcliffe-Brown treated the Aborigines as children and to a certain extent traded on their easy credulity, although he never lacked respect for them; "they were his charge and his concern and so was I, in that I was his helper and companion".<sup>43</sup>

The weeks progressed until, partly because Radcliffe-Brown's task was nearly completed and partly because of the growing tension between himself and Mrs Bates, he decided to leave the island. "He and I and Louis were to make a preliminary journey up the Gascoyne River. Mrs Bates was returning to Perth." In *But To What Purpose* Grant Watson wrote: "I was already, when we left Bernier Island, feeling a pull to return to England, and in contradiction to this there was growing stronger, and always stronger, the magic of life as lived beyond the outer fringes of civilisation." The letters he had looked forward to from Ida Bedford had continued throughout his absence, thus forging the relationship begun before his departure from England and now drawing him back. Yet at the same time the lure of the bush became stronger, "and as we made our way of discovery up the Gascoyne River, the powers within the wilderness closed around me." Once again one can see the influence of Conrad in his writing.<sup>44</sup>

They followed the river course, and this, though marked so boldly on the map, was not what he knew of the rivers of Europe, being for the most part a dry and stony bed, with occasional pools of stagnant water, wherein fish, both fresh and salt-water as well as sharks and sword-fish that had been stranded by receding flood waters, floundered restlessly waiting for the next rainfall to escape. The pools were each a separate world of living things surrounded by great trees and bushes with innumerable insects buzzing in the flowers. Here, like the other creatures of the plains the wild men congregated and moved from pool to pool, hunting the animals of the scrub and spearing the fishes. "I can give but a faint impression of this country," Grant Watson wrote:

It was both a lure towards a future wonder and an ever present ravishment. I grew increasingly to love and fear its mild aloofness. My own work I was neglecting, and was throwing away my biological opportunities. True, I still collected beetles, and I helped Brown, as I was bound to do, but in the larger mansions of my life I was dreaming, and I knew that I would soon have to decide which course I would follow.<sup>45</sup>

After a short expedition of a few weeks, they returned to Carnarvon. Radcliffe-Brown was planning a nine- or twelve-month absence in the bush. Grant Watson was faced with the decision:

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<sup>42</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', Book 2, ch. 5, p. 90.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 91.

<sup>44</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, pp. 124-25.



Should I go with him? And if I did, would I ever return to Europe? He was more firmly anchored in the past than I was. I felt I was becoming almost adrift. I told him I dare not pledge myself for so long. I would have to leave him to go alone, and so I decided to renounce the bush and all of the unknown that it stood for, and to return to Europe.<sup>46</sup>

Towards this decision he was influenced by a note of uneasiness in the letters from Ida Bedford, making him feel he might be needed. Yet nothing had been spoken, nothing pledged. In defiance of this call he decided, before returning, he must see more of Australia, the South Seas, and return through Honolulu and the Canadian Rockies. He had saved a little money and the urge to be free and see more of the world was strong.

Radcliffe-Brown did not question his decision. Grant Watson believed he understood his restlessness. He would go on with Louis to finish his work, and he parted with Grant Watson in the friendliest manner.

Following the career of Radcliffe-Brown we find that he was in Melbourne for the 1914 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, where he was accused of gross plagiarism by Daisy Bates. Stranded by the outbreak of war, he taught at Sydney Church of England Grammar School (Shore) before going to Tonga in 1916 to take up a position as Director of Education. From 1921 he was foundation professor of anthropology at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. The following year he published *The Andaman Islanders*. In 1926 he changed his name by deed poll to Radcliffe-Brown.

Described as a 'starter and stirrer', that year he accepted the new chair of anthropology at the University of Sydney, partly funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. He founded the journal *Oceania* in 1950. Its first monograph notably by R. H. Mathews and Daisy Bates, the book marked the beginning of an epoch and drew scattered material together in manageable form.

A flamboyant, egocentric character, Radcliffe-Brown cultivated the idiosyncratic. He was handsome, charming, a brilliant conversationalist, and he moved in Sydney's highest social circles. Fearing that the Depression might lead to financial collapse, he departed in 1931 to fill a chair at the University of Chicago, leaving his successors to solicit government and Rockefeller grants to save the Sydney department. In 1937 he moved to a new chair at Oxford, from which he retired in 1946. He was divorced from his wife in 1938. Survived by his daughter, he died in London on 24 October, 1955.<sup>47</sup>

Radcliff-Brown and his contemporary B.K. Malinowski were the founders of modern anthropology. A theoretician rather than a field worker, he strove to make anthropology a branch of the natural sciences.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 125.

<sup>47</sup> Source: Ian Hogbin, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. II: 1891-1939, Geoffrey Serle (gen. ed.), Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988, p. 322.

It is interesting to look at the opinion of an Australian writer, Diane Bell, on the theories of male British anthropologists – in particular Radcliffe-Brown. In her book *Daughters of the Dreaming* (1983) she wrote:

Australian anthropology bears very much the stamp of British anthropology as a result of the appointment of individual professors and their theoretical interests. The founder and first professor of anthropology in Sydney A. R. Radcliffe Brown was a student of the French sociologist Emile Durkheim and the English ethnologist, W. H. R. Rivers. For these men, women's self-evaluations were not central to an understanding of society. Durkeimian dualism (the sacred-profane dichotomy) with its view of women as the profane, existing only to highlight the importance of men in the moral order, has permeated Australian anthropology. In such a scheme women have no religion only magic. This has been a hard yoke to throw off. Certainly the nature of marriage arrangements in Aboriginal society has not been ignored, but women's role in establishing and maintaining marriages has been neglected or relegated to the domain of the secular. Unless women are accorded the status of joint owners and managers of country and ritual along with their male kin our understanding of group structure will be skewed. At the core of the debate concerning the nature of the landowning group in Aboriginal Australia is the patrilineal, patrilocal, territorial exogamous horde of Radcliffe-Brown. The level at which this model may be said to exist, its fit with empirical reality and its universality have all consumed many pages of anthropological texts.<sup>48</sup>

From Julia Blackburn's *Daisy Bates in the Desert* (1994) we have an imaginative version of Daisy Bates' opinion of Radcliffe-Brown with this Bates quote: "In 1910 I was asked by the government – that nice man, Mr. Forrest – if I would be willing to help a young English anthropologist called Radcliffe-Brown who had come over from Cambridge University to study the kinship systems of the Aborigines. Of course I said yes, I felt that this was recognition of my work and the first step towards success."<sup>49</sup>

"But Daisy Bates told lies," Julia Blackburn wrote. "I am beginning to think that she must even have told lies to herself when she sat on her own in the desert, searching through the storehouse of her memory".<sup>50</sup> There seems little doubt that Daisy Bates enjoyed fabricating stories of her life, in particular, presenting herself as a single woman when she married Jack Bates, and was already married to 'Breaker' Morant. However Lucy Frost has written of the book, "I as a reader, become uneasy, the author has already raised the issue of truth claims, labelling as liar the woman who is her subject – the book has not, after all, been offered as fiction, and yet its methodology seems a little strange for a historian."

<sup>48</sup> Diane Bell, *Daughters of the Dreaming*, N. Sydney: McPhee Gribble/George Allen & Unwin, 1983, pp. 236–37.

<sup>49</sup> Julia Blackburn, *Daisy Bates in the Desert*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1994, p. 66.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

Blackburn has written an intriguing book, its prose engaging and a pleasure to read. She has also raised disturbing questions about the boundaries between history and fiction. In searching the past for good stories, what are a writer's responsibilities to a world not hers, to the challenged dead who cannot speak.<sup>51</sup>

Why did Daisy Bates choose the life she did? Her years in London employed on W. T. Stead's journal made her realize that she had a natural talent for investigating and reporting. She was curious about the Aborigines, and sufficiently dedicated to devote herself to the prolonged period of research and writing necessary to produce a book. Her later withdrawal to the hard, long life at Oldea is all the more mysterious because of her sociable and gregarious nature. One motive was undoubtedly her ambition to continue her research into Aboriginal language and customs among people who were coming into contact with Europeans for the first time. Another, revealed in *The Passing of the Aborigines* (1944), was a humanitarian desire to help the people themselves and to ease their passing. It is clear too, that she came to enjoy solitude and the strange beauty of the Oldea landscape. However we can only speculate about her reasons for leaving white society and choosing a life of poverty and deprivation among Aboriginal people. Perhaps this fascinating woman did not know the answer herself.

*The Age*, Saturday Extra, 3 June 1989 published an article by Mary Anne Jebb, a Perth post-graduate history student who had read Daisy Bates' book and was moved but also vaguely puzzled. She wondered what had prompted an exercise on the scale of the Shark Bay islands project by a government that had showed no previous willingness to spend on Aboriginal health.

The answer, of course, was that Bernier and Dorré islands, with their hospitals, were the result of the fear of an epidemic of venereal disease. Having been spread from white to black, there was now fear that the disease would be transmitted in reverse from black to white. There was panic.

Today there is no regular boat to Bernier and Dorré, the latter being a prohibited area for conservation reasons. Bernier is reached after three hours of being tossed about in open seas in a chartered snapper boat. At first glimpse it fills the horizon, a long narrow strip at the mouth of Shark Bay.

At Carnarvon today the most hopeful evidence of progress is to be seen at the Aboriginal Medical Service where patient visits have grown from a handful to sixty or more a day. More than twenty-five per cent of the patients are white. The atmosphere is friendly, relaxed and confident. It would do Daisy's heart a power of good.

Much credit for the success story goes to a forty-one-year-old New Zealander, Dr Ray McKenzie, who opted out of a practice in Queensland when he no longer believed that what he was doing was necessarily right for the patients.

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<sup>51</sup> Lucy Frost, 'The Lies of Daisy Bates', *The Age*, 27 Aug., 1994.

Dr McKenzie is called Jababa because of his huge bushy beard. He enthuses about a \$1.3 million Aboriginal medical, legal and resource centre being built with federal and state funds despite much adverse local comment.

At the hospital site the Daisy Bates chapter was read aloud and for a while the Aborigines stared at the sand in silence. They had not heard her version before. They decided to arrange a meeting of all the groups whose people had suffered. The islands already have heritage protection and appear safe from the tourist and recreational development that was suggested not long ago. But the Aborigines would like full control.

It was suggested the graves should be found and a monument erected so that it should not be forgotten. Leaving them alone was the unanimous view of what should be done with the islands. "There has been enough suffering here," said Gordon Dorey, a local Aboriginal leader, "The islands shouldn't be made to suffer as well."

In the delicious winter sunshine the dunes of spinifex and saltbush take on a desolate beauty against the bright blue sea and cloudless sky, far from the dreary grimness of Bates' description. The hospital ruins are found in a hollow protected from sea and wind – two concrete foundation slabs and a third with a trapdoor letting down to cavern, a water tank, a cool store, a prison.

Daisy Bates died in 1951 aged 90.



Figure 9: 'Grant Watson in Australia'. E. L. Grant Watson photographed at the time of the Cambridge expedition to Western Australia.

*Photograph courtesy of the Picture Collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra.*

## Chapter Three

### Aboriginal Magic

#### The views of E. L. Grant Watson, Mrs Daisy Bates and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown on Aboriginal magic

Grant Watson was strongly affected by the practice of magic by the Australian Aborigines. He expressed a complete belief in its power to kill, or to make ill or well. As he wrote in his autobiography, *But To What Purpose*, "I only just snatched myself back in time to be able to half believe ever again in the conventions of Europe."

These and similar assertions regarding the power of magic are surprising coming from one with a scientific education and European background. I have also examined, briefly, the ideas of the other two members of the Cambridge Expedition – the anthropologist, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and the philanthropist, Mrs Daisy Bates – with the idea of comparing their views on Aboriginal magic with Grant Watson's views, and the relation, if any, between magic and religion. It may be possible, also, to see the merging, or otherwise, of the borders between fiction, philanthropy and anthropology in relation to the Aborigines and their magic.

Looking first at some of Grant Watson's recollections of the Aboriginal magic he experienced during his two years 1910–1912 in the Western Australian bush and Bernier Island on the north-west coast – he wrote in his autobiography, *But To What Purpose*:

I entered the bush with a rationalistic, scientific bias. I thought magic to be a kind of infantile make-believe. It might appear real enough to savages, but to civilized people like myself it was not to be taken seriously. That was the initial attitude. The passing weeks and months changed this preconception<sup>1</sup>

Setting up camp as they did in what Grant Watson described as "the wild unexplored bush" and living in close proximity with an Aboriginal tribe that had not yet come in close contact with white people, they hoped to be able to study the Aborigines in their natural environment, particularly as there was to be a gathering of several tribes for the celebration of a corroboree. Three decades later in his autobiography *But To What Purpose*, Grant Watson wrote:

I witnessed daily the power of magic and did not fear but respected it. The social consciousness of these simple and friendly people was a concrete reality, and if I did

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<sup>1</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, London: The Cresset Press, 1946, p. 107.

not actively fear their magic I respected it, and I came to believe in it; and, as I came to fall under the spell of these people, so many thousands of years distant from our European conventions, so did those same European conventions suffer from an objective *devaluation*, if I may use such a phrase. I was coming to stand not only three hundred years, but perhaps three hundred thousand years away.<sup>2</sup>

So in his three autobiographies he continued to express his reactions to witnessing Aboriginal magic and of his respect for and belief in its effectiveness:

The process went so far during those fifteen months amongst the Aborigines (in one place or another) that I only just snatched myself back in time to be able to half-believe ever again in the conventions of Europe. I knew that magic could kill, and that magic, the man-made bending of the universal powers, could make ill or well. I had entered the animism of the savage mind, and had found within those mystical, sympathetic identifications the open doorways to the unconscious.<sup>3</sup>

Grant Watson did not consider this was a desirable experience but he considered it a useful one. At a later date, he was able to balance its strong influence with five years of analytical psychology. As he has stated, it was in a way a unique experience, not so much understood or valued at the time, but valued and partly understood *afterwards*. With memories of the corroboree in the bush near Sandstone, he wrote, "That I have seen wild tribesmen trailing their silent naked way through the unexplored bush country still seems to me a possession of the soul". And of an experience on Bernier Island he wrote:

That I have seen stark young women streaming with blood of a yet living turtle which they were laboriously dismembering with a stone knife, is a picture every bit as significant as the intellectual tea parties I have attended at Lady Ottoline Morrell's.<sup>4</sup>

Many years later Grant Watson still had visions of his experiences amongst the Aborigines of Australia, and he ruminated on whether "A conscious balance between such stark experiences and civilization has not yet been attained." He believed that it might yet be – and he viewed the portal of death as possibly leading to such a blending of conscious and unconscious values."<sup>5</sup> Certainly he could not have drawn a more striking comparison than between the primitive young Aboriginal women dissecting a still living turtle for their food, and the sophisticated tea parties of a famous lady of intellectual English society. Of his experience he continued to write:

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



It had lifted me, or perhaps sunk me, above or below the orthodox horizon of vision. Through no virtue or merit of my own this accident has happened to me. I have lived for a considerable number of months in the world of magic-sticks and stones, of totem animals, and if I have not actually met and conversed with the Alcheringa animal ancestors, I have become convinced of their existence in the same way in which Dr. Jung is convinced of the existence of the archetypes.<sup>6</sup>

Here can be seen signs of his later studies of Jung's psychology and his possible translation of the Aboriginal mysticism through this medium. In his unpublished autobiography, 'To This End' he gives a full account of his three-day visit to Jung at Küssnacht a year before Jung's death which will be recorded in Chapter Seven, and some comparison made with Jung's experience with the South African natives.

That Grant Watson thought highly of both Radcliffe-Brown and Daisy Bates can be seen throughout his chapters on the Cambridge Expedition. In particular the considerable influence Radcliffe-Brown exerted over the young Grant Watson is clear in his description of the anthropologist:

The more he talked, the more I fell under his spell, there were times when he would pause from his eager, incisive speech; his eyes would be fixed on the distance, as a lion's eyes, and would seem to be dreaming some remote dream. He was beautiful to behold and certainly surprisingly well informed.<sup>7</sup>

Of Mrs Bates he wrote:

Her guiding spirit was not a missionary spirit, but one of charity and compassion and she presented in her person, so neat and dapper, and so much cut after the pattern of an Irish country lady, a strange example of symbiosis with these stone-age men and women who accepted her with trust and appreciation.<sup>8</sup>

What was Radcliffe-Brown's attitude to the Aborigines' belief in magic? In his book *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (1952) he examines religion and totemic rites and ways of distinguishing religious rites from magical rites. In his introduction to the book, he writes that the acceptability of a historical explanation depends on the fullness and reliability of the historical record. In the primitive societies that are studied by social anthropology there are no historical records. We have no knowledge of the development of social institutions among the Australian Aborigines, for example. Anthropologists, thinking of their study as a kind of historical study fall back on conjecture and imagination, and invent 'pseudo-historical'

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<sup>6</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

studies, or 'pseudo-causal' explanations. We have had, for example, innumerable and sometimes conflicting 'pseudo-historical' accounts of the origin and development of the totemic institutions of the Australian Aborigines.<sup>9</sup>

In his discussions on certain rites related to Taboo, Radcliffe-Brown writes that several anthropologists have attempted to classify rites into two classes: religious rites and magical rites. While Sir James Frazer regards the totemic rites of the Australian tribes as being a matter of magic, Durkheim treats them as religious because the rites themselves are sacred and have reference to sacred beings, sacred places and sacred objects. For Emile Durkheim the essential distinction is that religious rites are obligatory within a religious society or church, while magical rites are optional. A person who fails in religious observances is guilty of wrongdoing, whereas one who does not observe the precautions of magic or those relating to luck is simply acting foolishly.<sup>10</sup>

Radcliffe-Brown sees the distinction as of considerable theoretical importance. It is difficult to apply in the study of the rites of simple societies. He finds many points in Durkheim's exposition unacceptable and in 1912 much less was known about the Australian Aborigines than at his time of writing.<sup>11</sup> He quotes Sir James Frazer as defining religion as "a propitiation or conciliating of superhuman powers which are believed to control nature and man", and regards magic as the erroneous application of the notion of causality. If we apply this to ritual prohibitions, we may regard as belonging to religion those rules the infraction of which produces a change of ritual status in the individual by offending the superhuman powers, whereas the infraction of a rule of magic would be regarded as resulting immediately in a change of ritual status, or in the misfortune that follows by a process of hidden causation. Spilling salt, by Sir James Frazer's definition, is a question of magic, while eating meat on Friday is a question of religion.<sup>12</sup>

Of the various ways of distinguishing magic and religion, Radcliffe-Brown refers to Malinowski, for whom a rite is magical when it has a definite practical purpose which is known to all who practise it and can be easily elicited from any native informant. While a rite is religious if it is simply expressive and has no purpose, being not a means to an end but an end in itself.<sup>13</sup> As there is this absence of agreement as to the definitions of magic and religion and the nature of the distinction between them, and that in many instances whether we call a particular rite magical or religious, Radcliffe-Brown considers, depends on which of the various proposed definitions we accept. Certainly, he considers, the distinctions made by Durkheim and Frazer and Malinowski may be theoretically significant, but there is need for a systematic classification of rites, but a satisfactory classification will be fairly complex and a simple dichotomy between magic and religion does not carry us very far towards it.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, London: Cohen & West Ltd, 1952, pp. 136-37.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 156.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

One theory Radcliffe-Brown believes may be applicable is that in certain circumstances the individual human being is anxious about the outcome of some event or activity because it depends to some extent on conditions that he cannot control by any technical means. He, therefore, observes some rite, since he believes it will ensure good luck. Thus an aeronaut takes with him in a plane a mascot which he believes will protect him from accident. This theory, he says, has taken various forms from Hume's explanation of religion to Malinowski's explanation of Trobriand magic. Radcliffe-Brown then presents an exactly contrary theory, namely that if it were not for the existence of the rite and the beliefs associated with it the individual would feel no anxiety, and that the psychological effect of the rite is to create in him a sense of insecurity or danger.<sup>15</sup>

Thus while one anthropological theory is that magic and religion give men confidence, comfort and a sense of security, it could equally well be argued that they give men fears and anxieties from which they would otherwise be free – the fear of black magic or of spirits, fear of God, of the Devil, or of Hell.

To return to our main topic, the relation between religion and magic – and how Radcliffe-Brown perceived the rites of Aboriginal magic in Australia – another writer is referred to by Radcliffe-Brown whose theory is, if not identical, very similar to that of Durkheim. Loisy, besides his definition of the social function in terms of social cohesion and continuity, seeks for what he called a general formula in which to sum up the part that religion has played in human life, that is that magic and religion have served to give men confidence.<sup>16</sup>

In the most primitive societies, he maintains, it is magic that gives man confidence in face of the difficulties and uncertainties, the real and imaginary dangers with which he is surrounded. This, says Radcliffe-Brown, is the same theory later developed by Malinowski in reference to the magical practices of the Trobriand Islanders.<sup>17</sup>

Radcliffe-Brown, however, finds this formula unsatisfactory in that it lays stress on what is only one side of the religious (or magical) attitude. He offers as an alternative the formula that religion develops in mankind what may be called a sense of dependence. He must depend on his ancestors who watch over him. As a general formula, Radcliffe-Brown suggests that what is expressed in all religions is what he has called the sense of dependence in its double aspect, and that it is by constantly maintaining this sense of dependence that religions perform their social function. In his final chapter on Primitive Law, Radcliffe-Brown states that in its most elementary developments law is intimately bound up with magic and religion, therefore legal sanctions are closely related to ritual sanctions.<sup>18</sup> This adds a further dimension to the importance of magic in Aboriginal tribes, and it can be seen from the foregoing that Radcliffe-Brown acknowledged the place of magic as an important element in

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 149.

<sup>16</sup> Loisy, *Essai Historique sur le Sacrifice*, 1920, pp. 531–40.

<sup>17</sup> Brown op. cit., p. 174.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 214.

the tribal rituals of Aboriginal social structures and closely interrelated with Aboriginal religion.<sup>19</sup>

In her chapter on magic in *Kabbarli* (1973), Ernestine Hill relates how she spent some time with Daisy Bates in the desert of Ooldea where Daisy had lived alone in a tent for seventeen years of long and silent days and nights giving all her time and finances to helping the Aborigines. Three trunks held all her possessions and the third trunk contained the Aborigines' confiscated magic. There were magic bones, each one strung on a dead man's hair and wrapped in bloody emu feathers. Pointing the bone is not a tribal rite, Daisy explained to Hill, but the devilry of a witchman who is often a hired assassin. A notorious bone can be hired or borrowed for the job. When a vendetta is in the air, the wizard wears it on a hair string, terrifying the camp. Soon the victim knows it is for him – a fatal hypnotic power, melancholia, hysteria, coma, death. It kills quickly or slowly, no escape, murder by malice, the eerie power of evil thought.<sup>20</sup>

Grant Watson described such a threat to Eva, the white wife of Blunt in *Shadow and Sunlight* (1920). She has displaced his Fijian mistress who through violent jealousy stirs the tribe to dispose of this white intruder who, to her horror, finds the evil-looking bone in her bed. Soon after, both she and Blunt die in the fire which destroys their house. It is also in this novel that Grant Watson featured the voices of Matana, the fearsome voices he heard in the jungle treetops in Fiji, the fierce scream of the aggressor, the plaintive terrified screech of the victim.

From brown paper parcels Daisy Bates unrolled for Ernestine Hill the blackest of magic . . . dead men's spirit bones twined with their hair and hooked to catch souls. Kangaroo and emu bones for the lesser poisons; bad medicine stones to choke and fester. Mulga and corkwood whittled into snake shapes and crude animal forms, poison sticks; bird-claws in a ball of mindree gum. Guriyarra was a double bone to kill man and wife together in one fell shot. Whenever a new 'mob', as she called them, arrived, her first thought was to take possession of murder gear that scared the others out of their wits all along the line. She was not a collector of Aboriginal curios. In their councils and corroborees she never interfered.<sup>21</sup>

With Daisy Bates producing all the evidence of Aboriginal magic, we may take seriously Grant Watson's reactions which he reiterated many years later as an old man.

Coming from Europe where reason is supposed to rule, I thought lightly of magic, but not for long, for I have seen men die under magic spells and have come to understand how life can be pervaded by magic, which for the primitive man combines both religion and science. He thinks or chants magic spells when chipping flint spear-heads or shaping boomerangs. Magic is related to his own body in so far

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ernestine Hill, *Kabbarli*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1973, p. 114.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

as sexual responses are without direct volition, and every man's footmark can have a magical significance.<sup>22</sup>

While living amongst the primitive Aboriginal tribes of Western Australia, Grant Watson witnessed the death of their Aboriginal handyman, apparently through the pointing of the bone. Noticing he looked very dejected one morning, he asked him what the trouble was. "Me dead-fellow. Pointum bone, me dead-fellow."

To kill a man by magic is described by Grant Watson as a fairly simple procedure. The evil magician retires to a remote spot; he places a hollow bone upright in the ground, and then for as many hours as he can sustain himself without food or water, he wishes evil into the bone. He curses every part of his enemy's body, then everything that he touches or eats, with the exception of water. When he has finished cursing, he starts all over again. And then again. When his bone is well loaded with bad wishes, he puts on a pair of shoes made of emu feathers. This is to prevent his footmarks being tracked. Then he leaves the bone where his enemy will find it.

Our boy had found such a bone. He had no idea who had made the magic. Unless he could find out and kill his enemy he would certainly die. And die he did, of a mixture of depression, fear and his own strong belief in the powers of ill-wishing.

Such are the powers of suggestion. But bush magic is not only suggestion. A man can be killed without knowing that magic has been made against him.

When I first went into the bush I thought it was all nonsense and superstition, but by the time I had lived there a year, I was sure that great powers were hidden in magic and would on no account have risked having magic made against me<sup>23</sup>

Grant Watson has described such instances where magic has been realistically practised so that he came to believe in it. He was young, inexperienced and overwhelmed by the Australian bush and, therefore, more vulnerable to the mysticism of the Australian Aborigines than Radcliffe-Brown or Daisy Bates. For him the Australian bush projected a strong spiritual force with which he had to come to terms, and which he described in terms of being aware of animistic projections invisible in rocks, plants, water and earth – as the Aborigines were.

It was on his way to Fiji that Grant Watson met Dr Fox, one of the Chief Medical practitioners in Suva. They found plenty of interests in common, since both were students of native life, both were keen naturalists, and both believed in magic. Unlike Grant Watson, Dr Fox had obviously lived and worked amongst the Fijians for long enough to have absorbed and accepted their beliefs and culture. He told Grant Watson of the magic practised in Fiji,

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<sup>22</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Journey under the Southern Stars*, London: Abelard-Schuman, 1968, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 32.

telling of localities where turtles could be called out of the sea by native singing, of fire walking and of devil corpses that screamed in coconut plantations and of native cures for maladies. Grant Watson witnessed two of these phenomena, the turtle calling and the devil-corpses, heard but not seen, in the treetops, and which he later dramatized in *Shadow and Sunlight*.

In *But To What Purpose*, Grant Watson described the ritual of the turtle singing. Meeting with 20-30 young Fijians on Nathamaki headland some five hundred feet above the sea, the ceremony of yangona-drinking was the introduction to any business or pleasure, and not until they had tasted the prescribed number of cups, did the young men move towards the edge of the cliff. They sang in unison an ancient song in a lost language and

there, sure enough, on the surface of the sea, appeared turtles, some eight or ten of them. They were so far distant that they looked no larger than shilling pieces. The strange thing was, that they were there, and seemed to have come in response to the singing. Never before had I seen more than two turtles at once on the sea's surface, for turtles are usually solitary reptiles. They had not come for food, there was no food offered, and amongst them were four or five large brown fish, each some twelve feet long. These were the wives, I was told. The little ones were left in the depths, as commanded. I was about to point to these distant creatures when my hand was snatched down. It was not permitted to point with the hand. That would be unlucky, not only for myself, but for all the men gathered there.<sup>24</sup>

The other magic Grant Watson witnessed on Koro was more immediate, where many of the plantations were visited by strange and terrible voices, screaming in the treetops at night so that no native could be persuaded to go through the plantation after dark.

Later and by comparison with other magic phenomena, Grant Watson evolved a theory that accounts, or part accounts, for such strange happenings. The theory came, in its inception, as a result of a strong feeling that if all the men and women in the native villages were removed to other islands, then the voices would cease to be heard. With some ideas borrowed from modern psychology, he felt that these voices were projections of the collective unconscious of a people who still lived the group life. The voices were significant of the sadistic authoritative voice of the bully; there was the masochistic yelp and whine of the self-chosen victim. Two dominant tones from the *shadow-side* of the human soul, manifesting themselves as autonomous and compulsive forces.<sup>25</sup>

The fire-walking ceremonies he did not witness, but from Dr Fox he learned of the Scotsman who attempted the fire-walking ritual but at the last few steps disobeyed the order not to look back at any account. Elated at his success, he glanced back and immediately felt a burning sensation and leapt clear. The odd thing, as Dr Fox related, was that he was burnt on the buttock and not the feet.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 120.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pp. 123-24.

Of native cures for maladies, Dr Fox told of success when he, with all his European science, could not compete. It was a kind of ophthalmia known locally as 'bung-eye', common among the natives. This was a painful inflammation inside the eyelids, difficult to treat. Dr Fox sent his patients to an old woman witch doctor who gave the following magical treatment. Resting the patient's head on her thigh, she bent back the swollen eyelid and scraped away the blood and pus with the rough underside of a leaf of the breadfruit tree. The patient, black or white, felt no pain from this rough-seeming treatment and the eyes when washed clear of extraneous matter were in most cases cured.<sup>26</sup>

In his novel *Shadow and Sunlight*, Blunt, the plantation manager, explains to Eva, his white wife, that the natives are great believers in magic. "They have magic sticks, little pieces of carved wood which they point at each other to avert or to cause evil. They fear magic more than they fear death, it is their religion". Blunt believes their religion is important to them so that he tells Matheson, the missionary, who has come to teach them Christianity:

When I heard that you were coming to Nathamaki, two years ago, I was sorry, I had long ceased to be a Christian, and I didn't want my natives christianised. I had got to understand something of their religion.

There is a wonder and a wildness, a magic which is both simple and extraordinarily deep-meaning. It satisfied me."<sup>27</sup>

In *The Native Tribes of Western Australia* (1985), Daisy Bates gives a more scholarly version of religion and magic than she does in either the book by Ernestine Hill, *Kabbarli* or her own *The Passing of the Aborigines*. From Daisy Bates' voluminous notes written between 1901 and 1914, Isobel White has finally brought her valuable writings into print. In the chapter entitled 'Religion and Magic', Daisy Bates gives several definitions of religion in its application to the beliefs of the native races and like Radcliffe-Brown refers to Durkheim's theory. She goes on to say that the Western Australian Aborigines have certainly some form of religion amongst them, but the most satisfactory method of enquiry into the beliefs and practices of the Aborigines is to go in amongst them as a learner, divesting oneself completely of one's own personal beliefs and to follow closely the native line of thought;<sup>28</sup> which is exactly what she herself did, as also did Grant Watson.

The force which compelled obedience to the laws of the ancestors was magic and superstition, and the lively and ever-present fear of the sorcerer who, being possessed of supernatural powers, could see an act of disobedience committed, no matter how far away from the transgressor he or she might be. The punishment was real and vivid. A breach of moral code was punished by death or wasting disease, in many cases, the outcome of the intense fear inspired in the native by the magnitude of his offence in his own eyes.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 88.

<sup>27</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Shadow and Sunlight*, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1920, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Daisy Bates, *The Native Tribes of Western Australia*, ed. Isobel White, Canberra: The National Library of Australia, 1985, p. 217.



She then goes on to describe the various forms of magic, the two principal ones being the pointing bone or stick and fire magic. The magic bones or sticks are of various shapes and are generally ornamented either by bands of red ochre and white pipeclay, or certain designs are burnt into them. Bird's down may be stuck on by means of blood or gum. Besides being pointed at a certain person, bones or sticks which have been charged with magic may be thrown into a camp or placed in some spot which the particular person aimed at is sure to go. This practice was dramatized by Grant Watson in *Shadow and Sunlight*.

In the editor's introduction to *The Native Tribes of Western Australia* (1985), Isobel White wrote:

A profound belief in magic, and in the possession of supernatural powers by living persons, is held throughout Western Australia by Aborigines. Indeed, magic and sorcery might be said to be intertwined with almost every action occurring in the daily life of the Aborigines. Sorcerers are appealed to upon all occasions to exert their supposed powers towards curing illness, avenging the same, bringing success in hunting, and directing and controlling the elements, so that rain can only fall through their influence, and thunderstorms gather at their bidding. Every sorcerer has as lively a faith in his own powers as his people have, and an equally strong belief in the powers of his fellow practitioner. A sorcerer when ill will invariably call in the services of another magician, and will place himself unreservedly in his brother doctor's hand.<sup>29</sup>

The interesting part of all these theories of the various anthropologists mentioned, as well as of Radcliffe-Brown, Grant Watson and Daisy Bates, who all worked together in Western Australia with the Aborigines, is that, like Grant Watson, Radcliffe-Brown took a very serious view, as did the other anthropologists, of Aboriginal magic and related it quite specifically, as did Daisy Bates, to the Aboriginal religion.

It appears from their writings, that the three members of the Cambridge Expedition, from their totally different backgrounds, clearly respected and understood – with compassion – the Aborigines of Australia, their magic, religion, myths and ritual. So we can see a merging of the borders between fiction, philanthropy and anthropology in relation to the subject of Aboriginal magic. That Grant Watson showed he was more personally vulnerable to the Aboriginal mysticism and the Australian environment is certainly true in that, unlike Radcliffe-Brown and Daisy Bates, he had had no previous contact with native tribes; and as shown by his letters to his mother, he was not only new to the Australian environment, but in his youthful enthusiasm was extremely sensitive and responsive to all its unique features.

The impressions of his 1910–1912 experiences Grant Watson certainly carried for the rest of his life, putting them into print in his six Australian novels and a book of short stories, all published between 1914 and 1939. Gradually through wide reading and five years of

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<sup>29</sup> Isobel White (ed.), introduction to *The Native Tribes of Western Australia*, op. cit., p. 217.

psychoanalysis, he was able to interpret those early impressions of the Australian bush and the mysticism of the Aborigines, and put them down in impelling language in his autobiography, *But To What Purpose* (1946). Later, in *Departures* (1948), he wrote of his experience working with Gilbert in the solitude of the Australian bush where he "would savour the ever-increasing power of the great mystical background." It was Ruskin, he continued:

who wrote of the pathetic fallacy, meaning thereby that men read into the surrounding of external things their own feelings, and characterize Nature with human emotions. Pathetic, in the sense that he used it, stood for the creating of effect, and by fallacy, I suppose, he meant that this was a falsification of the truth. If he had lived for a week or two in the Australian bush, or if he had read the modern physicists, he might have substituted some other word for 'fallacy'. He was assuming that there *was* an objective reality, whereas he would have been nearer to 'reality' by recognizing that all reality, and all our concepts of the universe, are in part determined by the subjective quality of our sense perception, and that 'reality', in so far as we approach it, is but an unstable projection of the average psychic life. The influences of the bush which strike on the solitary human soul with such tremendous effect, are, if we are to attempt to express them in terms of modern psychology, the partly apprehended, largely unknown impulses of a collective unconscious rising to expression within an individual.<sup>30</sup>

Grant Watson's vivid perception of the Australian bush and the Aborigines is defined through his own sensitive consciousness influenced by his psychological readings through which he, so many years later, expressed his impressions in a manner significantly unusual in Australian writing.

The tremendous effect of the Australian bush on Grant Watson as a young impressionable Englishman is expressed again in *Departures*.

Sometimes when I was away by myself, and not near to my companion, there would come to me strong poignant feelings; this scene, this surround, had happened somewhere before; the accepted values of England and my home were liquefied, no longer relevant. This great plain was ageless, still and vast, existing somehow outside of time. Perhaps it *was* eternity, and I, in its presence, for certain moments, dropped out of time, and was encompassed by the Eternal. It was strange, beautiful, *and* frightening.<sup>31</sup>

Such impressions of the Australian desert, "strange, beautiful and frightening," were for Grant Watson so strong as to threaten the accepted values of England and home. In *But To What Purpose* (1946) he wrote:

<sup>30</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Departures*, London: Pleiades Books Ltd, 1948, p. 40.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 43.

[Rudolf] Steiner maintains that an original and divine revelation was given to primitive man. This was transmitted from initiate to initiate through the medium of the mystery-cults of the ancient world. Great secrecy guarded this knowledge; only those who qualified by severe tests could attain to this understanding. It is significant, with reference to this postulate, to compare the highly metaphysical beliefs of the primitive Australian Aborigines, as so beautifully and accurately set forth by Spencer and Gillen, with those ideas concerning the integration of personality, as set forth by Dr. Jung and his school. Both the Aboriginal medicine men and Dr. Jung would rank as initiates or part-initiates. The Aborigines deriving (according to Steiner, or so I think) *their* knowledge from the original source and Dr. Jung and his fellow explorers deriving their knowledge through the development of individual consciousness brought to a high degree of sensitivity. In both cases something essential and not obvious is revealed.<sup>32</sup>

From Steiner to Spencer and Gillen and finally to Steiner and Jung, Grant Watson has submitted impressions of the Australian Aborigines, holding up for inspection a glimpse of their views on the metaphysical beliefs of these people.

One important discovery of Spencer and Gillen with regard to the totem system of the Central tribes, was that they regularly perform magical rites for the purpose of multiplying or increasing their totems; as their totems are useful objects, most frequently edible animals or plants, the performance of the ceremonies is supposed to contribute to the wellbeing and even to the existence of the tribes, who therefore attribute great importance to them. Later research has revealed so many similar cases of magical rites for the multiplication of totems performed by other tribes in other parts of the continent that we may fairly assume them to be universal features of Australian Totemism. When we contrast the universality of magical rites among the Australian tribes, with the conspicuous absence of the worship of gods among them, we may fairly conclude that these facts lend some support to the theory first broached by Hegel that in the early history of humanity the Age of Religion has been preceded by an Age of Magic.<sup>33</sup>

Grant Watson has demonstrated in his writing that the 'Age of Magic' as he witnessed and understood it amongst the Australian Aborigines in 1910-12 had prevailed. Both Daisy Bates and Radcliffe-Brown have also expressed interest and belief in the importance of the rituals of Aboriginal magic and in its relation to Aboriginal religion.

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<sup>32</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., pp. 209-10.

<sup>33</sup> W. Baldwin Spencer and F. G. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, preface G. J. L. Frazer O.M. London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1938 (first ed. 1899), p. ix.

## Chapter Four

### Wanderings and Return

Before leaving Western Australia, Grant Watson decided to visit the southwest which he had glimpsed on his train journey from Albany to Perth. Limestone caves had been recently discovered at Busselton,<sup>1</sup> within the borders of the great national reserve there. The Western Australian Government was anxious to make known the beauty of these natural attractions, so they were subsidizing, for a limited period, excursions to the caves. The excursion included board and lodging for ten days, with the train and buggy rides through the forests to the caves, and the services of a guide, included in the cost of ten pounds. Accompanied by one other passenger, an elderly English lady, Grant Watson set off on their buggy ride through the giant jarrah forest, later describing it as "making ant-like progress under the high canopy of branches through which the sunlight fell in dappled patterns dwarfing the buggy to a child's plaything".<sup>2</sup> Following hours of travelling through the forest, they stopped to water the horses. The driver produced a basket of food, thoughtfully provided by the government. He then kindled a fire and boiled water for tea. For Grant Watson this was a different experience as he lay on his back for a while, "gazing up into the clear spaces of air contained among the branches, and felt the invisible emanations of the forest. Here amongst the great trees was a different spirit from the arid daemon of the northern bush. Streams trickled and gurgled; sometimes a river was to be forded, and our track wound often from a direct course to avoid swamps and fallen tree-trunks".<sup>3</sup>

In the early afternoon they came into a valley of a small river. This they followed to a clearing where cattle pastured, and to a farmhouse, with a ridge of sand dunes beyond and a sight of the sea. This was their destination and where they would stay while making journeys to the caves.<sup>4</sup> The farm was called 'Cattle Chosen'. Their host and hostess, both descendants of the original settlers, related the story of its origin.

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<sup>1</sup> Busselton: Town on the shores of Geographe Bay, 231 km south of Perth on the Bussell Hwy. Established as an agricultural (beef and dairying area), the town has also been both a whaling centre with as many as 22 whalers anchored in bay and a timber port for the magnificent south-west karri and jarrah timbers. Geographe Bay was chartered and named by the French expedition of 1801 led by Nicolas Baudin in the ships *Geographe* and *Naturaliste*. A long-boat of this expedition was wrecked in the bay and a sailor named Vasse was believed drowned. A river and the district were named after him. Source: Peter Pierce (ed.), Rosemary Hunter (asst. ed.), *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia*, Melbourne, Oxford, Auckland, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 285-86.

<sup>2</sup> Grant Watson, *Journey under the Southern Stars*, London: Abelard-Schuman, 1968, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Yallingup Caves were discovered in 1899 by Edward Dawson who stumbled on a sinkhole found in limestone formations. Explorations were carried out by Dawson, Curtis and Seymour. The Lake Cave probably referred to is near the Margaret River. Grant Watson apparently visited several caves in the area.

When the first English colonists came to Australia, being quite ignorant of conditions, they brought with them the accustomed conveniences of civilization: things of little use to settlers in a virgin forest, such as family coaches. Families, horses and cattle, coaches and household goods were then littered along the seaboard. The settlers slept in coaches and rigged up table cloths, sheets and blankets as protection from the sun's heat. The cattle and horses strayed; some were lost, some found good pastures. Cattle had found this particular site, and when the owners followed and saw the good grass, the little river and the pleasant prospect, they built their farm and called it 'Cattle Chosen'.<sup>5</sup> Parts of the original structure were still being used. It had been enlarged but always in a fairly primitive manner. The dividing walls of the rooms were made for the most part of hessian, but Grant Watson found it a most delightful place where they were fed on the best farmhouse fare, and on melons, peaches and figs. On one side was the forest, and on the other was the river which, as it met the sands, divided into several streams. Beyond the dunes were rippling sea waves lapping the shell-strewn beach. "I was well accustomed to shell-strewn beaches," Grant Watson wrote, "but had never seen one so rich in brilliant colours or decorated by more variegated shells."<sup>6</sup>

They climbed down rope ladders into the depths of the Busselton caves loosening as they went a string clue, so that they might be able to find their way out from the maze of dividing ways. "For illumination," Grant Watson wrote, "we carried small lanterns, but when, at the lower levels, we came to features that he considered worthy, our guide would ignite a tray of magnesium dust and reveal the stalactites and stalagmites, pointing to their perpendicular lines in the silence of their remote loveliness." In one place a shallow underground lake about fifty metres long by twenty wide, was supported on what had been at one time the floor of a river. It was now left suspended, and an empty river-bed went beneath.<sup>7</sup>

Grant Watson described his guide as a "naturalist by nature, a man of sensitive observation who had spent many years in the bush and had devoted much ingenuity to the exploration of caves". He invited Grant Watson to inspect the wreck of an old ship he had discovered hidden in a muddy estuary not far from the caves. The ship corresponded to the description of a Dutch ship carrying bullion for the payment of soldiers that was lost off the West Coast of what was then called New Holland, between Cape Mentelle and Cape Naturaliste. He believed the gold bullion could still be in the hold. Grant Watson was able to see that to make any attempt to search for, or to retrieve, any gold that may be there would be "a tough job". "Unfortunately neither he nor I had any money available," he later commented.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Grant Watson's informants were not quite accurate re 'Cattle Chosen'. See E. O. Shann, *Cattle Chosen*, ch. V, (facsimile ed., 1978) intro. by Marian Aveling; The owners arrived before the stray cattle.

<sup>6</sup> Grant Watson, *Journey under the Southern Stars*, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

After leaving the limestone caves and bathing beaches of 'Cattle Chosen', Grant Watson explored the bush between Guildford and the Darling Ranges, delighting in the great variety of wild flowers in the swampy ground, meeting with all the wild life of the Australian bush, from kangaroos to snakes and lizards, tree frogs and cockatoos, green parakeets and red crows and huge dragonflies which drove away the clouds of biting flies.

Before leaving Western Australia, Grant Watson took a job for a couple of weeks in a brewery cleaning out barrels, and so replenished his fund of money; also having received some from Europe, and eventually sailed from Albany in one of the older of the Orient-line boats sharing a cabin with a lawyer, an undertaker and a parson – "All that was necessary to prepare a man for his hereafter".<sup>9</sup> The hereafter seemed very near when they struck a gale of great force in the Bight during which the ship, already with a list to starboard, threatened with every horrific roll to turn turtle.

However, arriving safely in Sydney, he was fortunate to be given generous hospitality by friends. "Sydney as it was then," he wrote, "seemed teeming with an almost explosively joyous life. It was a lovely city on the shores of a superb bay, with tough-looking men, wonderful swimmers, and a great many pretty girls, as tough, perhaps, as the young men".<sup>10</sup> His impressions of Sydney are compared in Chapter Five with those of D. H. Lawrence, however his impressions of the Blue Mountains can be recorded here. In *Journey under the Southern Stars* (1968) he wrote:

I have climbed in the Alps, seen the mountains of New Zealand and Fiji, lived on the West Australian plateau, crossed the Rockies of Canada, and looked down on the Nile Valley from the top of the Great Pyramids. But never have I met anything to compare with the beauty and grandeur of the canyons in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales. They are not distinctively high, but the marvellous blues of these deep ravines, the swirling falling waters and the eagles so far below give a feeling of something not of this world.<sup>11</sup>

Grant Watson found something very special about the Blue Mountains that can be appreciated by those of us who have felt the same magic when one comes suddenly on the edge of an enormous cleft that goes down six hundred metres and far down below "through the azure blue atmosphere one can see the tops of the forest trees, and distant rivers. Huge tree-ferns look like tiny rosettes, and below are eagles circling."<sup>12</sup> Grant Watson chose not to sleep in a hotel room, but with a couple of blankets and a ground sheet selected a suitable cranny at the top of a precipice, and so was able to watch the sun rise breaking up the clouds below into plummy fragments, revealing an underworld "of distant forest and river and rainbow lights in curtains of spray".

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

Grant Watson's wanderings next took him to Kiama, south of Sydney, where he was impressed by the basalt rocks which offered the same sort of formations as those of the Giant's Causeway in Ireland, and where he found the scenery as wild and strikingly picturesque. The constant movement of the waves had caused large blow-holes, sometimes as much as half a mile inland, where sea-spray was ejected to a height of more than twelve metres. The opportunity of experiencing a further dimension of Australian life took him to the New England Ranges in central New South Wales, where he was given an introduction to a farmer who would take him as a paying guest. Fortunately, he had some riding experience, and so found his short experience of working on a cattle station exciting,

driving the deep-breathing cattle that jostled one another, each pushing with strong fore-shoulder and heavy horned head. The eyelids drawn back from the bulging eyes exposed brown iris-rims flecked with white and with red veins. These were wild lives, primitive in their fierceness and fear. I found a kind of exultation in being beside them, and feeling the earth shake to the thud of their feet.<sup>13</sup>

Overlanding three hundred head of cattle about forty miles (70 km) to another station rewarded Grant Watson with some memorable experiences: the constant clouds of flies buzzing around every living head; the duty rides at night, around the resting herd. A low continuous noise, either singing or humming, reassured the cattle and prevented any sudden and single sound that might stampede them.

The dry air, the brilliant scorching sunlight, the hard dusty earth; on the upland farms these were the foreground of a vast yonder that stretched in the daytime into violet-blue distances and a haze of heat, and at night into a dim void where the sound of scuttling wallabies and a few bird-voices broke the stillness.<sup>14</sup>

Close to the farmhouse there was a small camp of natives, some of whom gave their services, not for money but for food. Grant Watson admired the skill of the Aboriginal men as horse-breakers and superb riders. He found that life on an Australian cattle-station is hard, but for the men who live there nothing can be better.

As the spirit of the western goldfields has captured men who dig for the precious metal, so the spirit of these New England Ranges has captured those who make their homes there. They have become its servants and worshippers. Man had entered, knowing the land, yet seeming not to know it. He had turned salt-bush into wool; had trained dogs to work, cultivating their conditioned reflexes, made of them most adequate engines to further his purpose; he had lived and sweated in an alien environment, yes, and in part was changing his nature to enter its oneness. There

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



were good reasons, he assured himself, that made him come into the wilderness of salt-bush to gather wool, to gather riches. These were his aims, if he were to declare his aims; but something greater than these interposed, the land and the elusive spirit of the land conquered him, absorbed him into its oneness, evoked his love, and bound him with the law of its obedience – so that men who once thought that they were interested in making money found themselves, after a few years, devoted to a manner of life they could no more readily discard than the dogs could discard the acquired habits of their behaviour. The land and the men became one in that dry and rarefied atmosphere.<sup>15</sup>

Here Grant Watson showed his sensitive perception of the men of the bush, either on the goldfields or on the land. As H. M. Green has observed, “he not only records the facts of what he has observed but he gets beneath the surface of the facts; he conveys what he thus perceives by re-creating imaginatively the mood that the facts produce in him, filling it with suggestion and in some cases reinforcing the suggestion with direct statement.”

In his description of his impressions gained while working on the goldfields and later in the New England Ranges on a large station property, Grant Watson saw the men of the land as equally captive as the men of the goldfields – and how they became one with the land – whether to extract gold or to grow wool or run cattle.

Grant Watson created the characters for his novels from these men of the land in *The Mainland* (1917), *The Desert Horizon* (1923) and *Daimon* (1925). In these novels he captured the spirit of the bushman's life, coloured by his own sensitivity to the life as he experienced it and the men he encountered while living and working in the Australian bush. His descriptions clearly show that he found every experience an exhilaration to the spirit and this he is able to convey to us imaginatively, as in the following passage:

After I had left the fireside and the evening meal, when only a faint wisp of wood smoke was rising from the dying embers, I would go to a little distance from the others and stretch myself on the earth. It is extraordinary how comfortable the bare ground can be as a couch, once one has accustomed oneself to fitting one's bones into the convenient irregularities of the soil. A potency of rest seems to rise out of the earth to cleanse and purify the fatigue of the body. The sight of the distant stars completes the harmony, and all too soon sleep comes with its oblivion. But as though Nature were unwilling that her child should be deprived of her whispered communications, short periods of wakefulness alternate with sleep. One is easily aware of the grazing flock not far distant, of the dogs that are always on the watch, of the other men, stretched flat on their backs and almost invisible in the faint lights; aware too of the passage of the night. Sometimes on such nights or at the dawn I have felt my thoughts (if they were indeed my thoughts) grow great in me, and I

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

have been aware of existence as a great Becoming, everything changing, nothing knowable, everything transient.<sup>16</sup>

Close contact with the earth and the mysticism of the night seemed to evoke something of a spiritual awakening for Grant Watson, as he wrote: "Such thoughts have moved for me between Heaven and Earth in the awakening of dawn or in the night hours when my body has been rested by close contact with the soil." However such spiritual uplifting was soon dispersed: "the first flies have begun to buzz: and there is the business of looking for my hobbled horse, of collecting twigs for the breakfast fire, and so the ordinary day has returned. Another day, a good day of 'overlanding'."<sup>17</sup>

From Australia Grant Watson travelled to Fiji and although he relished the new experience he was moved to write:

During all my stay in the islands I was uncomfortably, increasingly aware of the inherent pattern which the people of the two islands seem to afford of the symbiotic relation of tyrant and victim. One partner is given over to authority and cruelty, and the other accepting persecution only too easily. The commonest devil-devils in the Fijian myths, and in their actual magic, are a persecuting monster and its victim. Perhaps it was for this reason I never felt that I was able to contact the spirit of the land with assurance. I was a mere visitor in Fiji, and although I went into out-of-the-way villages, slept in native houses, and wore native costume, I never felt towards the earth or the land as I had felt to English earth, or to the desert dust of the Australian goldfields.<sup>18</sup>

Returning to Suva, Grant Watson was stricken with a bout of dengue fever and while convalescing he received a cable from England, making his return imperative. He booked a berth on the first boat available, the S.S. *Marama*, an old vessel of ill reputation, on account of the rotten bilge-water in her hold, which gave its aroma to all the lower deck cabins. She was the first boat bound for Vancouver. Staying one day in Vancouver, Grant Watson found the unfriendly manner of the Canadians in direct contrast to the white Australians who, although they had been considered generally hostile to Englishmen, rough in speech and manner, were positively courteous in comparison with the Canadians. Crossing the Canadian Rockies, he stopped over at Banff for twenty-four hours and found the "bare, hideous upheavals, of rock, with here and there a scrubby moss-like covering of pine trees, divided by sprawled glaciers covered with moraine, afforded a dismal contrast to the remembered beauty of the Blue Mountains, and the volcanic peaks of Fiji."

By this time his money had dwindled to such an extent, he was obliged to live on two boxes of grapenuts, moistened with water for the three and half days' journey to Montreal.

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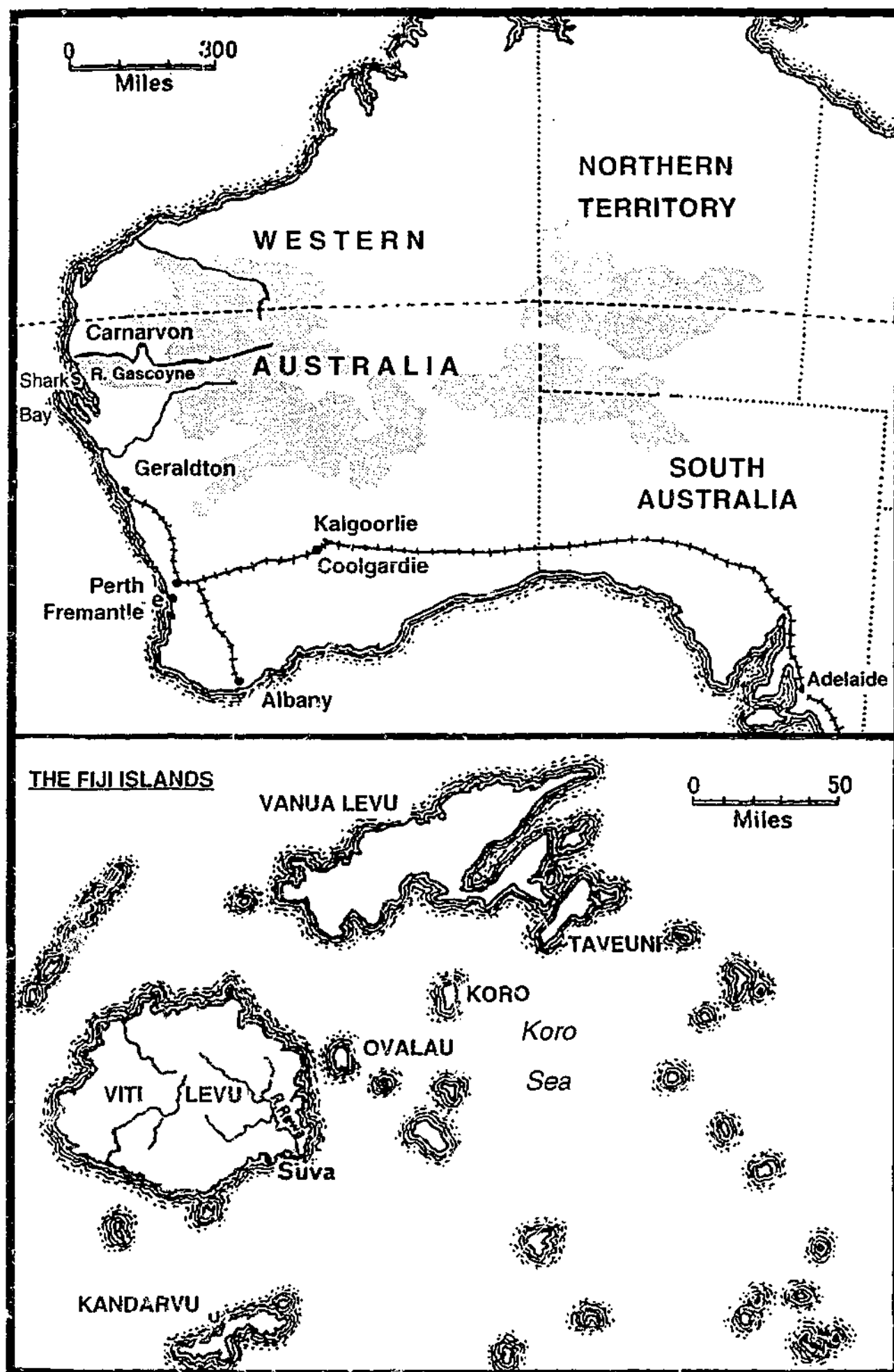
<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 88.

Fortunately, he had a ticket for the return trip to England, and arrived in Liverpool with one sovereign and a few loose shillings in his pocket.

Never before had he realized how much he loved his native land. An old friend from Cambridge and his wife invited him to stay with them, and they welcomed him, "bearded and tanned, as a man from another hemisphere. I could stay as long as I liked and would I tell his boys about the Aborigines of Western Australia; a formal lecture on Saturday evening for which I would receive a fee of five pounds."



Maps of Western Australia and the Fiji Islands showing places visited by Grant Watson.

# Chapter Five

## England and Ida

While away on the Cambridge expedition both Grant Watson and Radcliffe-Brown had kept up their reading. Radcliffe-Brown was an accomplished reader and had read aloud much of Shelley and Keats and André Gide's *L'Immoraliste*. Grant Watson had his own books, and had found in Perth several volumes of Henry James in a colonial edition. "We had sustained our Western culture among the Aborigines", Grant Watson wrote, "who had also contributed much to my *Weltanschauung* demonstrating how good it was to be away from Europe, and to get an objective view."<sup>1</sup> But now returned to England after two years away in distant lands, Grant Watson found it wonderful to be in his native England again, as he expressed it in *Departures*. (1948):

It seemed that because I had been away so long and so fortunately engaged among distant scenes I could enter direct and without misgiving into a region of feeling and speculation that became even more enchanted. Perhaps because I had been under the spell of the animism of primitive people I now saw this region of my homeland as alive with spirit influences. Surely, I believed in fairies if those invisibles which live in trees and flowers, in thickets and woods and in the whole landscape could be called by so misleading a name.<sup>2</sup>

Grant Watson balanced his Australian experiences against the familiarity of the English scene which seemed to have gained, for him, an added enchantment from the broadening of his vision in other lands. He had indeed absorbed much of the spiritual animism of the Aboriginal people which he demonstrated in *Daimon* (1925) during the night ride of Martin and Maggie in the bush where the salt bush was like a thick grey moss growing upon the plain.

It was a strange and desolate sight possessed of a beauty which caught at the heart and held it fluttering in a magic power. Suddenly the mare neighed with a short high-pitched neigh; both horses sprang sideways shying.

"Martin, they have seen something. What is it?"

<sup>1</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, 'To This End', unpub. autob., ch. 6.

<sup>2</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Departures*, London: Pleiades Books Ltd, 1948, p. 95.

Maggie, the young English wife is afraid, but for Martin, as for Grant Watson, it is part of the spiritual animism of the bush. "There are things in the bush we don't see," he tells Maggie. "That I've known for a long time. But they don't do any harm. When I'm alone I like to feel they are there . . . you simply must not be afraid."<sup>3</sup>

These were Grant Watson's fairies. His return to the English scene had not dispelled the magnetism he had absorbed from his experiences in the Australian bush amongst the Aborigines. "Instead," he wrote, "journey into other lands had seemed to give an added depth and reality to the English scene." For Grant Watson, "they had enhanced the inner world, had added both beauty and terror, but in no way had they reconciled any of the contradictions."<sup>4</sup> For him nature, whether in the Australian bush or the English countryside, was teeming with such spirits that flowed between his inner world and the landscape he perceived.

His interest in fairy stories can be seen in his study of the meaning of the Grimm collection, and he wrote:

If we try to guess the meaning of fairy stories we must inevitably, if at all successful, dream ourselves into them. We find an inner world clothed in the symbols of the outer, and come, as we ponder, to look in directly the opposite direction to that which we look in our ordinary lives. We are in the intermediate state in which the veil of the physical world has been lifted, and intimations of a spiritual world are revealed. These awakening perceptions of an objective spiritual reality are related to what is innermost in ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

He was also an admirer of Karen Blixen's writing, of which he wrote:

From leaves to chameleons, she makes us relive in the bright stimulating air of the African plateau. She tells how waiting for the rains to come in a year of drought she wrote what she called fairy-stories which have appeared in later published volumes. Like the best of folk tales they present several levels of understanding together with hints of a primal mystery. They are as clear as Spring water on a rock but the reader must look for signposts to guess at her subtle symbolism.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear from Grant Watson's expressed perception of fairy stories, and of Karen Blixen's writing, that he had the vision to absorb a spiritual meaning from fairy stories that related to his own innermost beliefs, or his 'inner world'. For him Nature was alive with fairies and fairy stories were closely aligned to reality.

The period of absence was part of a destined pattern between Ida Bedford and himself. Her letters to him in Fiji had shown things were not well with her. He had written asking,

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<sup>3</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Daimon*, London: Jonathon Cape Ltd, 1925, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, ch. 10, p. 177.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 178.

should he return? The answer was a single word, "Come". He arrived, unannounced, at her house, bearded and tanned as he was, and found her – though thrown off balance at his return – unmistakably pleased. Her husband was away, and Grant Watson was able to take up his old abode in Dr Robert's hillside hut on the Hawkely side of Wheatham Hill. In early May the English countryside was at its most lovely flowering period, butterflies of various kinds and rabbits young, old and half-grown, sunned themselves among the cowslips.

Often Ida's husband was absent in London and they had together "unclouded spells of England's Springtime". Yet Grant Watson could not get close to her physically.

"I can't bear to be touched," she had said. "So it was, I did not touch her, but I questioned, and she told me when she was first married, she had been horrified. On one occasion when she and her husband were in camp, she had rushed out into the jungle in her nightgown with feet bare not heeding that she might put her foot on a snake or scorpion or be eaten by a leopard. She had gone so far in her horror that natives were used to track her and bring her back. "It is terrible for him too," she had said. "I can't help it".<sup>7</sup>

The resemblance to Sue Bridehead in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) again became clear to Grant Watson in that there was the same masochist persuasion she should be punished for her guilt. "I took her hand and she let me hold it. Again the relationship was between us. We were adrift. Adrift between two worlds; in one secure, in the other at a loss."

What could I say. I was twenty-four and still a virgin, the horrors of the marriage bed were as yet unsuspected. The caterpillar had shed at least one skin while away among the Aborigines, but in the mysteries of sex I was not much wiser. I could but repeat: I must meet your husband.<sup>8</sup>

If she would go with him, he could get a job in Australia at one of the universities. So they talked in the pain of indecision, and she insisted that Grant Watson must never let her husband know of his existence. He was terribly jealous of everyone. That was part of her trouble. She might get away on her own. They were both unhappy. In his position any woman would be eager to marry him. Her eldest daughter would be on her side – it might be possible.

Looking back at that time Grant Watson recalled only the great struggle. Walking hand in hand through the streets of London, they ventured onto Waterloo Bridge. Ida took off her wedding ring and dropped it into the Thames. Grant Watson would buy another like it, but his ring not Bedford's. Later they pledged each other. She told him she was no longer sleeping with her husband nor was she afraid, she would ask for divorce. He might grant it.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, ch. 6, p. 98.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 99.



There had been another woman, and he would be sure to remarry, find a more satisfactory wife. So they planned and talked, sometimes happy and hopeful, and sometimes she would fall back into negative flatness and Grant Watson would not know how to meet it. The presence of her husband when he was home sapped her life.

A letter from Grant Watson's mother in Sydney<sup>9</sup> reveals that her son had written to ask her advice regarding the possibility of he and Ida making a life together in Australia. His mother's reply was supportive, revealing an interesting glimpse of an English woman's view of the Sydney folk of 1911. But she did want some clear idea of Grant Watson's intentions as indicated in the following:

By the way I should like to know how you and Ida propose to live and by what name she will go in private life – shall you come out as 'married' or do you mean to brave convention? Your fight will be more uphill than ever if this is so – so far we have only a glimpse of the tragedy of Ida's life, but I gather from Mamie's sister also – how they were sacrificed.

Her letter ends with a promise to write to Ida.

In July Ida had a breakdown, nothing serious, but sufficient to take her to a convalescent home, where Grant Watson could only see her on rare occasions being a visitor with no family claim. He urged her not to wait for a divorce but to go away with him now. But she wanted to do things with dignity . . . in what she called "the right way". Her husband was going back to India soon and before he went he made conditions. If she would follow him when she was recovered, they would give their marriage a trial for three months, then at the end of that time, if she still wanted to leave he would divorce her. To this she agreed, she seemed sure of herself, both she and Grant Watson were inexperienced. Soon after he was gone she left the sanatorium and returned to her house. For the month of August Grant Watson was partly in his hut and partly at a house in the East End that belonged to his friend, Dr Roberts. Roberts was very kind and generous. He had four tenement houses knocked into one and Peter was by no means the only guest who "leaned", as they expressed it. Sometimes Ida and Peter met in London to go to the theatres and museums together. Other times they roamed together on the North Downs.

In September Ida was to go and Peter would go with her as far as Le Havre. They booked on the steamer as man and wife. She did not like it, yet conventions must be observed. She said she would never marry again, but they would live together. So Grant Watson wrote in 'To This End':

We both lay in our separate bunks. I was afraid to come too near. I felt I could so easily hurt her who had been hurt so much already. She took down her wonderful hair brushed and plaited it in two great plaits. In a two bunk cabin one could be

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<sup>9</sup> Full letter dated 5 Dec., 1911 in Appendix at end of chapter.

both intimate and remote. The bunks were very narrow. Arriving at LeHavre, we found the dawn was breaking through a thin mist. The day was before us.<sup>10</sup>

The steamer by which Peter was to return did not sail until next morning. They had coffee and crisp madeleines at the hotel where she was to spend the next night. She booked a room. "On that day of our honeymoon," Grant Watson wrote, "we walked inland, at first through exceptionally ugly suburbs and hutments. Everything amused us". They explored an attractive wood where numerous young pheasants surrounded them soliciting food. "These added to our gaiety."

"That night," he wrote, "the whole structure of the caterpillar was transformed, yet as I ran down the stairs at 3.30 a.m. to catch the steamer, my heart was heavy. Was this destiny or fate? She would have called it destiny but it took some fifteen years of separation to make it so." 'Destiny', she told me, 'leads to Meaning. Fate is haphazard accident.' <sup>11</sup> However, as will be seen, it was fate that later caused the separation of fifteen years with the loss of Ida's letter, but on the other hand perhaps it was destiny that Grant Watson's life developed in the way it did. A letter, "such as only she could have written", as Grant Watson described it, came from Marseilles, and two weeks later another from India, "brave but clouded". Other letters followed showing increasing signs of distress. She said she was writing in the bathroom, where she could find peace and safety. "He is persecuting me."

Grant Watson felt helpless. "What was he to do?" He talked with her sister who was his friend and ally, a staunch supporter. "She should have been a nun," she said. "Only in a nunnery will she find peace". This was not much consolation for Grant Watson. "And I?" he asked. "Could you be gentle enough?" she said. "I think so," he answered. "You cannot leave her to struggle alone," she said. "You should go out and help her."<sup>12</sup> That was a great decision, for Ida had made him promise to await her return. After walking the streets of Mayfair for a night, Grant Watson decided he would go. He sold all the books he had collected and all his possessions, and bought a ticket on a P. & O. boat calling at Colombo and sent a letter announcing his decision. Since it had been mooted that she might return to England, he sent wireless messages to all homeward-bound steamers.

At Colombo there was no letter, not on the rack or at the Purser's office. Grant Watson went ashore to inquire at the P. & O. Office, but there was no letter. Imagining all kinds of things that might have happened in an agony of mind, he travelled to Madras. He had the address of her most intimate friend and wrote asking where he could write to Ida. He waited at the Gallface Hotel, hating the grandeur and well-to-do people. One day when he was at lunch, they both walked in on him.

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<sup>10</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', ch. 6, p. 101.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 102.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

"We had better go to your room," Bedford said. She looked pale and depleted. She was my soul, and I, like her, was numb. She had in some way, I could not guess, been beaten into submission. That at least I knew, and was with her in her numbness. I had lost my faculties. Bedford could afford to be calm in his triumph.

"She had made a mistake," he said. "Now had come to her senses." I asked her to speak.

"I am a dead woman, you must leave me." If she had rejected me, where could my strength come from? Later I thought of all the things I might have said, have told of the ring she wore, but I could think of nothing. I knew she was lost, something dreadful had happened. The best I could think of was to ask him to leave us for a few moments. He was so sure of his position that he went out onto the verandah. She told me in an abject and terrible manner that her husband had made her utterly ashamed, not fit for any man to know. I could not believe this, I knew her better than she knew herself. What could I say? If she was dead, I was dead also. She took my hand and would have kissed it, . . . <sup>13</sup>

Not accepting so small a gesture, he found the following lines from Meredith's *Modern Love* expressive of his pain:

In tragic life, God Wot,  
No villain need be.  
Passions spin the plot.  
We are betrayed by what is false within.<sup>14</sup>

He did not judge, only resented the last sarcastic 'flick' Bedford gave him. "He said he hoped that I would enjoy the company of the pretty girls I would meet on the boat on the return journey." "That," Grant Watson thought, "was caddish".

When he arrived back at Colombo he had ten days to wait for the next boat. It happened to be going to Australia. He went to the P. & O. Office to arrange for a cabin, and was handed Ida's registered letter which he should have received ten days ago giving him an address to wire to. She was in camp in the jungle but would ride six miles on a bicycle along a jungle path to the nearest station. Grant Watson was to meet her at Tuticorin. The long wait and lack of an answer, and the sense of guilt Bedford had played on, had broken her resolution. Her letter full of love and hope, from some obscure cause, had not been delivered.

Writing some years later, Grant Watson observed that Jung, in one of his later books, dealt at some length with what he called "synchronistic events". They find no origin in space or time, but, arising out of an *a priori* knowledge of immediate presence of events which lack any cause or basis, anticipate events to come. Looking back some fifty years later on what was then a dreadful suffering, Grant Watson could see that there may have been a meaning

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 104.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 105.

lurking there and this he expressed in a sonnet, to help him find a clue in what remained a mystery.

#### **The Prohibition**

Like a sly angel sent by high degree  
The Prohibition slipped 'twixt thought and deed.  
*There* thou shalt stay, although thou cans't not see  
How that my NAY can germinate a seed  
That lies concealed in the deep underground;  
Within its darkness utters no least sound;  
In hell it lies, whence no faint call is heard.  
Unyielding, obstinate, yet shall thou grow  
To value right my synchronicity.  
Thy sickness and thy dire distress shall show  
My fiat for the thing that had to be.  
A life denied was in my life begun  
To grow, in its own impulse, towards the sun.<sup>15</sup>

The sonnet seems to express Grant Watson's recognition of the synchronicity of the events which although causing him such distress had a purpose in resolving his future along the lines that developed.

At the age of twenty-four, waiting in Colombo for a ship, Grant Watson had no such reserves as he found in later life, to alleviate his despair. Knowing he had to leave the Gallface Hotel so full of horrible associations, he decided to go to Perydeniya, with its famous Botanic Gardens, and there he found a cheap third-class hotel where he could dump his case. He took his revolver and walked into the jungle with the idea of killing himself, but, at the last, the thought of his mother who had given him so much changed his intention. He would go on living. That night he had a strange dream which he related in 'To This End', his unpublished autobiography, repeating it under the title of 'Occupied Territory' in *But To What Purpose* (1946). He described it as follows:

I saw myself sitting alone in a darkened room beside a dying fire, about whose embers flickered blueish flames. The light, if one could call it light, came from these, sufficient to illuminate the livid features that were my own. This man was not all of myself only part of me. Another man entered behind the seated figure, and with a sword pierced his back in such a way that the blade sloped upwards penetrating his heart. Blood flowed from the double wound, both from the breast and from the back and he who watched saw the man, who was himself, collapse and die, and he felt the anguish as the sword pierced his heart.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 106.

The murderer withdrew and I was left alone with the dead man. I knew that I too was dead. I was dead and no longer in the body, for I could float about the room. If I were dead, I thought, I could pass through the walls. Very well I would try, Yes, I could pass through. I went from house to house, from street to street, until at length I came to the house of my destination, where I was at that time living. I slipped through the walls, up the staircase, and through the walls again.

In my room there was a man sitting at a table. His hand held a revolver, and he was motionless as though in deep thought. I knew that he was contemplating suicide, and I felt that for some most urgent, though vague reason, I must save him.

Alas, I could not in any way communicate with him. I hovered about him; I tried to speak to him. He did not know I was there.

His hand was moving, and I thought that he was going to put the revolver's muzzle in his mouth. I must, I must draw his attention.

I put my two hands on his hand, and felt the warmth of his flesh, though my own hands had grown cold. I held his hand in my hands and with all my will I willed for him to look at me, and be conscious of my presence.

At last, and as though with reluctance he raised his eyes, and I knew then that he had seen me. We looked into each other's eyes.

"You must not do it," I said.

"And why not?"

"Because - because." I could think of no reasons then the thought, the conviction, came to me. "Because you and I are to be one. You and I - something different from what you are something different from what I was. A man made of us two, will go on with life!"

"For what reason?" he asked.

"For the reason that you see me and hear me, and because I know that it must be so."

He gave a faint smile of resignation, and then I felt that I myself was becoming one with him, and that I was vanishing out of the atmosphere of that room into his body.

And so it was.

After a while I put the revolver away in the drawer of my desk.<sup>16</sup>

I have included this in full as I believe it illustrates the severity of the crises which changed Grant Watson's life and from which much stemmed.

The chapter 'Occupied Territory' in *But To What Purpose* (1946) could refer to countries such as Greece or Czechoslovakia occupied by the Nazis, but in his unpublished autobiography 'To This End' it has a more personal implication. As his daughter, Josephine has written: "'Occupied Territory' was indeed a dream that he had where he saw the landscape of his soul occupied for ever by Ida." "So," she continues, "I think the story

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 108.

'Occupied Territory', is putting an extremely painful experience into an imagination which is different from recalling it."<sup>17</sup> In the dream he sees himself from outside so that he can see that self die and a new self develop, one that still has the wish to die but is prevented by a stronger part of his consciousness and so he lives but now becomes a man made up of the two conflicting beings.

In following the thread of the development of the caterpillar in relation to this period of his life, he completed the symbolism with a parable regarding a friend who gave his wife a bunch of chrysanthemums which she placed in a vase on the television set. A few days later the picture on the screen went out with violent flashes and an unpleasant smell. The electrician discovered the remnants of a caterpillar which had strayed from the flowers and found its way into the wiring at the back of the television and was electrocuted and burnt to a cinder.

Grant Watson related the parable to his own condition but, unlike the caterpillar, he recovered and found that, as in the dream, two separate personalities had replaced what had seemed his former unity. It would seem that one half of him was so wounded, he was impervious to further hurt. The other half was his creative half still impressionable. He had suffered what seemed an incurable wound and his life became a quest to heal the wound.

He referred to such writers as Jung who, in his posthumously published book: *Memories, Dreams Reflections* (1961) wrote about the dual personality that he discovered in himself at a very early age.

The play and counter-play between personalities no. 1 and no. 2 which has run through my whole life, had nothing to do with a 'split' or dis-association in the ordinary medical sense. On the contrary, it is played out in every individual. In my life no. 2 has been of prime importance, and I have always tried to make room for anything that wanted to come to me from within. He is a typical figure, but he is *perceived only by a very few*. Most people's conscious understanding is not sufficient to realize that he is also what they are.<sup>18</sup>

And, he continued:

From the beginning I had a sense of destiny, as though my life was assigned to me by fate and had to be fulfilled. This gave me an inner security, and, though I could never prove it to myself, it proved itself to me. I did not have this certainty, *it* had me. Nobody could rob me of the conviction that it was enjoined upon me to do what God wanted and not what I wanted. That gave me the strength to go my own way . . . These talks with the 'Other' were my profoundest experiences; on the one hand a bloody struggle, on the other supreme ecstasy.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Grant Watson's daughter to the writer dated 3 Sept., 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, London: Flamingo, 1983, p. 63.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 65.

Here Jung finds security in believing that his life was under God's direction, which seemed to give him a sense of strength and confidence in going his own way.

After his ordeal at Madras something of the same had happened to Grant Watson. Very slowly he discovered his no. 2 personality. He was helped by finding that many of the poets and philosophers had also experienced a similar split and had developed no. 2 personalities.

Goethe in his *Faust* speaks of having two souls. In a quieter, but no less overpowering way the advent of no. 2 personality came to Rossetti in his sonnet 'I and He'. Shelley existed in his no. 2 personality, so also did Keats and Shakespeare. Hamlet is destroyed by the conflict of his no. 1 and no. 2 personalities. No. 1 personality wants to kill the King his uncle, and so avenge his father. No. 2 personality shrinks from so barbarous a task. In most of Shakespeare's plays this dualism can be found.

Grant Watson saw it not as madness, but the inner conflicts that are destined to accompany a developing consciousness. Martin Buber in his book *I and Thou* most clearly defined the ascent from the *Klammernden Organen* to the *Hüher Ahnen*, indicating the reality of the Eternal that can be achieved when "Time and Space are fled."<sup>20</sup>

For Herman Melville, Grant Watson related how the advent of the second personality came in a violent manner. He fell from the topmast spar of an American warship, barely missing the deck as he fell. He lost consciousness, and only recovered it when he was deep under water, and could see above him the light of day as a green haze through water. He struck out for the surface, was rescued, and was changed. Prior to this, his activities had been wholly extrovert, but after this experience he introverted and produced marvellous symbolical fantasies, probing into the deep collective unconscious. "Indeed," Grant Watson continued, "Melville in his *Pierre* (1852)<sup>21</sup> forecasts most of the discoveries of modern psychology".<sup>22</sup>

The poet who comes nearest to expressing what had happened to Grant Watson was, he thought, James Thomson, the author of 'The City of Dreadful Night'.

As I came through the desert thus it was,  
As I came through the desert: When the tide  
Swept up to her there, kneeling by my side,  
She clasped that corpse-like me, and they were borne  
Away, and this vile me was left forlorn;  
I know the whole sea cannot quench that heart,  
Or cleanse that brow, or wash those two apart;  
They love; their doom is drear,

<sup>20</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', ch. 7, p. 113.

<sup>21</sup> Herman Melville, *Pierre*, A Signet Classic. N.Y. & Toronto: The New American Library, 1852.

<sup>22</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', ch. 7, p. 114.



Yet they nor hope nor fear;  
But I, what do I here?<sup>23</sup>

From this dark picture his way slowly developed into a search for religious life. Dreams and visions helped him to make conscious the deeper causes of destiny that moved at first unperceived beneath the surface.

"Whatever the pace of my advance in no. 2," he wrote, "no. 1 was inextricably entangled. In fact I found that no. 1 in its stupidities and sufferings, determined to some extent the inner pattern."<sup>24</sup>

In the months that followed Grant Watson travelled because movement was better than staying still. He went to New Zealand and back to Australia before returning to England where his parents received him and "better," he told us, "than any prodigal son deserved".

Grant Watson's state of mind at this stage can be understood by his description of the dream. He has received a mortal blow yet goes on living but in a different way, with the second side of his personality, and from this second side he will draw the strength to plan his future in a new direction.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 115.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

## Appendix

The Astor  
Macquarie St.  
Sydney,  
December 5th. 1911

Dear one, we have just received your letter with the postmark of the 2nd or 3rd November, in which you tell us of your change of address. I hope the rooms at 52 Doughty St. Bloomsbury will be alright, but dear one *do* be sure of the drains, it was in rooms in Bloomsbury that your Father was taken ill – so do look to it.

I wonder what you found at Battle that was any good to you – I am afraid little or nothing – as the things I had put by were only household good and no usefuls, as of course I never dreamt of you wanting to furnish rooms in England – still there were your pictures, you will have to have them.

About your coming out here in 2 year's time, we quite think, as I said in a previous letter, that there are openings and we hope soon to get to know a man named Hardy-Wilson, an architect and an artist, who has studied at home – and after that, so we hear, spent 8 years on the Continent studying and measuring all the best buildings and saturating himself in all the best classical work of the past. I am not yet acquainted with any of his buildings, but his paintings are strong and charming, with a great touch of 'Turner' in them. I have just met him and my first impression is favourable. Out here among the (nuts) I gather he is considered to be English, and to have a lot of 'side' – that only means he has the manners of a cultivated man.

As to the feasibility of Ida's scheme, I know nothing except that every woman on this side dresses immoderately and that no one can get their work done to time if at all – and that work women are *scarce* – and more than independent – but I will, in the course of time, find out all I can and let Ida know. What I think would be a more congenial life would be 'house decorating', supplying curtains, covers – painted and embroidered panels. And to help her in this work I think I could by then put her in touch with quite a number of girls who could do good work under direction – as I have a joined a society of women handicraft workers – so I could get to know the girls. A sweet shop like 'Fullers' would also pay – as there is only one good sweet shop in Sydney and I know of several girls making sweets on their own who would be glad to combine. But the shop should be run for the rich – on quite tip top lines – with smart handpainted boxes – French – and start with a splash.

By the way, I should like to know how you and Ida propose to live and by what name she will go in private life – shall you come out as 'married' or do you mean to brave convention?

Your fight will be more uphill than ever if this is so –

So far we have only a glimpse of the tragedy of Ida's life, but I gather from Mamie's sister also – how were they so sacrificed?

Dear one, you say you think me 'wonderful'.

Are you not learning that love can do wonderful things.

Some poet says –

Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with might;

Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, pass'd in silence out of sight.

Have I not loved you dear one from the moment you were conceived? And do you still wonder?

I am writing to your Ida this week.

Yours ever,

Mother.

# Chapter Six

## Change of Direction

So in 1913 began the critical period of Grant Watson's life from which much developed. He was as empty in purse as in hope. Amongst other things he felt he had thrown away any prospects he might have had as a biologist. He had lost his position with the Appointments Board at Cambridge, which was no longer interested in men who had discarded a good position. He had to make a new start. He decided to go to France where the collector, Monsieur Oberture still owed him two hundred pounds for insects from Australia. Although he had not replied to letters, when Grant Watson found him at his ornately furnished Paris flat, he was most courteous, taking him into the bedroom where he produced the money from under the mattress. Back in the street with a wad of bank notes, he was undecided what to do. To return to England was heartache, and he felt his long-suffering and always loyal parents had had about enough of him and his failures. He remembered a hotel kept by an Englishwoman who ran a small pension in a village near the forest of Fontainebleau. Here he settled down where a very kind Madame and her aristocratic husband, retired from the Civil Service in Algiers, made him most welcome. It was there he wrote 'Out There', which was first published in *The English Review* (1914). After it appeared the editor, Norman Douglas, received some indignant letters from shocked readers, one threatening to cancel his subscription. It was later published in Grant Watson's book of Australian short stories, *Innocent Desires* (1924).

Grant Watson described his first short stories as "cruel, brutal tales of life in the Australian bush, and that and all my early work were a kind of excretion, an attempt to get rid of pain and anger and frustration."<sup>1</sup> As autumn grew into winter, Grant Watson felt that he had had enough of loneliness and must return to his own country. In Chelsea he rented three attics overlooking the river in a very old, very dirty house in Cheyne Walk. For these he paid six shillings a week. He let two of them to the mother of a young artist friend for five shillings a week, and felt he had secured probably one of the cheapest rooms in London. The view was superb and the little attic he had furnished for five pounds was pleasant, once he had won his way through the mixed, thick odours of the old house. Here he lived very cheaply, buying food already cooked to take back to his room.

Grant Watson settled down to write his first novel *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914), based on the lives of the people working in isolation with the Aborigines on Bernier and Dorré Islands. He received a great deal of hospitality at that time, and met, amongst other

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<sup>1</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, London: The Cresset Press, 1946, p. 145.

friendly and generous people, the exceptionally vivid personality, Muriel Draper, the author of *Music at Midnight*. She was an American, said to be a 'white negress'. She kept a salon in a vast studio in Edith Grove where she collected musical and otherwise distinguished people and, out of sheer kindness, gave Grant Watson an open invitation to visit when he liked, and to partake of fried mushrooms in cream, and other rich and expensive viands. Her husband was an inveterate gambler, but Muriel often managed to invest his winnings in antique furniture before he had time to lose it again.

Here Grant Watson met the renowned novelist, Henry James, the psychologist, Godwin Baynes, who became a lifelong friend, the pianist, Arthur Rubenstein, Norman Douglas, the author of *South Wind* and co-editor of *The English Review* – who was instrumental in getting 'Out There' first published – the actor, John Farquarson, the Baroness Von Hutton, and the art critic, Herbert Read, as well as many fair women, as he described them, "with morals accustomed to bend according to their fancies". Grant Watson saw himself as a "minnow amongst these tritons". Muriel Draper he described as the most witty, vital woman he had ever met. Often she fed him when he was hungry, amused herself by scandalizing his innate puritanism with outrageous confessions, but also allowed him to read his book to her chapter by chapter.

Meanwhile his mother wrote loving letters from Italy, anxious for his welfare, always addressing him as "Dear Boy" or "Dear One". Her letters were colourful, and often illustrated with her expressively clever little sketches or amusing anecdotes of her insect discovery experiences. Once while travelling through Italy, she found a locust, half frozen with cold by a railway cutting and carried it a day and night in a lozenge box borrowed from a fellow traveller – much to her husband Jack's disgust – across Italy where she released it on a warm rock. "There he lifted his wings in quick rotation and blessed and praised the God of sunshine. He was lovely," she wrote, "and we both quite enjoyed him, and so left him to find a wife in the ruins of ancient Girgaite instead of in a dull old railway cutting."<sup>2</sup>

In a letter from Italy, dated 12 December, 1913, following a visit from her son, she wrote: "Jack has just had a letter from Frank Pryor in which he says he has just read 'Peter's gruesome storey' (sic) and does not like it – but says 'it is well written'. We shall have to content ourselves with that, as I don't see how anyone can 'like it'!! I hope the poor *English Review* will not be damned on your account!"<sup>3</sup> As in all her letters to Grant Watson she shows much affection and concern for his welfare, particularly following the disastrous trip to India and loss of Ida: "Dear One, your letter was balm to both our hearts – come again as soon as you can. Your room will be always ready and remember there are two. When the time comes may it be soon and may you be guided to the rightest of right women. Bless you dear. Mother. p.s. A hideous calendar from Janet just arrived."<sup>4</sup> The contrast in the p.s. is

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<sup>2</sup> Letter from Grant Watson's mother, then in Italy, dated 27 Jan., 1907.

<sup>3</sup> Ditto, 12 Dec., 1913.

<sup>4</sup> Ditto, 15 Jan., 1913.

characteristic of all her interesting and lively letters showing very much an independent and original spirit.

More than once Grant Watson went to Florence to visit his parents. However, for him the beauties of Italy had lost their zest. He wondered how his parents could bear to stay in a city, so stale, flat and unprofitable. In the dim interiors of the churches he found a departing piety, to which he was not quite insensible. He always returned to his attic in Chelsea, to the fog-laden atmosphere of the Thames Embankment, to his sixpenny meals and to the finishing of his book.

At that time he had the good fortune to be taken by Norman Douglas to meet Joseph Conrad at his home in Kent. He had long had the greatest admiration for Conrad's novels and short stories, and had tried to model his style on Conrad's. He was introduced as an admirer and the meeting may have ended there had Grant Watson not had the courage to say he had just finished his first novel and to ask if Conrad would look at it. Describing Conrad's response, he wrote: "He looked at me as though seeing me for the first time, and not much relishing the sight. Suddenly he grunted, 'Yes you may send it along.'" Two days later Grant Watson received the following short note: "Dear Mr. Watson, Just a note to say the MS reached me safely and has been read once, you shall hear more before very long. Our united regards, sincerely Conrad."<sup>5</sup>

Conrad gave it seven readings and enlisted the opinion of a close neighbour called Norwood, a Cambridge man. Both devoted considerable time to it, and in a long letter Conrad commented favourably on the manuscript, concluding by writing: "Nothing but the conviction that you were fundamentally worthy of it could have induced us to give your prose that detailed, I may say meticulous examination." He ended his long letter by inviting Grant Watson to visit him and his Cambridge friend to go through the notes they had made on the manuscript.<sup>6</sup>

Grant Watson was received in the kindest manner by Conrad, his wife and Norwood. They lunched and during the conversation they talked of his stories. Grant Watson told Conrad he had read all his published work and was asked which he liked best, to which he replied, 'The Secret Sharer'. Conrad seemed pleased. "Ah that story – I wrote it for myself, I am glad you liked it."<sup>7</sup>

After lunch going through thirty-one pages of notes in Conrad's study was rewarding but one piece of advice hit Grant Watson hard. Conrad and Norwood wanted him to rewrite the whole thing as a shorter story of 40,000 words. Thoughts of his money running out and difficulty in getting published at that length worried him and he was stale to the book and

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Conrad, short note to Grant Watson, reprinted in *But To What Purpose*, p. 148.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Conrad, extract from letter to Grant Watson dated 2 Sept., 1913, reprinted in *But To What Purpose*, p. 149. See Appendix at end of this chapter for copy of letter in full.

<sup>7</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, p. 150. 'The Secret Sharer' by Joseph Conrad, is a short story dealing with recognized 'mysterious similitude' physical and circumstantial between the two main characters, rather than questions of identity. It has been likened to Alfred Deakin's story, 'The Theatre', a Gothic tale written in 1888. See Al Gabay, *Voices*, vol. IV no. 2, Winter 1994, Nat. Lib. Aust., p. 24.

eager to be engaged on further ventures. A few days later Duckworth informed him they were prepared to publish the book. He had it back for correction but left it essentially as it was.

The meeting with Conrad, however, produced a great change in his life. Conrad's attitude towards literature impressed him deeply. There was no question but that he took his latter-day profession very seriously. "Literature, I could feel," wrote Grant Watson, "the work of the artist, came first, and the other residue of life, could take second place. And as I saw him so trenchant, so vivid and so masculine, he conquered me by his example." The minus side of that addition was not seen until years later when he read Mrs Conrad's extraordinarily penetrating and most feminine book, *Conrad and His Circle* (1935), after which he saw Conrad as "a courteous monument of granite egoism". So he wrote in *But To What Purpose*:

I followed a great example though a false one, and soon persuaded myself that my work as a writer was to be a justification for my continued existence. Because of the wreck of my past, nothing else was to matter now. I believed that I had within me an infinite store of the creative urge, not guessing that this fount was sprung from bitterness and frustration, as is so often the case when simple normal springs have been turned back upon themselves. I felt, if I had been articulate at that time to express my feelings that I would squeeze my poison herbs and make from them a balsam. I would speak through the mouth of my wound, and little did I care whether other people might approve of such outpourings. I had my task, like an obsession, it was fixed for many years. Like Idion I embraced a phantom and like Idion was tied to my own wheel. My interview with Conrad and Norwood, the one so vital and urgent, the other so gravely critical, gave me an erroneous idea of my own importance, for the compliment that they had paid me, outweighed what might have worked for humility from showing up of faults.<sup>8</sup>

However, Grant Watson's first book came out with unexpected success and received favourable reviews in both England and America. Film rights were contracted and a film produced and made by Waldorf Photoplays, Inc. in 1919. Directed and written by David Fischer, and based on the novel by E. L. Grant Watson, it starred Mr Fischer, Dixie Lee and Arthur Behrens. Some of the feature was shot on the Dry Tortugas in the Bahamas. Besides *Variety* the film was also reviewed in early August, 1919 by *Exhibitor's Trade Review*,

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<sup>8</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 151.



*Motion Picture News*, *Motion Picture World* and *Wid's Film Daily* and by *The New York Times* on 3 August.<sup>9</sup>

In 'To This End' Grant Watson described the plot for the book *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914) as being based on his experiences at Bernier Island in Shark's Bay:

a brutal story of two men, a doctor of a Lock Hospital, and a stockman, and a matron, who was the 'used-up' mistress of the doctor. At the finish the doctor is murdered by the stockman, who is accepted, blood stained and quick from the murder, by the terrified woman. This was a near picture of the actual happenings on the island, when the two men stalked, and shot at one another, and were only prevented from murder by the bold intervention of my colleague Radcliffe Brown. These were disguised reflections, and indeed, all my subsequent novels played on inner themes; they were excretions of pain, powerful and unpleasant. They got full meed of praise from reviewers, but were too stark, and lacking in any sort of covering for the bones and blood of life, to be popular.<sup>10</sup>

At this time Grant Watson felt all his previous life pile up in a wave of emotion, adding to his inner turmoil of, as he described it, having fallen over a cliff and been killed, but yet remained strangely alive. Following his despairing journey to India, the hypertensions of the erratic life he had been leading on his return, brought him to a nursing home early in 1914 with what the doctors described as a nervous breakdown. He was gradually assisted in recovery by a Dr Wingfield who helped him to overcome sleeplessness and who preached to him his philosophy of complete atheistic pessimism – "Man's life is governed by accident."<sup>11</sup> This philosophy appears in Grant Watson's novel *The Partners* where Vera, looking back on her recent marriage to the wealthy but coarse Tim Lawson, feels that all that had happened to her was like an accident and yet inevitable, not to be avoided. She remembers how she had been told by a gipsy that she was a woman to whom many accidents might happen.

In his talks with Dr Wingfield, Grant Watson mentioned his belief in reincarnation but Dr Wingfield had only a pessimistic view on the subject. "Such theories are but sad fallacies to make life more tolerable, when it is really intolerable!"<sup>12</sup> he said. This deeply pessimistic view Grant Watson found, strangely enough, helpful. He found in it a kind of tonic which made him feel that if he were to start again he would start with no illusions. He did not share

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<sup>9</sup> A letter dated 1 March 1990 from Joel J. Raine, a library assistant at Louis B. Mayer Library, American Film Institute (AFI), informed Paul Brennan of Primavera Press that the film is listed in the AFI Catalogue but that it had not been possible to locate it. It was distributed by the World Film Corp., which was soon bought by the Republic Distributing Corporation. Some of this company was bought by the Select Pictures Corporation, which went bankrupt in 1923. This company was jointly owned by Lewis Selznick and Adolph Zukor, so there is a small possibility of the film being in the archives of the studios they later founded, Laird International and Paramount. It seems possible, therefore, that with some further efforts the film may be located.

<sup>10</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', unpub. autob., ch. 7, p. 118.

<sup>11</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

Dr Wingfield's views and never gave up the beliefs which seemed to him he had had since he had been born and were, indeed, even strengthened by the juxtaposition of Dr Wingfield's alleged lack of faith.

When sufficiently recovered, Grant Watson returned to Cambridge hoping to find some biology pupils and so be able to keep himself for a time until he regained his strength. He was able to occupy the rooms at Granchester of Rupert Brooke who was abroad for the summer term. During his return to Cambridge, it soon became evident to him that he was barely successful in making sufficient pounds to keep him in board and lodging and also that he had lost the verve and spirit to coach pupils for the Tripos. During his years of absence in Australia, and elsewhere, he felt he had lagged behind the standard of necessary proficiency. However, there was positive achievement in the renewal of his friendship with G. Lowes Dickinson who knew his story and offered a charity and sympathy free from any flavour of pity or condescension. Frequently, Grant Watson was invited to join him in the Fellows' Garden at Kings College where with the sheer lightness and staid gravity of his spirit he revealed a caring friendship which to Grant Watson proved both so rare and uplifting.

Another friendship which grew and prospered from early school days was with the poet Feri Bekassy, who was in his second year at Kings. He was a lovable and stimulating character with a great sense of fun. Also, at this time, Grant Watson was shown much kindness from many other men and women and was grateful for their "undeserved toleration". At the end of the summer he travelled with Bekassy to Switzerland, where he joined his parents who had given up their villa in Florence and were making their way by stages back to England. In Lucerne they heard of the murder of the Archduke Ferdinand at Sarajevo. Bekassy became surprisingly excited. Grant Watson described his reaction:

"As a good European," he said at length, "I, of course deprecate political murders. They are altogether wrong but – but as a Hungarian, nothing could please me better. The Archduke Ferdinand was the one man who could prevent the Hungarians taking the leading role in the Dual-Monarchy. Now that he is dead you will see that Hungary will lead. Count Tiza will know what to do now."<sup>13</sup>

Feri went on to tell about Count Tiza, the greatest statesman in Europe, and a personal friend of his father's. "There will be war", he said and next day left for England to collect two brothers and two sisters who were being educated there. Grant Watson went to see him off and remembered his saying, "I don't mind so much being wounded, but I don't want to be

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 156.

killed, I have too many good friends".<sup>14</sup> He was killed in June, 1915, fighting against the Russians on the Galician front.

Bekassy's poems, written in English, were collected and published after his death. "They were," wrote Grant Watson, "evidence of a great promise unfulfilled. His many English friends felt something rich and precious had gone from their lives, as can be seen by an extract from a letter written by Grant Watson's mother (see footnote 14 this page).

On account of the French mobilization it was not possible to leave Switzerland for some time. When, finally, they were able to leave, the journey was slow. At Dole the station was converted into a hospital with wounded and dying men lying on bloodstained beds. There they waited for many hours for a train which took them to Paris. Paris was empty, even the waiters had gone from the hotels and there were no trains to the coast. Finally, they were allowed to proceed very slowly. At Boulogne there was the fantastic sight of thousands of abandoned motor cars, an English steamer with guns on her decks, talk of submarines – and at last Folkestone and "the illusive feeling at the touch of English soil, that everything was almost as it had been". Grant Watson wrote of this period:

The fact of that first great war was hard for our peacetime psychology, and although I may have intellectually apprehended Nietzsche's prophecies concerning the dark things that were coming to Europe, I had no more preparedness than anyone else for this systematised killing. We had lived so long in the sunlight we were not able to see the shadow. If I had been as brave and strong-minded as I would have liked to have been, I would, at that time, have been a conscientious objector, but I was neither brave nor strong-souled.<sup>15</sup>

He went to join up but the doctors would not pass him, so soon after his severe breakdown, and he was advised to recuperate in the country. He did go to the country for a short while before presenting himself to the local practitioner who looked at him, and said "he would do" and wished him luck giving him a certificate stating that he had passed a medical inspection.

Grant Watson spent eighteen months in camp in a yeomanry regiment. The army life, though never congenial, improved his health enormously and he would no doubt have gone to the war if he had not received a letter from Clifford Dobell, who was in charge of Burroughs & Wellcome's Tropical Diseases Laboratory, asking him to join him in his work on diagnosing *Amoeba Histolitica*, a work which he said was of great national importance. Since Grant Watson had had experience in working with high-powered microscopes, would

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 157. Includes extract from letter from Grant Watson's mother re 'Ferries' death, written at 33 Strand on the Green and dated 31 August, 1915: "Oswald & Jo were here on Sunday. He told me of 'Ferries' death! He was killed immediately he went to the front – 3 other Bedalians were killed last week – Jock is in France and Roger has just joined. Alas, Alas for these young lives, such a wicked waste – poor Ferries – his last careless hours were spent with us, and his outlook on life was so bright and full of plans – I suppose he died fighting against England, how sorely against his will it must have been – Things seem to look very black all round. I wonder if our push has at length begun. May it be sharp and I trust short – that this senseless waste may be at length stayed."

<sup>15</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 159.

he join him? Grant Watson took the letter to his colonel who said he had better go. It was dull, exacting and tiring work, but he was glad to be in England and back in his Chelsea attic. He was amongst friends and since he still drew a sub-lieutenant's pay, was comparatively well off.

Away from the "hypnosis of army life", as he described it, "his inner life rose from its retreat". He went to the ballet performance of Stravinsky's *Sacred de Printemps* (1913) and was uplifted and agonised. He was again a frequent visitor to Muriel Draper's studio. Here Arthur Rubenstein, after hearing one playing of Stravinsky's ballet, was able to play on the piano many of the major themes. Grant Watson wrote:

I was amazed at his genius. I found him a simple, charming man yet one distressingly complex and enviable. Watching him and listening to his uninhibited talk, I began to remember episodes of my earlier lives. I was convinced I had lived many times, I recognized souls I had known before. These memories were always painful, yet afforded brilliant intervals from my present state of frustration.<sup>16</sup>

It was at this time he met Herbert Read, with whom he made the habit of lunching once a week. He invited Grant Watson to attend the Thursday meetings of the *Criterion*, where he met T. S. Eliot, who asked Grant Watson to review psychological books for his monthly publication. In this way Grant Watson contacted the minds of Freud, Adler and Jung, and most difficult of all, Wolfgang Köhler's *Philosophy of Gestalt*.

Wolfgang Köhler insisted throughout his life that the phenomenal world is for science the only world open to inspection and that the initial data of this world are *Gestalten* no matter from what angle or branch of science they may be reported.<sup>17</sup> It must have been a source of satisfaction in his later years for Köhler to note how pervasive this view had become, not only in science, but also in practical affairs. Doctors, economists, ecologists, conservationists and even those who bulldoze our landscape – some of them, at any rate – seem increasingly aware that an operation in one place is often a contradiction in terms, for any one place may be part of a larger area in which the operation will produce unexpected and sometimes disastrous results. *Die Physischen Gestalten* and the earlier book that soon became so popular, *The Mentality of Apes*<sup>18</sup> undoubtedly had a good deal to do in securing for Köhler his appointment in 1921 as Director of the Institute of Psychology in the University of Berlin. There Köhler, A brilliant lecturer, reigned supreme until he left Germany for good in 1935. At Köhler's Institute, he and his students published in their own journal, *Psychologische Forschung*, an astonishing number of studies, largely in the field of perception, that in a short

<sup>16</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', ch. 7, p. 150.

<sup>17</sup> *The Macquarie Dictionary* defines Gestalt (in psychology) as "an organized configuration or pattern of experiences or of acts. In more general terms, it defines gestalt as "form". Thus the *Gestalt* of a melody is distinct from the separate notes. See: Wolfgang Köhler, *The Task of Gestalt Psychology*, with an introduction by Carroll C. Pratt, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969.

<sup>18</sup> First German edition, *Intelligenzprüfungen und Anthropoiden*, published 1917.

period of time Gestalt psychology became known the world over. One of the marked contrasts between Gestalt and classical psychology may be seen in the treatment of perception. In the study of perception Gestalt psychology assigns only a minor role to sensations and meaning. In many ways it represents a critical reformulation of nativism, a view that would insist that in explaining psychological phenomena no appeal should be made to past experience until every other possibility has been exhausted.

For Grant Watson, Köhler's theory of perception would seem to have been of most interest. Trained as a naturalist and biologist, his perception of the Australian bush, as one example, demonstrated the clarity of his perception unclouded by any past experience. D. H. Lawrence's perception of the Australian bush, by contrast, was shadowed by his memories of England and unpleasant experiences he had during the war.

All the years he was writing, Grant Watson was reading voraciously, chiefly from German sources – Weiniger, Von Hauptman, Nietzsche, Goethe, Freud, Jung. These with his earlier readings of Whitman, Blake and William James' *Varieties of Religious Experiences* made a foundation for his work. Out of the adventures of his youth – boating expeditions, camping, sailing of rough seas and entomological activities – and with a high degree of sensitive awareness to nature's works, Grant Watson drew a sustenance that assured him of the spiritual quality of nature, that was, although he denied him in name, the assurance of the presence of God.

From my poisons I brewed my balsam and out of my failure came new sensibility, like Fechner, after his blindness and starvation, I saw the vegetable kingdom in a new way. Flowers and leaves hinted at compelling secrets, and, on occasions, the woodlands flung vaporous torches of flames up into the over-arching sky. So in some degree, I began to find what was really my inner life.<sup>19</sup>

In October 1918, Grant Watson's mother died after a long, wearying illness. She was ready for death and looked forward to a more unhampered life to come. "She had been growing thinner and frailer for many years," wrote Grant Watson, "and her illness was a slow ordeal, in which she had opportunity to see death coming near, and to make her adjustment for the adventure into the unknown." In *But To What Purpose*, he made some estimate of his relationship with his mother.

My mother gave me too much of her life to allow me to let go easily of her influence, when I ought to have been finding my own way to reality. Yet she had

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<sup>19</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', ch. 7, p. 124. Gustav Theodor Fechner, 1801–87, Leipzig, attempted, as a psychologist and philosopher, to adjust idealistic philosophy to nineteenth-century science; all branches of science should, according to him, be incorporated in metaphysics. He rejected the notion of an *a priori* concept of God, and sought to replace it by a pragmatic notion of God as we sense him in the world and within us. Source: Henry and Mary Garland (eds), *The Oxford Companion to German Literature*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 220–21.

— in no small or selfish manner. Always she had urged me to be free of her when it was a question of mere travelling in space or time. She sent me God-speed to Australia, and had seemed to open every door, yet by the innate force of personality she had impressed upon me *her* way of life, so that for a long while I was living (with inner rebellion) the life which she had thought right for me, rather than discover, for myself, what was my own.<sup>27</sup>

Grant Watson recognized these cardinal facts and that in so far as she had been, through her very virtues, this brake on his development, he had resented her. Yet though he was conscious of this, his earlier feelings of admiration, gratitude and reverence remained.

He remembered his mother as a great naturalist. She had a loving eye for all natural manifestations, and an appreciation for their qualities, sensing intuitively something beyond them that gave them significance. He saw her as a Platonist, regarding the things visible as expressions of an unknown invisible. And from her Grant Watson had absorbed these same qualities, as has been demonstrated in his writings.

Nature for her was sacramental and symbolic, and was linked with the mind of God, which created it. For this reason Grant Watson believed that she repudiated the authoritarian deity, so often preached in the churches just as he himself did. Churches were for her places of suffocation. Poets and scientists, she believed, were the true prophets of God.

She had her ideas as to what sort of life her son should lead which he admitted was a good, thoroughly sane idea, but not necessarily his idea. As a result the struggles between them were often intense, and more so because of their deep affection.

Grant Watson remembered his mother as never having a timid reaction to any situation, as she demonstrated during the zeppelin raids over London. Although she was an invalid at the time and had a nurse in attendance, she refused to move from her bed and it was she who looked after the nurse during the raids.

For the last ten years of her life she suffered from an extreme thinness and frailty due to some fault in her metabolism. Grant Watson recalled an incident towards the end of her life when she was alone in their house in Strand on the Green accompanied by a small maid of fifteen. A man came to the door demanding money, and managed to get his foot against the door so that it could not be closed. This was towards the last months of the war when policemen were not very common, even in London's streets. Drawing on that reserve of energy which seemed always available in an emergency, she sprang at the man and seized his nose, giving it a sharp twist so that he not only withdrew his foot, but fell backwards down the steps in a cloud of curses. The door was shot and bolted.

Grant Watson believed that to a large extent she dominated both his stepfather and himself. Once a certain clinch of opposing wills was established, there was nothing to be done but to give way. This he saw as a fault in his mother's character and he believed the

<sup>27</sup>

Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 163.

origin was in her nature which was essentially religious, but this religious impulse had been checked in her youth by the imposition of a false teaching.

"Before her death", Grant Watson wrote, "all signs of the earlier disharmony fell away, and just as she had never been afraid of life she had no fear of death. She was assured of immortality. Death was a function of life. Death was life's high meed, I believe that her love of life brimmed to overflowing as death drew near. For my stepfather and myself, I believe, our position, in face of the inscrutables, was made stronger, we received a parting gift which was to remain with us further on the way."<sup>21</sup>

Grant Watson remembered with gratitude the way his mother plunged him, in his youthful years, into the writings of such authors as Emerson,<sup>22</sup> Walt Whitman, Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis and James Hinton. "In these she found and conveyed to me a positive view of life. What was negative in her influence was her horror for the church, and under the heading of the Church was for me, included for a long time, the writings of the gospel. These were carelessly included under the heading of churchiness."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp. 162-67.

<sup>22</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882. American philosophic writer and essayist.

<sup>23</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 166.



## Appendix

Capel House  
Orlestone,  
Nr. Ashford.

Sept. 2nd, 1915.

My dear Mr. Watson,

You must forgive me all the anxieties which you say you suffer. My health had something to do with the delay, but not much. What looks to you as delay has been for the most part a very earnest consideration of your work, following upon the first reading of it immediately on its receipt.

It would be easy to write at once a complimentary letter. And what's more with complete sincerity. But I don't think you sent me the MS. only in order to hear compliments – however well deserved. You did not strike me as that sort of man. No greater proof could I give of the impression produced by your work than to take it seriously.

It had seven readings – not all by me alone, however. I perceived at once (and with great sympathy) that your work was concerned with the right things, but that you did not always express them in the right way. To tell you this, and leave it at that, would not have been treating your work with the consideration which is indubitably due to it. I took into my council a neighbour of mine, a Cambridge man, a great reader with a profound knowledge of literature, in whose judgment I have an absolute confidence; a man whose critical instinct is of marvellous justness. I know this because I have seen it proved many times. You may take it as evidence of your work's internal worth that he had devoted ten days to it. During the last week I went twice to see him exclusively with the purpose of talking you over, MS. in hand. On the second visit we settled on the remarks which in our joint judgment should be made, and we wrote them down.

I assure you that we approached that self-imposed task with all respect and tenderness due to your sincerity and your talent. And indeed it could not be otherwise. That sort of thing is not undertaken for fun. Nothing but the conviction that you were fundamentally worthy of it could have induced us to give your prose that detailed, I may say meticulous, examination. It is done, and the question for us now is whether you care for the ordeal (for it is one) of having the result put before you. Will you come down here one day and meet both of us, two

sincere well-wishers, who will appear to you no doubt a pair of cold-blooded brutes, or do you simply want the MS back with or without the notes?

Whatever you desire, believe in my most friendly sentiments.

Yours

Joseph Conrad

My wife and boys send their kind regards.

(Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, p. 149.)

# Chapter Seven

## Marriage, Writings, and the Enduring Triangle<sup>1</sup>

The following June, 1919, Grant Watson met his wife to be, Katharine Hannay. At that time she was the organizing secretary of the Arts League of Service which in time evolved into the Arts Council of Great Britain.

Born in London 6 December 1894, Katharine was the youngest of three children. Her father, a lawyer and patron of the arts, was financially well off; her mother, Alice Howard, although she had no formal education in art, had a natural talent which her husband eventually recognised by setting up a studio for her at their home.<sup>2</sup>

In 1901, the family acquired a villa in Dieppe, the centre of an English settlement, and until 1914 they moved frequently between London and Dieppe. Here in Dieppe the Hannays, with the handsome, cultured father and the beautiful, talented mother were frequently visited by other residents including many authors and celebrities. They shared a beach with other English families, including Winston Churchill and his wife. Diving from the jetty, Katharine once landed on top of Churchill and for a minute feared she had drowned him.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Extracts from Katharine Hannay's unpublished autobiography 'Between Two Worlds' have been reproduced in *Westerly*, no. 1, Autumn 1994, under the title 'Katharine Grant Watson, the Artist's Wife: Portrait of an English Lady' by Elizabeth Perkins. Although incomplete and in part paraphrased and interpreted by Professor Perkins, we are given an important insight into the relationship of Katharine and Peter Grant Watson. Katharine Grant Watson's autobiography 'Between Two Worlds' is held with restricted access in the Department of English, James Cook University, North Qld. Originally it was written in order that Dorothy Green might draw on it for her planned biography of Grant Watson. Following Dorothy Green's death it was the intention of Josephine Spence, the daughter of Grant Watson and Katharine Hannay that the autobiography should be published. To date this has not eventuated. The present author sought access to the autobiography in the initial stage of writing this biography of E. L. Grant Watson but was denied access on the grounds of its anticipated publication. As a consequence it has been necessary to rely on Elizabeth Perkins' publication of extracts from this valuable source, published in *Westerly*, no. 1, Autumn 1994 and originally given as the Dorothy Green Memorial Lecture by her at the 1993 Conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature.

Bracketed numbers refer to the five typescript volumes of Katharine Grant Watson's autobiography 'Between Two Worlds'. Her story occupied much of Dorothy Green's thinking in the year before her death. When Grant Watson died in 1970 Dorothy Green had already sought permission to write his biography. Partly to assist in this project, Katharine compiled an account of her own life which she called 'Between Two Worlds'. She prefaced Book 2 with lines from Byron, 'Between Two Worlds life hovers like a star, / Betwixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge'. The autobiography was completed in 1977 in five typescript volumes comprising over one hundred thousand words. These volumes, the taped conversations between Katharine and Josephine Spence, Grant Watson's daughter, and several thousand letters and documents from the Grant Watson papers, temporarily held at James Cook University, were Elizabeth Perkins' sources.

<sup>2</sup> E. Perkins, *Westerly*, no. 1, Autumn 1994, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, Perkins, p. 8.

In 1909 when Katharine was fourteen, she met a young artist, Noel Simmons, who became a frequent visitor to the Hannay household at Dieppe, and although thirteen years older, he was apparently greatly attracted to Katharine.<sup>4</sup>

Because of her busy social life and practising her art, Mrs. Hannay had little time to take care of three children, but was fortunate in having a kind friend who took great care of the children and was affectionately referred to by Katharine as "Aunt Eleanor". However, Katharine also had a loving relationship with her mother.

During the war years Katharine experienced a very different kind of life from the "luxury and beauty" in which Noel once told her she had been brought up. Her first assignment was with the Forage Department visiting remote farms to persuade reluctant farmers to sell their fodder to the army. Travelling by Douglas motor-cycle loaned by a friend, she experienced many situations which were difficult and uncomfortable for a young woman, especially at that time.<sup>5</sup>

Her first meeting with Grant Watson was at a lecture she was giving, supported by W. L. George and Wyndham Lewis, on the aims of the Arts League. He was impressed by her lecture and afterwards they talked together.

"You made a good speech you must be an idealist," he told her. Katharine explained that she did not really believe the league would succeed, but that "somehow, as a sceptic, I think I can put the things far better than I could if I were a dedicated enthusiast – if you are detached and reasonable, if you can see both sides, you may be more efficient than if you are blind with enthusiasm". The idea seemed to disturb Peter, who thought it "cynical", but Katharine's ability to assess fairly matters with which she had little emotional sympathy was to play an important part in their relationship.<sup>6</sup>

In his unpublished autobiography, 'To This End', Peter Grant Watson wrote, "I liked her and felt there was some undefined quality that I could only think of as the blue of a summer sky. She was going to be in Wales with her sister, and as I was also going to be in Wales with my step-father I suggested that we should meet, and walk amongst the mountains. A few days later I sent a telegram to that effect."<sup>7</sup>

They met at Aberystwyth, and since Peter had his bicycle and could not leave it behind, they set off to walk with the bicycle, over Plynlimmon. "I forget much of this adventure," he continued, "only remembering that she walked beside me as I pushed the bicycle over the heathery and mossy ridge of Plynlimmon and down the marshy side of the descent towards Carno."

It was a considerable walk, and the presence of the bicycle, so unlikely on a mountain-top, brought a comradely feeling between us. I told her, I think, a good deal of my story, part as we walked, part at Carno, and part later at Rhayader. She

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, 'To This End', unpub. autobiography, ch. 7, p. 130.

told me she had been about to become engaged to an artist, whom she had known since she was fourteen but he had died of war wounds. We were both feeling our losses and both attracted to each other.<sup>8</sup>

At Carno they found a pleasant little inn, with many hams hanging in the kitchen. They each slept in double bedrooms with large beds. His sheets were damp and so were hers. They confessed after they were married they would have liked another human body to warm and dry them.<sup>9</sup>

In an extract taken from Katharine Hannay's unpublished autobiography Katharine gave her version of their first meeting:

In Wales fate threw them together alone for a few days. Peter told her about the expedition he made in 1910-1912 to Western Australia with Radcliffe Brown and about his love for a woman, some eight years older than he. She was unhappily married and a brave attempt to leave her husband for Peter had disastrously failed. All his letters to her since had been returned to him unopened and marked 'dead'. This had precipitated Peter's breakdown from which, even then, he had barely recovered.<sup>10</sup>

Katharine felt that the story she had to tell him was less significant: her early life in the cultural circles of London society, her war work on English farms and the death from war wounds of the man who had wanted to marry her.

The following I have purposely recorded in Katharine's language because of the frank simplicity in which she made the suggestion that they marry and her account of his reply.

"I have always been very much against the institute of marriage," he said. "A prison ... you know what Bernard Shaw says about it: but I want children... I want little girls so I can teach them to swim and read Shakespeare with them."<sup>11</sup> (2:188) On the evening of their second day, he explained how his mother taught him to love living things, and to look at them "with eyes that could see". "We had shared it together, she and I," Peter said. "There is so much in sharing things ... did you know that?" Katharine felt as if she were about to jump off a cliff:

"Do you think it possible that you and I might try to share things?" she said.

"How do you mean?"

"To share life together."

Katharine continued with her own account of that moment:

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, Watson, ch. 7, p. 129.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 130.

<sup>10</sup> E. Perkins, *Westerly*, no. 1, Autumn 1994, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.6.

"Lots of women have wanted to marry me." He said this with an earnestness which absolved it from its naivete. "But I couldn't do it. Some were intimate friends, and you are a stranger, and yet I think we might."

"You don't think it is just because you don't know me?"

"No" and now he was regarding me with that desert look, "No, there is something blue about you."

"Blue?"

"Yes, you are like a veronica – you know that little weed, a clear blue that grows in the grass."<sup>12</sup>

"It was nice to be associated with that little flower, pervasive though it could be especially as I felt I was being a very forward and predacious weed."

(1:195)

The story of this "very forward and predacious weed" suggests that there seldom was a more inaccurate self-description.<sup>13</sup> of this remarkable woman whose life story before and throughout her marriage to Grant Watson is told in her unpublished autobiography 'Between Two Worlds', a fascinating and frank account of her life and how she coped, with love and devotion, in a marriage with Grant Watson which she willingly shared for so many years with the figure of Ida, the woman Grant Watson could never forget.

Grant Watson's account of their first time together continues with the walk and bicycling through Wales. On the third day they reached Rhayader and visited the beautiful reservoir, which reminded Peter of the fairy story lake in Grimms' tale, *Two King's Children* where the wife of the Green King leaves three magic walnuts in tufts of rushes for his runaway daughter – nuts that were to stand her in good stead. They talked of fairy stories and biology and the great mystery of life which Peter acknowledged they didn't know much about, and on the third evening they arranged to marry. Within three weeks they were married in the "dreary little Registry Office at Hampstead. Friends on both sides foretold that the marriage could not last more than six months," Grant Watson wrote in his diary, "because we were so different, and so we were. Ours was a stony road, but there were many interludes of brilliant sunshine. We are still happily together after more than fifty years. To my wife I owe it all." <sup>14</sup>

They settled in their first home in Dorset, renting two empty coastguard cottages for 10/- a week while waiting for a more suitable home. Dorset, at that time, was attractive with not many cars, caravan sites or tourists.

In 1919 it was extremely difficult to find a home. They pedalled their bicycles from North Wales to Cornwall, from Cornwall to Norfolk and back again to Dorset. Finally the Grant Watsons found an old farmhouse in Dorset. It proved to be sunless and damp so within a year they moved to Tenterden in Kent. Here they lived for several years getting to know, as

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', ch. 7, pp. 130, 132.

time passed, some of the quality of that wild unspoiled countryside that borders Romney Marsh.

Although his wife was a London girl, Grant Watson felt she had a more sensitive reaction to life than he. He knew the countryside better than she, and knew the names of things she did not know, but she looked at plants and animals in a more intimate way. "Together we learnt a good deal about our English country, and that rich inheritance which comes out of the past."<sup>15</sup>

All the time they were exploring the countryside and learning to know and love it, Grant Watson was writing his books, not about England or his present life, but about the Australian bush. "These books were not very successful," he wrote, "nor were they altogether failures."<sup>16</sup> He found publishers in England and in the United States, and in Scandinavian countries; and reviews were favourable. A small income allowed them bicycles but no motor car. He sometimes went to London and was persuaded by a friend, Mrs Dawson Scot, to join the Pen Club where, she told him, "he would meet all the important people". This was true, he thought, but at the same time he did not feel at ease while eating noisy and, for him, expensive dinners. Perhaps, he told himself, his view of his profession was "a bit distorted and high falutin", for in his writing he sought to compensate for the accidents and frustrations which had been his fate. This, he thought, gave to some of his work a subjective quality, which though satisfying to him did not particularly interest other people.<sup>17</sup>

Grant Watson returned home, resigned to his "all-too-vegetable country life", and by such gestures was thrown back even more into the region of myths in which he moved at that time. In retrospect, he believed he was mistaken. He should have learned to grow a shell and taken the Pen Club as a small sample of the world, a useful platform on which to meet publishers. The loss, he felt, was his.<sup>18</sup>

In 1922, their eldest daughter, Bridget, was born and spent the first year of her life at Tenterden. Here she sat in the pram under the ripening pears and learnt to crawl amidst the bush grasses under the cherry tree.

To Dymchurch they went for her to see the sea and Peter marvelled at the ring-plover catching three to four fish at the one time and passing them on to the female in mid-air. They enjoyed the Kentish seaboard as it was then and the beautiful inland of the Marsh, the wheatfields, the larks and the continuous call of cuckoos, the dykes of clear water and lush green herbs, the long grasses and the drinker caterpillars, all contributing to the fairy quality of the place. Whether the shy and undefinable things that then were there will have survived the minefields, the barbed wire, the tank traps and the aerodromes, he could not venture to guess. "As we grow older, in our experience of a mechanised age, England grows older too,

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<sup>15</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, ch. XXII, p. 168.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 170.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 171.

and changes with her age. Doubtfully one wonders whether she will ever change back again."<sup>19</sup>

On their wedding night Peter had given Katharine a copy of his novel *Deliverance* (1918). He had told Katharine that if she read the book she should know that he was now free of the relationship with Ida. "You will know that I am *free*. This book will prove it to you, that is the meaning of the title, that is the reason why I wrote the book." Reluctantly, on that night, Katharine read the book in bed:

As I read the effect it had on me was the opposite of what he had hoped for, but I did not tell him. It did not convey deliverance: it conveyed the impression of a deep, ineffaceable relationship.<sup>20</sup>

(3:203)

The book centres around the principal character, Susan, and her relationship with her father. Susan is characterised, it appears, as Grant Watson's ideal woman. In fact, it seems that she is based on the character of Ida. Susan Zalesky and her younger sister are stranded in India with their mother when their Polish father, Paul Zalesky, deserts them. The mother dies and the children are taken to England and cared for by their aunt. Susan grows up very much a creature of the woods where she spends much of her free time roaming with her young companions. In her roamings she meets Tom Northwood, a character taken from a youthful companion of Grant Watson's of whom he wrote in *Departures* (1946): "There are people who are like objects in nature and my school-time companion, Spotter, was of this kind. He was as consciousnessless as a mole or rabbit or a cat might be."<sup>21</sup>

When the girls are teenagers, Susan's father returns on the scene, penniless and repentant and somehow wins over the aunt and his daughters so that he is permitted to stay with them. He undertakes Susan's education in literature and the arts and is greatly attracted to his beautiful daughter and her eagerness for intellectual development. However Paul Zalesky, unable to retain stability, eventually becomes involved with a girl from the village and robs the aunt in order to take off with the girl. The shame of the episode strikes Susan hard. She feels as if some accident has happened to her own spirit as well as sympathy for her aunt. Not long after the father's departure, Susan meets Tom Northwood again who has returned from college and later travel and work in the wilds of northern Canada. He has restored an old monastery on the cliff tops where he lives. Their mutual love of nature and the woods brings them together again. Tom knows he wants to marry Susan but at first she resists. She cannot bear to be touched, she hates the idea of marriage, of being possessed, although she loves Tom whose understanding is broad, and he convinces her she will always belong to herself.

As can be seen this follows the events of the relationship of Grant Watson and Ida related in his unpublished autobiography 'To This End'. Eventually Susan and Tom marry

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 173.

<sup>20</sup> E. Perkins, *Westerly*, no. 1, Autumn 1994, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Departures*, London: Pleiades Books Ltd, 1948, p. 15.



and after a year, travel to London where Tom wishes to study art. Here Susan meets her father again. He now has a job, has given up the girl and plans to pay back Susan's aunt for the valuables he stole from her. Still loving his beautiful daughter, Paul Zelesky is pleased to see, as he thinks, she is still untouched by love for Tom. He becomes a frequent member of their circle of artist friends and when Tom is attracted away from Susan to live with an artist woman friend who has fallen in love with him, Susan's father is available to take Susan and her baby daughter to live with him in Paris.

Katharine's unpublished autobiography, 'Between Two Worlds' (1977) contains more details of Ida and her relationship with her father. Ida Caroline Josephine Da Silva Le Geyt was born 19 March, 1877, the second of three daughters of an Anglo-Indian father and a mother from a long-established Portuguese-Jewish family from the Channel Islands. Ida's mother died when she was three years old. Her father apparently deserted the family before this and returned to India where he twice remarried. "As a ward in Chancery, belittled by other girls because her school fees were not paid, Ida did not have a happy childhood, but she enjoyed several memorable holidays in France with her grandmother."<sup>22</sup> According to Katharine's autobiography, before Ida was sixteen she was raped by her father, either in India or England, and she apparently lived as his mistress for several years.<sup>23</sup>

The story *Deliverance* (1918) does not state the relationship reached this stage but Grant Watson creates a scenario where Susan, in spite of Paul's faults, has a sympathy for his weakness while admiring his intellectual accomplishments, which suggests that when she goes off to Paris to live with him, an incestuous relationship could develop.

Visiting her sister in India, Ida, then eighteen, met and married a man some twenty years older, James Bedford of the Indian Civil Service. Ida was extraordinarily beautiful, as can be seen in the portrait by Charles Condor painted in Paris in 1897 when she was about twenty years old. Katharine related that Peter's account was that Ida married Bedford because he promised to give money needed urgently for medical treatment for one of her sisters, who had tuberculosis. After the wedding, Ida told Bedford of her father's incestuous relationship with her and his reaction was as stated on a tape by Katharine:<sup>24</sup>

She innocently didn't expect him to mind, if he loved her. Well he minded. He was shockingly angry and I think he stormed off. He left her for several days, he stormed off into the jungle leaving her terrified and humiliated. And he came back, not, as she said, from love but from lust.<sup>25</sup>

(Tape 1).

Katharine described Bedford as an intensely unhappy man because he was also intensely jealous.

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<sup>22</sup> E. Perkins, *Westerly*, no. 1, Autumn 1994, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Tape 1 recorded by Katharine for Dorothy Green, Jan., 1979.

Her only protection was to remove herself from him, not physically but soulfully – she became frigid and frozen to him. She was polite. She ran his house, she bore his children, but she was not there with him at all and he found this unbearable.<sup>26</sup>

Katharine continued in her description of Bedford, "who," she wrote, "also involved himself in black magic in India, and it is possible that he was a man in whom the rational side had dangerously less than normal control. Nevertheless he was a very intelligent man with his own kind of integrity." Bedford was educated at Balliol under Jowett and before retiring from the Indian Civil Service in 1919 he refused to accept promotion and knighthood, because he was a strong Socialist.<sup>27</sup>

In her first year of life Bridget's health declined and she became a very ill child so that the Grant Watsons felt it necessary to move to London to be near medical assistance for her. However, after a short time they realized they hated living in a city and that one of the most essential bonds in their relationship was the shared appreciation of the English countryside.

Peter at this stage was becoming restless, asking himself what was he doing to justify existence? Not much it seemed to him – writing books which no large public was anxious to read, helping to look after a baby, cultivating a garden and appreciating the country scene. This might well have been enough, but life began to indicate, in various ways, that it was not. Although he was not ill in the true sense of the word, he felt he was ill enough to be uncomfortable. Feeling the need for change, he bought land and built a pleasant little house near Petersfield. Here he planted fruit trees and made a garden, and continued writing books. But yet – something was still wrong, "Everything ought to have been alright, but it wasn't."<sup>28</sup>

At about this time he came in contact with the ideas of Sigmund Freud and also those modified, even contradictory, ideas of his apostate disciple, Jung. And so he wrote: "In spite of the attractive little home in Petersfield, I began sniffing at the New Psychology."<sup>29</sup> In the course of time he came to hear of a practising psychologist who was presented in a most favourable light by Frances Cornford, an old friend from Cambridge days. At the age of thirty-eight Grant Watson became launched on a series of visits which were to last, on and off, for the better part of five years, radically altering his outlook. He turned to the reading of the Gospels for the first time and it seemed to him that the story there told was the story of man – the essential and ultimately inevitable development of his soul. Although he had read St. Luke for the Little-go, and had translated large portions of it from the Greek, he had been completely impervious to any significance; but now some few passages of the Gospel writings took on a most exciting meaning. He tried going to church once or twice, but in Church found nothing of that which he was seeking. In the Gospel writings themselves he

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 12. Tape 1 recorded by Katharine for Dorothy Green, Jan., 1979.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, 1946, p. 173.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 174.

found his inspiration. Here was something essential to the actual business of life. What the Church was making of it seemed to him "topsy-turvidom"<sup>30</sup>

His visits to his analyst took him to London twice a week. On the days he remained at home he continued with his writing. But in spite of the good wife, the comfortable home, the excursions to London, he was still, it appeared, "In the doldrums".<sup>31</sup>

At this time, 1926, their second daughter was born. Meanwhile Bridget's puzzling illness continued and Katharine, feeling that Peter's restlessness was not just due to the continuing illness of Bridget, learned from him that Ida and Bedford now lived at Hampstead. Peter had seen them in the distance and had written to Ida, but she still returned his letters with "Dead" written on them.<sup>32</sup>

In her autobiography Katharine wrote:

These two, Peter and Ida – so closely bound together by such affinities, were held apart by what was for him an intolerable barrier. From his story I knew that an almost fatal wound had been inflicted on him ... but I told myself they were both *still* alive. I thought of Noël, who had died while I was somehow unable to communicate ... but these two were *still alive*". "In Life Deliverance abides"<sup>33</sup>

(3:255)

Katharine saw that Peter, Ida, the sick Bridget and herself formed some kind of whole that had to be treated as one problem. But she wondered what renewed contact between Ida and Peter would mean for her:

Of one thing I was certain, I did not want to be possessive. What was the value of an enforced tie? What was the value of my experience over the loss of Noël if I had not learned to help with a yet living relationship? "I kept saying to myself, 'They are *both* alive.'<sup>34</sup>

(3:255)

Katharine wrote to Ida and received an immediate reply arranging to meet Katharine at the National Gallery. Katharine was seventeen years younger than Ida who was then in her early fifties. Katharine saw that she was still beautiful with her golden hair in the same thick knot Peter had known, but her iris-blue eyes, Katharine saw, had no life in them at all. While Katharine was asking Ida to renew contact with Peter, partly because she thought somehow it would help Bridget, she also found herself wishing urgently to help Ida. Ida said she could not meet with Peter but she gently offered a personal cheque, as she had money of her own,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 175.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> E. Perkins, *Westerly*, no. 1, Autumn 1994, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

to help pay for a good nurse for Bridget. Katharine accepted the cheque, feeling it would be too hurtful to refuse.<sup>35</sup>

Later Katharine wrote to Ida asking if she would visit Peter and Bridget. Ida came, a very quiet presence and after she had seen Bridget, Peter came in. In his unpublished autobiography, Grant Watson wrote:

When Ida arrived I did not see much change in her appearance although we had not met for fifteen years. Her hair was a shade darker, but no less abundant. Her expression was non-committal, but a bit tense. We talked for a time of my eldest daughter and her illness, and then Katharine withdrew. Alone, once more we were silent quite an appreciable time. With no reference to the past, no apologies or excuses, she took my hand, and remained silent; she then looked at me and smiled. I do not remember how our conversation went, only that I told her that I had not received her letter sent to the boat at Colombo. Things would have been different if I had. There was little constructive to say, and what there might have been, I did not know how to express. I found that the separation between us was even greater than before. Her husband was still alive and I was married. Yes, I might write to her, and even meet her on occasion. Katharine came back after allowing plenty of time, and we talked as three separate people. I felt perplexed and numb, only half aware of the conventions which held us apart, and of which we were a part.<sup>36</sup>

Thus began the triangle relationship that lasted for over thirty years until Ida's death in 1967 at the age of eighty-nine years. Peter and Ida met at regular intervals in tea-shops and other public places and later, after her husband's death, at the flat she shared with her daughter in London. When four-year-old Bridget was given a choice of names for her baby sister, she chose Josephine, one of Ida's names, and Ida became her godmother.

Peter and Katharine now looked forward to a more positive relationship with each other and with Ida. Peter assured Katharine: "Ida took nothing away from you Katharine," and Katharine, writing in her autobiography, agreed: "The truth is that we each gave, she and I, as time went on, what the other could not give, and Peter could take it all, and was hungry for more. His appetite for life, and especially for appreciation was insatiable. This, I think, was a protection against his oversensitivity."<sup>37</sup> (4:272)

During this period Grant Watson wrote *Shadow and Sunlight* (1920) and *The Desert Horizon* (1923). The first not such a good book in his opinion; the second, followed later by *Daimon* (1925) are two of his best. It is significant that Katharine found one of the difficulties in her early relationship with Peter, was that she was associated not with Ida but with his

<sup>35</sup> E. Perkins, *Westerly*, no. 1, Autumn 1994, p.

<sup>36</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', ch. 8, p. 141.

<sup>37</sup> E. Perkins, *Westerly*, no. 1, Autumn 1994, p. 15.

mother. His attitude towards her as a husband was influenced by the fact that somehow his mother got in the way, but not Ida, and she always thought it was Ida.<sup>38</sup>

An outside view of Peter Grant Watson and the triangle relationship is given by the poet, Kathleen Raine, in a letter to Dorothy Green dated 11 January, 1979. Meeting him at the Steiner Institute she remembered him:

As a tall, elegant, charming, already elderly man with his delightful speaking voice. I say 'elderly' but that was only in years, for my strongest impression of him then, which remains with me now, is of his youth of mind and youth of heart, reminiscent of Yeats's lines,

Saw I an old man young  
or young man old?

Mrs Ida Bedford, to whom he introduced me early in our acquaintance and who was some years older than Peter, had this same quality of youth, and seeing them, Peter and the woman he had loved all his adult life, with so much pain, and who had only in *her* old age accepted him fully, recalled Yeats's love for Maude Gonne, reflected in the lines

Old lovers yet may have all that time denied.

Those two tall, beautiful, refined people did not seem to be ageing, but travelling like the people in Plato's parable towards the dayspring of their youth, the soul growing, it is said, younger as the physical body ages. Both lived the life of the soul, both believed in reincarnation. Ida Bedford was more fully committed to the school of Rudolf Steiner than Peter.

Describing this love of Peter's as the central and determining experience of his life, Kathleen Raine portrayed the relationship as one of those rare instances of *Platonic* love which few in the present world are capable even of imagining. "As a love-story of old-age," she wrote, "I recall it as one of rare beauty". And in regard to Katharine, she observed:

However much Katharine may have suffered a sense of deprivation, all three seemed enriched by the significance of the level on which they had chosen to live. Companionship was, perhaps the basis of his marriage, which was also a most significant and living relationship.<sup>39</sup>

After Peter's death Kathleen Raine continued to correspond with Katharine, "who always seemed to have been reading the most interesting new books on philosophy and psychology, within the area of thought she shared with Peter."<sup>40</sup>

Letters from Ida written from the nursing home run by 'The Blue Nuns' of the Order of St. Joseph in Holland Park where she spent her last years also show reflections on the same

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Letter from Kathleen Raine to Dorothy Green, Jan. 11, 1979.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

subjects usually linked with nature, philosophy or the classics of literature. However, there were times when she expressed some concern for Katharine as in 1967 she wrote: "Can I help you to understand that it is quite impossible for me to talk about *us* as it would be equally impossible for me to talk to anyone about one's inner hopes and fears of the Cosmos . . . The most important point is that Katharine should not suffer more than I have already made her suffer by my mere existence. Some day she will understand and you too."<sup>41</sup> (4:290)

Although there were, naturally, some hurtful events in Peter's relationship with Ida, Katharine felt she herself had always understood, and that it was her "self-chosen destiny" to bear the relationship she did to both Ida and Peter. Peter looked rather sceptical when Katharine once suggested that theirs was an unusual relationship which an ordinary woman might not have accepted, but he admitted, "you are my best critic, better even than Ida."<sup>42</sup> (4:282) Katharine seldom accompanied Peter when he travelled to research his work, but she recalled a memorable visit to Fraser Darling who was deer- and bird-watching on Priest Island and Tannera off the west coast of Scotland. This resulted in the novel *Priest Island* (1940).

Bridget as she grew older was distressed by the presence of Ida in her father's life, and after adolescence was sometimes in conflict with Peter over events that were unhappy for Katharine. For Peter, the return of Ida into his life during the mid 1920s, the developing relationship between himself and Katharine and, not least, the course of psychotherapeutic sessions, combined to bring him a new life. So he wrote:

Like Fechner,<sup>43</sup> who had been an orthodox physicist and, in his way, a psychologist, I had become a visionary and a mystic, but unlike Fechner, the process had come to me not suddenly but gradually. My boyhood appreciation of nature was enormously enhanced, and not only the natural objects which are to be met everywhere, but men and women became more vivid and challenging. As my friend George Adams had suggested everything was changed by love. I became aware of the vast background to life. Chiefly through the loving kindness and generosity of my wife was my life renewed.<sup>44</sup>

Peter made regular visits to Ida at the nursing home at Holland Park, travelling from Petersfield to London by train on weekly visits, then as he grew older, fortnightly trips, taking her small gifts of flowers and fruit from his garden. On fine days they would go to the Holland Park gardens, taking their lunch and feeding crumbs to the tame robins, chaffinches and sparrows.

Their thoughts led them to speculations on extrasensory perception, and how could it be possible to measure the immeasurable? Visions and dreams, which themselves are immeasurable, are guides to thoughts that have never been wholly grasped. They are

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<sup>41</sup> E. Perkins, *Westerly*, no. 1, Autumn 1994, p. 17 (4:290).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15 (4:282).

<sup>43</sup> Gustav Theodor Fechner, psychologist and philosopher, 1801–87. *Source*: Henry and Mary Garland (eds), *The Oxford Companion to German Literature*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 220–21.

<sup>44</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', ch. 8, p. 143.

themselves clairvoyant perceptions. Grant Watson saw that in actual life clairvoyant perceptions have different values, and he recalled the clairvoyant perception of the unselfconscious primitive, such as he had met in the Australian bush amongst the Aborigines, whose famous bush-telegraph can send messages from Queensland to Western Australia almost instantaneously; and the clairvoyance of more sophisticated men, whose inner perceptions have endured and survived the material environment of our civilization.<sup>45</sup>

Peter seldom thought of Ida as constrained in spite of her being confined most of her time in a bed-sitting room at the nursing home. However, she was able to walk in the park and in a season after heavy rainfall she slipped and fell, breaking her hip, arm and collar-bone. From this accident she recovered in a remarkably short time and was later able to come with her daughter to stay at the inn at Steep and so to spend with Peter the last of their country expeditions. Peter believed she was then as happy as at any time in her life.

In the late winter of 1967 Ida died. She was eighty-nine years old. "I was not present when Ida died as only relations were admitted into the sickroom. We had promised each other to be present at the time of death". Peter received an invitation to the funeral and the Memorial Service at the Steiner Institute but decided not to go; instead at the time of the service he went to Steep Church, which was, fortunately, empty, and sat waiting.

At first there was no communication at all, but then, suddenly, I felt she had come out of the coma of death from what the Greeks thought of as 'the river of Lethe', forgetfulness. Our relationship was restored, and I was glad she was no longer in that confined room. Yeats was right when he affirmed: 'The things come after death.' I did not mourn, but because I did not mourn I was affected both physically and psychologically. With old age the ills of the flesh multiply and humiliate one to the dust; yet redemption abides in life. The locked casket of Life is unlocked by the key of Death.<sup>46</sup>

Again, he related his experiences with the Australian Aborigines and wrote:

An occult tradition lies behind the dogmas of all religions. The Aborigines of Australia, a most primitive people, have an elaborate metaphysic of secret names only spoken on rare occasions, of ghost ancestors whom they reverence and fear, and each man, when he has survived the ordeals of initiation, is accompanied by an invisible doppelganger.<sup>47</sup>

His meditations lead him to the theme of opposites in one of Karen Blixen's stories when she lets her beggar-man, the 'shadow' of the Prince of Teheran, say, as sage and prophet: "Life

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, ch. 14, p. 233.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 241.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 242. Doppelganger: an apparitional double or counterpart of a living person, referred to in Spencer & Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, first ed. 1899, reprinted with preface by Sir James Frazer, O.M., London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1938.



and Death are locked caskets, each has the key to the other." This paradox of opposite conditions existence, as "Man and Woman are locked caskets, each having the key to the other."<sup>48</sup> And the rich and the poor are likewise locked caskets, each having the key to the other. Life would be intolerable were it not for Death". He then related it to the Greek myth of Tithonus, who was the beloved of Apollo, and who asked of him the gift of immortality. The myth tells how Apollo granted his gift with a smile, and Tithonus lives as an old, old man in the gateway of the past where the sun rises, and came to beg Apollo to take back his gift.

Grant Watson wrote his mythical romance, *Moonlight in Ur* (1932), which dramatizes his own story of his truncated love relationship with Ida. Set in the third dynasty of Ur, colourful in archaic language and setting, it presents the leading characters of the beautiful Gula-ata, Ibin Matt, her jealous husband and Gishzida, her lover. In the father's guilt in subjecting Gula as a child to black magic – resulting in the mark of ill omen on her breast caused by the bite of the black snake used in the black magic – one can discern something of the guilt of Ida's father, in raping his young daughter. Ida, having brought the story of being raped by her father to her husband early in her marriage, was consequently furiously spurned by him, just as Gula's defacement is received in a similar manner by her husband. The black magic said to be practised by Ida's husband was transferred in the story to Gula's father. The figure of Gishzida's mother and her influence on Gishzida strongly resembles Grant Watson's mother in her relations with her son. Herbert Read, in a BBC broadcast (1932) wrote: "A reader with any knowledge of psycho-analysis will perceive as he reads that the characters and incidents of the romance *Moonlight in Ur* are elements of one of those constantly recurring myths which embody the mother fixation of the son." (*Yorkshire Post*, 1932). Another critic, Hugh L'Anson Fausset wrote: "Gula bears the mark of her fate both on her breast and in her suffering, and Grant Watson makes us feel the strong sorrow of her life lying like some familiar garment upon her. Grant Watson has realised the hot violence of the East very finely and without ever indulging in the exotic or the decorative, but the violent is always subordinated to the visionary." (*Yorkshire Post*, Leeds, 1932).<sup>49</sup>

*Priest Island* (1940) is also hauntingly reminiscent of the enduring triangle of Peter, Ida and Katharine. Grant Watson first visited Priest Island through the author and naturalist Dr Fraser Darling. It came about as follows. Grant Watson had written a review of Darling's book, *A Herd of Red Deer* (1937) for *The Listener* and was much attracted by Darling's description of the country neighbouring Little Loch Broom in Northern Scotland. With a desire to meet both the author and the country whose spirit had been so intimately revealed, Grant Watson wrote to Darling expressing a wish to visit the area. He received a letter of friendly invitation suggesting he and his wife stay at the hotel at Dundonnell. Darling and his wife were bird watching on Priest Island but would come across to see them. In Dr Fraser Darling, Grant Watson found his ideal of the field naturalist devoted to the study of wild

<sup>48</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', ch. 14, p. 227.

<sup>49</sup> Review of *Moonlight in Ur* (1932), Leeds, *Yorkshire Post*, 18 May 1932.



creatures in their environment. As an observer he, too, had become part of the environment. Grant Watson envied him his singleness of purpose and close contact with wild nature.

When Darling took him to Priest Island, Grant Watson was able to appreciate the serene and mystical harmony which Darling had established with the wild country and its wild creatures. Darling said he had learned to feel something of the rhythm of their life. The description of the landing cove, the track up the cliff, and the stone hides one hundred feet above for bird watching, where Darling often slept to be near the birds at all times of day and night, is recreated in the scenario of Priest Island.

Darling told him about the outlaw who had once lived on Priest Island – outlawed for stealing sheep. He had not lived alone, for a woman had come to join him. They had raised a family and after many years, when he was an old man, he had been allowed to go back. His grandchildren still inhabited some of the coast villages. Looking around that sheltered recess between two knolls, Grant Watson began to make a picture of the solitary man and his family. As he sat with Darling eating bread and cheese, Darling told him how storm petrels made nest in the crevices of the hut walls, and how otters swam from the mainland making their way up well-worn paths to the freshwater lakes, and about the seals that rested on the rock ledges in winter. Darling spoke of what he called “the philosophy of the fringe”. He maintained that those feelings and thoughts which come to men and women who live in close and inevitable contact with the primal forces of nature, carry the essential and enduring elements of life. Such feelings and thoughts are only experienced by those who live on the outer fringes of human society, they diminish and die when subjected to the mechanistic age. He told of old men who, on some nearby islands, would each morning go to the cliff edge, take off their hats and gaze at the sea; then put on their hats again and go about their day’s work.

Grant Watson wrote *Priest Island* (1940) from this experience. The story is symbolic of his own life, exiled as he was from Ida, the woman with whom he was in love all his adult life. It is also significant that the outlaw is called Peter. In *Priest Island* the outlaw continually dreams of Jean, the woman he loved, and for whom he stole the sheep so that he would win her father’s permission to marry her. She comes to him regularly as a vision, and he talks to her in his solitude sharing with her his discoveries of the wild life on this windswept island. At times the spirit of one of the priests, who in the past came from the mainland to pray in solitude, also appears as a vision and speaks with the outlaw. When Mary comes to the island, the outlaw is surprised and glad of her presence, yet at times he resents her intrusion on his dreams of Jean. Often Mary wishes she could come closer to him, yet does not dare. Jean, Mary feels is between her and her man. In the long silence of their companionship, the outlaw feels Mary’s willingness to come nearer to him, yet he holds off from her, presenting a hard front to her approach. For what man can depart from his pain and aloneness without regret?

Gradually, through the winter days when they come back from hunting on the cliff tops in the fierce gusty winds and drenching rain, they find each other, within the shelter of the stone walls, and are glad; and the outlaw’s heart rejoices in having a companion and a woman

strong and able to meet the buffets of the winter and to return and be with him in that small shelter. Wet through and tingling with the wind, they would stand close together in the darkened hut. Sometimes they would lean against each other and clasp hands, and touch cold wet cheek to cold wet cheek. Through such experience their affection grows, finding in their necessity its growth. Comradeship was love, and love comradeship. Jean slides further away, out into the storm and windy weather, leaving the two within the hut unshadowed for a time.

On the fine nights Peter goes walking beside the lakes or over the hills. A need to be as he had been comes to him, then his loneliness is dear, and he has no desire for the woman, but a vague feeling of a great loss sustained, a dim awareness that the things which were precious and beautiful and strange and unexplained were ebbing and, like a wave, drawing away over the shingles. He has lost something, and is hungry for his loss. Left solitary and perplexed at his aloofness, beside the dim embers of the fire, Mary does not know whether it is some inadequacy in her that drives him forth, or whether this is the result of his long outlawry.

Like Grant Watson's wife Katharine, it is Mary who has claimed Peter as her man, knowing he was still in love with a woman he could never have. Regret for what is lost and thankfulness for what is gained – these contend, and in the nights when he walks alone, Peter feels the pull of the loss and of the gain; unresolved and unconscious of anything but the pain and tension of their opposition, he would pause and stand between the two worlds. Mary comes to recognize the grey look in his eyes when he is separate from herself and the home that she is dreaming about; then it would seem that he neither sees nor hears but dreams another dream than hers. Though Mary is now the focus of all immediate things, and is a promise, he does not know quite what she promises. She is of the croft and that would seem almost sufficient, whereas Jean is of the waves. Peter finds reminders of Jean in the glittering pools of light, in the tossed weed amongst the foam-laced eddies even in the winds and the pained cry of the gulls. She is shy, and would no longer come and be with him as she had before, yet would not leave him, and in her absence-presence seemed to speak of what had once been given, given for once, and lost now for all time.

*Priest Island* (1940) is hauntingly reminiscent of Grant Watson's enduring love for Ida throughout his adult life, his suffering when he lost her, and his marriage with Katharine who had taken the initiative in claiming him as her husband. Their marriage, continually haunted by memories of Ida yet strengthened by Peter's need for Katharine's admirable understanding and unfailing strength, is demonstrated in Grant Watson's unpublished autobiography 'To This End' and in Katharine's also unpublished 'Between Two Worlds', a moving and fascinating study of Katharine's life with Grant Watson.

In 1993 the book *Priest Island* was made into a film by Paul Cox of Illumination Films, entitled *Exile* and filmed off the East coast of Tasmania at Coles Bay, Freycinet Peninsular, adapting the story to an Australian scenario. Coles Bay was reputedly a favourite gathering ground for the Aborigines. Paul Cox found rock carvings there which he believed were done by the Aborigines and it was considered to be a very sacred, holy place and one of the last

paradises on earth. Talking about the film, Paul Cox said: "*Exile* is about how society gives people totally the wrong values. Though set in the last century, there were so many parallels with today. Peter is forced away from society for stealing a few sheep. The people on the mainland want to hang him, but, because he is so young, he is sent instead to this island. He suddenly has to go back to the earth and survive for himself. Only later does he realize he is in paradise.<sup>50</sup> In *But To What Purpose* (1946) Grant Watson continued: "The outlaw who lived on this island had a fuller, richer life than most citymen. Life flowed inward from the fringe; here were the pure sources. Here, where the giants rule, here man can live serene. This concept of 'The Philosophy of the Fringe' can be seen in much of Grant Watson's writings, in particular, a whole chapter in *But To What Purpose* (1946) and in *The Mainland* (1917) where Sherwin and his wife exile themselves on an uninhabited island: "This man and woman, who lived so solitary a life on Kanna Island, had found happiness. They had attained an easy harmony with the surroundings of sea and cliff. The wind, blowing over the swept sand-dunes contained the significance of their isolated life."

*The Mystery of Physical Life* (1967, repub. 1992) which Grant Watson considered to be his major work, contains the epigram by Nietzsche "Giften brauest du dir deinen Balsam" (translated as "Out of thy poison brewest thou thy healing"). The acknowledgments include at the top of the list, "Mrs. Ida Bedford for her careful typing and retyping of my script." When he wrote his poetry at the age of seventy-five, and publishers were afraid to publish it as he was not well-known as a poet, it was Ida who stated that it must be published and that she would pay for the publication of two hundred copies. Ida Bedford contributed significantly towards the fulfilment of both the professional and private life of Grant Watson. But more so was Katharine's unfailing contribution, which is acknowledged in his dedication to her of *Departures* (1948), a fascinating collection of memorable experiences of his life and in which he had written, "Dedicated to My Wife whose loving kindness and criticism have enabled me to persevere for so long."

In a letter to Katharine dated 25 February, year not stated, the poet Kathleen Raine wrote of Ida:

The story of Peter, yourself and Ida takes its quality from your three characters. You were all exceptional people, acting according to what each of you felt, most deeply, to be the highest motives. What was at stake was far more than a conflict of code and convention, you were all in it for life and all life means – vitally engaged. You must all three have learned profound (though very different) things from those years and years of working on your lives. I am sure you must believe, as I think I do, that we have a long pilgrimage of which this life is only one step on the journey, and that nothing we learn in those deep engagements is ever lost or wasted.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Cox's film *Exile* was shown at the 1994 Berlin Film Festival and won the award for cinematography at the Australian Film Institute's awards in Nov. 1994. It has not been shown commercially in Australian theatres. See 'Self portrait', Paul Cox, Andrew L. Urban, *Cinema Papers* (94:7). Both *Exile* and *The Nun and the Bandit* were shown on television Dec., 1996 and are available on video.

Ida too was, when I knew her, as an old woman, wise and beautiful and serious. Peter never grew stale or dull, I never knew any man more young in mind and spirit than he was to the end. I am sure you should tell the story.

And tell the story Katharine did in her unpublished autobiography 'Between Two Worlds'. The story of Ida and Peter was not well known and Kathleen Raine's knowledge was only gained through her close friendship with Peter, Katharine and Ida. Although Katharine has written the whole story with details of some of her own heartaches that she inevitably experienced, her interesting autobiography tells of her life from early childhood to her marriage with Grant Watson. It was left by Dorothy Green to Elizabeth Perkins with the hope that it could be eventually brought to publication.

In a letter to Peter dated 23rd October (1967) Kathleen Raine wrote:

Ida's death draws my thoughts to you. You spoke of her to me long before I saw her, and it was through you I had the great privilege and joy of knowing her. Her beauty was of the timeless kind, and she carried with her the aura of a young and beautiful woman to the end, when she also had the no less beautiful wisdom of age. Like some Greek priestess. For when one was with her, at a certain moment she would become inspired and Sibylline, and say wonderful things, deep truths. My grief is quite selfish – I shall never see her again in this life. Perhaps in one of our many others. Indeed I hope so. But if I feel this death as a bereavement, to you it must be a loss of part of yourself. Or do you not find it so, indeed do you feel perhaps that she is nearer to you, in that other state into which we pass, and which is such a mystery, than fettered to an aged body which seemed so inappropriate to that immortal quality of her real being? May it be so, Peter – so I would it may be for you, who like her, have the wisdom of age and the immortal quality of youth.

In a letter to me from Josephine Spence, Grant Watson's daughter, dated 19 September, 1993, she wrote:

Ida's father was a Portuguese Jew, and yes, she was very beautiful but very retiring. Dorothy Green who had seen photos of her (she avoided being photographed whenever possible) describes her as a marmorial beauty and, in another context, as having amazing spiritual beauty. She came back into my parent's lives at about the time of my appearance. I was named after her and she was my Godmother

The memorial service for Ida Bedford was held on 4 November, 1967 at which a tribute was paid to her tremendous gift of sympathy, her sensitivity towards her environment and her great love of nature.

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Having exchanged several letters with Jung on his essay: *Synchronicity: An a-causal connecting principle*<sup>51</sup> Grant Watson with his wife visited him at his home at Küssnacht in 1961, a year before Jung died. Discussions as fully related in his unpublished autobiography, 'To This End' lasted over three days beginning with the complicated patterns of instinctive life as manifested in the synchronistic relation of plants and animals and continued on many other subjects including belief in Karma, the philosophy of *I-Ching*, the ancient *Chinese Book of Changes* and the work of the scientist Henry Fabre.<sup>52</sup> They talked of the conscious recognition of nature by civilized man as a true participation in contrast to the primitive participation which is achieved by a direct stimulation of the senses by primitive man and of Jung's experiences of the magic practices of African natives as compared with Grant Watson's experiences of the magic he had seen practised by the Australian Aborigines and the Fijians on the remote island of Koro.

On the question of evolution raised by Grant Watson, Jung saw the orthodox Darwinian point of view as inadequate. "Far too simple – life is not like that, too full of contradictions but you cannot move people from it".<sup>53</sup>

They talked about the patterns of animal behaviour and about patterns of growth and how the growth of living things synchronised or almost synchronised with certain mathematical formulae. The irrational in nature was their theme and they found no lack of material. Jung was sympathetic to the idea that the complicated patterns in insect life found correspondence in human psychology. Grant Watson told him the story of the anthrax fly with its dimorphic form of larvae which preyed on the pupa of the mason bee. The number of adaptations which must be coincident in this insect defies any explanation of segregation of gametes even though an infinite period of time is postulated. Such histories, which have been meticulously recorded by Henry Fabre, the French entomologist and popular writer on insect life, left them both feeling that they were but on the outer fringe of understanding.

"I look to Nature," Jung said, "and I have my thoughts. So many of those that I have loved are dead. I have my life here, but I am alone. I have no-one to talk to. Sometimes I go to my country cottage where I cook my food and chop my wood. And I have my spooks."<sup>54</sup>

"Spooks?" Grant Watson asked.

"Ya ya", spooks.

<sup>51</sup> Synchronicity: A term coined by Jung to designate the meaningful coincidence or equivalence of a psychic and a physical state or event which have no causal relationship to one another. Such synchronistic phenomena occur, for instance, when an inwardly perceived event (dream, vision, premonition etc.) is seen to have a correspondence in external reality. Source: C. G. Jung, *Memories Dreams, Reflections*, edited by Aniela Joffé, Flamingo, 1983, p. 418.

<sup>52</sup> Henry Fabre, French entomologist, popular writer on insect life.

<sup>53</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', ch. 10, pp. 166–67. In the foreword of the *I Ching Book of Changes* Jung wrote "The Chinese mind as I see it in the *I Ching* seems to be exclusively preoccupied with the chance aspect of events. What we call coincidence seems to be the chief concern of this particular mind and what we worship as causality passes almost unnoticed." He used the term synchronicity, a concept that formulates a point of view diametrically opposed to that of causality. Source: *I Ching Book of Changes*. The Richard Wilhelm translation rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes. Foreword by Dr. C. G. Jung, London: Routledge and Reagan Paul Ltd. First published in Great Britain, 1951.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 172.

"You mean ghosts?"

"Ya ya" surely ghosts.

"They come to you?"

"When I am here by the lake side, I am on top of the mountains; When I am amongst the mountains, high up, I am down at the bottom of the pit. Everything surrounds me. Do you understand? Then my spooks speak to me."<sup>55</sup>

Grant Watson seized this opportunity to return to a question he had breached in one of his letters. He had asked if certain human patterns did not point to Karma and reincarnation. Jung had answered that there was no empirical evidence of Karma – Grant Watson now thought, if he believes in and has conversed with spooks, Karma is not an unreasonable supposition. He reminded Jung of the question.

"For you and me privately to believe in Karma, ya, it is an Indian idea, but amongst themselves they have different opinions and conceptions. Buddha speaks of having been a grasshopper."

"But may it not be possible," Grant Watson continued, "to have faint memories of earlier human lives? You have written of a-causal events, where do they come from? Is it not possible that if we could collect all the a-causal events that occur in our lives, good and bad, fortunate and unfortunate, and put them together so that they might appear like a straw, skeletal structure of a dodecahedron, then we might get an intimation of Karmic destiny?"

Jung disregarded this with his accustomed "ya ya" and went on, "When I met Wilhelm and was working with him on *The Golden Flower* he said to me, 'You must be an incarnation of a Chinaman, otherwise you wouldn't know about the I Ching ... Perhaps' and as he slowly said the word, Grant Watson saw him to be in many ways like a Chinaman, a wise and rather sly, and extremely clever Chinaman.

"I have always thought of you," Grant Watson continued, "as the reincarnation of a Gnostic."<sup>56</sup>

He chuckled, "No my Guru was a Gnostic."

"The one who wrote with you *The Sermons of the Dead*?"

"You have read that?"

"Yes, Godwin Baynes gave me a copy, but how can you have a guru who is dead? Is he one of the spooks?"

"Surely, I have talked with an Indian and a wise man and he said that his guru was Shankaracharya."

"I said I knew no man of that name except the sage of the 7th C."

" 'That is the man I mean,' said my Indian friend."<sup>57</sup>

"One of the spooks?" Grant Watson ventured.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 169.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

The next day they talked chiefly about patterns of animal behaviour and queried where the instinctive and the physiological surge into one another. Grant Watson told him the life history of the sea slugs and the coelenterates on which they feed and how some sea slugs are able to eat the explosive nettle cells without exploding them, and who subsequently use them as weapons for their own defence. He was delighted with the story.

"Ah that beats the band," he said.<sup>58</sup>

On the second day of the visit, Grant Watson's wife accompanied him and was received by Ruth Bailey, a lady who had travelled with Jung in Africa, and who was now his housekeeper. The four had tea on a patch of grass overlooking the lake. Jung talked of the magic practices of African natives, occurrences quite unaccountable to our modern rationalistic thinking, and asked Grant Watson to tell again of the calling of the turtles that he had seen in Fiji.

"On a remote cliff on the remote island of Koro," Grant Watson related, "I had been met by about twenty Fijian men to be shown this ancient and sacred custom. They stood on the edge of the cliff and sang a traditional hymn in an ancient and forgotten language. Its purport was: 'Turtles, O Turtles, come up out of the deep and show yourselves and bring your wives.'

The turtle is a solitary reptile, but on this occasion eight of them appeared. These sea-turtles measure about seven feet long, but they looked no larger than shilling pieces. Among them were some large brown fish as large as sharks, but they were not sharks. Natives said they were the turtles' wives. From only two places in Fiji could turtle-calling be effected."

"There are things as strange in the human soul," said Jung, "of which we know nothing."<sup>59</sup>

From these visits Grant Watson had a feeling of elation. "I had support in my challenge to the orthodox scientific view of life," he wrote, and quoted a passage from one of Dr Jung's later books to illustrate this viewpoint.

Since scientific knowledge not only enjoys universal esteem, but, in the eyes of the mere man, counts as the only intellectual and spiritual authority, understanding the individual obliges me to commit *lèse-majesté*, so to speak, to turn a blind eye to scientific knowledge. This is a sacrifice not lightly made, for the scientific attitude cannot rid itself so easily of its sense of responsibility, and if the psychologist happens to be a doctor who wants not only to classify his patient scientifically but also to understand him as a human being, he is threatened with a conflict of duties between two diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive attitudes, of knowledge on the one hand, and understanding on the other. This conflict cannot be solved by an either/or, but only by a kind of two-way thinking; doing one thing while not losing sight of the other.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 171.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 172.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 173.



While being a sane philosophy of reasoning, perhaps Grant Watson understood that it was an unusual capability of the modern man to be able to achieve this kind of two-way thinking.

"We met once more before our return to England", Grant Watson wrote, "and on each occasion I felt I had encountered his kindliness side and with his native hospitality. I sensed however, his toughness. Here was a man who had fought many battles, and had never been worsted. Before leaving, photographs were taken on the lawn; he was far the most imposing figure."<sup>61</sup>

Grant Watson's visit to Switzerland was in 1961, the year before Jung died. "He seemed in full health," wrote Grant Watson, "and certainly in command of all his senses. His death, when it came, was a smooth continuation of his life. In the morning he had been working at one of his scripts; after luncheon he said he was feeling tired, and sat down to rest and died. What could be a more natural passing."<sup>62</sup>

His book – *Memories, Dreams and Recollections* (1961) was published after his death, as he intended. The greater part, if not all, must have been written by the time of Grant Watson's visit. This book, Grant Watson believed, revealed the wider attitude than his earlier published work, reincarnation and the myth that lies between the actual world discovered by the senses and the hidden reality which we think of as God. For Grant Watson the book became a confirmation of quickening intuitions, illuminating the later years of his life.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 174.





*Photographs by kind favour of Grant  
Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence.*

Figure 10 (above): E. L. Grant Watson  
engaged in his favourite pastime.

Figure 11 (centre): Grant Watson serving his  
country during World War I.

Figure 12 (below): On an excursion with his  
wife, Katharine.



## Chapter Eight

### Literary Landscapes – Comparisons with Other Writers – Part One

#### Introduction

*In Chapters Eight and Nine I propose to compare this writer's literary responses to life in the Western Australian bush and to the Aborigines of 1910-1912 with other, more famous, writers of Australian literature and, furthermore, to endeavour to project what I believe is a unique response to the Australian landscape with the Aborigines as a vital integral part. Added to this I believe Grant Watson was able to delve deeper than other writers, English or Australian, into the experience of the Australian desert, and of the Aborigines as part of that landscape; also that he has expressed his reaction in compelling psychological terms, drawing upon his memories of those early two years (1910-12) spent in the Western Australian bush.*

In his study of the changing literary perceptions of Australia in *The Diminishing Paradise* (1984) Ross Gibson reviewed the development in three stages of writing about Australia from 1770-1850: the descriptive journals of the *Endeavour* writers; the more 'imaginative' literature up to the mid-1830s – in which inexperienced writers sought to impress their own natures on the new colony, by evoking it in terms of a terrestrial paradise using metaphor and motifs which derived from their English literary heritage; and, finally, from 1835-1850 the literature of the explorers whose "practical activity enabled them to produce more enduring and convincing interpretations of Australian experience. Yet in many respects they [Australian writers] maintained the overtones of their English heritage while Grant Watson maintained an openness of mind which enabled him to absorb with extraordinary clarity the unique features of the Australian bush".<sup>1</sup> In *But To What Purpose* (1946) Grant Watson personified the bush as saying: "Fear me. Do not hate me. Do not worship me. Do not resist me, nor presume to look too long. Look aside, and if you can, accept me."<sup>2</sup> After his initial fear it is almost as if he has made his peace with this strange landscape and his perception is unclouded so that he does not impose the English vision on the Australian environment as the early settlers did between 1770 and 1830. Certainly he saw the contrast as expressed above but he came to terms with it as he absorbed it into his consciousness and was changed by it. As David

<sup>1</sup> Ross Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise: A review of the changing literary perceptions of Australia*, A Sirius Book, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1984, pp. xxi, xv, 95, 96.

<sup>2</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, London: The Cresset Press, 1946, p. 101.

Malouf has iterated: "What this country may make of us as we fully expose ourselves to it and take it into our consciousness depends on how it will shape and change us".<sup>3</sup>

Ross Gibson views descriptions by the explorers Sturt and Eyre as more enduring and convincing interpretations, evoked by their practical explorations of the Australian desert, than that of earlier writers such as, perhaps, Thomas Watling and Watkin Tench. Their responses to and representations of what they encountered on treks towards the centre of Australia are inevitably steeped in connotations pertaining to the legendary continent – alternating between "land of despair, land of hope". They looked to the land itself rather than to imagination to supply the images of their Australian experiences. Such images were essentially coloured by the circumstances of their journey – the constant search for water, provisions running short, fatigue and illness.

As the environs of the land became more barren, Sturt invested his descriptions of the landscape with the emotional impact of such experiences, projecting what Ross Gibson described as the "melodramatic almost Gothic" side of his personality on to the region. He described the dreariness of the view presented – "The plains were still open to the horizon, but here and there a stunted gum-tree or a gloomy cypress, seemed placed by nature as mourners over the surrounding desolation. Neither beast nor bird inhabited these lonely and inhospitable regions over which the silence of the grave seemed to reign."<sup>4</sup>

There is a strong contrast here to Grant Watson's description of the bush. His desert landscape is not presented as a barren wilderness with connotations of death, but has a teeming population of life – animals, birds, insects, earth-spirits, Aborigines and ghosts, all of whom are intimately related in a "totemic animistic religion". A disciple of Nature from early childhood and later a trained zoologist and naturalist, Grant Watson was abundantly aware of life in the Australian bush and was able to express his reactions at times in more abstract, almost symbolic terms. As he wrote in *English Country* (1924):

For me, however it may be for others, the food of life, the food which generates spiritual power, comes from what I can describe in no other words but the inspired in nature; the vivid expression of vitality in beetle or plant or bird; the living of life for life's sake ... I am grateful for the good fortune of having lived most of my life far from towns or cities. My earliest remembrances are of birds, moths, beetles, caterpillars, of hayfields, of hedgerows, of streams and of bathing pools.<sup>5</sup>

Because of his affinity with nature, the contrasts he experienced in the Australian bush were possibly more keenly perceived, yet when once he had made his adjustment to the strange atmosphere he was able to absorb the richness of life in the bush:

<sup>3</sup> David Malouf, *The Age*, 23 April, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *English Country*, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1924, pp. 70–71.

I feared and was attracted to the bush, feeling a strange light-heartedness when alone, out of sight of my fellow men amidst the dry foliage of mulga, always the same, always silent and motionless under the sun's glare. The silence was made up of many occasional sounds: the croaking of the red-brown crows, the chatter of a passing flock of parakeets, the whirr of the wings of the blue and red locusts as they flew from bush to bush, and the continuous buzz of flies.<sup>6</sup>

In his description he invokes all the sights and sounds distinctive of the vibrant Australian bush in contrast to the previous description of the mellow English woods.

Kay Schaffer wrote in 1988 of the fantasy of the bush as an absorbing landscape capable of sucking up its inhabitants which circulates through the narratives of history, fiction and film. She referred to *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the film (1975) produced by Peter Weir from Joan Lindsay's book (1967). Critics praised the film for its depiction of "The awe-inspiring power of the Australian bush which alienates some and hypnotically absorbs others into the enigma and mystery of its animistic force". Kay Schaffer saw the film as depicting the ultimate – that the land might actually absorb its inhabitants as the school girls were absorbed by Hanging Rock.<sup>7</sup>

Something of the same power is suggested in Paul Cox's film (1993) based on Grant Watson's novel, *The Nun and the Bandit* written in 1935. He projects Grant Watson's vision of the bush as a stage for the development of the story, the isolation, the silence disturbed only by the hidden creatures of the land. The profound effect on Lucy, the nun, newly arrived from England, of this environment and the outcast with whom she shares the experience, is projected in the following passage:

Here as she gazed, all things grew stranger and more changed. The substance of the rocks, which gleamed with a faint, translucent purple, and the grey-blue foliage of the mulga bushes were alike pierced and made almost transparent by so much brilliance. Here in the desert was the presence of an all-pervading light. This light has existed before any imaginings of man. God without man; a thought both terrible and strange. Around her, on all sides, sky and earth met in a purple haze, and nearer, the earth was but the reflected sky; the light would penetrate right through. Amidst this blending and piercing, chaos was in conception.<sup>8</sup>

On this highly charged description of the remote bush setting, Grant Watson reflects Lucy's strong emotional reactions to her desperate situation. For her the vast desert becomes a cathedral of translucent colour and brilliant light, a prehistoric light, representing God, the

<sup>6</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Journey under the Southern Stars*, London, New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1968, pp. 10–11.

<sup>7</sup> Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *The Nun and the Bandit*, Sydney: Primavera Press, 1993, pp. 261–62. First pub. 1935.

God Lucy was about to forsake, and in her emotional devastation, the earth and sky become one in the chaos of her emotions.

So Lucy, the novice, not yet having taken her final vows, slowly removes her novice's habit and replaces it with the cheap cotton dress she has borrowed from Sorrel, Michael's woman of the bush. She folds her habit and places it carefully on the ground, symbolizing the relinquishing of her dedication to a life of prayer.

In his reflection 'Book to Film', Paul Cox wrote:

E. L. Grant Watson's belief and religion originated in the personification of the powers of nature. His prayers were directed towards the powers working behind the stupendous phenomena of nature. His cathedral was the landscape – large, vast and all embracing. His God was the God of spirit and faith nourished by his senses. The Father, the child and the Ghost permeated his being, his spirit and the landscape. In his novel *The Nun and the Bandit* (1935) however, in contrast to contemporary Western thinking, Grant Watson transcended the limitations of the senses. The senses in the end didn't satisfy him. He went beyond, to the Dreaming – the most profound 'religion' of them all.<sup>9</sup>

Kay Schaffer expressed her view of the various constructions of the bush within her knowledge as "What is articulated in these constructions of the bush comes not from the bush itself but from the fantasies of those who view it".<sup>10</sup> She saw the bush as taking on the attributes of woman, according to male interest, whether described as a passive landscape or an alien force, a place of exile or belonging, a landscape of promise or of threat. Grant Watson's contention was: what we are, determines what we see and if you go into the fields with curious eyes and love in your heart then nature will speak to you by suggesting thoughts and symbols. This is well represented in all his writings whether set in the English countryside or the Australian bush. In his Australian novels he expressed a spiritual relationship between the Australian bush and man. His attitude was more akin to that of the Aborigines who knew the secret of living with the land rather than on it.

The difference in perception and human expression can be viewed from Hegel's viewpoint:

Man realizes himself through practical activity, since he has the impulse to express himself, and so again to recognize himself, in things that are at first simply presented to him as externally existent. He attains this end by altering external things and impressing on them the stamp of his own inner nature, so that he rediscovers his own character in them. Man does this in order that he may profit by his freedom to break down the stubborn indifference of the external world to

<sup>9</sup> Paul Cox, 'Book to Film', *The Nun and the Bandit*, op. cit., p. 308.

<sup>10</sup> Schaffer, *Women and the Bush*, op. cit., p. 53.

himself, and may enjoy in the countenance of nature only an outward embodiment of himself.<sup>11</sup>

What Hegel has written can be illustrated in the responses of Grant Watson as compared with D. H. Lawrence's reactions to the Australian landscape. Each writer impressed his own inner nature, moulded by his life experiences, on the landscape, as did the early settlers or explorers. Grant Watson enjoyed the countenance of nature as an external expression of his lifelong fascination with and keen perception of nature, while Lawrence's *Kangaroo* (1925) reflects the writer's indelible impression of his disturbing wartime and post-war experiences in Cornwall, as fictionalized in the chapter, 'The Nightmare'. A different concept of the Australian landscape is projected in *The Poets' Discovery* (1990) where the editors, Jordan and Pierce, see that where exploration eventually revealed Australia to be a continent of greater wonder and variety than had been anticipated by the European imagination, so the poetic discovery of Australia was an uncovering of immense richness. Nineteenth-century poetry about Australia is seen as characterised by its sense of encountering something very new, and displaying all the wonder and fear that such a discovery brings.

A dwelling on the grotesque in the landscape in a mood of melancholy is seen as much a European response in its origin as was any other, having its roots in the Romantic period of the earlier nineteenth century. That it came to dominate the vision of many Australian writers, however, was, as we have seen, in part a result of actual experience in the Australian bush. The notorious ease with which one could become lost in the bush, the repeated devastation of fire, flood and drought – all these were turned by the settlers and explorers into "something threatening and monstrous." In 1897 Barcroft Boake wrote of a country out west "Where the Dead Men Lie"<sup>12</sup> while Ernst Favenc, for example, imagined how easily those who travelled there could come to be "Dead in the Bush". In his novel *The Partners* (1933), Grant Watson gives an extraordinarily vivid description of Sam Lawson's gradual disintegration as he flounders in the relentless heat of the desert, hopelessly lost and dying of thirst. In his autobiography, *But To What Purpose* (1946) he wrote: "I would wander solitary in the bush, but never very far from a wheel-track for I had a keen apprehension of how easy it would be to get lost."<sup>13</sup>

The imaginative construction of the land as an alien wilderness is familiar to contemporary readers of Australian literature. Marcus Clarke's novel of the convict system *His Natural Life* (1870–72)<sup>14</sup> represents Australia in similar terms as a place from which there is no escape. In Clarke's text Australia is represented as a fantastic land of monstrosities which tells its story of sullen despair in the language of the barren and uncouth.<sup>15</sup> In the

<sup>11</sup> Hegel quoted in Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, op. cit., p. xi.

<sup>12</sup> Barcroft Boake, *Where the Dead Men Lie and Other Poems*, ed. with notes & memoirs by A. G. Stevens, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1897.

<sup>13</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>14</sup> Revised in 1882 under the title *For the Term of His Natural Life*, by which it is now better known.

<sup>15</sup> L. T. Hergenhahn, (ed.), *A Colonial City High and Low Life: Selected journalism of Marcus Clarke*, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, pp. 362–64.

introduction to a volume of the poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon, Clarke extended the metaphor of a monstrous, alien landscape, describing the spirit of the bush as one of "weird melancholy".<sup>16</sup> Henry Lawson wrote similar descriptions of the bush as "a blasted barren wilderness that doesn't even howl".<sup>17</sup> To the early explorers, however, the land was imagined as an Arcadian paradise. Thomas Mitchell wrote evocatively of the allure of the luxuriant, verdant landscape of Victoria: "Of this Eden I was the only Adam and it was indeed a sort of paradise to me".<sup>18</sup>

As a trained naturalist and zoologist, Grant Watson was able to project a more realistic description from impressions gained in 1910–12 during his experience with the Cambridge Expedition in the Western Australian bush and islands in Shark Bay. It was the Western Australian country, the land itself, that made an immediate and deep impression on him. Its individuality and strange power – a power he recorded as destroying some who could not come to terms with it – influenced his writing from the beginning. His awareness of the landscape and its influence on people is clear in his novels, as is his recognition that the novel had to do more than mirror landscape or devote itself to tales of adventure. "It is in this sense," wrote Veronica Brady and Peter Cowan, "that his work is in advance of most of his fellows of the 1920s in Australian writing and certainly of those concerned with Western Australia for a much larger period."<sup>19</sup>

In *The Desert Horizon* (1923) Grant Watson wrote of young Martin O'Brien's feelings for the virgin Australian bush:

The desert horizon stretched blue and infinite. It was the same as he had always known it, the dry trees growing from the soil, gnarled and bent, the blue leaves turned edgeways to the sun the branches feathery and brittle, the twigs brittle and hard. The land was eternally old, it had always been thus, yet it possessed the innocence of youth. It was not yet aware of man's advent upon the world. It would not be changed; men might live here perhaps; already like so many ant-runs, roads and trackways were being made, but like ant-runs these also would disappear in the dust. For himself he would survive for a while and at the end find space enough for a grave. And why had he come back to the bush? There was something to be found out. It was not only a matter of earning money and gaining power, though these in themselves were sound enough arguments. There was something else beyond, it was elusive and alluring. Oh, magically alluring, outside his comprehension, yet filling his body with desire ... And this old man? Did he know anything of that? No nothing at all, and he was surely a little cracked with his talk about wheat-fields and railway trains.

<sup>16</sup> R. Jordan & Peter Pierce, *The Poets Discovery: 19th century Australia in verse*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1990, p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>19</sup> Veronica Brady & Peter Cowan, 'Grant Watson & Western Australia: A concern for landscape', *Westerly* no. 1, Mar., 1980, p. 39.



A young man's scorn kindled in Martin's heart. This poor old fool, good farmer that he was, did he think that he would really be able to change the desert? The idea of changing the character of the land seemed to him grotesque. It also shocked him. There were wheat fields down south, and dull enough they looked. He knew the bush better than this old man; it was unchangeable, eternally the same, safe from his touch.<sup>20</sup>

From passages such as this written some ten years after returning to England, Grant Watson showed how deeply impressed he was by Australia's desert landscape. His feeling for the land is vividly expressed in its opposite connotations of "eternally old", "trees gnarled and bent", yet possessing the innocence of youth, not yet aware of man's advent in the world. It would not be changed. With Martin's passionate denial of the good farmer's wish to change the desert into wheatfields and railways, we can see Grant Watson's strong feeling for the unique quality of the Australian desert and the futility of man's attempts to change it. For him, as he showed through Martin, there was that something else beyond, elusive and alluring that captured his imagination during his two years in the desert country of Western Australia.

"I should like to live here without changing anything," Martin continued, "without changing it much I mean. I should like to have a farm of my own; a few fences and sheep and cattle, they don't do any harm."<sup>21</sup>

As Veronica Brady and Peter Cowan have pointed out, it foreshadows remarkably a later generation who, too long exposed to what Martin rejects, could wish to live in harmony with the land. The communes of the late 1970s in the south-west of Western Australia are implied in the boy's feeling, as is the whole environmental concern of that later period. Martin's sense of unity with the land and his understanding of it is perhaps as deep as it is possible to achieve, and looks forward to the environmentalists and 'greenies' of today who are dedicated to preserving what is left of the natural environment both on land and sea.

The land is a protagonist in this story, not as something to be subdued, as in the pioneering novel, but to be understood; an understanding that is enriching and significant. The novel concentrates on the boy's developing awareness of himself, the land, of other people and finally of Maggie, the girl he meets and takes to live in the desert country, confident that she, too, will gain something of his own affinity for the desert horizon. Something of the same feeling was expressed by D. H. Lawrence in *Kangaroo* (1923) when he wrote: "This land always gives me the feeling that it doesn't want to be touched. It doesn't want men to get hold of it."<sup>22</sup> Through the protagonist, Somers, Lawrence seems to be expressing a similar idea to that of Martin, yet in other respects his reaction to the land of Australia was quite different to that of Grant Watson, as will be seen later. Another view is

<sup>20</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *The Desert Horizon*, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1923, p. 176.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 179.

<sup>22</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1950. First pub. 1923.



expressed in Patrick White's *Voss* (1957) when Judd, the ex-convict, now a proud landowner, sees "his own fat paddocks, not the deserts of mysticism, nor the transfiguration of Christ, but as the fate of common man."<sup>23</sup> For the prosaic Judd the land, whether desert or bush, was there to be conquered by man and to provide him with a living.

D. H. Lawrence wrote of

that curious sombreness of Australia, the sense of oldness, with the forms all worn down low and blunt and squat. The squat-seeming earth. And then they ran into real country, rather rocky, dark old rocks, and sombre bush. It was virgin bush, and as if unvisited, lost, sombre, with plenty of space, yet spreading grey for miles and miles.<sup>24</sup>

Here his reaction to the virgin bush is different to that expressed by Grant Watson. It is as though each impressed his own feelings on what he saw, in impressionistic style. In *Kangaroo*, Lawrence's observations are clouded by his recent disturbing experiences in England, (related in the 'Nightmare' chapter as the experiences of Somers,) thus expressing the writer's emotional reaction rather than the representation of the natural appearance of objects. Yet when his vision cleared, a change is seen in Lawrence's observation as he wrote: "and yet, when you don't have the feeling of ugliness or monotony in landscape or in nigger, you get a sense of subtle, remote, formless beauty more poignant than anything ever experienced before."<sup>25</sup>

Of his first days in the Bullfinch goldmining camp near Kalgoorlie where he waited the arrival of Radcliffe-Brown, Grant Watson would later write these impressions:

There was the bush and all that it stood for, and that was no small thing to cope with. I learned, and before long how many men were distressed and indeed utterly destroyed by its strange power, a surveyor from Perth shot himself dead on the third day of his sojourning. The miners took his death with no great surprise. "It's the bush," they said, "many men can't stand it. How about yourself, you Johnnie Englishman?" I had been asking myself that question, or rather the ambiguous, veiled influence of the bush, had been asking me.<sup>26</sup>

In this extract Grant Watson transferred the question from the miners to the bush, investing it with a sense of its power over men and giving it a voice of its own.

Stemming from his later readings of Jung and his study of analytical psychology, Grant Watson wrote:

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<sup>23</sup> Patrick White, *Voss*, Great Britain: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1957, p. 345.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>26</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 100.

In psychological interpretation it is, I suppose that the mild, innocent and aloof quality of that virgin territory appears as a symbol of the unconscious, as a symbol of all that civilization has chosen to disregard. It is a vast interrogation mark, questioning itself, and more than consciousness can know of itself, or indeed of life. It says to man: "Thou insignificant spark, where art thou? How is it with thee in thy soul? Canst thou sustain my vast and indifferent regard? Or wilt thou shrivel into nothingness, rather than listen to my silences? So it was that day after day, the bush questioned me, as I wandered looking for beetles. One moment I might be happy enough, intent upon my hunt but the next day the veil of time seemed drawn aside, and eternity gaped in the sun's glare, or in the cracking of a seed-pod.<sup>27</sup>

Grant Watson's interpretation of the bush as a symbol of the unconscious showing the insignificance of man in relation to its mystery, its silence emphasized by the cracking of a seed pod, follows Jung's reflection that consciousness finds its limit when it comes up against the unknown. This consists of everything we do not know. The unknown falls into two groups of objects, those which are outside and can be experienced by the senses and those which are inside and are experienced immediately. The first group comprises the unknown in the outer world, the second the unknown in the inner world. We call this latter the *unconscious*.<sup>28</sup>

For Grant Watson, the Australian bush was an unknown quantity that strongly affected his inner consciousness, becoming a symbol of the unconscious with a voice and spirit of its own with which he had to come to terms, as did the characters in his Australian novels, such as Martin O'Brien who, like the Aborigines had learned to live with the land rather than just on it. Others, of course, failed to come to terms with the bush and therefore, "shrivelling into nothingness" was the result. Grant Watson's early days in the Australian bush were a testing time for him, but with his experiences and training as a naturalist and zoologist, plus a youth in which he spent so much time exploring nature in the English woods, he was able to re-adjust to the strangely different environment.

There were times when I was frightened, but never too frightened to control myself. Death never stared threateningly at me. Already I seemed in a way to be familiar with this unfamiliarity, this unknown monster which whispered to me, "I am the indefinite mother of good and evil. I transcend all things and am less than all things. I am the fullness and the void. I am both death and life, I am love and love's murder. Look not upon me for too long."

Then I would turn away and seek the camp, and familiar human things, and be righted in my own esteem; and the next day perhaps, or some days later, the bush would speak to me again; "Fear me, Do not hate me. Do not worship me. Do not resist me, nor presume to look for too long. Look aside, and *if you can*, accept me."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Great Britain: Flamingo, 1983, p. 419.

<sup>29</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 101.

By structuring his argument through the theme of opposites, Grant Watson personified the bush as he saw it and came to terms with it as still a formidable force not to be treated lightly, yet not to be feared, and he learned to accept it:

for towards the end of my visit to the Bullfinch I had chosen to sleep out on the ground wrapped in my blankets, at a short distance from the camp rather than be under the protection of my tent. I liked it better that way, liked to gaze at the stars until my eyes closed in sleep; woke with the false dawn, when all things stir in their slumber; slept again and woke as the sun lipped the horizon, sending its slanting shafts to underline every bush and herb with a purple shadow.<sup>30</sup>

Grant Watson took time to establish his thinking regarding the Australian bush. He never forgot its formidable power, which he recorded many years later in his autobiographies and used as the theme of his Australian novels, particularly *The Desert Horizon* (1923) and *Daimon* (1925). In both books the character of Gilbert appears, who at Bullfinch had become Grant Watson's bush partner and from whom he learned much in their bush forays and hunt for gold and who he described as:

A strange and yet most attractive companion, and if ever man could come near to representing what the Australian bush represents, then Gilbert was that man. His humanity had been sifted by so long an experience as to be almost elemental. He was the bush incarnate.<sup>31</sup>

For Grant Watson he was the bush in flesh and blood; he had absorbed the bush into his very being and was so impressive in his knowledge of the bush he had become a living symbol of it:

He was a man of education, sixty years old, and had spent the last twenty years in the bush. He was as red as the dust amongst which he moved. He did not often wash he wandered like a tramp from place to place, carrying his few possessions, and followed by his dog. He always slept on the bare ground, and was altogether under the exacting dominion of the precious metal. He had no use for money, but continued to make it as a excuse of his activities. It was not riches or the hope of riches that lured him on. It was the unknown background which held him in thrall, and the gold was symbol of the impossible-to-be-realized centre of all life."<sup>32</sup>

The character of Gilbert appears not only as himself in Grant Watson's autobiographies but something of his character can also be seen in Martin O'Brien, as he becomes in later life, in the closing chapters of *Daimon* (1925).

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 101.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 102.

However, Grant Watson found the prospecting expeditions and all the days of search were not dominated by any feverish seriousness:

Gilbert was too old a hand to be unduly excited, and I was too inexperienced, and too much taken up with the bewildering impact of the vast spaces which stretched so monotonously in all directions. I had the sufficient business of adapting my inner being to this mysterious newly-discovered universe that was so unspeakably old. Certainly the gold had its spell, but for me it was part of the land, and no aim in itself. I did not think of the power it might give, but looked for it as I might for some rare manifestation of Nature".<sup>33</sup>

For Grant Watson, the naturalist, the fascination was in the vast increase of insect life in the springtime when creatures never seen in the dry season made their appearance. Not only insects but all other creatures seemed miraculously to increase, such as lizards, snakes and toads, following the break in the long dry spell of a week of heavy showers and brilliant sunny intervals. It brought an amazing transformation: green carpet of sweet-scented herbs and clusters of flowers, soon to wither and disappear under the scorching sun, turning back to dust all that the rain had brought forth.

In view of this writer's recorded impressions of the Australian landscape it is interesting to look at the impressions of other English writers of the Australian landscape. Robert Darroch stated in his book, *D. H. Lawrence in Australia* (1981) "Lawrence has been Australia's most significant literary visitor. His novel, *Kangaroo* (1922) is one of the most perceptive books written about the land and its people."<sup>34</sup> Adrian Mitchell also wrote "Although Lawrence was in Australia only briefly, *Kangaroo* catches the features and moods of Australian scenery brilliantly. What he says about Australian life is something of a muddle. Half invented, half distorted, yet with glimpses of real discernment, but he is unrivalled in his response to the landscape and to the suggestion that it partakes of a different order of experience, "the dark forces"<sup>35</sup>

These views have been contested, as Robert Lee has pointed out, by Australian critics who have tended to regard *Kangaroo* with some distaste claiming that it accurately portrays neither national character nor local politics, and was too hastily conceived.<sup>36</sup> Written in about six weeks during his three months in Australia, beginning in May 1922,<sup>37</sup> *Kangaroo* skims over the top of an Australia viewed through the eyes of a writer disturbed by humiliating and

<sup>33</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Departures*, London: Pleiades Books Ltd, 1948, p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Darroch, *D H Lawrence in Australia*, South Melbourne: The Macmillan Company of Australia Pty Ltd, 1981, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> A Mitchell, *The Oxford History of Australian Literature*, eds Leonie Kramer & A. Mitchell, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 104.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Lee, 'D. H. Lawrence and the Australian Ethos', *Southerly*, no. 2, 1973, p. 144.

<sup>37</sup> Harry T. Moore, preface to *The Boy in the Bush*, London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1924. Lawrence landed in Fremantle 7 May 1922. Sailed to Sydney 18 May where in about 6 weeks he wrote *Kangaroo*.

alarming experiences in wartime and post-war England. Lawrence expressed his own dark thoughts through Somers in *Kangaroo*:

Why had I come? Why oh why? What was he looking for? He imagined he knew what he had come for. But he wished he had not come to Australia, for all that. The vast uninhabited land frightened him. It seemed so hoary and lost, so unapproachable. The sky was pure, crystal pure and blue, of a lovely pale blue colour; the air was wonderful, new and unbreathed – but the bush, the grey charred bush. It scared him. It was so phantom-like, so ghostly, with its tall pale trees and many dead trees, like corpses, partly charred by bushfires and then the foliage so dark, like grey, green iron. And then it was so deathly still. Even the few birds seemed to be swamped in silence. Waiting, waiting – the bush seemed to be hoarily waiting and he could not get at it, nobody could get at it. What was it waiting for?<sup>38</sup>

Lawrence's impression of the Australian bush was lacking in life, silent, phantom-like and ghostly. He could not communicate with the bush as Grant Watson did. He could not penetrate its secret. He could not get at it – nobody could. What was it waiting for? This is his description of Somers' first experience of the bush at night:

And then one night at the time of the full moon, he walked alone into the bush. A huge electric moon, and the tree trunks like naked, pale aborigines among the dark-soaked foliage in the moonlight – and not a sign of life – not a vestige. Yet something big and aware and hidden! He walked on, had walked a mile or so into the bush, and had just come to a clump of tall, nude, dead trees, shining almost phosphorescent with the moon, when the terror of the bush overcame him – there was something among the trees and his hair began to stir with terror on his head. There was a presence. He looked at the white, dead trees and in to the hollow distances of the bush. Nothing, nothing at all. He turned to go home and then immediately the hair on his scalp stirred and went icy cold with terror. What of? He knew quite well it was nothing ... But with his spine cold like ice, and the roots of his hair seeming to freeze, he walked on home ... But the horrid thing in the bush? ... It must be the spirit of the place ... He felt it must be watching and waiting ... it might have reached a long black arm and gripped him.<sup>39</sup>

Richard Somers never got over that glimpse of terror in the West Australian bush, and in *Kangaroo* (1923) Lawrence never allowed him to come to terms with the bush or the Australian landscape.

In *Daimon* (1925) Grant Watson described a similar experience for Martin O'Brien and his young English wife, Maggie, as they ride into the bush on a calm moonlight night:

<sup>38</sup> Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Martin checked his horse and gazed into the ghostly and pearl-coloured haze that hung in a thin veil over the land silver and grey and neutral-tint mingled and merged together. It was a strange and desolate scene possessed of a beauty which caught at the heart and held it fluttering in a magic power. The horses lifted their heads – snorted and quivered – it seemed that they saw moving in the desert emptiness things that the eyes of the humans could not see. Suddenly the mare neighed with short high-pitched neighs. Both horses sprang sideways. “Martin they have seen something, what is it?” “How can I tell? I don’t know any more than you but there are things in the bush that we don’t see – that I’ve known for a long time. But they don’t do any harm. When I’m alone, I rather like to feel that they are there. I’ve told you that there are some fellows that can’t stand it out here they feel there is something and they are afraid.”<sup>40</sup>

Both writers evoked a sense of eeriness of the bush at night – of a ‘spirit’ or ‘hidden spirits’ of the bush. But Lawrence created a grotesque picture of the bush distorted by the emotions of Somers who projects a distinct fear of the strangeness of the bush rather than “the magic which caught at the heart” projected by Grant Watson. Lawrence’s bush has images of death – trees like corpses, phantom-like and ghostly, the moon is electric, distances are hollow, the stillness is deathly, the trees are weird, white and dead like naked, pale aborigines. Thus Somers is terror stricken by the horrid thing in the bush which he sees “as the spirit of the place”. The presence of unknown things in the bush does not frighten Martin; when he is alone in the bush, he finds comfort in their presence. As David Malouf expressed it so piquantly:

But the spirits have to be recognized to become real. They are not outside us, nor even entirely within, but flow back and forth between us, and the objects we have made, the landscape we have shaped and moved in. We have dreamed all these things in our deepest lives and they are ourselves. It is our self we are making out there”.<sup>41</sup>

David Malouf has expressed much the same impressions that Grant Watson has expressed through Martin, a sense of communication between the sensitive onlooker and his surroundings. It is the onlooker who projects himself onto the landscape, who allows his spirit to flow into the landscape so that he feels part of it. For Martin the landscape he has shaped and moved in has become part of himself so that he finds comfort when alone in the bush, in communion with its hidden spirits.

<sup>40</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Daimon*, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1925, p. 27.

<sup>41</sup> Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, op. cit., p. ix, quoting David Malouf, *An Imaginary Life* (1978).

Lawrence saw it differently. Through Somers he projected a reaction of terror to the unknown quantities of the bush at night. Somers, newly arrived in Australia from the trauma of postwar Europe, walking alone at night in the Western Australian bush, feels the spirit of the place is provoked by "that unnatural West-Australian moon, watching and waiting – it might have reached out a big black arm and gripped him". And again: "He was of an alien people – a victim but the horrid thing in the bush it must be the spirit of the place".<sup>42</sup> Through Somers Lawrence was projecting his own disturbed reactions to the strangeness of the Australian bush at night, and, indeed, such negative reactions to the Australian scene reiterate throughout *Kangaroo*. "Sydney, itself," he wrote, was "an awful piggly suburban place, the houses little dog kennels". He skims over suburbia with a sneer. Then of the countryside:

The squat-seeming earth, and then they ran at last into real country, rather dark old rocks and sombre bush with its different pale-stemmed dull-leaved gum trees – it was virgin bush and as if unvisited, lost, sombre with plenty of space, yet spreading grey for miles".<sup>43</sup>

And of the city, he admitted that:

the parks and the Botanical Gardens were handsome and well-kept; that the harbour, with all the two-decker brown ferry-boats sliding continuously from the Circular Quay, was an extraordinary place. But oh, what did he care about it all? In Martin Place he longed for Westminster, in Sussex Street he almost wept for Covent Garden and St. Martin's Lane, at the Circular Quay he pined for London Bridge. It was all London without being London. The London of the Southern hemisphere was all, as it were, made in five minutes, a substitute for the real thing.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast Grant Watson wrote:

Sydney is surely the most lovely of southern cities and despite its human quality of hard-boiled toughness its original, natural setting prevails above everything, and its superb suburbs dispose themselves with ample gestures about the indentations of its sunken valleys, which the sea has trimmed with invading waters. The bathing reserves staked against the sharks where men and girls in smart water attire laugh and dance and swim, as only Australians or Polynesians can swim and dive and laugh. Here you can lie, sunbaking until you are browner than a south sea islander – and then there is the view of the city from the sea, the great buildings half-hidden in smoke and mist then the downward glance into the water where float jelly fish as big as bath tubs – the attractive Botanic Gardens threatened by the emerging city – the Chinese quarter with its long narrow tea shops and far distant the roar and crash of

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<sup>42</sup> Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. pp. 86–87.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

George St. – the great bank buildings symbols of potential wealth – Here in Sydney  
I found kindness and hospitality – and beetles even on the pavement.<sup>45</sup>

From his brief visit in 1912 Grant Watson captured a vivid picture of Sydney's landscape which any 'Sydney-sider' could appreciate, in contrast to Lawrence's version of it as "the London of the Southern Hemisphere ... a substitute for the real thing". Grant Watson had the breadth of vision to assess it for itself, not as a copy of London.

Lawrence's borrowing of the name Mullumbimby, a northern New South Wales town situated in the rich dairying country behind Byron Bay, was a thoughtless choice for Thirroul, the mining town on the south coast of Sydney. The description of black smoke, of steamers on the high pale sea and a whiteness of steam from a colliery among dull trees shows little concern for the reaction of Australian readers who know Mullumbimby and its rich surrounding countryside do not fit such a description.

Lawrence's first impressions as expressed to a friend in 1922 were a complex apprehension of place, its people, and its spirit felt on the pulse: It's queer here; wonderful sky and sun and air – new and clean and untouched – and endless hoary bush with no people – all feels strange and empty and unready. I suppose it will have its day this place, but its day won't be our day. One feels like the errant dead, or the as-yet-unborn; a queer feeling – it is not and the people are not and there is a queer preprimeval ghost over everything.<sup>46</sup>

This is Lawrence viewing the landscape through his own depression which seems to have dominated his writing throughout *Kangaroo*, and was caused by the repeated humiliation of medical examinations for conscripted army service when it was obvious he was totally medically unfit. The depression caused by these disturbing experiences seems to have continued for some time and is reflected in his writing of *Kangaroo*.

Both Lawrence and Grant Watson wrote realistic descriptions of men lost in the Western Australian bush that were similar in some ways, although in *The Partners* (1933) Grant Watson took a whole chapter to describe Sam Lawson's horrific experience of being lost and finally dying in the desert.

In the novel *The Boy in the Bush* (1924), a collaboration between Lawrence and Mollie Skinner, the description of Jack lost in the bush has some similarities to Grant Watson's description of Sam Lawson's fate. Both men feel sure they can find their way back to their horse, both gradually discard each item of clothing, their feverish thoughts realizing that thirst was the intolerable thing, but fear was the great danger. Both go over their past lives. Sam Lawson's gradual deterioration is realistically portrayed by his own agonized thoughts reflecting the unrelenting landscape surrounding him.

<sup>45</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>46</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Aldous Huxley, Melbourne, London: Heinemann, 1932, p. 547. Letter dated 15 May, 1922.



The sun was sinking, only the blood red cap of its upper rim floated above the horizon. A flock of tiny birds came flying close to the earth. They did not stay for long but flew further toward their roosting place wherever that might be. Sam turned to follow their flight and there in the east was the full face of the rising moon. It seemed like a great copper counter-weight to the descending sun, suspended on an invisible balance of which the earth was the fulcrum, for as the sun sank the moon rose.<sup>47</sup>

Drawing metaphysical inferences from the observation of nature is unusual for Grant Watson but in this graphic description the effect of the earth balancing the scales of the sinking sun and the rising moon precedes Patrick White's description in *Voss* (1957):

Heavy moons hung above Jildra at that season. There was a golden moon, of placid, swollen belly. There were the ugly, bronze, male moons, threateningly lopsided. One night of wind and dust, there was a pale moonstone, or, as rags of clouds polished its face, delicate glass instrument, on which the needle barely fluttered, indicating the direction that some starry destiny must take.<sup>48</sup>

Both writers used metaphysical language to describe a phenomenon of nature, but where Patrick White used a complexity of language combining ugliness with delicate beauty Grant Watson, writing thirty years earlier, achieved a more realistic effect in simpler language.

Helen Watson Williams wrote of *The Boy in the Bush* (1924): "I would contend that Lawrence records his own responses to the physical environment with a perceptiveness that no other writer, to my knowledge has demonstrated.

Jack looks around. The track wasn't there. The well wasn't there, only the silent, vindictive, scattered bush. He couldn't be lost. That was impossible. The homestead wasn't more than twenty miles away. But as he tramped on, through the brown, heath-like underground, over the fallen, burnt-out trunks of the scattered gum trees, he realized he was lost".<sup>49</sup>

Here Lawrence intrudes on Jack's story with his own voice, as he recalls his own experience in the Western Australian bush, as recorded in *Kangaroo*:

There is something mysterious about the Australian bush. It is so absolutely still, and yet, in the near distance, it seems alive and as if it hovered round you to maze

<sup>47</sup> John Lovegood (E. L. Grant Watson), *The Partners*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1933, p. 230. Pub. under pseudonym John Lovegood with the title *Lost Man*, New York: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1933.

<sup>48</sup> White, *Voss*, op. cit., p. 176.

<sup>49</sup> Helen Watson Williams, 'Land into Literature: The Western Australian bush seen by some early writers and D. H. Lawrence', *Westerly*, no. 1, Mar., 1980, p. 70.

you and circumvent you. There is a strange feeling, as if invisible hostile things were hovering round you and heading you off ... nothing was hidden. It was all open and fair. And yet it was haunted with a malevolent mystery. You felt yourself so small, so tiny, so absolutely insignificant, in the still, eternal glade ...<sup>50</sup>

Like Grant Watson, Lawrence saw the bush as having its own life but with a threatening, malevolent spirit that he could not come to terms with as Grant Watson was able to do when he wrote:

I stayed on watching the influx of hungry gold-seekers, happy to continue hunting for my echidnas and beetles. With the gold-seekers came the keepers of stores, the sellers of food and clothes and blankets. Primitive stores were set up, and even an outdoor cinema made its appearance. An eager population of men peopled a few acres of the desert, and all around them on every side, the innocent and wide-eyed country remained as it had been from the beginning, and was until now, the possession of some pre-human spirit which still brooded above it, indifferent to this chance-gathered community of humans, who hurried so eagerly over the surface, chipping the rock outcrops with their hammers.<sup>51</sup>

In a short time Grant Watson was able to come to terms with this strange environment and to become part of the rough mining camp in the Western Australian bush. Later, on his return to England, he wrote his Australian novels from 1914 to 1935 in which the bush or the desert had a leading role with a forceful character of its own sometimes fearsome, mostly alluring, capturing its human inhabitants either in a spellbinding dedication – as was Martin O'Brien in *Daimon* (1925) – or for those who could not come to terms with it, with a destructive force, as it was for Clara Mackay in *The Desert Horizon* (1923). Grant Watson's response to the physical environment of Australia was more sensitive, more receptive and more spiritual than that expressed by Lawrence in *Kangaroo* (1923) or *The Boy in the Bush* (1924). Nevertheless there is, as we have seen, some similarity in their response to the bush, giving it its own life and forceful character.

In *The Partners*, through Sam Lawson, the city businessman inexperienced in bush lore, Grant Watson portrayed the bush as a ruthless force threatening to destroy those who have not come to terms with it. Sam Lawson's partner, Tim, an experienced bushman, has been bitten by a poisonous snake and dies instantly, leaving Sam to find his way back to the horse and cart:

Though the heart of the world had ceased to beat, his own life was held suspended at the thought that no one was there but himself. What shall I do now? What now? Get back of course to the cart and horse. What was that sound? Dingoes were howling,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 102.

and not far distant. They were in two places, answering one another. What did they find to eat he wondered. He thought of Tim Bah! a horrible thought!

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So long as he looked at his feet, he didn't feel so frightened but when he looked round him at the dust and the brittle-leaved bushes it was the immense sameness of the plain that made his heart shrink in fear. He began at a steady walk and as he went he remembered stories he had heard of men who had been bushed. No doubt there was something peculiar about the bush because quite strong men had died after just a few hours. They hadn't died of hunger or thirst but they had died of funk ... lost their heads and ran round like mad creatures even though they were not more than half a mile from a house or a railway line or something that would have saved them. Sometimes they would be found trying to dig their graves scratching in the ground like animals. He wasn't like that nothing in the least hysterical about him.<sup>52</sup>

Sam talks to himself, seeking some reassurance and trying to steady the panic that threatens to overwhelm him. There is a sense of terrible isolation in "Though the heart of the world had ceased to beat, his own life was held suspended at the thought that no one was there but himself." Terror is there too, in the dingoes and the horror of their fighting over Tim's body. Grant Watson also emphasised the helplessness of an inexperienced traveller, as was Sam, against the forces of the desert and his pitiful attempt to fight against the fear that threatened to overwhelm him. In spite of his resolution not to panic, it is obvious Sam is no match for the ruthlessness of the desert and the next paragraph describes his eventual admission of defeat.

He unstopped his bottle and this time drank all the water he had left. "Oh God have pity on me, have pity on me," and as he ran sweating and panting his thoughts became argumentative "To live, not to die or be lost or frightened and so to run - to run - to find the reef, riches, everything. The reef and the gold and easy to get back with the horse and cart. But here nothing but the god-damned, bloody howling wilderness. O God! O God!"<sup>53</sup>

It is the desert, the vast limitless plain of sameness that defeats Sam Lawson and as he wanders in circles in the blazing sun, tortured by flies and burning thirst, the desert delivers a final blow in a vicious whirlwind that reduces the lost man to the last stages of life. Then as the whirlwind recedes, Sam sees a dead bush which has somehow escaped the fury of the whirlwind and as he gazes he sees a number of brilliant blue-winged butterflies fluttering about its desiccated branches.

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<sup>52</sup> Grant Watson, *The Farmers*, op. cit., pp. 230, 240.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 256.

Strange how they disappeared, and how he lost them when they settled, like figures in a dream, that he might be dreaming! Black like the twigs, when they perched with folded wings, but when they moved, they flashed metallic purple and blue. Dream images, or things of earth? They flitted circling a little distance, now vivid in colour, now dark and vanishing. Fragile, delicate enigmas. His head ached and his throat was a dry craving – cruelty, metallic and terrible – yet their lightness was a wonder. Ah, when would death come? And as he gazed as though peering right through the region of his pain he saw the metallic wings, that opened and closed breathing the sunlight. They existed beyond the greyness, beyond the limitation of surmise – and all his old thoughts and values of the past were far remote, not to be recalled, lost in oblivion, only this new found ignorance, those fluttering enigmas of the air. What were they? What made them as they were? Spirits of beauty that spoke with the language of pain.

And as he looked, and more surprisingly than before, his heart, as though now completely cleft, was opening and closing, even as the wings were opened and closed. Not with his eyes alone, which saw through a red haze into the grey, but with his heart, was he beholding, and all the life that he had lived was now the residue of spent hungers."<sup>54</sup>

The metallic blue butterflies appear in several of Grant Watson's books. Here they are linked with Sam's mental and physical agony, their pulsating beauty linked with the throbbing of his heart. Such delicate beauty of the butterflies in the harsh arid desert is emphasised by Grant Watson's description of them as "fragile, delicate enigmas. Spirits of beauty that spoke with the language of pain". Grant Watson seems to emphasise that though delicate and beautiful as they are, they are also part of the terror that is destroying Sam.

Twenty-four years later Patrick White wrote in *Voss* (1957):

There was an air of peace at that camp, since rain had drowned many doubts ... Over all this scene, which was more a shimmer than the architecture of landscape, palpitated extraordinary butterflies. Nothing had been seen yet to compare with their colours, opening and closing, opening and closing. Indeed by the addition of this pair of hinges, the world of semblance communicated with the world of dream<sup>55</sup>

which resembles Grant Watson's interpretation of these enigmas of the arid desert as "Dream images, or things of earth?" just as Patrick White transposed the reality of hinges with the dreamlike vision.

Although an Australian, Patrick White was born and educated in England and therefore was influenced by English traditions. In *Voss* he presented a relentlessly cruel Australian landscape where Voss and his men press on, although fully aware of their failure to succeed

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 278.

<sup>55</sup> White, *Voss*, op. cit., p. 159.

in their venture and of their impending destruction, finally precipitated by the shadowy tribe of faceless blacks.

So they advanced into that country which now possessed them, looking back in amazement at their actual lives in which they had got drunk, lain with women under placid trees, thought to offer their souls to God, or driven the knife into His image, some other man.<sup>56</sup>

Like Grant Watson's characters, Voss and his men find they are possessed by the power of the desert.

In *Cooper's Creek* (1963) Alan Moorehead described Howitt's march through the desert to find the lost Burke.

The silent unrelenting bush enfolded them, the dingoes loped away as they approached, the kangaroos stared meaninglessly at the strange procession, and nothing was communicated. Sometimes strange double mirages quivered on the plains around them and trees hung upside down in the empty sky. Where in all this dreaming floating space was Burke to be found?<sup>57</sup>

Such a dreamlike vision created by a quivering mirage is described in Grant Watson's *The Desert Horizon* (1923) when young Martin O'Brien and his younger sister, having found their mother dead in the clay pan, push a pram across the desert with their baby brothers and their puppy, in order to find their father at a distant property where he is helping with the shearing.

Towards mid-day the children paused bewildered. To the left is the white, encrusted rim of a salt marsh, beyond this line of white, is a shimmering haze whose surface undulates into waves and ripples. As they watch the waves seem to rise higher, and glassy layers which look like water, appear one beyond the other, rising up into the sky. The mirage flows out before them and behind, clipping them as in a horse-shoe – the surface is twisted and torn by faint, hot gusts of wind into wisps of shining vapour, which are in shape like the bodies of fantastic creatures – beyond the horizon, there appear images of the desert, trees and low scrub, and here and there cattle, large beyond all natural proportion. The girl stands beside her brother, she puts out her arms and clings to him. Together they look at the strange creatures that move up and down over the surface of the sea.<sup>58</sup>

As Martin watches, his fear slowly leaves him. He no longer is fearful, but gazes as if in a trance at the changing images of that silver-cool, most marvellous ocean.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 194.

<sup>57</sup> Alan Moorehead, *Coopers Creek*, London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1963, ch. 13, p. 131.

<sup>58</sup> Grant Watson, *The Desert Horizon*, op. cit., p. 53.

To his boy's heart comes the first knowledge of illusion – the world is changed into unsubstantial air and vapour. From out of that realm of fancy, out of its strangely consoling beauty, he comes back with a start. The ground wherein he stands remains hard and unyielding, he too in the bitter consciousness of thirst and exhaustion remains real, too, the hateful lurching pram and the sunburnt suffering faces of his brothers, a pulse of courage mingled with despair stirs in him, he had to follow the track which he had chosen.<sup>59</sup>

Often they are tempted to halt and rest in the open blaze of the sun, but fear drives them on. The two red crows keep unpleasantly close.

Their hoarse cries give a peculiar feeling of unrest. Flies swarm around the children settling in black masses. Both crows and flies combine to form an evil fancy of dark malignant creatures, an embodiment of the desert's suddenly revealed hostility.<sup>60</sup>

In the description of the children's struggle across the desert Grant Watson presented a graphic picture of the desert's secret weapons for the unwary traveller who may be deceived into complacency by its openness, its bland and flat surface, its sameness and its shining mirages of false water. All the while it is waiting and always ready to inflict its "dark, malignant" creatures, its evil red crows, torturing flies and burning sun to destroy the inexperienced traveller. For Martin, who grows to love the desert, the experience is some kind of revelation of man's vulnerability to illusion and of the strength needed to face up to the reality, however hard and unyielding it may be.

In *The Diminishing Paradise* (1984) Ross Gibson wrote of the problem which confronted English people – writers as well as soldiers and settlers as they subsisted in the strange new country before they had managed to modify their Old World attitudes. Although it was not an English land, English writers were always liable to graft English expectations onto it. Or, as Thomas Watling understood it, appreciation of a new region can be hindered by "those national prejudices every man imbibes, and perhaps cannot entirely divest himself of."<sup>61</sup> This does not apply to Grant Watson whose Australian novels, short stories and autobiographies display an unusually different landscape to his beloved English countryside. His clear perception of the Australian landscape is unbiased by his memories of England. While there is no connection between the authors whose work has been compared with Grant Watson's, Grant Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence has told me that her father admired Moorehead's work but disliked Lawrence as can be seen in his article, 'On Hell and Mr. Lawrence', published in *The English Review*. In this article he wrote:

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>61</sup> Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, op. cit., p. 45.

... to all but the most superficial readers, the work of D. H. Lawrence must appear as an interrogative work against the accepted values of pre-war Europe. Mr. Lawrence is sensitive and perhaps exaggeratedly sensitive in the forces of disintegration. He portrays more vividly than any other contemporary writer the suffering of a selfconscious mind.<sup>62</sup>

"I can't remember Lawrence's books on my father's shelves", Josephine wrote, but he didn't like him – particularly because *The Rainbow* misrepresented and humiliated friends who had been kind and supportive to the author"<sup>63</sup> In the article 'On Hell and Mr. Lawrence', Grant Watson wrote:

He can describe with crystal clearness his vision of nature; he understands better than anyone else, the spiritual intent of animals which is behind their physical form, the poise of flowers, the movement of cat or snake; for these he has the same quality of sensuous divination as was possessed by Blake. Yet though his genius is close to the sources of life, he understands the destruction rather than the creative representation.<sup>64</sup>

This would apply to Lawrence's earlier books. There is no evidence Grant Watson had read *Kangaroo*.

It is interesting, therefore, to look at the reaction of another English writer, Havelock Ellis, to the Australian landscape. He has been well recognized but more so for his seven-volume work, *The Psychology of Sex* (1899–1928). His only novel was *Kanga Creek* (1922), based on his experiences in Australia where he lived for three years between the ages of sixteen and nineteen. The one year he spent as a solitary teacher at Sparkes Creek and Junction Creek, two tiny bush schools in the hills beyond Scone, he described as the most important in his life. He arrived in Australia with a trunk full of books – poetry, philosophy, religious writing, fiction and science – and, above all, a mind open to new experiences as was Grant Watson's. Of his eighty-three years Ellis always maintained that the most potent were those he spent in Australia. Published in 1922, *Kanga Creek* is a text based on personal experience. It was written in 1884–5 in the midst of his strange love affair with Olive Schreiner, who had just become famous as the author of the book *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and whose experience in South Africa seemed to correspond with the experience of Havelock Ellis in Australia, "in those countries where solitude is in harmony with space and nature".

In 1883 the South African Oliver Schreiner's first novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, was published in London. Born in 1855 she had sent the book to Chapman & Hall, where their reader, George Meredith, had accepted it; it was published under the pseudonym of

<sup>62</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, 'On Hell and Mr. Lawrence', *The English Review*, pp. 383, 392 (undated).

<sup>63</sup> Letter to me from Grant Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence, dated 19 Mar., 1995.

<sup>64</sup> Grant Watson, 'On Hell and Mr. Lawrence', op. cit., p. 391.

Ralph Iron. The book was an immediate success, but Schreiner, later to become famous not only as a writer but also as a pioneer of feminism and an opponent of racism and imperialism, was very pleased to have an appreciative letter about the novel from Havelock Ellis early in 1884. On 25 February she wrote him a modest letter of thanks. It was odd that they were brought together by solitude; they had both experienced a flowering of life through a communion with Nature, in the solitudes of Africa and Australia. Their correspondence continued for thirty-six years. The love they felt for each other never diminished, but their sexual incompatibility made it impossible for them to live together for any length of time, let alone marry.

By April 1885 he was sending her a rough draft of the first chapter of the novel he had decided to write, 'an idyll', to be called *Kanga Creek*. It is the only work of fiction of his life, and it is certain that he would never have written it if it had not been for Olive and their miraculous meeting and her encouragement, for she read the chapter and urged him to finish the book.<sup>65</sup>

The year that Ellis spent in Sparkes Creek he described as "being the most eventful year of my life in the country where I was to find my soul".<sup>66</sup> Of the Aborigines, Ellis wrote with the same empathy as Grant Watson. "The Aborigines had no intellectual life understood by modern Europe, but they showed how life could be truly lived by their relation to their country which was of course religious".<sup>67</sup> It was during his solitary life as a teacher in a remote bush school that the decision was made to be a doctor. It was as if the extreme simplicity of his life at Sparkes Creek had stripped away all indecision and provided the energy to transmit to consciousness a decision that had already, however slowly, taken place unconsciously. He never ceased to be grateful to Australia for it was there he found the direction of his life. But it was true, he was to be no ordinary doctor. The deepest of the many interests in his life was that which he had in sex, an interest which was slowly and steadily formulated into his life's main study.

On his return by ship to England, he wrote of the thoughts of the young school teacher of Kanga Creek:

As his thoughts were pressing into the future, reaching forward to the time when, as he could not know he would go back to the days that were past as to the sweetest thing that life could give, where he would thirst for the strange solitude that the blackman had left and the white man had not yet taken for his own and where the mystery of the early world is still alive.<sup>68</sup>

It is as if, like Grant Watson, Havelock Ellis felt in the virgin bush a mystery of secrets yet undiscovered by white men and to which both were able to relate spiritually and physically.

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<sup>65</sup> Source: Geoffrey Dutton, *Kanga Creek: Havelock Ellis in Australia*, Sydney: Picador Pan Books, 1989.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 64.



For both, the Australian experience was an inspiration that was influential in changing the direction of their lives.

On his lonely walks between his two small bush schools, with some biscuits for lunch and a flask of cold tea in one pocket of his alpaca jacket and a book of Shelley poems in the other, Havelock Ellis began to have an insight into nature that he had never known before. His reading bridged the air between himself and "the silence and isolation of the strange land". Grant Watson, in his autobiography *But To What Purpose* (1946) told of how he walked into the Australian bush with a volume of Meredith's poems in his pocket. For him, "They were English and the English tradition when I was almost overwhelmed by the strangeness of Aboriginal corroborees, a sheet anchor in a strange sea, but they remained valid in the face of magic that I was forced to believe in by its strange efficacy".<sup>69</sup> As we saw in the chapter on magic, Grant Watson experiencing it at close quarters came to believe in its power to bring about death to a victim. In spite of at times being overwhelmed by the strange power of the Australian bush; of his first few weeks in Australia, Grant Watson wrote:

The great richness that life sometimes offers to youth, as an undeserved, unearned gift, an almost inconceivable beauty can illuminate the world for the young and inexperienced human being. It is the undeserved and priceless promise of the soul.<sup>70</sup>

A third and more famous writer of Australian literature, Patrick White, returning to Australia after completing his education in England, began work as jackeroo on his uncle's property at Barwon Vale in New South Wales. "Around Walgett," wrote David Marr, "There is a folk memory that before riding off to work in the morning Paddy used to put a book in his saddle bag with his mutton chops. An extreme version of the same story is that he sometimes packed the book instead of the chops."<sup>71</sup> This experience is dramatized in *The Twyborn Affair*, (1979) where rookie jackeroo, Eddie Twyborn, packs his cold mutton chops with a book in his saddle bag before setting out with the team of workers on his uncle's station property. But there is a difference in Eddie Twyborn's reaction to the landscape as compared with the other two writers.

As he continued thumping automatically at his wholly unresponsive mount, loss of faith in himself was replaced by an affinity with the landscape surround him. It happened very suddenly in spite of a sadistic wind, the sour grass, deformed trees, rocks crouching like animals petrified by time, a black wagtail swivelling on a grey-green fence post might have been confusing an intruder had he not been directing one who knew the password. The red road winding through the lucerne flat into the scurfy interior seemed to originate in memory along with the wood carving, boy

<sup>69</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 104.

<sup>71</sup> David Marr, *Patrick White: A life*, Melbourne: Vintage, Random House Aust. Pty Ltd, 1992, pp. 105, 194.

scout knots, and plasticine castles. For all the contingent's knowledgeable remarks on wool, scours, flute and bluestone, as they mounted the contours of Bald Hill, the scene's subtler depths were reserved for the outcast-initiate.<sup>72</sup>

Written thirty years after Grant Watson's *But To What Purpose* (1946) and fifty years after *Kanga Creek* was published, Patrick White's reaction to the Australian landscape as experienced by Eddie Twyborn, newly returned from England, was to see it as sadistic, with sour grass, deformed trees and crouching rocks, a threatening landscape. Yet it gradually eased into an affinity "with the scene's subtler depths", which only the newcomer jackeroo is aware of, expressing his emotional reactions rather than the representation of the natural appearance of objects. "Australia," White remarked bitterly in later life, "is in my blood – my fate, which is why I have to put up with the hateful place, when at heart I am a Londoner."<sup>73</sup> It angered him to be mistaken for English, yet it mattered a great deal to him that he was born in London. He somehow gives the impression that he really had a strong affinity for "the hateful place" but it would be too naive for him to openly express it.

In Patrick White's *Voss* (1957) Mr. Bonner describes the deserts as preferring to resist history and to develop along their own lines where Voss will find a few black fellows and something resembling the bottom of the sea.

"Have you walked upon the bottom of the sea, Mr. Pringle?" the German asked.

"Eh?" said Mr. Pringle. "No".

"I have not," said Voss. "Except in dreams, of course, that is why I am fascinated by the prospect before me. Even if the future of great areas of sand is a purely metaphysical one."<sup>74</sup>

Many years earlier Grant Watson was a pioneer in his use of the desert as a symbol of the unconscious, endowing this symbol with a metaphysical as well as a psychological significance which is developed in the novels *The Mainland* (1917), *The Desert Horizon* (1923), *Daimon* (1925), *The Partners* (1933) and *The Nun and the Bandit* (1935). However, all his Australian books have been allowed to go out of print, and are extremely difficult to locate, with the exception of *The Nun and the Bandit* (1993).

In later life there was some correspondence between Grant Watson and Havelock Ellis. Havelock Ellis wrote an encouraging letter to Grant Watson on publication of *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914).

In *But To What Purpose* (1946) Grant Watson wrote: "I have returned to Havelock Ellis's *Impressions and Comments* and have found in all three volumes both width and depth of visions. I value him not so much as a psychologist of sex but as one of the most cultured

<sup>72</sup> Patrick White, *The Twyborn Affair*, Melbourne: Penguin Books Aust. Ltd, 1979, p. 194.

<sup>73</sup> Marr, *Patrick White: A life*, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> White, *Voss*, op. cit., p. 62.

and sane of English critics".<sup>75</sup> Both Grant Watson and Havelock Ellis had an aversion to Lawrence's work. Grant Watson wrote in his autobiography *But To What Purpose* (1946), "D. H. Lawrence when I first read him seemed a writer set apart from all the others of his time, but as I read him further he had become for me monotonous, bewildering, even boring."<sup>76</sup> Similarly, Havelock Ellis, in writing to his friend of many years, François Lafitte-Cyon, once said that he detested Lawrence's work but went on to say, "without knowing much about him, now that I have read *Kangaroo*, I see that there are real streaks of genius and insight in the man". This was referring in particular to Lawrence's understanding of a love relationship being like an electric current, always at work. But the common experience of Australia was also a bond between the two men. Lawrence at thirty-seven years of age was in Australia when Ellis published *Kanga Creek* (1922).

A further view of Grant Watson's aversion to D. H. Lawrence is seen in *But To What Purpose* (1946) when he wrote of his visits to his parents during their stay in Italy,

I met Vernon Lee and the hospitable English lady who lived at the Villa Medici and who I believe was much abused by D. H. Lawrence in his novels, but I have forgotten most of those scenes, which now appear as pictures out of a book whose pages were hurriedly turned by a young man, gripped by an inner nausea.<sup>77</sup>

Satire, irony, wit and sometimes even cruelty were characteristic features of many of Lawrence's stories. Many were believed to have been written about his friends and acquaintances.

In the introduction to *Kangaroo* (1922) Richard Aldington wrote that Lawrence was greatly interested in the nature of power and many pages and scenes of *Kangaroo* will show the battle of wills between himself and his wife when, after nearly ten years of marriage, he laboured unavailingly to prove to her that the basis of marriage is not perfect love, but perfect submission of the wife to the husband. The Somers-Harriet contest is one of the major themes of the book, and marvellously true to the characters of Lawrence and his wife".<sup>78</sup> This is one aspect that Grant Watson objected to as he did to Otto Weiniger's *Sex and Character*, written with such desperate sincerity and conviction it forced him to feel that at least some of its content was true. His analysis of the thinking process in women was significant, but the picture of woman, herself, standing in man's shadow, that the author had painted, "wounded my idealism and seemed far removed from any of my earlier ideas. As time passed I had ceased to think about this disturbing book; should not my much-loved George Meredith with his convincing belief in women pull me clear of such oriental pessimism."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 273.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 244.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 148.

<sup>78</sup> Richard Aldington, introduction to D. L. Lawrence's *Kangaroo*, Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1950, first pub. 1923.

<sup>79</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 244.

Grant Watson's female characters in his novels are all resilient and strong, capable of making their own decisions, like Vera, whose realization of herself as a person and not just a sex symbol for Sam and Tim seems to be typical of Grant Watson's female characters. Lucy, the nun and Alice Desmond, the nurse, both make their own decision to come to terms with the crises in their lives. Even Maggie O'Brien rides off into the desert leaving Martin to decide for himself whether to return with her to civilization.

Here in the open bush following the wild track made by the cattle she found solitude. At the house there had been no free solitude, merely isolation and the oppression of the desert. Now as the minutes passed, Maggie penetrated further and further into stillness, into a realm of quiet in which nature seemed to wait attention in a mood of expectation. She had left the house behind for ever – Men it was easy for them they did not live in houses; they lived in the bush, slept as often on the ground, where the night took them and merely visited their houses from time to time. Women lived in the house and that was what was wrong.<sup>80</sup>

Here Maggie takes the initiative and Martin finally follows her and takes her back to the more civilized wheatfield country. Helen in *The Mainland* (1917) is admired by the young John Sherwin for her independent spirit and Nance of *The Desert Horizon* (1923) is admired by the young Martin O'Brien for her self assurance and complete independence.

This picture of Australian womanhood is in contrast to Christina Thompson's statement of "looking back over two centuries, the single most representative portrait of Australian womanhood is the drover's wife – in other words, the drudge, isolated and trapped by the loneliness of the indomitable bush." Christina Thompson came to Australia as a young American student on a Freda Page Scholarship in the early 1980s to study at Melbourne University. It culminated in her PhD thesis 'The Paradigm Journey of the Paradigm Elsewhere' (1992) – A study of romantic imagery and ideas in fictional and non-fictional European writing about the South Pacific. "Lured to Australia from America," she wrote, "by Australian films of the seventies and early eighties, I was amazed at how unrepresentative those films were of the general Australian ethos and other forms of Australian art but they were perfectly suited to the American temperament and imagination."<sup>81</sup> Hearing of Grant Watson's work, she devoted one whole chapter to a determinedly unfavourable criticism of this writer and his Australian novels. She has quoted from several well-known critics of Grant Watson's work such as H. M. Green and his wife Dorothy Green as well as Peter Cowan of Western Australia, R. F. Dosseter and Joseph Conrad, selecting their few unfavourable comments, and failing to balance them with favourable comments. The work of these writers, she continues:

<sup>80</sup> Grant Watson *Daimon*, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>81</sup> Christina Thompson, 'The Paradigm Journey of the Paradigm Elsewhere', unpub. PhD, 1992, ch. 3, p. 131, Notes.

appears to have struck some chord among the influential generation of Australian literary, social and historical critics – those of the fifties and sixties, the infamous ‘Leavisites’, the ‘imperial’ historians, who with White and Stow and Nolan and so forth gave definition to a particular set of Australian myths. Without suggesting any sort of conspiracy it seems not unreasonable to suggest that this period represents a surge (possibly the last) of Euro-centrism in Australia. It was a generation of critics trained overseas, a conservative era in history, a period of gentlemanly conservative criticism which was not tuned to the misogyny, the racism, the European superiority (masquerading as love for a virgin land) or the general exploitativeness of Grant Watson or D. H. Lawrence.

Otherwise, Thompson continued, “It is hard to explain how anyone could argue that what Grant Watson and Lawrence had to say was ever deeply, essentially true about Australia.”<sup>82</sup> In a footnote she added:

By contrast there is a new generation of Australian critics and artists (a generation or two after Green) who will have none of this myth of the centre, the dead heart, the desert that spawns prophets in the wet only to kill them off again in the dry. The tyranny of these metaphors, the tyranny of the great arid declivity in the middle of the continent gets on their nerves. The horse they say is not a native species and it has long since died of thirst, stop beating it.<sup>83</sup>

The suggestion of “European superiority” could be applied to this kind of criticism which overlooks the fact that people, young and old, are still being lured by the magic of the centre, “the great arid declivity in the middle of the continent”, and indeed, some, like Sam Lawson, are still being trapped and destroyed by the seeming innocence of “the dead heart”!

Australia is unlike other countries in closeness of bush to the city. Anyone who travels beyond the cities on land will realize how many hundreds of thousands of other Australians are constantly travelling, for pleasure rather than business, being made aware of the peculiar nature of our country. Such is its unpredictability, people have died within a ten-minute drive from Adelaide. A strange antipathy to both myth and fact is often discernible in visitors to our country. To attempt to demolish our myths of the bush, the outback, is even stranger than if the Americans were to deny the myths of the West. In spite of its being described as ‘The Lucky Country’, Australia has been given notice that nature cannot be ignored in the devastation of Cyclone Tracy, 1975, the dust storms of 1983 blotting out the city of Melbourne with fierce north winds from drought-stricken country, the cock-eyed Bobs of the centre featuring in Grant Watson’s books.

While Lawrence in *Kangaroo* gave a skewed version of the Australia he glimpsed for a few months and the Lawrentian passages of *The Boy in the Bush* (1923) outweighed Mollie

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, pp. 127–28.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 136, Notes.

Skinner's Australian version, Grant Watson's books were written from an unbiased perception of the Australia he experienced in 1910-1912 while working in the goldfields of Western Australia and with the Australian Aborigines in the North Western area. His characters all based on the people of the outback, whom he met or with whom he worked, experiences Lawrence never had. Nor for that matter did White or Stow.

Apart from the "influential generation of Australian literary, social and historical critics" – the infamous 'Leavisites' mentioned by Thompson – who with White, Stow, Nolan and other writers gave definition to a particular set of Australian myths, there have been a very large number of critics who have been favourably impressed by Grant Watson's writings. To look briefly at one early critic of *The Desert Horizon* (1923), Eva Goldbeck wrote in *The Nation*, 15 August 1923:

A large proportion of great writers have drawn strength and flavour of their work from the free, the explored forbidden places of the earth. Of these Grant Watson is one. He does not rank with Hardy and Conrad, he is relatively a beginner compared to their works. *The Desert Horizon* is a miniature. No great human action moves in its pages which are filled with the Australian bush with an undivided majesty that cannot be regretted. The characters and incidents are sparse gripped by the relentless domination of the bush. The bright light and soft hues of an arid land are in Willa Cather's earlier books but they do not inform the consciousness of her characters as they do in Martin's. Grant Watson conveys the purely indomitableness of Martin's love for the bush flawlessly in his brittle pellucid sentences. His book is like a beautiful vase blown from the sands of the desert and tinted with colours.<sup>84</sup>

Seventy years later, Elizabeth Riddell, critic and poet, wrote: "Where were all of us readers (those of us who were born, that is) when Grant Watson published *The Nun and the Bandit* in London in 1935, or six years later when he published in New York and received serious acclaim?" Not interested obviously, because the book figures little in Australian literary history in spite of its sensational plot about the kidnapping of a nun named Lucy by an unsuccessful West Australian cattle farmer named Michael. His motive was money, ransom for Lucy's adolescent charge, the child of the cousin on whom he fixed his 'narrow passion' for money. Only H. M. and Dorothy Green, patrons, protectors, nurturers and chroniclers of Australian writing, were alert to Grant Watson's talent, continually admiring and promoting it.

Two things have happened for this novelist who died in 1970 after a life which reflected many of the complexities he wrote about in this and other books. One is the reprinting of the novel *The Nun and the Bandit* by Primavera, a small Australian publishing house, and the other is Paul Cox's production of a film of the same name, based on the book. Cox says, "the film is not faithful to the book but is, I hope, faithful to Grant Watson's spirit and to his

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<sup>84</sup> Eva Goldbeck, *The Nation*, 15 Aug., 1923.

unique faith in the land". Elizabeth Riddell writes: "The action is set in the WA outback, near Kalgoorlie. The manner in which Grant Watson, a middle-class Englishman who visited this country intermittently, has tapped the aged and brooding Australian landscape experience is a minor miracle. Only a few novels have managed it. Grant Watson's country town and its worthies, the pubs, the homestead, the cattle staging camp at Ponton Creek, the heat, the flies, the mosquitoes, the vast night skies that seem to obliterate humanity, are all appallingly real. So is the Shanley family, the rich and poor halves of it. The reader may well believe that the outback is full of Shanleys, or was in 1910 when Grant Watson was writing about them." In relating an account of the story, Riddell concludes with "I suppose that Watson is saying in such mesmerising prose that good may come out of evil".<sup>85</sup>

Christina Thompson has summed up *The Nun and the Bandit* after a detailed criticism as "The trash end of the spectrum and blatantly pornographic".<sup>86</sup> Against this refusal or inability to understand the real thrust of the story and to overlook the mesmeric prose in descriptions of the bush settings where the story unfolds, are at least thirty English and American favourable reviews in the thirties and forties and, following the film made by Paul Cox in 1993 and the reprinting of the book by Primavera Press in 1992, some excellent Australian reviews such as Elizabeth Riddell's above. While the title may suggest a melodramatic tale, it is in fact a strong psychological study derived from the author's mythological and Jungian readings and his spiritual empathy with the Australian bush.

In this book as in all Grant Watson's Australian books, the bush plays a major role in its influence on the characters, especially on Lucy, the nun, often left alone for long periods in the bush.

Almost unconscious of her movement, she had come a few steps out into the open, following him, and now that she was alone, she looked around at the few things that were familiar and reminiscent of the past. There was the car standing in the half-shadow of the rocks, and behind her there were the stores and the blankets and the glowing embers of the fire. These things were still a part of the accustomed world, And besides these, there were the natural features of the landscape, the pool and the bare rocks with their sharp, dark shadows, but not as in other landscapes ... they were in some way enchanted and made unreal, or else more real, by the silence and by the bright ocean of air, warm and impregnated through and through with sunlight. A buzz of insects, but so monotonous as to be but an emphasis to the silence which lay behind.<sup>87</sup>

In this emotional and colourful description of the bush, Grant Watson reflected something of the crisis Lucy is undergoing in her struggle to come to terms with the promise she has made. Grant Watson never allowed us to lose sight of the typical Australian bush

<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth Riddell, 'Fame after 60 years', *The Bulletin*, 5 Oct., 1993.

<sup>86</sup> Christina Thompson, 'A Piece of Savage Mischief' (chapter on Grant Watson and D. H. Lawrence), *Art and Text*, 25, 1987, pp. 20-34.

<sup>87</sup> Grant Watson, *The Nun and the Bandit*, op. cit., p. 260.



surroundings and its effect on his characters. He had a special talent for using primitive nature in its unpredictable moods in conjunction with the emotions of his characters who are in an isolated environment in the bush, far from civilization, or on Bernier Island where the violence of a "Cockeyed Bob" with its sudden intensity is merged with the violent conflict of the doctor and the stockman and dramatized in *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914). Nature, in his Australian books, is always depicted in its raw vitality, its mystery, in strong contrast to the gentleness and subtle colours of his English nature books, as for example 'Sheep' in *The Leaves Return* (1947).

Grant Watson's short stories, published in *Innocent Desires* (1924), are a collection of some of his dramatized Australian experiences. 'A Farewell' recalls his experiences on the goldfields. The spirit of Sandstone locale is rendered in graphic detail.

There is a town called Sandstone in the desert region of W.A. Once a week a train used to run from Sandstone to Mt. Magnet. At Mt. Magnet it connected with the express to Geraldton, and so escaped across the goldfields to civilization. Once a week the greater part of the population of Sandstone made their way over the split, heat radiating earth, down to the railway station, and there stood in groups and clusters to watch the departure of the train. They were like a swarm of migrating insects, gathered for their flight but constrained by some force stronger than instinct. The train with its comings and goings marked the history of the town. It was the link between present hardship and the hoped for realization of desire. Its arrival broke the week's monotony, there was indeed quite an excitement as the rusty engine gathered steam preparatory to the pulling of the three dilapidated coaches away across the desert towards the sea. Those who watched, knew that at the sea the men in carriages would go aboard steamers, and sail back to the world, the pleasures, to change of company, to the theatres, and music halls, to women and all that makes life vital, seductive and possessing.<sup>88</sup>

Grant Watson travelled in that train with Radcliffe-Brown to Sandstone from Mount Magnet, to carry out their research on the four-class marriage customs of the Australian Aborigines. Their study was interrupted by the arrival of the police looking for a murderer, so terrifying the Aborigines they all took to the bush and the programme was then moved to Bernier and Dorré Islands. They assisted in the refuelling of the train's engine from the supply of wood blocks at a halfway stop. The train was a vital link between the Western Australian desert outposts of Sandstone and Mount Magnet, the link to Geraldton and civilization, a means of available escape which drew the desert folk to view each departure. Yet they were constrained by the forces of the desert, such forces as held men like Martin O'Brien not only for the finding of gold but for its spiritual forces as seen in *Daimon* (1925). It seemed the people trapped at Sandstone by the lure of the goldfields, gathered at the departure of the train in an

<sup>88</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, 'A Farewell', *Innocent Desires*, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1924, p. 217. 'A Farewell' also appeared in *The New Statesman*.



attempt to reinforce their sense of freedom to escape from the blazing heat, dust and flies of Sandstone, but in reality knowing they would not leave.

In an article 'Random Reflections' in *Through the Window* (1927) J. H. Wood wrote:

Speaking of the Australian novel, I am impelled to raise my voice interrogatory-wise and ask why there would appear to be a conspiracy of silence regarding the work of E. L. Grant Watson. When anyone is counting the tale of worthwhile fiction about this country, one may scan the list of names in vain for any mention of this name, Grant Watson, or any of this author's books. Here is one P. R. Stephensen launching out a magazine to be devoted to fine literature and the development of an indigenous culture. In a lengthy editorial running to nigh half of the whole issue and dealing with Australian literature, there is not the slightest hint the writer is aware of any such person yet this man should be acquainted with the literature of this country.

He goes on to say:

I have read *A House is Built*, *The Richard Mahony trilogy* and a few other works commended as really worthwhile pieces of Australian fiction but the only thing about them which might be accounted as specifically Australian, is the fact that the authors have been born here. I incline to the opinion that there is not one of them all but could have been written by any competent writer who had never been in this country, provided that he only read up his locale and background a bit, and I am just as firmly of the opinion that it would be hard indeed to write *Innocent Desires* (1924), *The Desert Horizon* (1923) and *Daimon* (1925), in fact any of Grant Watson's Australian novels without not only a personal knowledge of the Australian desert, but a sensitive awareness and deep understanding of all its secrets.

When J. H. Wood wrote this in 1927, Grant Watson had published five of his Australian books: *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914); *The Mainland* (1917); *The Desert Horizon* (1923); *Daimon* (1925) and *Innocent Desires* (1924). In *Daimon*, J. H. Wood found a subject, "dramatic enough and more worthy of an Australian writer's pen than the tawdry love stories and jerry-built limitations of the *Forsyte Saga*, and suchlike with which the Australian public is regaled. The mystic spell of the bush; its terrible desolation and silence; its awesomeness; its aspect of the sinister; its sunsets; moonlit charms; its own peculiar beauties; the conflict between the spirit of the sojourner and the spirit of the place . . ."<sup>89</sup>

However, the "conspiracy of silence" Wood wrote about continued in Australia, allowing all five books to go out of print before anyone got to know about them, and to this day few people have heard of E. L. Grant Watson. His two autobiographies *But To What Purpose* (1946) and *Journey under the Southern Stars* (1968) both long out of print, contain much that is unusually perceptive about Australia, the land and the Aborigines written in

<sup>89</sup> J. H. Wood, 'Random Reflections', *Through the Window*, Melbourne: Fraser & Jenkinson, 1937, p. 495.

mesmeric prose projecting the memories which he carried for the rest of his life. His attitude is akin to the Aborigines who long ago discovered the secret of living with the land rather than on it.

In 1991 Geoffrey Blainey, in his essay, 'A Love Affair with the Arid Heart', wrote: "How we view the dry interior is a mirror of how we view our nation and its goal and future. Poets and Painters depicted the desert and rarely did they see magic in it."<sup>90</sup> Not until the Aboriginal paintings came into existence illustrating an Aboriginal culture with its own structure of myth, ritual and magic, could be glimpsed the rare clues to the many faceted culture of a unique lifestyle in its own special environment of a unique landscape. But for Grant Watson in 1910-12, the Western Australian desert was the heart from which radiated the pulses of areas more civilized, less magical, extending to the towns and cities, vibrating with the clang of a teeming population that has no room for magic. Randolph Bedford, journalist and mining promoter, was one of the first to write of the dry inland with affection. In 1900 he marvelled at Central Australia and the dry gold country of Western Australia, but even he preferred his desert after rain, especially when the salt lake became a plain, rippling away in waves of crimson to the horizon, a great garden filled with pink amarantha and native lilac.

In one of his Australian novels, *The Partners* (1933) Grant Watson described how Vera, Sam Lawson's young English wife, travelling by train across the Western Australian desert from Geraldton to Meekathara<sup>91</sup> looks at the blaze of sunlight on the plain, and notices the country had changed since her last view.

Her eyes gazed at the empty land, vaster than her imagination had pictured. There was a slight declivity at about fifty yards, and fringing the edge of it there were flowers. To Vera it seemed in its unexpected brightness like a living river of pink and white blossoms.<sup>92</sup>

For Grant Watson the appearance of the delicate blossoms carpeting the arid land after rain was a phenomenon as magical as the appearance of the delicate metallic blue butterflies in harsh surroundings.

The critic H. P. Heseltine has written: "A feature of a good deal of recent Australian writing has been its willingness to use an exploration of the bush as an analogy for the exploration of the individual soul. The bush becomes a metaphor for the self."<sup>93</sup> He sees

<sup>90</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *Speeches and Essays*, Melbourne: Schwartz Books, 1991, pp. 126-27.

<sup>91</sup> Meekathara: town 760 km north east of Perth on the Great Northern Highway, whose name derives from Aboriginal words for 'little water'. It became a gold rush town in 1896 when gold was discovered there by prospectors Meehan, Porter and Soich. It is now the administrative and transport centre for a large region of pastoral and mining interests.

Grant Watson's novels *The Desert Horizon* (1923) and *The Partners* (1934) are set predominantly in the Murchison region, in the country traversed by the Geraldton-Meekatharra railway. In *The Desert Horizon* (1923) the town is thinly disguised as 'Tharameka'. Source: Peter Pierce (ed.), *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987.

<sup>92</sup> Grant Watson, *The Partners*, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>93</sup> H. P. Heseltine, 'The Forties to the Sixties: Australian image', *The Oxford Anthology of Australian Literature*, eds Leonie Kramer & Adrian Mitchell, pp. 308-09.

James McAuley's poem, 'Terra Australia', as making quite explicit the analogical uses to which the Australian land can be put. Fiction, however, he sees as offering extended opportunities for the landscape to be used in this manner, as for example Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* (1983) which he views as a literal and metaphorical journey of self-discovery for Heriot, and Patrick White's *Voss* (1957) where the vast landscape is used as an extended metaphor for the exploration of the soul. Both Heriot and Voss are gradually destroyed in their search for self discovery.

Many years before these writers used the exploration of the bush as an analogy for the exploration of the individual soul, Grant Watson wrote in *But To What Purpose* (1946): "Those first weeks that I spent in the bush were rich, not so much in outer, but in inner experience". In his Australian novels, *The Desert Horizon* (1923) and *Daimon* (1925), the theme of the landscape as the dominating force of self discovery for the protagonists is followed as it is in the author's own autobiographies, *But To What Purpose* (1946) and *Departures* (1948) as well as *Journey under the Southern Stars* (1968). He felt himself into the landscape and the landscape became part of his soul.

Brian Elliott concluded his pioneering study, *The Landscape of Australian Poetry* by urging the reader to consider McAuley's 'Terra Australia' as a summary-fusion of the diverse strains to be found in Australian poetic depictions of the landscape.

Voyage within you, on the fabled ocean,  
And you will find that Southern Continent,  
Quiros' vision – his hidalgo heart  
And mythical Australia, where reside  
All things in their imagined counterpart<sup>94</sup>

James McAuley, 'Terra Australia' (II:1-5)

Kirpal Singh sees "Landscape as Revelation" in linking McAuley's poem with that of another earlier, dislocated poet, Walt Whitman. Both searched for a meaningful bond with their landscape by evoking fabled mystical journey. "Both poets," he wrote, "embarked on an inner voyage more spiritual than material and therefore more poignant than spectacular. The complexities inherent in their mutual confrontation with the realities of the landscape, provide ample opportunities for readers to share in the delicate balancing perspectives. A major burden for any poet is the conversion of the unfamiliar to the familiar, the exception into the ordinary and writing basically as an outsider he sees that this burden is also at the heart of Les Murray's poetry."<sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Brian Elliott, *The Landscape of Australian Poetry*, Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1967.

<sup>95</sup> Kirpal Singh, 'Landscape as Revelation: The case of Les Murray', *SPAN Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies*, no. 28, April, 1989, p. 90.

For Grant Watson, long time a devotee to Walt Whitman's philosophy, revelation came through the landscape as a powerful force behind the innocent facade, a force he had to contend with in order to survive in the Australian bush, by the conversion of the unfamiliar to the familiar, the exception into the ordinary.

There were times when I was frightened, but never too frightened to control myself. Death never stared threateningly at me. Already I seemed in a way to be familiar with this unfamiliarity, this unknown monster which whispered to me ... "I am the indefinite mother of good and evil. I transcend all things and am less than all things. I am the fullness and the void. I am both death and life. I am love and love's murder. Look not upon me for too long." Then I would turn away and seek the camp, and familiar human things, and be righted in my own esteem.<sup>96</sup>

It was the Western Australian landscape, the land of the Kimberleys that made an immediate and lasting impression on Grant Watson. Its uniqueness and strange power – a power he described as destroying some who could not come to terms with it – and which was prominent in his writing from the start.

His awareness of the landscape and its influence on people is clear in his novels, as is his recognition that the novel had to do more than mirror landscape, or devote itself to tales of adventure. "It is in this sense," wrote Veronica Brady and Peter Cowan of the University of Western Australia, "that his work is in advance of most of his fellows of the 1920's in Australian writing, and certainly of those concerned with Western Australia for a much longer period."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>97</sup> Veronica Brady & Peter Cowan, *The Literature of Western Australia*, ed. Bruce Bennett, WA: University of WA Press for the Education Committee of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations, 1979, p. 40.

# Chapter Nine

## Literary Landscapes – Comparisons with Other Writers – Part Two

### Section 1: Miscegenation

The critic Adam Shoemaker in *Black Words White Page* (1989) wrote of Katharine Susannah Prichard and Xavier Herbert as having, in the years of the Depression, rescued the Australian Aborigine from literary invisibility and of boldly addressing the embarrassing issue of miscegenation.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, Grant Watson's work was again overlooked. His short story 'Out There', published in 1914, and his two autobiographies of 1946 and 1968, have considered this theme. In 'Out There', the subject of miscegenation was dramatized from an experience Grant Watson had while working with Radcliffe-Brown in Western Australia. The story is set in a remote bush area south of Wyndham in the far north of Western Australia. It is based on a meeting described in *Journey under the Southern Stars* (1968) of Radcliffe-Brown and Grant Watson with the manager of an isolated cattle station near Sandstone, east of Geraldton. Radcliffe-Brown had heard of the white man who had lived in close association with the tribesmen for some years and, as they needed to replenish their water supply and the station was not far distant, they decided to visit the property. At first the station manager was uncommunicative and suspicious. He gave them permission to take the water then retired to his dilapidated house, hustling his native girls inside. Later, after seeing the friendly meeting of his visitors' Aborigines with the members of his tribe, he relented, and joined them at their camp fire for a smoke and a talk. He led them to understand that he preferred the native way of life to that of Europeans. He told them he had come to love these people and had become a member of their tribe. "They have a religion," he said, "better than I have found amongst the white men". He showed them scars on his chest similar to those carried by the natives. "These scars show I have chosen their way of life. I am one of them. When you go back don't talk about me. Let me be forgotten". He showed them with pride the coffee-coloured children that squatted amongst the ruins of his one-time mattress. "They will be better off here than in Perth. My accounts are straight. There is nothing to complain of. These men work for me for nothing, what more can the owners want?"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Adam Shoemaker, *Black Words, White Page: Aboriginal literature 1919–1988*, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1989, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Journey under the Southern Stars*, London, New York, Toronto: Abelard-Schuman, 1968, pp. 42–43.

"He had assimilated his environment," wrote Grant Watson in his autobiography, "yet despite his affirmations there were indications he was not quite at peace with himself. We wondered how long the simplicity and adaptability of the native girls would satisfy the restless ego of the European. However, his anecdotes helped us to make a picture in our minds of the integration of an Aboriginal tribe".<sup>3</sup>

From this encounter, Grant Watson wrote 'Out There' (1913). It tells of Jefferies, the young English station manager of an isolated well-run property with the Aborigines who work for him as his only companions. In his loneliness or isolation he found he needed to adapt to their way of life. He interested himself in their beliefs and took a young Aboriginal girl as his mistress. However after ten years he is urged by his company, who are pleased with his management, and concerned about his isolation, to take a long holiday in Perth. He does so and meets and finally marries a shallow white girl. It seems like an attempt to regain his white man's principles and for her, on the lookout for a suitable man, Jefferies, good-looking and with a good salary seems to be the right one. Returning with his white wife to a newly-built house but the isolated environment, he has not bargained for a violently jealous black mistress who, after several nasty incidents finally, in stabbing the white woman, solves a problem created by himself. His extreme rage and remorse are finally overcome by his sense of oneness with the land and the Aborigines as part of it. As J. J. Healy has written, Grant Watson projects a scenario which, in other hands, would become a concern with sexuality, miscegenation or 'going native'. In fact, the tone of the story is quite different. What the story projects is the conception of the Aborigines as being in harmony with the land and with the rhythms of existence, and the lonely white man's realization that he, too, had become part of the harmony.

On every side in the dim light stretched the arid bush; flat and sun-baked. Scattered over its surface were gum-trees and mulga bushes, that repeated themselves far into the distance and for distance beyond distance. For many evenings the white man would sit, listening to the stillness of that untroubled land. Kangaroos and wallabies would come out of the scrub and hop fearlessly within a few yards of him; he would hear the rhythmical rise and fall of the native songs, see the smoke of their camp fires, and hear the whirring, humming sound of the bull roarers. At such times the natives, together with all his surroundings, beasts and trees, seemed to be in league. They were part of the land and understood its mystery. He alone was foreign and out of place. Gradually through his loneliness, he began to see the Aborigines as individuals, human beings who were interesting and in some respects attractive. He liked their light cheerfulness, their good horsemanship and the quality that made them so easily pleased with small things. He was less lonely when working among them, and felt subconsciously that they were a possible means of interpretation to

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

the mystery of the land that seemed, at one time to threaten and overpower with immense forebodings and at another to caress with a soft and hovering quiet.<sup>4</sup>

The story was included in a collection of short stories entitled *Innocent Desires* (1923). It was first published in 1913 in *The English Review*. The publisher, Norman Douglas, received indignant letters from shocked English readers, one cancelling his subscription. In 1914 A. G. Stephens published it in *Bookfellow* calling it 'an authentic Australian document'. In 1990 it was reprinted in *Descent of Spirit* (Primavera Press).

Louis Becke's *His Native Wife* (1895) provides an interesting possible parallel to Grant Watson's 'Out There' although there is no evidence in Grant Watson's work that he was aware of Becke or his work. Set in a less realistic, more romanticized setting in the South Sea Islands, it tells the same story of miscegenation and has the same violent end with the jealous native woman stabbing her white man's white woman. It also parallels the theme of imposing the Christian religion on the natives as in Grant Watson's *Shadow and Sunlight* (1920). In Louis Becke's *His Native Wife* (1895), the missionary's wife, Helen, is in love with Barrington, a ship's mate who has been stranded on an island following a quarrel with his captain. He gets himself a native wife, Nadee, who is half-caste, having had a white father. The Chief of the island builds them a house. Helen's sister, Kate thinks it disgraceful, but is told by the missionary that it is not accepted in the USA or UK but in South Sea Islands it shows he means to settle down and live decently.

The book points to a perceived foolishness in missionary work. The missionary's wife, Helen, says: "My husband is only a unit in a vast crowd of silly people who throw away millions of dollars every year in sending out people sillier than themselves to worry heathen people about their souls". Barrington tells her: "We cannot put new wine into old bottles", and Helen replies: "I would have gone on in the laudable effort to put new wine in old bottles, meaning thereby to cram simple native minds with Boston-made theology."<sup>5</sup> This illustrates the iconoclasm perceivable in romance fiction.

Nadee's grandmother blames the Christ woman for taking Barrington away from her. Grandmother tells of the Christ man who told her father cunning lies of a man-God greater than all the Gods of Ponape. They sent the cunning Christ man to Ponape to tell her father to forsake all Gods. The island people were seized by an illness from the Christ ship and died. T'Nanakin asked Christ wizard to save them. "If they die," Christ wizard said, "it is the will of God". This struck terror in the hearts of the island people. Her father would not accept the will of God, so T'Nanakin's men slew all who opposed, but Nadee's family fled to another island. On this island Railek, the son of the Chief wants Nadee, and Nadee's grandmother tells Nadee to take Railek for husband and forget white man while the wizard's wife loves her white man. Meanwhile Barrington and Helen are almost drowned in a shipwreck. Railek

<sup>4</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, 'Out There', *The English Review*, 1913, p. 14. Also published in *Innocent Desires*, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1924 and *Descent of Spirit*, Sydney: Primavera Press, 1990, pp. 213-14.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Becke, *His Native Wife*, London: Alex Lindsay, Unwin, 1896, p. 116.



saves them but allows the missionary, Helen's husband to drown, so that people will think Helen is Barrington's wife. Nadee's grandmother then gives Nadee a knife to kill Helen, which she accomplishes and claims back her man who actually was not in love with Helen, but still loved his native wife.

In Grant Watson's *Shadow and Sunlight* (1920) also published in the USA (1921) as *The Other Magic*, he wrote of Blunt, a plantation owner on Montana, an island in the South Seas. Blunt speaks to the visiting missionary from an adjacent island:

"When I heard that you were coming to Nathamaki two years ago, I was sorry. I had long ceased to be a Christian, and I didn't want my natives christianised. I had got to understand something of their religion. There is a wonder and a wildness, a magic which is both simple and extraordinarily deep-meaning. It satisfied me; and though Nathamaki is fifteen miles away, it seemed too near for the habitation of another white man. I felt all this, and you must have known I was hostile to you." Matheson replied, "I am a servant of God - I must do as He bids me."

The theme of attacking missionaries for what they saw as misguided attempts to Christianise the natives is followed by both these writers and goes back to Melville's *Pierre* (1852) which cost the author his popularity because of its confused metaphysics and iconoclasm.

The theme of misguided attempts to christianize the natives follows through both stories culminating in violence against the threat as they see it, of the Christian missionaries. As in the other stories, Blunt's newly-acquired white wife is the target of his native mistress's jealousy. Unfortunately, Blunt's wife, Eva, is also a fervent Christian and with the silver cross on the chain around her neck, she has previously protected herself from their threatened violence and they have become terrified of her "magic cross". Because Blunt refuses to send her away, the natives eventually gather in force and murder them both, as well as the missionary. While the theme of miscegenation is the same, both these stories differ from Grant Watson's 'Out There' in their romanticized scenarios of the South Seas, which are a contrast to the realism of 'Out There', set in the outback of Western Australia in 1910-12 and showing the Aborigines as an integral part of the Australian landscape.

Another novel of the same theme is *Gone Native* (London: Constable, 1914) written by R. J. Fletcher, who was an uncle of the English novelist, Penelope Mortimer, better known as the author 'Asterisk'. The novel tells a similar story of the white man in the South Sea Islands taking a native girl as his wife. When visiting a neighbouring island, he meets an attractive white girl and everything seems right for the perfect match, when he feels he must return to his native woman and their child. The same struggle takes place with the white man torn between his European principles and his attraction to the native woman as part of the tropical environment. Like Grant Watson's and Beck's stories it also has a violent ending. Again, Grant Watson's story has the realism of an actual happening projecting the white man's strong ties with the land, the extreme isolation of his life and the affinity he has established with an Aboriginal tribe.



Another viewpoint comes from Christina Thompson criticizing Grant Watson's sensitive portrayal of the isolated white man's acceptance of the Aboriginal way of life and the taking of an Aboriginal mistress. She wrote of 'Out There': "Such are the story's racist and sexist assumptions that it is preferable, if not obligatory, to end with the black woman repentant and on her knees."<sup>6</sup> This comment shows a misconception of Grant Watson's story and of the character of Kennedy, who differs from Patrick White's Boyle and Prichard's Brumby, as we shall see later, in that he has entered into an understanding of the Aboriginal tribal customs and accepts their mystical beliefs.

The women he lived with were simple and understood him and he understood them. He cursed civilization. Why had it not left him in peace? He had found God in the wild bush, and then forsaken him. Now he was alone, curse them! But Jenny had come back, not on her knees but bravely unrepentant, to claim her man. "I came back to cook for master, look after master". She looked up at him fearlessly.<sup>7</sup>

The author who comes closest to Grant Watson's 'Out There' is Katharine Susannah Prichard with *Coonardoo* (1929). Christina Thompson described 'Out There' as a sketch of *Coonardoo*. Written fifteen years earlier, it is similar but different. Although both have typical Australian outback settings of the isolated white station manager, Hugh differs from Jefferies in his refusal to relinquish his white man's principles in spite of a deep love for Coonardoo, his childhood companion. Coonardoo faithfully serves his white wife, as she did his mother, but it also ends in tragedy. Drusilla Modjeska, in the introduction to *The Roaring Nineties* (1983) wrote of *Coonardoo*:

The dust raised by the novel took a long time to settle, not least because the Aboriginal Coonardoo has an affair with a white man, an idea which, in 1928 was more shocking than the novel's central point about the dispossession of an entire culture.<sup>8</sup>

On the contrary, Prichard's presentation of the Youie/Coonardoo relationship is more sad than shocking, originating as it does from their childhood companionship on Hugh's mother's station property where they grew up together and dearly loved one another, but which as an adult, Hugh refuses to acknowledge – or to relinquish his white man's principles – with tragic consequences for both.

Like Grant Watson's Jefferies in 'Out There', Hugh has a sense of oneness with the land and of how the Aborigines are part of it.

<sup>6</sup> Christina Thompson, 'The Paradigm Journey to the Paradigm Elsewhere', unpub. PhD, 1990, ch. 3, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Grant Watson, 'Out There', *Innocent Desires*, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> Drusilla Modjeska, introduction to *the Roaring Nineties*, repub. London: Virago, 1983, p. ix; first pub. London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1946.

He could hear the blacks singing beside their camp-fires in the dark, the frail eerie melodies winging over the dark plains, under a wide sky on which the stars were dim as rock crystals. That throbbing on one note, flight, fall and reiterated rhythm and melody quivering, infiltrating had always stirred and excited him. He told himself he liked to hear the blacks on Wyaliba singing, because it showed they were happy, life was good to them. But there was more in it than that. The blacks' singing was a communication, a language of the senses, remote and Aboriginal. Infinitely, irresistibly Hugh felt it. Always he could hear Coonardoo singing above the rest of the women.<sup>9</sup>

Although there is no doubt he loves Coonardoo, there is no way he will allow his love to develop into 'an affair'.

Drusilla Modjeska continued:

There was some university based research into Aboriginal society but *Coonardoo* was the first popular statement that Aboriginal culture far from being primitive was rich and complex. It was the first popular exposure of the exploitation and decimation of the Aboriginal population which was assumed to be primitive and backward and thus dying out.<sup>10</sup>

In this respect Grant Watson's 'Out There' (1914), his Australian novels, and particularly his autobiographies have displayed a profound and prior understanding of the rich complexity of the Aboriginal culture. As well, in *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914) he described the tragedy of the dying Aborigines forcibly isolated in the hospitals on Bernier and Dorré Islands away from their families and the lands of their tribal ancestors, and suffering from the white man's diseases.

In the play *Brumby Innes* (1927) Prichard portrayed the theme of miscegenation with a different approach. Winner of the Triad Prize in 1927 for an Australian three-act play, the play premiered at the Pram Factory, Melbourne, 1 November 1927.<sup>11</sup> Set in the far north-west of Western Australia, "it savagely contrasts the morality of the city with the extreme conditions of the north, where the city is as harsh as nature and as demanding." In this play, the station manager is the opposite to Grant Watson's Jefferies and Prichard's Hugh. His brutal approach to the Aborigines and their women lacks all the sensitivity of Hugh's suffering and Jefferies' remorse. The play tells of Mary Hallinan, a city girl who comes to see life on a neighbouring station. She flirts with Brumby who rapes her. She marries him but with unhappy results. J. J. Healy's opinion that the stories reveal "all station life in the outback needed was white women, freed of pretensions, who recognized the nature of the task their

<sup>9</sup> Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Coonardoo*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1956, p. 71. First pub. 1929.

<sup>10</sup> Modjeska, introduction to *The Roaring Nineties*, op. cit., p. ix.

<sup>11</sup> Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Brumby Innes* (1927), published in Perth, 1940. Republished Sydney: Methuen, 1974; Melbourne: Currency Press, 1983.

men faced in settling the land"<sup>12</sup> would not apply to Brumby who informs his white wife that she is obliged to take her place, with Wylba and the other Aboriginal women, in his harem.

Similarly in Patrick White's *Voss* (1951) we see Brendan Boyle after ten years managing a lonely station property on the edge of the Western Australian desert offering hospitality to Voss and his men in his

house, or shack of undaubed slab, that admitted day and starlight in their turn, several pieces of smooth Irish silver stood cheek by jowl with pocked iron, the former dented somewhat savagely, in reprisal it seemed, for elegance. The dirt floor was littered with crumbs and crusts of bread. Birds and mice could always be relied upon to carry off a certain amount of this rubbish but some lay there until it became petrified by time, or was ground to dust under the hard feet of those black women who satisfied the crude requirements of Brendan Boyle.<sup>13</sup>

Here we see degradation over the ten years of isolation symbolized by the "smooth Irish silver stood cheek by jowl with pocked iron". There is none of the spiritual alliance with the Aborigines or the land projected by Grant Watson or Prichard. White is reported as saying, "I've only known one or two Aborigines in my life. The inspiration for Dubbo came purely from my own head ... I don't know what Aborigines think of my books."<sup>14</sup>

Both Prichard and Grant Watson had close contact with the Western Australian Aboriginal tribes. The period of their life spans was almost identical – Prichard 1883–1969 and Grant Watson, 1885–1970. Both had a love for the writings of George Meredith. In his unpublished autobiography, 'To This End', Grant Watson wrote:

Meredith has been my companion in all my journeys, even into the Australian desert where we carried little personal luggage. As a poet he often lacks grace of style and harmony. He is both poet and philosopher, and is the only poet who still lures me on, tempted by his obscurity into undefinable regions. It was his obscurity that prompted me, as a lad of eighteen to seek to solve the enigmas of his poetic prosody. His *Woods of Westermain* (1885) in which he challenges his reader to enter at some risk, are the *Woods of Life*, which may appear light or dark according to the beholder. The approach is through the ordinary woods of earth, rich in sun and rain for anyone to see who has the eyes to look. These lead inevitably into the inner world. This is a long poem; in it is contained all Meredith's philosophy of Earth and of Man.<sup>15</sup>

When in Fiji, he found himself, as an honoured guest, forced to attend a church service where the missionary on his half-yearly visits preached to his Wesleyan flock. The time came when

<sup>12</sup> J. J. Healy, 'Grant Watson and the Aborigine: A tragic voice in an age of optimism', *Aust. Lit. Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1975, pp. 24–38.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick White, *Voss*, Great Britain: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1957, p. 166.

<sup>14</sup> Shoemaker, *Black Words, White Page*, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, 'To This End', unpub. autob., p. 201.

it was obvious that Grant Watson was expected to make an oration. Not having understood a word of their language, he launched into 'The Woods of Westermain', then on to Keats and Shelley, but the final one, Vachel Lindsay's 'Congo' drew shouts of enthusiastic "Wah", "Wah" from every part of the church.

In 1908 Prichard, who was born in Fiji, travelled to England with an introduction from the Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin,<sup>16</sup> to George Meredith, whose style and outlook she admired intensely; particularly in that he had shown an emancipated woman taking her life, her loves and her business affairs into her own hands – shocking to English attitudes of the time. As Justina Williams has written in an introduction to *Haxby's Circus* (1930), Katharine Susannah Prichard was to pioneer a new form of realist writing as distinctly Australian as Meredith's was English. Although she created her own strikingly original characters, George Meredith's 'Diana of the Crossways' was perhaps the spiritual forerunner of G'na in *Haxby's Circus* (1930) and of Elodie in *Intimate Strangers* (1933).

In her novels of this period, Katharine Susannah Prichard was becoming increasingly interested in the sexual as well as the economic and social oppression of women. It is at this point that the two impulses in her work come together, for it was in the area of sexuality and the unconscious that she was most influenced by modernism. *The Roaring Nineties* (1946) is written from the miners' point of view and from the experiences of the miners' women, in the early days of the goldfields. It centres around Southern Cross and a new discovery of a promising reef a night's journey away by horse and buggy, which could have been the Bullfinch mine where Grant Watson experienced life on the goldfields in 1910 and which he has vividly related in *But To What Purpose* (1946). In the introduction to *The Roaring Nineties*, Prichard wrote:

For several years, I gathered material, living and working on the goldfields, yarning to old prospectors, and hearing from them of rushes, experiences of the early days. I read all the old newspapers and almost everything that had been written on the subject. The book opens with an account of the Aborigines being chased from their lands by the encroaching miners, yet the miners relied on the Aborigines for gaining knowledge of water locations, which they accomplished by force if unable to gain ready agreement with the Aborigines.<sup>17</sup>

Prichard was remarkable for gaining first-hand experience of the material for her books. She lived with the timber cutters in the south-west for *Working Bullocks* (1926), travelled with Wirth's Circus for *Haxby's Circus* (1930) and stayed on a station in the north for *Coonardoo* (1929).

<sup>16</sup> At age 22, Alfred Deakin was President of Spiritualist Association. His Gothic tale 'The Theatre' written in 1888, is in the mode of Joseph Conrad's 'The Secret Sharer' – self-consciously literary Gothic and with religious themes implicit. See also: John Thompson, 'A note on the Papers of Alfred Deakin', *Voices, The Quarterly Journal of the National Library of Australia*, Winter, vol. IV, no. 2, 1994, pp. 33–37.

<sup>17</sup> Katharine Susannah Prichard, Introduction, *The Roaring Nineties*, London, Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1946.

A different style of writer, in that he was a naturalist, an itinerant bushman, is Donald Stuart who in *Yandy* (1959), portrays the Aborigines not as the primitive tribes of Grant Watson's or Prichard's books or the treacherous, symbolic figures in Patrick White's *Voss*, "faster than light, blacker than darkness like corporeal shadows" following the explorers, always in the background, waiting for the death of Voss. Stuart's Aborigines are individuals working within civilization striving for recognition of their labours. A Western Australian by birth, Donald Stuart lived there nearly all his life, except when interned in South-East Asia as a Japanese prisoner-of-war. He spent much of his career in direct contact with Aboriginal people on the land, swag-carrying, cattle driving, sinking wells, prospecting and working on the wharves. Being intimately involved with the aftermath of the Pilbara strike of 1946, the genesis of the strike provided the source material for his first novel, *Yandy* (1959) which is written more from the Aboriginal point of view.<sup>18</sup>

Whereas Shoemaker has described Patrick White as a symbolist and Stuart as a naturalist, Grant Watson was concerned more with a metaphysical interpretation of the human relationship with them during his two years in Australia. As Dorothy Green has written:

Young and inexperienced, he certainly came to Australia with the full equipment of the anthropological stereotypes that constituted racial theory throughout the 19th century, but once he came to live among Aborigines and met those who knew more about them than he did, his conventional ideas began to collapse; he learned to respect the dark people and their view of the world, and said later that he was able to enter into a direct human relationship with them that he could not achieve with the natives of Fiji.<sup>19</sup>

He felt a distrust for the Fijian natives, in whom he sensed a feeling of latent cruelty and even hostility. Had it not been for the letter he carried from an important magistrate in Levuka, he believed these people would have killed and eaten him. In his autobiography he wrote: "If ten years back I had come presenting a whale's tooth, I would without doubt, have been killed and eaten."

## **Section 2: Corroborees – Reincarnation – Myths**

In *Journey under the Southern Stars* (1968) Grant Watson described his first encounter with the Australian Aborigines of 1910. From the sounds of bull-roarers invisible in the bush around them to the time when he and Radcliffe-Brown finally tentatively ventured to join them in a seated conclave on the ground. With Radcliffe-Brown's experience in the Andaman Islands, they were able to gradually gain the confidence of the Aborigines over a period of

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<sup>18</sup> Shoemaker, *Black Words, White Page*, op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>19</sup> Dorothy Green, *Descent of Spirit: Writings of E. L. Grant Watson*, Sydney: Primavera Press, 1990, p. 29.

time and were eventually invited to witness a corroboree, for which there had been weeks of preparation.

We were greeted by the other natives, and when all was quiet we sat down with our adopted tribe beside one of the small fires into which they thrust their firesticks. About the ground cleared for the dancers, spears were set upright, and from all directions came the whirring cadence of bull-roarers. Listening to that recurring, yet irregular rhythm that was as organized as any heartbeat, I felt myself lifted out of my present self into the strange and new, which was yet familiar. Away in the bush, hidden from sight, were Aboriginal savages, standing with legs straddled, swinging the vibrating blade, summoning the ancestral spirits.<sup>20</sup>

In *The Boy in the Bush* (1924) the Lawrencian style of writing can be seen in the description of the corroboree:

Everybody seemed to be dancing a crazy dance of death. He could understand that the blacks painted themselves like white bone skeletons, and danced in the night like skeletons dancing in their corroboree. That was how it was, almost biblical in its finality. The night, dark and fleshly, and skeletons dancing a clickety dry dance in it.<sup>21</sup>

This contrasts with Grant Watson's reaction to the Australian environment, of which the Aborigines were an integral part with their symbolic corroboree dance, which for Grant Watson was all life and fire energized by the stirring rhythms of the bull roarers invisible in the distance, lifting him out of the present into a strangely familiar past. It is unlikely that Lawrence ever experienced a corroboree as Grant Watson did, and his description, in contrast, features a caricature of "a crazy dance of death, white bone skeletons" and the night becomes humanized "dark and fleshly" in which skeletons danced a "clickety dry dance in it." The dancers appear as skeleton puppets manipulated by an unseen force against a dark background – all of which was totally removed from his inner self and the surrounding ambience of the bush.

However, in Prichard's *Coonardoo* (1929) there is a similarity to Grant Watson's description of a corroboree in her description of Mumae's reaction expressed in lyrical terms:

Warrieda asked Mumae to stay and see the corroboree. His people had never before permitted a woman to watch. Mumae sat down on the earth beyond the fire again. Part of the shadows, sitting there in the dark, she had glimpsed another world, the world mystic, elusive, sensual and vital of this primitive people's imagination. A

<sup>20</sup> Grant Watson, *Journey under the Southern Stars*, op. cit., pp. 34–35.

<sup>21</sup> D. H. Lawrence & Mollie Skinner, *The Boy in the Bush*, London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1924, p. 226.

presentiment of being part of the shadows, of the infinite spaces about her, and of the ceremonial dance itself, she banished peremptorily.<sup>22</sup>

Like Grant Watson, Prichard showed Mumae as being captured by the magic of the Aboriginal aura but while Mumae makes a conscious effort to free herself from the mysticism, Grant Watson was caught up in

... the mystical Aboriginal world of ancestral spirits. In that short time the prehistoric past had been brought into the present and united with the eternal moment of now. A communion between man and nature had been achieved, and these simple savages, living and having all their being within the controlling aura of their tribal life, had dipped down into the religious matrix of an emotion which was beyond any articulate expression, but could only be reflected in the movements of the dance. Greater emotions than individual emotions had been felt, and although I, as a European, was utterly alien to these Australian Aborigines, I had come nearer to the earth through witnessing the interpretation of their tribal experience.<sup>23</sup>

Here, as in *Departures* (1948), Grant Watson interpreted the Aboriginal corroboree with its deep spiritual meaning in the dramatizing of mythological events and, for him, its close alliance to the earth and the surrounding landscape of the bush and the desert.

In his subsequent fifteen months of close contact with the Aborigines, he wrote: "I had entered the animism of the savage mind, and had found within those mystical sympathetic identifications the open doorways to the unconscious". Here we can perhaps see the results of his subsequent five years of analytic psychology, during which he was able to retrospectively interpret his vivid experiences through the web of psychology enabling him to express his reactions through such avenues. In particular, he was influenced by Jung's psychology with its insight into the minds of remote and primitive people as experienced by Jung in South Africa. Jung's theory was that the *anima* of a man has a strongly historical character. As a personification of the unconscious she goes back into prehistory, and embodies the contents of the past. She provides the individual with those elements that he ought to know about his prehistory. To the individual, the *anima* is all life that has been in the past and is still alive in him.<sup>24</sup>

Claude Lévi-Strauss sees the savage mind as logical in the same sense and the same fashion as ours. He sees no reason why the mind in its untamed state cannot co-exist with the cultivated mind, but the existence of the latter threatens the former with extinction.<sup>25</sup> Something of the reverse happened in Grant Watson's case. Quoting from Nietzsche he

<sup>22</sup> Prichard, *Coonardoo*, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Departures*, London: Pleiades Books Ltd, 1948, pp. 50-51.

<sup>24</sup> C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, London: Flamingo, 1983, p. 317.

<sup>25</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, Paris: G. Librairie Plon; Great Britain: George Weidenfeld & Nicholson Ltd, 1966, p. 219.



wrote: "He who would hope to get an impartial view of contemporary affairs must separate himself by an act of will from the objects of his study and place between himself and the present an interval of at least 300 years. I did not need to make any such gigantic effort".

This adventure of separating myself from the consciousness of my race, this feat was accomplished for me, whether I would or no, by the simple fact of being surrounded by aboriginal savages, and absent from civilization in which I had been moulded. The process was slow and imperceptible, yet it was sure. I entered the bush with a rationalistic, scientific bias. I thought magic to be a kind of infantile make-believe. It might appear real enough to savages, but to civilized people like myself it was not to be taken seriously. That was the initial attitude. The passing weeks and months changed this preconception.<sup>26</sup>

Grant Watson's responsiveness to the ancient rituals and magic practised by the Australian Aborigines in the Western Australian bush of 1910-12 is significantly different to that of other writers, not least for the theory which he would later bring to bear on it. The enchantment he feels in their ancient culture is distinctive of a quality observed in this writer of an ability to experience all phenomena with a great sense of wonder. His responsiveness is incompatible with the judicial attitude of the standard approach of the white man's attitude to the inferior black. The aura they created impressed his inner consciousness and the "European conventions with which he had been raised". Later in his autobiography, Grant Watson described the simple animism of the savage as a wisdom given to the tribe and not consciously apprehended in the individual. He recognized a unique culture more complex than he had imagined and more impressive when experienced in its natural environment, remote from the European civilization in which he had been moulded.

Although trained as a scientist, Grant Watson was also a mystic and his understanding of the spiritual beliefs of the Aborigines was remarkable for a white man, an Englishman and a visitor to this country, as was also the mesmeric effect on his consciousness and the "European conventions with which he had been raised".

Another much earlier writer has written of the effect of mysticism experienced in the aura of the Aboriginal rituals of song and dance. The explorer, Edward John Eyre, must have been one of the first to recognise it, for his *Journals of Expeditions into Central Australia* (1840) contains a vivid description of a corroboree he witnessed which, he wrote, "Would have drawn down thunders of Applause at any theatre in Europe":

The contrast of their sable skins with the broad white stripes painted down their legs; their peculiar attitudes and the order and regularity with which these were kept, as they moved in a large semicircle, in the softening light of the fire, produced a striking effect; and in connection with the wild inspiring song, which gave an impulse to their gesticulation, led me almost to believe that the scene was unearthly.

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<sup>26</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, London: The Cresset Press, 1946, p. 107.



It was a long time before I lost a vivid impression of this ceremony; the still hour of the night, the naked savages, with their fancifully painted forms, their wild but solemn dirge, their uncouth gestures, and unnatural noises, all tended to keep up an illusion of an unearthly character, and contributed to produce a thrilling and imposing effect upon my mind.<sup>27</sup>

While Eyre's experience is expressed in lyrical terms with such expressions as 'sable skin', 'softening light' and 'inspiring song' all producing what seemed like an illusion of an unearthly character, it seems he was also strongly affected by this experience as having "an imposing effect upon the mind".

In Patrick White's *Fringe of Leaves* (1976) Mrs Roxburgh, as a captive of the Aborigines, also experienced the mysticism of the Aboriginal rituals:

Silent consent seemed to call a halt beside a small lake, on the surface of which torchlight and the ghosts of their fleshly forms underwent a series of fearsome fluctuations. ... the spirit of the place, the evanescent lake, the faint whisper of stirring leaves, took possession of her. When the blacks resumed their flickering march almost in silence, she could smell their fear. If she too flickered intermittently it was less fear than because she might have to come to terms with the darkness ...

The darkness erupted at last, hurling itself in distinguished waves into the firelight foreground. White ribbed men were stamping and howling the other side of the fiery hedge as they performed prodigious feats relating to hunting and warfare.<sup>28</sup>

Like Lawrence, Patrick White described a corroboree in purely fictional terms, both authors singularly unaffected by any spiritual influence as expressed by Grant Watson, "Lifted out of my present self into the strange and new" and Eyre, "... all tended to keep up an illusion of an unearthly character, and contributed to produce a thrilling and imposing effect upon the mind", or Prichard's Mumae who had glimpsed another world, "mystic, elusive, sensual and vital of this primitive people's imagination."

A further comparison can be made with Jung's experience of a tribal dance, a N'goma, in the Sudan, North Africa in 1925. He travelled with two companions, an Englishman and an American, from Mombasa through Nairobi as head of the Bugishu Psychological Expedition, an application imposed by the foreign office in London. In reality, as Jung pointed out, they visited the Bugishus but spent a much longer time with the Elgonis, with

<sup>27</sup> Edward John Eyre, *Journals of Expeditions of Discovery into Central Australia and Overland from Adelaide to King Georges Sound in the Year 1840 Including an Account of the Manners and Customs of the Aborigine and the State of Their Relations with Europeans*, vol. II, 29 New Bond St, London: T. & W. Boone, 1845, p. 233.

<sup>28</sup> Patrick White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, Australia: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 246; Great Britain: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1976; USA: Viking Press, 1977, p. 246.

whom he always took the time to engage in long palavers, noting their talent for mimicry and their ability to understand the emotional nature of others.

In a village on the way from Lake Albert to Rejäf in the Sudan, they were approached by the local chief proposing that they give a N'goma in the evening. Jung assented gladly, though with some uneasiness, as they had only three Askaris as a military escort who had only three cartridges each for their rifles, their presence being merely a symbolic gesture on the part of the government. Night had fallen when they heard the drums and some sixty men appeared followed at some distance by their women and children. The women tripped around the fire, the men danced towards it, waving their weapons, amid savage singing, drumming and trumpeting. Jung remembered that a countryman of his had been struck by a stray spear in the course of such a N'goma in the Celebres. He was also aware in dances such as these accompanied by such music, that the natives easily fall into a vertical state of possession which seems in contrast to the Aboriginal corroborees, controlled as they were by the re-enactment of their spiritual beliefs and rituals of the Dreamtime.

It was a wild and stirring scene bathed in the glow of the fire and magical moonlight. My English friend and I sprang to our feet and mingled with the dancers. I swung my rhinoceros whip, the only weapon I had, and danced with them. By their beaming faces I could see that they approved our taking part. Their zeal redoubled, the whole company stamped, sang, shouted, sweating profusely. Gradually the rhythm of the dance and the drumming accelerated. In dances such as these accompanied by such music, the natives fall into a vertical state of possession. That was the case now – suddenly the whole affair took on a highly curious aspect. The dancers were being transferred into a wild horde, and I became worried about how it would end. I signed to the chief it was time to stop – but he kept wanting “just another one”. Disregarding the Chief's pleas, I called the people together, distributed cigarettes, and then made the gesture of sleeping. Then I swung my rhinoceros whip threateningly but at the same time laughing, and for the lack of any better language, I swore at them loudly in Swiss German that this was enough and they must go home to bed and sleep. General laughter arose, capering, they scattered in all directions and vanished into the night.<sup>29</sup>

It seems that by joining in the dancing Jung further accentuated the excitement of the natives. However, it is apparent that the natives knew that Jung was to some extent pretending his anger which seems to have struck the right note.

In writing of his experiences in Africa Jung also showed some evidence of a belief in reincarnation. Writing of a train trip from Mombasa to Nairobi, he awakened at dawn when he saw on a jagged rock above, a slim brownish-black figure standing motionless leaning on a long spear looking down at the train. Beside him towered a gigantic candelabrum cactus.

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<sup>29</sup> Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, op. cit., pp. 300–301.

Jung was enchanted by the sight as something utterly alien and outside his experience, but on the other hand a most intense *sentiment du déjà vu*.

I had the feeling that I had already experienced this moment and had always known this world which was separated from me only by distance in time. It was as if I were this moment returning to the land of my youth and as if I knew that dark-skinned man who had been waiting for me for five thousand years. I could not guess what string within myself was plucked at the sight of that solitary dark hunter, I knew only that his world had been mine for countless millennia.<sup>30</sup>

The feeling of this curious experience accompanied him throughout his whole journey through Africa. He felt he had already experienced this moment and had always known this world which was separated from him only by the distance of time.

Like Grant Watson, Jung never forgot the impressions gained from his experiences. "My companions and I had the good fortune to taste the world of Africa with its incredible beauty and its equally incredible suffering before the end came. Our camp life proved to be one of the loveliest interludes in my life. I enjoyed the 'divine peace' of a still primeval country thousands of miles lay between me and Europe."<sup>31</sup>

However the strong effect of the South African native tribal dance can be seen in his relation and interpretation of a strange dream following the event. He dreamed of a Negro holding a tremendous red-hot curling iron to his head intending to make his hair kinky. He took the dream as a warning from the unconscious: "It was saying the primitive is a danger to me. At that time I was all too close to 'going back'". "The dreams," he wrote, "dealt with my personal problems. The only thing I could conclude from this was that my European personality must under all circumstances be preserved intact. To my astonishment, the suspicion dawned on me that I had undertaken my African adventure with the secret purpose of escaping from Europe and its complex of problems even at the risk of remaining in Africa. The trip revealed itself as less an investigation of primitive psychology than a probing into the rather embarrassing question; What is going to happen to Jung, the psychologist in the wilds of Africa?"<sup>32</sup>

This was the question he had constantly sought to evade, in spite of his intellectual intention to study the European's reaction to primitive conditions. It became clear to him that this study had not so much an objective scientific project as an intensely personal one, and that any attempt to go deeper into it touched every possible sore spot in his own psychology. Like Grant Watson he had not known in advance what such contact with a primitive people would give him, but for both it was a fulfilling experience possibly worth more to them than any ethnological yield would have been, any collection of insects, weapons, ornaments or

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 283.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 293.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 302.

hunting trophies. They had wanted to know how such an experience would affect them and they had found out.

Both Jung and Grant Watson seem to have gained an insight into their own psyche from close encounters with native tribes, participating as they did in their prehistoric rites. Both experienced some kind of revelation. While Mumae's experience in *Coonardoo* was with the Aboriginal tribe who worked on her property and White's and Lawrence's descriptions were fictionalized examples, the experiences of Jung and Grant Watson and Eyre show the effect on a European mind when confronted by the primitive in its most primitive surroundings.

Laurens Van Der Post, a South African who became an Englishman, writing of his first meeting with Jung, stated how he was struck at the symbolic importance of Africa for the master. "Jung," he wrote, "followed Rider Haggard<sup>33</sup> in equating Africa with the primitive element in our psyche. As an admirer of Haggard, Jung was interested enough in Africa to make his own pilgrimage to the continent".<sup>34</sup> He emerged, according to Van Der Post, with a "strengthened conviction that knowing oneself thoroughly requires that the primitive within us must be acknowledged but that we must not succumb to its attraction. The task of modern man was not to go primitive the African way but to discover and confront and live out his own first and primitive self in a truly 20th century way."

From his experience with the primitive Aboriginal tribes in Western Australia Grant Watson wrote:

I had entered the animism of the savage mind, and had found within those mystical, sympathetic identifications the open doorways to the unconscious. I do not pretend that this was an altogether desirable experience, though I think it has been a useful one, seeing that I was able to balance, at a later date, its strong influence by five years of analytical psychology. It was in a way a unique experience, not so much understood or valued at the time, but valued and partly understood *afterwards*. It had lifted me or perhaps sunk me, above or below the orthodox horizon of vision.<sup>35</sup>

As well as gaining an insight into their own psyche from their experiences, participating in a native corroboree in the form of some kind of revelation, for Grant Watson it confirmed his previously held belief in reincarnation.

All this while the native songs had been rising and falling in accord with the whirr of the bull-roarers, It was extremely moving and I was caught away into the tribal collective, submerged in the pervading spirit of the bush. The nasal singing, the glowing circle of fires, stole from me familiar thoughts. I had the feeling that this

<sup>33</sup> H. Rider Haggard, 1856-1925, romantic writer, agricultural expert; imperial politician; deeply interested in the affairs of church and state; much of a mystic, and not a little of an ascetic. One of the most striking, picturesque and versatile men of his day and generation, he was an initiator of the revival of Romance in late Victorian times. The three main literary themes of his life were Africa, Ancient Egypt and rural England.

<sup>34</sup> Laurens Van Der Post, *Jung and the Story of Our Time*, New York: Pantheon, 1975, p. 51.

<sup>35</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 108.

had happened before, strange but somehow familiar. The prehistoric had been brought into the present.<sup>36</sup>

Even at the age of thirteen, Grant Watson had accepted with instant conviction the idea of reincarnation. He later wrote of that time:

I did not presume for myself any definite memory of what I had experienced in other lives, but I remembered that I had forgotten much, and what I had forgotten still faintly glowed behind a veil of mystery. There were people whom I felt I had met before ... the scent of such and such a flower brought a wafting of forgotten glory.<sup>37</sup>

Jung, in South Africa, wrote of much the same impression as he glimpsed the native poised with spear on the jagged rock at dawn from his train window. "I had the feeling I had experienced this moment and had always known this world which was separated from me only by distance of time."<sup>38</sup>

In *Departures* (1948) the same feeling was expressed when Grant Watson wrote:

Sometimes when I was away by myself, and not near to my companion, there would come to me strange poignant feelings; this scene, this *surround* had happened somewhere before; the accepted values of England and my home were liquefied. This great plain was ageless, still and vast, existing somehow outside of time. Perhaps it was eternity and I, in its presence, for certain moments, dropped out of time, and was encompassed by the Eternal. It was strange, beautiful and frightening. I might be lost. Already I might be lost?<sup>39</sup>

Grant Watson was affected spiritually by the vast Australian desert, but also in the physical sense, for he continued: "Men only, of earth's children, are easily lost; whereas animals seldom do. Civilization has spoilt in men their sense of direction".<sup>40</sup> This he fully demonstrated in *The Partners* (1933).

The thought of the amazing and intricate scheme of reincarnation was familiar to Grant Watson many years before he read Nietzsche. The concept of Superman did not at any time appeal to him, but it was the vision of eternal recurrence that caught the attention of the writers of his time so that for Grant Watson as for W. B. Yeats, Nietzsche's doctrine could have acted as confirmation; the idea of eternal recurrence was also familiar to Yeats many years

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<sup>36</sup> Grant Watson, *Journey under the Southern Stars*, op. cit., p. 34-35.

<sup>37</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>38</sup> Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, op. cit., p. 283.

<sup>39</sup> Grant Watson, *Departures*, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

before he read Nietzsche, and for Grant Watson it could have been a considerable stimulus to his ideas of reincarnation.

A contemporary of Grant Watson, Rosa Praed, writing during that period, showed that the notion of reincarnation appealed strongly to her temperament. She subscribed to the belief in the reincarnation of groups of personalities working out their destiny in varying relationships with each other. She had in 1866 reached these beliefs which were an important influence in the composition of the novel, *Nyria*, which on its publication in 1904 roused considerable controversy.<sup>41</sup>

On 24 July, 1904, Rider Haggard wrote from Norfolk to Praed to congratulate her on a recent novel, probably *Nyria* (1904), the story of a Roman slave girl whom she believed to be a former reincarnation of Nancy Harward, the woman with whom Praed lived.

Peter Pierce writes of Haggard's romance fiction that Haggard's commitment was to the supra-national cause of imperial unity, but this was qualified by his conviction that the end of the Empire was not far distant. Such is the witness of his romances, some of which are also the vehicles by which he considers the possibility of reincarnation, such as *She* (1887), where Ayesha believes Leo Vincent, the young Cambridge graduate, is the reincarnation of her beloved Kalikrates.<sup>42</sup> The world of public affairs fascinated Praed even more than Haggard. She wanted the private solace, the more manageable self-dominion that the doctrine of reincarnation afforded.<sup>43</sup>

Rider Haggard's life, in retrospect, resembles Grant Watson's. Both revealed an intimate knowledge and a love for the strange land in which they found themselves, and felt an empathy for the native inhabitants.<sup>44</sup> For Grant Watson it was the lore of the Australian Aborigines and for Haggard, the history and customs of South African Zulus. Both were described as mystics, Grant Watson by H. M. Green, who wrote: "In spite of his short experience in Australia, Grant Watson was able to put his fascination into a lyrical statement. In doing so, he followed the road of the mystics and only those who walk that road can accept literally what he has to say."<sup>45</sup> The critic and author V. S. Pritchett wrote, "Rider Haggard tapped the mystical hankerings after reincarnation, immortality, eternal youth, and psychic phenomena."<sup>46</sup> They each travelled abroad to obtain material for their novels, and felt a strong affinity for ancient Egypt. All their adult lives each writer remained in love with a woman he could never marry. Both were reared by strong-minded mothers and were greatly saddened by their deaths. Had they lived in modern times it seems they would have been strong

<sup>41</sup> Colin Roderick, *In Mortal Bondage: The strange life of Rosa Praed*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1948, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *She: A history of adventure* with an introduction by Stuart Cloete, London and Glasgow: Collins, first pub. 1887, repub. 1957, 1974.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Pierce, 'Weary with Travelling through Realms of Air: Romance fiction of Boldrewood, Haggard, Wells and Praed', *Westerly*, no. 2, June, 1987, p. 89.

<sup>44</sup> See H. Rider Haggard, *The Best Short Stories of Rider Haggard, (1896-1925)*, edited and introduced by Peter Haining, foreword by Hammond Innes, London: Michael Joseph, 1981, p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> H. M. Green, *An Outline of Australian Literature*, vol. 1 (1789-1923), Melbourne, Sydney, London: Angus & Robertson, 1961.

<sup>46</sup> V. S. Pritchett, *New Statesman*, August, 1960.

supporters of the feminist movement in their belief that women should have equal status with men. In later life they settled around the English countryside as gentlemen farmers, and wrote their books on rural England.

Both Haggard and Grant Watson believed in reincarnation – a belief very strong in intellectual circles during the period 1889–1920. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a prominent figure among the writers of that era, throughout his adult life was interested in the occult and the supernatural.<sup>47</sup> One of his first stories in this mode was *The Leather Funnel* (1900). This interest matured with the death of his son and led to an intense preoccupation with spiritualism, to which he devoted more and more of his time in the 1920s. From Walt Whitman, Grant Watson found passages to fit his own belief in reincarnation, the idea of which was first communicated to him as a schoolboy. As soon as he grasped its exciting implications and far-flung vistas, he accepted it with instant conviction. The fact of reincarnation, the travelling from life to life, that was, for him, the great half-revealed secret of existence.<sup>48</sup>

Grant Watson in *Man and His Universe* (1942) wrote of Jung's explanation of the origins of the *anima* as a blending of the images of women who are desirable; these will form a single woman-image, who may be powerful through weakness or through her difference from our own persona-nature. She will appear to us like the heroine of Rider Haggard's novel as "one-who-must-be-obeyed". She will have super-individual qualities, she will be clothed in garments of super-earthly splendour, and will hint in all kinds of acceptable ways at a complete and wholly satisfactory fulfilment of our sensual and emotional needs. In this aspect alone she is powerful, but she finds additional strength, in that she is partly derived from the feminine elements in a man's own nature, which in his outer life are largely hidden or repressed.<sup>49</sup>

In *Fugitive Anne* (1903), the Australian writer Rosa Praed presented the notion of the lost civilization and the Aca Priestess Keorah bears some resemblance to Rider Haggard's *She* (1887). As J. J. Healy has shown, she was also influenced by C. K. Sclater's postulation of the lost continent of Lemuria that once extended from Madagascar to Malaya, of which Praed herself noted: "the largest part that remains to this day is Australia". Praed was fascinated with the idea that Australia represented a remnant of the legendary southern continent of Lemuria and made direct reference to the myth in her memoir *My Australian Girlhood* (1902) in which she describes the land in its

hoariness and the convulsions that have torn it and upon no other land, and the gum trees of such weird conformation unlike all other trees that are – who can see these

<sup>47</sup> See Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, London: Cassell and Co. Ltd, 1926. See also Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Complete Professor Challenger Stories*, Albemarle St, London: John Murray, first ed. 1952. Reprinted 1953, 1958, 1963.

<sup>48</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>49</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Man and His Universe*, London: Hutchinson & Co. (Pub.) Ltd, Macmillan, 1942, p. 100.



things and ponder over them without pondering too and greatly wondering over the story of the lost Atlantis and of Lemuria that was before.<sup>50</sup>

It is debatable whether Grant Watson's Australian novels can be included in the title of 'Romance fiction' as were those of Rosa Praed. Grant Watson's novels are based on the real-life people he met while in the West Australian bush, people of the outback living in isolation on their vast properties on the edge of the desert, and of the real-life happenings as he witnessed them. Certainly Anne, in *Fugitive Anne*, in fleeing a tribe which massacred the white family on Kooloola station, is taken from Praed's own traumatic childhood memories of the killings at Horner Bank in October 1958, but as Pierce has written: "is another part of the fanciful revival and revision of her own past which is a major self-indulgent attraction of the novel for her".<sup>51</sup>

In *Fugitive Anne* (1903) she employed the form of the lost race romance, which Haggard had popularised, and, as has been stated, was influenced by C. I. Sclater's postulation of the lost continent of Lemuria. Though her social and personal allegiances had been transferred to England, Lemurian Australia was attractive to her as what Nathaniel Hawthorne called, in an analogous context, "a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon". This is in direct contrast to Grant Watson's vision of Australia. Open, at random, any of his Australian novels and the vitality of Australia is projected realistically and vividly, particularly the conservation of man's bond with the land, as portrayed by Martin O'Brien in *Daimon*:

Martin's anger again subsided, and the irritation caused by the presumptuous impudence of the harsh-voiced prophetess of progress was stilled. Even the wind which fanned his face, and the dark, velvety quality of the night gave him assurance. Oh, he was safe enough; and the land was safe. Could it be changed? Never . . . It had been like that for all time, and so it would remain. He and the land were one; they were expressions of the same impulse; they both responded to and took their shape from the same mystical promptings; they drew their life, the subtle and delicate quality of their being from the same source. As he rode further through the darkness, lit only by the stars, he became aware of a sweet harmony pervading body, mind and soul.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast Praed rejected realism in projecting stories of Australia as she wrote of Kombo who "foreshadows what Anne and the chivalrous Danish anthropologist, Hansen who accompanies her, will discover 'a mysterious race of red men who were Tortoise worshippers' ". This sets Hansen speculating "upon the possibility of a prehistoric race

<sup>50</sup> J. J. Healy, 'The Lemurian Nineties', *Aust. Lit. Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1978, p. 309.

<sup>51</sup> Pierce, 'Weary with Travelling through Realms of Air', op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>52</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *Daimon*, London: Jonathon Cape Ltd, 1925, p. 192.



dwelling in the unexplored heart of Australia", whose religion he deftly connects with "the old tradition of the lost Atlantis".<sup>53</sup>

As Pierce has written, forced to depict in detail the life of the lost race of the Aca, Praed collapsed into plagiarism of Haggard. She invents Keorah, a High Priestess who is a pallid version of *She*.<sup>54</sup> In doing so Praed lost the opportunity for writing realistically of the Australian experiences of her own lifetime. Katharine Susannah Prichard and Grant Watson, however, wrote their stories from real life experiences in the Australian bush.

Although the mythical concepts in the books of Haggard and Praed do not appear in Grant Watson's realist Australian novels, his interest in myths, however, was revealed in his other writings. In his unpublished autobiography 'To This End' (1946) he wrote how he and his wife had taken a step into the unknown early world, by reading a book upon ancient and modern myths by Rudolph Steiner, picked up while holidaying in France. They were excited to find that ancient stories such as those of Theseus, Hercules, Osiris and a great many more, were what the author saw as incomplete foreshadowings of the Christian story. "This book", Grant Watson wrote, "taught me to look on myths as expressions of something more important than historical events."<sup>55</sup> He saw them as human expressions of the unknown that lies behind experience. In writing of his own reaction to Steiner's writings, Grant Watson wrote that "many of his ideas seemed brilliantly illuminating", but he mentioned only what seemed to him as the most fundamental.

First and most obvious was his interpretation of the great idea of reincarnation. Steiner based this on what he affirmed were Western foundations, no longer, as many other writers had done, looking to the East for authority. For him it was more than an assumption. He claimed actual experience and could trace back former incarnations of modern men, through the Middle Ages, through Greek and Persian, to the ancient Indian civilisation.<sup>56</sup> There was of course no 'scientific' evidence for his statements but his sweep of thought and imagination was bold, and often so vigorous as to carry my native scepticism well off the ground of its ordinary mundane activities.<sup>57</sup>

However, although Grant Watson found much in Steiner which seemed to him fantastic

... many of his assertions seem mere assertions without any particularly relevant significance. It may be that they point to regions where I have no immediate need to follow, and that my own blindness accounts for my lack of interest, or it may be that they are mere assertions without foundations and without any significance ... I

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<sup>53</sup> Pierce, 'Weary with Travelling through Realms of Air', op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Grant Watson, 'To This End', unpub. autob., p. 206.

<sup>56</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., pp. 206, 207.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, pp. 208, 209.

argue that even if it were true for him, it is not true for me, unless it rings with my own experience.<sup>58</sup>

Grant Watson was interested in Steiner's assertion that divine revelation was given to primitive man; this being transmitted from initiate to initiate through the medium of the mystery cults of the ancient world. Great secrecy guarded this knowledge; only those who qualified by severe tests could attain to this understanding. "It is significant, with reference to this postulate" Grant Watson continued:

...to compare the highly metaphysical beliefs of the primitive Australian Aborigines, as so beautifully and accurately set forth by Spencer and Gillen with those ideas concerning the integration of personality, as set forth by Dr. Jung and his school. Both the Aboriginal medicine men and Dr. Jung would rank as initiates or part-initiates. The Aborigines deriving (according to Steiner, or so I think) *their* knowledge from the original source, and Dr. Jung and his fellow explorers deriving *their* knowledge through the development of individual consciousness brought to a high degree of sensitivity. In both cases something essential and not obvious is revealed.<sup>59</sup>

However, Grant Watson expressed his own ideas in regard to the Aborigines following his close contact with them in 1910-1912.

In *Man and His Universe* (1942) he wrote:

The ancient people had very little knowledge as we define scientific knowledge; they were not occupied in finding formulae which can present nature and her forces in the shortest and most exact way, but their wisdom was certainly as profound as ours; and this wisdom, as to how to cope with the difficulties and disharmonies of existence, they represented by myths. Of the same stuff as dreams are made of are myths and many folk-legends, only here the elements of the myth are rather more firmly established and less fleeting than the elements of a dream. In a dream the letters of that inner world of the soul are often mixed in an erratic fashion. In the myths they are in words and sentences and communicate meanings of deep significance and indicate, in the destinies of the heroic figures that they portray the predestined ways in which life finds its expression through human development. But if myths can be compared with dreams, dreams can be compared with myths and Dr. Jung and his school of psychologists have found it useful to regard dreams as incomplete and fragmentary myths.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 209.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 210.

<sup>60</sup> Grant Watson, *Man and His Universe*, op. cit., p. 100.

Grant Watson's interest in myths and fairy stories extended to a broad study of mythological and fairy stories. His mythological 'Walking with Fancy', the story of Gilgamesh and Ea-bank, was published with illustrations in 1943 in *Country Life*. He also wrote a number of fairy stories explaining their meaning, and a long mythical story not published entitled 'After This Darkness, a Pilgrimage of the Soul', appeared in many ways to be a story of his own journey through life. *Moonlight in Ur* (1932) a mythical story of unrequited love in the ancient world also follows the story of his relationship with Ida Bedford. 'The Changing Myth' published in *The British Homoeopathic Journal* (vol. LV, no. 4, October 1966) tells of how all religions rise out of the region of myth, and when the myth ceases to grow religions lose their vitality.

In these last chapters my aim has been to place Grant Watson in the realms of Australian literature in particular with regard to the bush, the desert and the Aborigines from which he absorbed and stored in his consciousness the knowledge and magic which in later years he was able to express so vividly in his autobiographies, novels and stories. While he also wrote against a background of wide intellectual reading as well as intensive psychoanalytical studies, in particular the study of Jung's psychology, this enriched rather than detracted from the authenticity of his perception of life in the early Australian bush. In addition, as a trained zoologist and biologist and a lifelong disciple of the study of nature, Grant Watson was able to bring a wealth of knowledge to his perception of all the secrets of the bush as well as of the people who lived in that environment.

## **Conclusion**

## Conclusion

Grant Watson was a self-reflective novelist and autobiographer who dealt with ideas on a grand scale and was a gifted writer capable of conveying his ideas impressively to the reader. The wide diversity of his published work – from his philosophical writings to his nature books and his Australian stories – exhibits an intriguing blend of fiction and non-fiction influenced by his wide reading in the European classics, as well as his study of Jung's psychology. Five years of psychoanalysis and wide travelling also influenced and shaped the writing of his experiences in Australia, and their effect on his later life.

Grant Watson's experiences of the Australian outback occurred at a formative moment in his own life, providing a reservoir of experience from which he was to continue to draw throughout the course of a long and creative life. He was fortunate also to travel to outback Western Australia at a time when frontier experiences were a commonplace and the natural world could still be experienced as something remarkable and strange. As a result, his Australian books provide a deeper insight into the Australian bush and the Aborigines than earlier or later more famous writers, such as D. H. Lawrence, Patrick White or Randolph Stow.

Grant Watson's experiences as a biologist, nature-writer, novelist, psycho-analyst, traveller, metaphysician and visionary and his own meditations and observations, convinced him that the principles in which he was trained at Cambridge over fifty years ago were not sustainable. These principles were based on Darwin's theory of evolution – the view that life develops entirely through chance variations – those chance variations to which environment is favourable surviving by natural selection and those to which it is unfavourable, perishing. In contra-distinction to this mechanistic theory, Grant Watson puts a spiritual or theological one. Chance variations, he thought, aren't merely fortuitous but occur in response to an urge – a purpose which encourages them, as it were. Or to put it another way, there is an overlying pattern in the universe with which the individual life patterns of nature are in accord. "The more I looked at those life patterns," he wrote in *The Mystery of Physical Life*, (1964) (1992), "the more my sense of wonder was awakened and I saw more clearly than before, that to understand Nature we must make our contemplation of the observed object a creative act of imagination."

It is because he made the observation of fact a creative act of imagination that Grant Watson wasn't simply a naturalist, a philosopher, a writer of books – he was a poet. His power to make vivid and palpable the wonder and mystery of physical life can be seen in his biological essays in *Descent of Spirit* (1990) and in his nature books. In all his work – Australian novels, nature books, autobiographies, short stories and talks – his language abounds with this inborn and carefully nurtured gift of observing and writing about nature's phenomena.

As a naturalist he occupies a very special position. Unlike such writers as W. H. Hudson, Richard Jeffries, Edward Thomas and Henry Williamson, he had a scientific basis for his observations in the field. So he was in the fortunate position of combining qualities of the W. H. Hudson kind of naturalist with those of more scientific naturalists like Carl Linnaeus and J. H. Fabre. As a traveller Grant Watson found himself in the Australian bush, and he learned to know it not only as a terrain of unique significance, but one where – beneath its visible facade – there was an invisible spirit of an overwhelming influence. Thus he wrote: "it says to man, 'Thou insignificant spark, where art thou? How is it with Thee in thy soul? Canst thou sustain my vast and indifferent regard? Or wilt thou shrivel into nothingness, rather than listen to my silences?' "<sup>1</sup> What is of interest here is the effect of the Australian bush on his consciousness and thence to his writing, where it consistently plays a major role in the lives of his characters.

For Australian readers Grant Watson's books are of particular interest, especially in his attitude to the land and the Aborigines. For his character Martin O'Brien in *The Desert Horizon* (1923) and *Daimon* (1925), the idea of changing the desert to plant crops is unthinkable: "I like the country just as it is; I should like to live here without changing it." In *Departures* (1945) Grant Watson wrote of man's devotion to the land and the elusive spirit of the land which conquers him, absorbs him into its oneness – evokes his life and binds him with the law of obedience. This is fully illustrated in the story of Martin O'Brien, who characterizes the men who have become an essential part of the Australian desert, which in turn has claimed their lasting fidelity. The land and the men become one in that dry and rarefied atmosphere.

For Grant Watson, the Aborigines were an essential part of his Australian experience as being part of the landscape – close to the earth from which they derived their sustenance and religion. In the bush he discovered that the Aborigines live in the conviction that in the universe there are spiritual counterparts of all aspects of nature. In experiencing their ceremonies and practices – the magic he witnessed and came to respect – he was greatly in sympathy with their belief that all natural objects possessed an animistic force. Grant Watson himself experienced with a sense of spiritual awe a distinct relation between man and the spirit of the bush, immersed in the trees, plants, rocks and bush creatures, so that his European identity was submerged in his primeval surroundings. Like the Aborigines, he found his religion in the environment, as he has shown in all his work. As an Australian Aborigine of today, Ernie Dingo, has said:

The Australian bush is religious. There is a spirit here but European culture builds walls to hide in their churches. We Aborigines don't need walls because our belief is in the environment – that's our religion.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, London: The Cresset Press, 1946, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Ernie Dingo, 'The Great Outdoors', *The Age*, 27 April, 1993.

This the Aborigines demonstrated in the centuries before the white man's arrival – their survival spiritually and physically was maintained by their native beliefs and knowledge of the environment. From the environment they drew their sustenance both physically and spiritually.

The Australian literary critic, H. M. Green, has described Grant Watson as "a mystic" and "for the mystic". One of Grant Watson's intellectual mentors, Rudolf Steiner, has written: "God is not present in the materially comprehensible world. There he is present in nature, he lies spellbound in nature".<sup>3</sup> Grant Watson illustrates this kind of pantheistic thinking throughout his books, and the fact that he was spiritually influenced by the Australian environment makes his books of interest to us. The expression of his thinking in regard to nature can be seen as having been inspired by his valued friend and mentor at Kings College, Cambridge University, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson. "Here, if anywhere, a man had found his right place, and 'Goldie', as before so long I came to call him, became one of those unique and perfect things that Cambridge had fashioned for her own adornment. He was kind and wise and lovable, and always young in spirit, and it was a privilege for any man to listen to comments he made on any subject."<sup>4</sup> In *But To What Purpose* G. Lowes Dickinson wrote the following as a Preface:

Nothing exists but individuals in the making. All things live, yes, even those we call inanimate. A soul, or a myriad of souls, inform the rocks and streams and winds. Innumerable centres of life leap in joy down the torrents: or it may be some diffused and elemental spirit singly sustains that ever-flowing form. The sea is a passion, the air and the light a will and a desire. All things together, each in his kind, each in his rank, press upward, moved by love to a goal that is good, what that goal is, I do not too closely inquire; neither do I ask after the origin or meaning of the whole. I cling to the fact I know, to movement and its cause; the fact I know from the soul of Man and infer from Nature. What He is, She is, and what He is I know. He is discord straining to harmony, ignorance to knowledge, fear to courage, hate and indifference to love. He is a system out of equilibrium, and therefore moving towards it; He is the fall of the stone, the flow of the stream, the orbit of the star, rendered in the truth of his eternal quest.<sup>5</sup>

From the Australian Aborigines to Rudolf Steiner and G. Lowes Dickinson, the spiritual belief in nature's power is expressed. If Steiner's quote is true, then Grant Watson may be described as a mystic, which is how he was described by the literary critic H. M. Green. However, it seems to me that Grant Watson's thinking follows more closely the beliefs as expressed by G. Lowes Dickinson and those of the Aborigines, even to the expression of

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Christianity as Mystical Fact and the Mysteries of Antiquity*, New York: Steinerbooks, Blauvelt, 1961, 1968, p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> G. Lowes Dickinson, preface to *But To What Purpose*, op. cit.

opposites at the end of the quote, a theme which is reiterated throughout his writing and personified in *The Nun and the Bandit*.

Peter Cowan, the Perth writer and academic, has been interested in Grant Watson's work since the 1970's. He says Grant Watson's obsession with the land preceded almost all other known literary associations with the Australian landscape. Because he could not find Grant Watson's books in Australia, Cowan approached booksellers in England and eventually found all his books.

His books about Australia are most profound and most moving. He was haunted by the place. You can compare books like *The Contracting Circle* (also published as *Daimon*) with Hardy. They are great books – intensely moving. He had the thing which is missing in a lot of writers – a view of life. ... Like Hardy, he had a terrible, terrifying view of life. He had never seen a landscape like that around Meekatharra or Carnarvon. He was struck by how the Aborigines coped in places that for an Englishman were very harsh. He saw that the landscape ultimately dominates you.<sup>6</sup>

This is fully demonstrated in *Daimon* and *The Desert Horizon*, and also in his autobiography *But To What Purpose* where Grant Watson expresses vividly his own reactions to the powerful force of the Australian bush.

In *Journey under the Southern Stars* (1968) Grant Watson wrote of the extermination of the Aborigines by their contact with white man's diseases. He also wrote of the hundreds of skeletons of Aboriginal men, women and children which he saw. The conflict of cultures resulting in such violence, he saw as a result of the inability or refusal to understand the Aboriginal way of life and their vital relationship to the land. Their self-sufficiency if allowed to remain in their own culture, with their own religion, is pursued in his Australian novels and two autobiographies. Grant Watson again came in contact with the Aborigines while driving in the New England Highlands of New South Wales. He praised their prowess as horsemen on the station property where they worked for their food. His concern for the destruction of the Aborigines is taken up by a New Englander, Geoffrey Bloomfield, who in his book *Baal Belbora: The end of the dancing* (1981) wrote the history of the massacre of the Aborigines of the Hastings, Manning and Macleay Rivers.

In his understanding of the Aborigines and their culture, as well as their vital relationship to the land, Grant Watson anticipated such writers as P. R. Stephensen and Xavier Herbert among Australian writers of the twentieth century. Stephensen described the Aborigines as "ancient and wise" people who had conserved Australia's resources and practised many arts, including poetry, music, painting, drama and religion.<sup>7</sup> In his Australian books, Grant Watson also stressed the spiritual and practical value of preserving the unique qualities of the desert; and in the brief glimpses of Aboriginal life to be found in each of his

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Moran, in *The Big Weekend 6 – Arts, West Australian*, 4 December, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Craig Munro, *Wild Man of Letters: The story of P. R. Stephensen*, Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1984.



novels, he clearly showed that he was fully aware of the tragedy of the mindless and self-righteous destruction of the unique culture of the Australian Aborigines. Always gentle in projecting his thoughts, he merely offers to the reader the views of a mind both scientifically and spiritually attuned to nature.

In his autobiography *But To What Purpose*, Grant Watson wrote on the subject of "Nature versus artifice" in regard to such issues as the cruelty directed at battery-imprisoned birds for the production of eggs, the barbaric treatment of baby foxes in Norway in the fur trade, and the artificial insemination of cattle, which he deplored and feared would later be practised on men and women. Such practices he sees as a lack of reverence for life. Later in his life Grant Watson wrote:

I seek for a meaning which may connect events, and in this task, approach what must be all men's task, for what are personal experiences worth unless they find relatedness to the psychic life of our time? We have all emerged from the security and complacency of the nineteenth century into the preliminary states of a giant metamorphosis.

Grant Watson the scientist was also spiritually in tune with the world around him and keenly aware of man's responsibility to constantly monitor an increasingly fragile environment. So at the end of his autobiography, *But To What Purpose*, he wrote:

This record was finished in August, 1944. Since then great things have happened. Two victory days have been celebrated, and two atomic bombs have been dropped. To some readers my theory of the spiritual metamorphosis in man, both in the larger body of humanity and in our individual souls may seem at first reading a bit far fetched. It may indeed be far from the truth, human thoughts inevitably are since they function in our creaturely existence and not in the absolute of reality. Yet far from truth as it may be, it has a relatedness to emerging facts. We look on the contemporary problems of war, and add to these the advent of the splitting of the atom, and we see them as things almost beyond the scope of human courage to endure. All that we know for certain is that the unknitting of the very groundwork of creation is here. It may seem not unreasonable to suppose that this great fact is part of the stupendous histolysis of which I have dared to prophesy.<sup>8</sup>

Grant Watson's belief in a spiritual metamorphosis in man, both in the larger body of humanity and in our individual souls – a great human metamorphosis – was inspired quite early in his career by his study of biology, and became increasingly significant throughout his work as he applied it to his own life, and to the lives of such characters as Lucy and Michael in *The Nun and the Bandit*. Finally, in applying it in the form of a 'stupendous histolysis' in human life, he revealed that he had an unusually keen perception of the problems that modern

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<sup>8</sup> Grant Watson, epilogue in *But To What Purpose*.

society would create for itself in the nuclear age. In Australia, for example, modern society seems powerless to stop the bulldozing of our forests for woodchips, chopsticks, crops or newspapers, thus destroying life-giving plants and the habitats of bird and animal life. Efforts to slow pollution of our rivers and waterways, cannot keep pace with increasing population.

Poet, writer and critic, Dorothy Green, in her introduction to *Descent of Spirit* (1990) has written: "Grant Watson's Australian books serve as a warning to a country in the grip of a development fever – that to banish the desert and its mystery, to violate Australia's distinctive and unique beauty for motives of greed may bring consequences as damaging as they are irreversible."<sup>9</sup> One has only to be confronted by the horrifying devastation of the huge uranium development that suddenly confronts the traveller in Australia's central desert, scarring its unique beauty, to illustrate what Dorothy Green had in mind. "Grant Watson's quiet, wise account of his own search for awareness", she continued, "his unanthropomorphic love for the natural world, are restorative and fortifying. His insistence that we constantly question our own motives for what we do is essential for the survival of such genuine civilization as we have managed to achieve."<sup>10</sup> With these thoughts in mind, it follows that in the dedication of *Journey under the Southern Stars*, which is mainly a record of his Australian experiences, he should write: "To my grandson, Hugh Spence that he may know what the world was once like".

In *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* (1936) P. R. Stephensen criticised *The Bulletin* under J. F. Archibald for not encouraging fine literature in Australia, claiming that it encouraged 'crude' literature. "We have a right", he said, "to our own Australian nineteenth century and twentieth century, in particular the seven decades from 1859 to 1920 are the foundation decades of the Australian nation and, as such, are of indelible interest to us. Grant Watson's books are important as written by an author of that period and one whose European intellect was so profoundly influenced by the Australian landscape that he was able to project its unique and splendid beauty as a living force."<sup>11</sup> During his lifespan (1885–1970), with his Australian books written between 1914–1968, he was able to see Australia as it once was: "I can give but a faint impression of this country; it was both a lure towards a future wonder and an ever-present ravishment. I grew increasingly to love and fear its mild aloofness." Later, on leaving Australia he wrote: "I had come to know better than before the many varied aspects of that land, not yet broken in altogether to the uses of men."<sup>12</sup> Grant Watson feels the insignificance of man when faced with the Australian bush. It says to man, "Canst thou sustain my vast and indifferent regard or wilt thou shrivel into nothingness rather than listen to my silences". "Likewise", writes the journalist John Larkin in 1993, "We should listen to

<sup>9</sup> Dorothy Green, *The Music of Love: Critical essays on literature and life*, Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Aust. Ltd, p. 147.

<sup>10</sup> Dorothy Green, Introduction, *Descent of Spirit: Writings of E. L. Grant Watson*, ed. Dorothy Green, Sydney: Primavera Press, 1993, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> P. R. Stephensen, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia: An essay towards national self respect*, Gordon, NSW: W. J. Miles, 1936, p. 99.

<sup>12</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, op. cit., p. 100.

Elliot Lovegood Grant Watson with his voice like the pure exalted steady sound of a bell in these restless times."<sup>13</sup>

Elliot Lovegood Grant Watson was eighty-five years old when he died on 21 May, 1970, at Petersfield in Hampstead, and was buried in Steep churchyard. His wife, Katharine Grant Watson, had read Dorothy Green's critical study of Watson's Australian novels in *Meanjin Quarterly*, Vol. 3, September 1971 and sent her, and the editor of the series, a copy of her husband's little-known book of poems, *Four Sacred Ones and Other Verses*,<sup>14</sup> most of which he wrote when he was over the age of seventy. "Poetry," wrote his widow, Katharine, "was what he cared for most of all. He used to say, 'If you really want to know me, read my poems.'"<sup>15</sup> At the ages of seventy-five and seventy-eight Grant Watson found he could better express his hidden thoughts in verse rather than in prose – "My verses which came directly out of my unconscious were so different from the anti-poetry that is popular today that I have shrunk from sending them to magazines." However, he did send them to a publisher, Harcourt Brace of the United States, and received an appreciative letter in which it was stated that although the poems had received recommendations from three of the firm's editors, who had praised them on account of the economy of words of diction and content, the publishing house could not undertake their printing since "I at seventy-five, had no reputation as a poet". Of the poems themselves, Grant Watson wrote, that they are no doubt influenced by Jung and Rilke, and most of all by my ability to perceive in nature". They were later published privately by a friend.<sup>16</sup>

On receipt of a copy of Grant Watson's book of poems, sent to her by his widow, Katharine, in 1970, Dorothy Green wrote: "The poems are extraordinarily interesting, some very beautiful. What a difference it makes to poetry to have it founded on an exact knowledge of concrete facts. So many modern poets go on spinning words out of themselves without feeling the need to enlarge the self".<sup>17</sup>

Of his thirty-seven books, distinguished scholar and friend, Owen Barfield, wrote: "He will continue to be remembered and read for his penetrating sketches and analysis of instinct, both animal and human, considered not as a blind and ascending force rather as a 'Precipitate of a descending wisdom.'"<sup>18</sup> In the republication of *The Nun and the Bandit* by Primavera Press in 1993, following the making of Paul Cox's film based on it, Cox wrote in 'Book to Film': "There is a strangeness about his work. It is complex, interesting and very spiritual. Here is one great soul who should be on our shelves."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> John Larkin, *The Age*, 9 May, 1993.

<sup>14</sup> Published as *Four Sacred Women and Other Verses*, Petersfield: Thwaites & Watts, printers, n.d.

<sup>15</sup> Vale, Grant Watson, *Meanjin Quarterly*, March 1975.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Katharine Grant Watson to Dorothy Green, 1976.

<sup>17</sup> I am including a selection of the poems as an appendix as I believe they are an important further dimension to Grant Watson's life and work. I have not sought in this thesis to offer a critical perspective on this aspect of Grant Watson's work.

<sup>18</sup> Owen Barfield, who wrote the Introduction to *The Mystery of Physical Life*, died Christmas 1997 at the age of 99; letter from Josephine Spence to the writer dated 19 Jan., 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Cox, 'Book to Film', *The Nun and the Bandit*, Sydney: Primavera Press, 1993.

Grant Watson's Australian novels and autobiographical books *But To What Purpose* and *Journey under the Southern Stars* have much to offer in his penetrating view of Australia in 1910-1912, in particular of the land, the desert, the settlers and the Aborigines, as well as the life on the goldfields; and it is to the loss of Australian literature that his books cannot be found today on the shelves of Australian school, universities or public libraries.

**Appendix A**  
**Selected Stories**  
**of**  
**E. L. Grant Watson**

## Preface to Grant Watson's Stories

*It has been maintained by Friedrich Nietzsche that a man writes to get rid of his thoughts. This is in essence true, but the process is not merely one of excretion. Undoubtedly the writer is often distressingly conscious of being too full of chaotic impressions, also he suffers from the vagueness of his emotion. Besides wishing for relief from this pressure, he desires to make crystalline what is amorphous and vague. Each such re-crystallization marks a stage of development, and is followed by a period of rest. The process of writing besides being excretory is also formative in that it changes the formless to the crystalline. It might be said that the writer becomes subjective that his objectivity may ultimately be the clearer. He writes that he may find his own thoughts. In the process, experience becomes part of conscious knowledge. Life is thus made deeper.*

Grant Watson

# Where Bonds Are Loosed

by E. L. Grant Watson

Published at New York by Alfred A. Knopf, 1914.

"If I go down to Hell,  
Thou art there also"

dedicated to  
Edward Thomas



Title page and dedication of *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (first pub. 1914).

WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF  
E. L. GRANT WATSON  
author of  
"WHERE BONDS ARE LOOSED"

(Duckworth)

"OUT THERE."

"AN ORDINARY CORPSE."

*English Review.*

"MAN AND BRUTE."

"THE NARROW WAY."

"A FAREWELL."

*New Statesman.*

"Remarkable Work." – MANCHESTER GUARDIAN

"A strong picture of the deterioration of the isolated white man in the far outposts of Empire."

– TIMES.

"A Novel worth reading." – OBSERVER.

"A first Novel of unusual interest and power." – BYSTANDER.

"The characters stand out from the book as flesh and blood. ... There can be no question as to the ability and sincerity of Mr. Watson." – THE NEW WEEKLY.

"Man cannot live alone or unto himself is Mr. Watson's thesis. There are pictures of unrestrained passion, but it is a book that once started will be unwillingly put down." – DAILY EXPRESS.

"Mr. Grant Watson is a person to be reckoned with, if he can sustain himself at the imaginative level of 'Where Bonds are Loosed'." – ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS.

"Mr. Grant Watson is one of the most resolute and intrepid novelists I have met." – PUNCH.

Advertising 'cut' from *Where Bonds Are Loosed*, compiled by E.L. Grant Watson.

Source: Grant Watson's Papers, National Library, Canberra.



## Where Bonds Are Loosed

In *Where Bonds Are Loosed* (1914) the theme of good and evil is developed. The epigraph: "If I go down to Hell, / Thou art there also" is indicative of the theme, which is also expressed metaphorically in the title.

In his preface to the book Grant Watson describes the characters, isolated on an island completely cut off from civilization.

Their natures under this sudden relaxation cannot adjust themselves until all former habit and prejudice have been burnt away by the fires of suffering, and until they find beneath their feet the primal foundation of individual desire left high and dry in the ebb of all past valuations and beliefs. This ultimate realization of life can come only to the more primitive individuals of the group; the more complex and finely adjusted natures are broken in the process; they crumble to pieces together with all that they have lost.

In Grant Watson's view, their story is by no means exceptional. "Such isolated groups of people exist in hundreds at the further outposts of civilization," he wrote. "Their fates, though showing every variety of detail, are already written. Their success or failure is determined by the relative strength of their individual or social instinct."<sup>1</sup>

The second thesis of his book he states as "Life can survive all bludgeoning provided that the individual soul is so violently shaken that all its old valuations fall completely away. Out of the ruins, life naked and without shame but beautiful in that naked vitality can rise to new expression."<sup>2</sup>

The story originated from a real-life experience described in *But To What Purpose* where Radcliffe-Brown was obliged to intervene between the young doctor and the stockman in a shooting match in the sandhills.

In the book, Bernier Island becomes Fenton Island, where the medical staff are based, and which is for the hospitalization of the female Aboriginal patients, and Dorré Island becomes Kanna Island, where the males patients are situated. The Aborigines on Kanna Island are mainly supervised by Sherwin, a red-haired, rough but capable Irishman, originally appointed to look after the sheep and cattle on the island, and to be general handyman.

Dr Hicksey is newly appointed to the island, replacing the negligent Dr Hubbard, and is dedicated to research and high efficiency. He is, at first, resistant to the efforts of Nurse Desmond to seduce him from his research work, to satisfy her desire for a lover and companion on the desolate island. But finally, during the height of a violent hurricane or "Cockeyed Bob", Alice Desmond clings to Dr Hicksey in abject fear of the violence of the storm. All his defences are weakened in his realization of her need for his response, which is

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<sup>1</sup> E. L. Grant Watson, preface, *Where Bonds Are Loosed*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

given spontaneously at the height of the storm. "Together they formed the nucleus, the centre around which the universe spun in a wild fury of elements".

Once having capitulated to her overtures, he is happy that he no longer needs to resist her. He now feels there is ample scope for both his ambitions and his love. However, as time goes on, Hicksey begins to tire of her persistent need for attention, and to regret the resulting neglect of his research. In desperation he finally sets off for Kanna Island to escape her, but she follows him to the beach and insists he take her with him.

On Kanna Island the red-haired Irishman, Sherwin, is quick to notice Hicksey's irritation and determined neglect of Nurse Desmond. He, himself, has envied Hicksey having her not only as his assistant but as his lover. Nurse Desmond expresses fear of Sherwin's obvious interest, and pleads for Hicksey to protect her. As tempers flare in the heat and isolation, the sand dunes of the island between the doctor's house and Sherwin's house becomes a shooting ground for the two men, precipitated by Alice Desmond's hysterical screams for the doctor's protection. In this way she brings about his death, which actually happens following a struggle, not with guns in the sand dunes but with a knife, which Sherwin finally succeeds in reaching, stabbing Hicksey in what can be seen as self defence.

That Nurse Desmond finally accepts that there has been a fair fight, and that Sherwin is the stronger man and more suited to her own volatile nature, is presented by Grant Watson as a logical end to the story. Certainly, she has little choice, being defenceless on the lonely island, but she is also resourceful in seeing the need for Sherwin's survival by removing all traces of Hicksey's death, and burying the body and Sherwin's blood-stained clothes. Sherwin had taken care to implicate his Aboriginal servant, Coffee, as an accomplice, so that he would remain silent to questioning.

So, by one irreparable act, the significance of which was embodied in the corpse of the dead man, they were cut off from the world; and yet, just at that moment when all seemed lost, life had surprised and awed them with new possibilities. Helen Desmond found with her lover's murderer a happiness and fulfilment lacking in her relationship with Dr. Hicksey. Together they made a new life on Fenton Island and a son completed their happiness. The son, John Sherwin, eventually leaves the island in the sequel *The Mainland*. But although the disappearance of Dr. Hicksey is accepted by the authorities, due to his habit of swimming midst the sharks in Shark Bay, Sherwin and Helen never return to civilization. They become the fringe dwellers as described by Grant Watson in his chapter 'The Philosophy of the Fringe' in *But To What Purpose*, in the words of the naturalist, Dr. Darling, whom he met on Fraser Island.

He maintained that those feelings and thoughts which come to men and women who live in close and inevitable contact with the primal forces of nature, are those which carry the essential and enduring elements of life. Such feelings and thoughts are only experienced by those who live on the outer fringes of human society. They diminish and die when subjected to the influence of a mechanistic age. In the centres of civilization, life was withering away ... that human life was centripetal,

having its sources at the circumference, and that it drove inward towards congestion and death.<sup>3</sup>

When the government inspector, Keynes, visits Kanna Island two years later, he finds in Sherwin "something at the same time final and primitive, something extraordinarily free and individual". When he asks Sherwin why he does not feel the need to return to civilization, Sherwin explains that he has learned to see and feel so many things; "just little things; you wouldn't take much stock of them; the hot sun on the sand, the noise of the waves on the shore and sometimes the feel of the wind, and the red and yellow butterflies clinging to the thorn bushes."<sup>4</sup>

The civilization of that world which he had left had become a shadow, irrelevant and meaningless; here a larger simplicity ministered to his soul. As fringe dwellers, he and his wife lived close to the basic principles of life, completely remote from the centres of industrial civilization with its drive towards destruction and death. The message is, the garden of rational, refined civilization may prove inferior to the natural, primitive environment *if* one can survive the ordeal. With solitude as the central personal problem of the novels, Grant Watson is concerned, in large part, with exploring the truth or falsehood of Nietzsche's statement: "In solitude Man becomes either a God or a beast."

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<sup>3</sup> *But To What Purpose*, p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> *Where Bonds are Loosed*, p. 304.

# The Mainland

by E. L. Grant Watson

Author of "Shadow and Sunlight," etc.

Jonathan Cape, 11 Gower St, London

First published by Duckworth & Co., 1917

Reissued by Jonathan Cape, 1917

*Over the great windy waters and over the clear-crested summits,  
Unto the sea and the sky, and unto the perfecter earth,  
Come little bark – to a land wherein gods of the old time wandered  
Where every breath even now changes to ether divine.  
Come, let us go; though withal a voice whisper – "The world that we live in,  
Whithersoever we turn, still is the same narrow crib;  
Tis but to prove limitation, and measure a cord, that we travel;  
Let who would scape and be free go to his chamber and think;  
Tis but to change idle fancies for memories wilfully falser;  
Tis but to go and have been." Come little bark, let us go.*

A. H. Clough<sup>5</sup>



Title page and quotation of *The Mainland* (1917).

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<sup>5</sup> Arthur Hugh Clough, *Selected Poems*, ed. Jim McCue, Penguin Selected English Poets, gen. ed. Christopher Price, London: Penguin Books, 1991 (copy consulted). Arthur Hugh Clough (1819–1861) witnessed at first hand several of the crucial scenes of his age. Son of a cotton merchant who emigrated from Liverpool to Charleston in South Carolina, he was sent back to school in England and in 1830 won a scholarship to Balliol College. In 1848 he was in Paris with Emerson during the revolution and the following year, before taking up his post as Principal of University Hall, London, he spent the summer in Rome, which led to the writing of his epistolary poem *Amours de Voyage*.

## The Mainland

The story opens with the son of Sherwin and Alice Desmond portrayed as a strong, well-formed boy of seventeen, his naked body suntanned dark brown and his red hair long to his shoulders. Skilled in fishing and sailing he has been content with his parents and the island life. Occasionally the cutter with its Captain Pomfrey, calls at the island and Sherwin barter his island products for necessities from the mainland. John Sherwin has never left the island and his father is reluctant to have his son leave the shelter of their secluded life for the contamination of the towns. However, the time comes when the boy must be allowed to go.

Grant Watson has featured a poem by A. H. Clough on the title page of the novel which highlights the growing desire of the boy, John Sherwin, to cross the sea to the mainland and experience life in civilization. The poem is persuasive in its suggestion of wider horizons for the boy.

*The Mainland* takes us back to civilization with the departure of John Sherwin with Pomfrey to the mainland, in reality the town of Carnarvon – called Kaimera in the book. John is told of his father's secret before he departs, and now knows that his father has killed a man, and the secret must be kept. He takes a load of stingaree skins which Pomfrey helps him to sell, and meets Cray, the owner of a well-appointed yacht, *The Ventura*. Immaculate in dress and manners, Cray is interested in the physically strong boy from an isolated island and newly arrived on the mainland. He offers him a job on a sailing trip north into the pearling area. Cray is obviously modelled on the anthropologist, Radcliffe-Brown, with his degrees in science as well as classics, and his further education in Paris, where "he assumed the habits of a French Savant".

Cray's wife is modelled on the character of Ida – a woman of twenty-eight but looking more like twenty, "with abundant hair largely concealed by a broad-brimmed hat, and with a direct glance of her blue eyes which made him look down to the blue waves thinking, "the woman was a being from another world".

While Cray and his deck hand, Julep, land on various islands and make friends with the Aborigines, with a view to gaining their help in pearling, John is involved in taking Mrs Cray ashore, where she likes to paint or read from her books. John becomes increasingly flattered by her attention and her desire to teach him to read. "There was something young in her – younger than himself and, in her company and their forages on the shore, John was happy with a new unclouded happiness." The story follows the Peter-Ida story, yet John has an admiration for Cray in his meetings with the wild Aborigines, just as Grant Watson had for Radcliffe-Brown, as he recorded genealogies with the elders of the tribe. However, it is also clear Mrs Cray feels her husband lives for his own plans and is unable to recognize a woman's life.

A plot by a white beachcomber, Trigg, and his half-caste wife, to steal the pearls from Cray, runs parallel with John's plans to leave Cray and take Mrs Cray with him. The plans

collapse when Cray discovers Trigg's plot and his wife's intentions. When confronted by her husband, her courage subsides in shame and despair – as had happened with Ida.

The story up to this point is light and lacks the raw vitality of *Where Bonds Are Loosed*. But as it proceeds to John's life in the bush, it takes on the breadth and reality of Grant Watson's two other bush stories: *The Desert Horizon* and *Daimon*. After a brief period of debauchery in Kaimera, following his disillusionment with Mrs Cray, John finds a job sandalwood-cutting in the bush. He teams up with Loo Radcliffe, a typical bush groper, red with the soil of the bush, his lined face having taken on the stamp of the desert – a character frequently seen in Grant Watson's Australian books.

During his first evening in the bush, John feels the subtle and powerful character of its charm. "There was a quality of virginity and unviolated youth in its vast and silent extent." Suffering from the immediate affliction of disillusionment, John is able to take comfort in the wide innocence of the desert.

The silence of the bush broken only by the stroke of his own axe seemed the natural medicine for his soul. The feeling lasted a while then a new one slowly grew in its place. He began to feel the cold indifference of nature's smile, as the discords of his own mind became less insistent, and his pain less turbulent, he felt with an overpowering vividness the insignificance of human life. He came to know with convincing certainty that all human power was but an accident possessing but a trifle's weight compared with the sublime endurance of the desert

He argued, "That men could spread over the desert, changing the nature of the land, but the argument gave no assurance. Even though man should cover the whole world with his importance, he would become thereby more than ever accidental and irrelevant. The stars and the vast spaces of the sky would still smile down as coldly chilling his imagination to humbleness – teaching him the knowledge of his insignificance."<sup>6</sup>

Thus through John Sherwin, newly arrived in the desert, Grant Watson is able to express some of his own reactions to the vastness and power of the Australian desert and what he could see then as "the sublime endurance of the desert as against the insignificance of human power". For John Sherwin the sound of his axe shut out the growing terror of the desert.

Familiar objects seemed grotesquely magnified, terrible in their mystical significance. In the presence of the soft, almost honey sweet smile of the desert the familiar humming of the bee reminded him of the duration of eternity.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Mainland*, p. 214.

However hard he worked and whatever he thought the desert was always enveloping him with its silent smile that yet remained indifferent to the advent of man.<sup>7</sup>

The reactions Grant Watson gives to John Sherwin and other characters in his Australian stories are his own very sensitive reactions, that he had experienced in 1910-12 and was able to express so many years later.

Then as the weeks and months passed, for John Sherwin, the terror of the waiting silence grew less. It became familiar, his heart grew larger, taking from the desert some of its tranquillity. Once he lay down upon the earth and wept with relief that his fear was passing. In his tears was gratitude – for a new and growing confidence – a confidence not in life or any sunny smile of fortune, but in himself, his pain no longer consumed him though the ache of it would remain for always.<sup>8</sup>

Grant Watson also shows how the desert is returning to John Sherwin the confidence he has lost and soothing the pain he suffered:

When the rains came the whole face of the land changed with a carpet of pink and white flowers and the appearance of innumerable insects, the sudden and surprising beauty was overwhelming. The metallic blue butterflies appeared and John was amazed at the fragility of such an airy thing which existed with obvious joy upon the scorched inhospitable desert.<sup>9</sup>

In all his Australian books, the desert, with its miraculous transformation from parched red earth to a sea of flowers and butterflies, sets a vivid background to the stories of the men and women who love it, hate it, and die because of it, as we see in *The Desert Horizon*, *Daimon* and *The Partners*.

For John Sherwin sandalwood cutting leads to the goldfields where, with a young companion, minor successes over a period of time lead to a major success and, as a mine manager, he needs to spend time in Kaimera. There, he is introduced into the society of the town by Stephens, the manager from the Magenta Mine. He is taken under the wing of Helen Vance, a girl of twenty-four, who tries to teach him tennis and dancing, but fails at both. She does succeed in taking him to her bed, with no tabs attached. She proclaims herself a free spirit and wishes to stay that way. She is typical of the female characters in Grant Watson's books – resourceful and able to make her own decisions in regard to how she will live her life. John's later attachment to Mrs Carter, fragile yet demanding, is one that he repents and is

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 215.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 216.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

thankful to finally relinquish. Finally he sees the town life as sterile and returns to the bush where his mind can escape the cramping bonds of the city.

Back in the bush, he expresses to his partner his happiness to be away from town life where he found "the women unhappy, the married ones hardly ever contented".

"Why should they be with their beastly little proper homes cluttered up with things – and men who own them without taking the trouble to understand them. The unmarried ones are worse off. They are either miserable because they can't get married or else slave at some damn job they hate, to keep what they call their freedom. There's an awful lot of talk about women's rights and freedom but the more they get of it, the worse off they are. It simply means freedom to slave their youths and beauty away in an office for some money-grabbing brute like myself."<sup>10</sup>

Through John Sherwin, Grant Watson expresses his views on the status of women, and also through the female characters in his novels and in his autobiography *But To What Purpose* – a theme he admires in George Meredith's writings with his convincing belief in free-thinking women. John Sherwin continues:

"As far as happiness goes the average black gin is better off than the women drudges of the town. In town you seldom hear a woman laugh with anything like the light heartedness of those black gins."<sup>11</sup>

And his partner Dixon points out that the city of Leith "doesn't seem to have agreed with you."

In his collection of short stories, *Innocent Desires* (1924), Grant Watson writes about one such happy black gin called Gnilgie, who also appears in *Daimon*. One wonders how city women today would react to his observation on the drudgery of urban womanhood. Yet, in many respects Grant Watson, were he still alive, might also be happy to observe some of the changes that have eventuated in the liberation of women over the past seventy years.

John finally meets the beautiful unsophisticated girl he marries and together they plan to settle near 'Cattle Chosen', away from the city life he has come to dislike. But first he takes her to Kanna Island to meet his parents.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 290.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



# **The Desert Horizon**

**by E. L. Grant Watson**

*Author of Shadow and Sunlight, etc.*



Jonathan Cape, Eleven Gower Street, London, 1923

Title page of *The Desert Horizon* (1923).

## The Desert Horizon

The *Desert Horizon* and *Daimon* tell the story of Martin O'Brien, and both books have a realism and purity Grant Watson's earlier books lack. The earlier works are a mixture of real-life characters and places, fictionalized to create imaginative stories. The later works, *The Desert Horizon* and *Daimon*, are stories of impressive realism and insight into the lives of their characters: Martin O'Brien; Maggie; Mackay and his wife Clara; Alex; the Cameron women and the lesser characters Jane and Nance. Most importantly, there is the desert, the dominant force in both books with its unrelenting power over its inhabitants, revealing both its mysterious beauty and its merciless cruelty.

Martin O'Brien is eight years old when his family first comes from England to Nallagoo station in the Western Australian desert.

The Nallagoo homestead was a straggling and roomy bungalow built of weather boarding, match boarding and corrugated iron. The kitchen and other out-houses were mere wooden frameworks covered with hessian and painted white. At a little distance, the raised ground on which the house was built met the granite plain, where a red, powdery dust lay deep upon the surface. The landscape was stained by the all-pervading colour of the dust, whose particles were so fine as to be carried into every cranny and nook. In the sunlight, the house, the windmill and the gum-trees all took the same soft and elusive blending of mauve and pink; the sky above was a deep, intense blue.<sup>12</sup>

A clear picture of a 1910 station homestead is given here, illuminated by Grant Watson's notable sense of colour, which can be observed in all his writings, especially when writing of the Australian desert.

In all his Australian novels there is a special place for a brief appearance by a tribe of Aborigines – men, women, and children – showing their itinerant habit of travelling from one waterhole to the next. Friendly and curious as they are towards white people, the Aborigines are not averse to stealing anything too easily available (for example, taking Martin's sugar supply while showing him the next waterhole), yet are always grateful for small presents such as wire and empty butter tins. At Nallagoo Station they are regular visitors, much to Barclay O'Brien's annoyance. He does not employ them as other station owners do, paying them with food. However, the eight-year-old Martin and his sister Mary curiously befriend the Daku tribe of natives who appear every year on the edge of their property.

They would appear usually at the same season; they came silently, men, women and children, with their accompanying dogs, drifting through the bush, and would take up their camping-place close to some water-holes at about half a mile from the

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<sup>12</sup> *The Desert Horizon*, p. 10.

homestead. Here they would stay for several months, and then, without warning and as silently as they had come, they would drift away again and be lost among the feathery vegetation.<sup>13</sup>

In *The Nun and the Bandit* and *Daimon*, they appear in the same way, drifting from waterhole to waterhole, wraith-like and elusive, like the creatures of the desert. These people, with their

primitive simplicity, knew little of malice, they were peaceable and cheerfulminded. They were wild in that they went naked or but very scantily clad, and that they followed no laws but the rigid unwritten laws of the tribe. Without history their traditions had come down through countless generations. Their being was of the desert wilderness, through their senses alone were they conscious. As were the animals and plants so they were they the children of the drought, of the fierce sunlight, of the gusty, mad winds of mid-day heat and of the overarching sky. They moved over the dusty plains, significant, sufficient unto themselves, sensual in singlemindedness, and cheerful in the absence of self-comprehension. For the most part they had come into contact with the white settlers and learnt to speak a few words of pidgin-English, but they remained untouched in outlook, entirely foreign. Where the contact becomes close, as in the south, they die, for they are not able to sustain a conscience so ruthless as the white man's.<sup>14</sup>

It would be difficult to find a description of the Australian Aborigines as spiritual in its understanding of these primitive people of the bush. Unlike Grant Watson, Barclay O'Brien has no such understanding of the Aborigines and does not welcome their coming. He finds something antipathetic in their easy-going contentedness. These people without laws and conventions that he can understand, he looks upon as a vagabond and useless lot. He suspects that they would only too willingly spear his sheep and cattle. In this he is not far wrong, but he does not see that the remedy lies in his employing them as herdsmen and outriders with definite wages paid in the foods they love. He does not trouble to understand them any more than he troubles to understand his wife. He makes it plain they are not welcome in the vicinity of Nallagoo.

The attitude of suspicion towards the natives is inevitably taken by his wife. She refuses to follow the example of other squatters' wives who, being more open-minded, take the native women into their service, teaching them to cook and wash.

The children, Martin and Mary, are forbidden to go near the camp. However, it is on the second visit of the tribe that Martin in his efforts to trap a bandicoot, is surprised at the sudden appearance of a black man who befriends him and expertly demonstrates the Aboriginal way of catching the animal, and shows him how to catch two large grasshoppers for tucker for the captive.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

The following summer, the children find the playmates in the native camp for whom they have unconsciously longed. But harmony such as the children witness in the Aboriginal camp is not to be found in the struggling bungalow at Nallagoo.

When the children go out into the bush they leave behind a large portion of that individuality which life in the family produces. It is as if they are able to escape from the circumstances of present-day European children and reach back into the past, living the lives of their prehistoric ancestors.

When they return home, they deliberately put aside the mysterious past, into which they have dipped and become once more the children of their parents. "The pristine free happiness of the native camp coloured as it strangely seemed with both a quality of self restraint and of abandon, was like a world of faerie which they would gladly have kept hidden."<sup>15</sup> For a time they succeed, but it is not possible to conceal for very long the results of so deep an experience.

When Barclay O'Brien finds out the children have been visiting the native camp he is so angry the whole family become mute and terrified. He thrashes both the boy and the girl, which is a foretaste of what they can expect if they ever go near the camp again. However, Martin's father gives him a pony so that he can help with the sheep, which leaves Mary in the house with her mother and baby brothers. Mary is puzzled at the unhappiness of her mother who cries a lot, is dull and fat, and very much taken up with the latest baby.

Barclay O'Brien has not been a successful sheep farmer, and is eventually faced with failure after four years of frustrated hopes. He is forced to seek work, sheep shearing some distance across the desert from Nallagoo. Martin is given the responsibility of caring for the animals and moving the flocks of sheep from one area to another.

All goes well until one day when he returns from the bush, he finds Mary minding the two younger children and his mother lying face downwards and dead in the clay pan. Unwilling to leave Mary and the babies alone while he seeks help, Martin decides to take them with him. He packs the two babies in the old pram with supplies of food and a water bottle, and sets off with Lulu the dog and her pup running alongside.

Martin pushes and Mary pulls, with reins across her body, as they set out across the desert early in the morning to walk the twenty-seven miles to the station where their father is helping with the shearing. At first the journey is not so difficult in the cool of the early morning – the track is fairly hard, but it stretches endlessly over the great plain.

Around on all sides was the silent, mysterious land. It seemed to be just waking from sleep and smiling at the memory of its dreams. Fresh and very young the desert region was not yet aware of the advent of mankind upon the earth. It had not yet woken from its age-long dream, its unmolested slumber. What had it to do with these children who crawled over its surface, what concern had it with their courage

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

or their despair? A few birds began to pipe melancholy notes at long intervals. The pram progressed lurching from side to side<sup>16</sup>

The desert, again, plays a prominent part in the story with a definite character of its own, absorbed only in its own destiny and regardless of any human life that may be intruding on its surface.

First the younger baby is very sick then Patrick, the older baby, follows his example. This entails two halts and a complete turnout of the pram. It begins to dawn on Martin that this may be a terrible adventure which will need all his boy's courage to carry safely through. He finally does this after a heartbreaking journey across the desert when "the bland and candid smile of this land which he had loved so much was terrible in its aloofness."

At the shearing shed the workmen lift the babies out and put them on new laid fleeces. They gather around and give them a little water. Martin is too tired to talk, the puppy and Lulu are stretched out and unconscious. Mary and Martin lay down on the wool fleeces and as Martin falls asleep, broken sentences swim in his half consciousness: "Well that beats everything – damn fine kid – all the bloody way, pushing the bloody pram all the way from Nallagoo . . . the little bleeding babies and the puppy and all".<sup>17</sup> Martin is not sure of the import of the oft-repeated word, but feels that somehow it signifies a high and heart-felt praise.

Life now changes for the O'Brien children, the younger ones with Mary are sent to a farmer and his wife near Perth while Martin is employed by Alec Shaw, one of the young shearers who has a small cattle property and will be glad of Martin's help. In return he will be given board, and allowed to go to the nearby bush school for four days each week.

Grant Watson gives a realistic picture of Alec's property with its one-room hut, its team of cattle, and the cooking of meals and sleeping in the open. The small village and school are reached by horseback each day, and we become acquainted with the people of the village, the school and the village shop, with the storekeeper, Evans, and Jane, eighteen years old and supposedly his wife, who befriends Martin as he grows tall and strong, a lad in his teens. He is attracted yet repelled by her, and finally rejects her overtures.

For Martin the daily routine stretches into weeks and the ride to school for rather dull lessons, the days of sheep and cattle herding merge into a seemingly stable texture. He grows almost to man's stature, well equipped for the physical labour of a man.

In the introduction of Nance, Alec's young friend, we see another of Grant Watson's free-thinking, self-reliant women characters. She rides out to visit Alec, staying for a day or two, sleeping with him in his hut. Martin resents her intrusion at first, but soon she wins him over with her friendly, easy-going manner and simplicity. His antagonism is overcome and he learns to accept their relationship and Nance's friendship.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

One evening during one of Nance's visits, Alec fails to return from cattle mustering in the bush. Nancy and Martin ride out to search for him, but it is not until next morning that his body is found, obviously trampled by the herd and already torn by dingoes. Their grief and shock throw them together. That night as Martin lies in his blanket on the ground, Nance, in a desperate state of misery, seeks comfort with him, which Martin gladly gives, holding her in his arms and loving her throughout the night.

Later Nance regrets having awakened in Martin his first passionate feelings of love, and rejects his desire for a continuation of a relationship which she feels would be wrong. She rides away and Martin never sees her again but she does send a letter later asking his forgiveness. His love does not wholly die but turns into a soft memory and, in his memory, Nance and Alec remain as examples of firm friends and lovers.

For six years Martin is away from the land of his boyhood and his return is an emotional experience, revealing more than ever his sense of belonging to the desert country.

It was a moonless, starlight night when the train reached Tharameka. Tharameka which was at that time head of the line, provided the Chief Labour Exchange for all the district. Employers came from fifty and even a hundred miles to find labour to shear their sheep or work their mines ... all the life of the district converged towards the town ... As he sat motionless in the railway carriage looking from steady eyes across the great plain of the Murchison goldfield, this desert country possessed for him then more than its old mystery and charm. It revealed, as he gazed, the innermost element of his own self, some portion of personality, seemingly limitless and in touch with power<sup>18</sup>

Among the miscellaneous mob of shepherds and rouseabouts and hardened wage-earning miners, Martin waits his turn for a job. "I want a station job, I don't mind being far out, fencing, permanent shepherd, outrider." His request meets with a rebuff – only shearers are required – and a nod of dismissal. Disappointed, Martin is leaving when a middle-aged man approaches him and offers him fencing work. George Mackay speaks with a slight Scottish accent and, inviting Martin for a drink, explains the job as one of isolation, miles away from civilization. One recalls from *But To What Purpose* that it was a landowner called Mackay who assisted the Cambridge Expedition with a donation of £1000.

Martin readily agrees to the offer and next day drives with Mackay in a buggy to Quinn's Springs. On the way Mackay turns to Martin, saying: "What a wonderful country it might be – why think of it this country could grow wheat, there's enough rainfall – it wants clearing and ploughing that's all. There could grow enough wheat on this Western borderland to feed a continent."<sup>19</sup>

With astonishment Martin looks at his companion. The idea of changing the character of the land seems to him grotesque. It also shocks him, there were wheatfields down south and

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 169.

dull enough they looked. He knows the bush better than this old man, it is unchangeable, eternally the same, safe from his touch.

"You don't think it could be done", Mackay continued, "Use a little imagination, there's water underground – a few windmills that's all that's needed – thousands of acres of wheat could be grown."

Martin shrugged his shoulders, "What would be the good of it", he said.

Mackay snorted at the stupidity of the question. "Progress, development – to let a thousand men live where one man could live with difficulty before. That's a great idea don't you think?"

Martin shook his head, "I don't know, I hadn't thought about it," Then after a pause, "I reckon it will stay as it is."<sup>20</sup>

Grant Watson could see this desert land would never be changed – its value lay in it being left unchanged, Australia's red centre, unique in its resistance to civilization and because of this, having a magic that is irresistible and significant. Through Martin, he expresses his awareness of the power of the desert to resist change.

"I came here because I like the country just as it is, I should like to live here without changing anything. I should like to have a farm of my own, a few fences and sheep and cattle, they don't do any harm."

Mackay nodded his head. He was again deep in thought, "It will break you young fellow, or you'll break it, one or the other. Why should men come here at all? They come because they are pushed by the will of mankind, by the will of God to conquer the barren places of the earth. Don't you believe that?"

"I've come here because I want to be here," Martin said.<sup>21</sup>

This conversation between the old Mackay and the boy Martin, who has grown to love the land, is significant in exhibiting the difference in an old man's desire for the need to civilize the land and a young man's wish to preserve its unique characteristics. It also demonstrates how the young Grant Watson, in his short time in the Western Australian desert, was able to realize that the desert would never be changed and that its unique character should be preserved.

The homestead at Quinn's Springs is different from the corrugated iron sheeting and hessian buildings Martin had been accustomed to. It is built of red jarrah, spacious with a deep verandah surrounded by a colourful garden, due to a good supply of water holes. Mackay's wife, a thin, bony woman not more than thirty, impresses Martin as being cold and hard and he perceives that Mackay, although much older, is frightened of her. She does not go out of her way to make herself agreeable, and does not take much notice of Martin who is

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 170.

impressed by her obvious efficiency. It is she who makes the decisions regarding the management of the property. But during the ride out next day, when Mackay's horse stumbles over one of the dogs, causing it to yelp as it lies on the ground, Martin is startled by her outburst of fury at her husband, calling him "a blasted old fool". Mackay, obviously upset as he rides ahead with Martin says:

"It's the country that's what it is – this infernal country. Women can't stand it – if any woman could stand it Clara is the one, she's as good as a man on the land, it's her nerves, she can't stand the loneliness, the eternal repetition. If it were wheat, it would be a different story. ... People would flock here then, there would be railways stretching out to the inland lakes beyond the breakaways. There would be branches from the Murchison to the upper Gascoign [Gascoyne] and beyond to the Pilbury district and beyond again to the Kimberley. There could be hundreds of miles of wheat, a wonderful country rich enough to feed millions. You don't believe it?"

"Maybe", Martin thought it best to humour the old fellow. He was obviously a bit cracked and so too, was the woman. If they wanted wheat, why didn't they stay down South? ... A young man's scorn kindled in his heart. This poor old fool, good farmer that he was, did he think that he would be able to change the desert? "I'd rather leave it as it is why not?"

"That's just where you make a mistake," said Mackay, "You will learn in time its nature or man, one or the other of them must go under."

Martin smiled in his superior confidence. He felt he knew the desert better than this old man. He had grown up in the desert, it had become a vital part of his life, not to be regarded as an adversary as Mackay did.<sup>22</sup>

Speaking through Martin, Grant Watson demonstrates a remarkable affinity with the unique character of the Australian desert – a spiritual affinity which he reveals in all his Australian books. At the same time he shows his full awareness of its formidable power to destroy – as in *The Partners*, when the inexperienced Sam Lawson is lost in the desert – and in the deadly monotony that destroys Martin's mother, Clara Mackay and, finally, both Martin and Maggie. But Martin's love for the desert never changes.

The desert horizon stretched blue and indefinite; it was the same as he had always known it, the dry trees growing in the dry soil, gnarled and bent, the blue leaves turned edgewise to the sun, the branches feathery and brittle. The land was eternally old, it had always been thus, yet it possessed the innocence of youth. It was not yet aware of man's advent on the world. It would not be changed.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 179.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 176.



Two days after meeting with Mackay, Martin has started his fencing job far distant from the homestead. His supplies of fencing materials and food mean he will not need to return to the homestead – with his two blankets he will sleep on the ground and water can be found at a nearby water hole. By the time he has been forty-eight hours alone he regains the deep sense of harmony with external nature with which in his childhood he had been so familiar.

There would be the kindling of the morning fire in the hush of summer, the knowledge of the aloof yet intimate land, vast upon all sides, and later the sweating, monotonous labour under the sun – the work would last months, a year, perhaps longer, and all the while he would be near to that something that strange intangible something for which he had no name. He knew it was present in the bush and that it promised a beyond greater even than life itself. It was the charm, the lure the pride of life, yet words did not describe it. But it was this intangible something that drew Martin on further and further into his incurable passion for the desert, the desert horizon was to increasingly hold him in its spell.<sup>24</sup>

As weeks and months pass, solitude closes in upon him, the fence grows and for a time it is the only material sign which connects him with the other members of his race. It leads back, over the ground that he has trodden, to civilization and to other men. Martin becomes fond of this thing that he has made; he likes to think of it leading always further out into the untracked bush. "As he wandered in the desert he would say words to himself; his own name, after he repeated it often enough, became meaningless, Martin . . . Martin . . . Martin, tin . . . tin . . . tin. Like all dwellers in solitude he talks to himself".<sup>25</sup> One can almost feel Martin's need to break the stillness of the remote bush in order not to lose his identity in its mystique, "that strange intangible something for which he had no name".

Occasionally his solitude is broken, firstly by Clara Mackay who brings him fresh supplies in the buggy. It is not long before she is pouring out her hatred of the desert.

"It was not fit for any white men to live in – a beastly, empty, barren country – it's a nightmare – in my sleep I dream of it – the red dust and the infernal insects – the flies – how filthy they are."

"Why do you come here?" asked Martin.

"There's a good living to be made, it's a fine station – the more one succeeds, the more tied one is, the more impossible it is to get away. It gets a hold on one, that gets tighter and tighter. He thinks he can bring it under cultivation but he is wrong – it's like a lure tempting one on . . . to destruction."

Martin, embarrassed by her outburst, said, "Why don't you clear out, what's the good of staying if you hate it so much?"

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 186.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 188.

"That's not so easy to answer, you've only been here three weeks. I've been here for three years."<sup>26</sup>

When she finally drives off Martin is glad she has gone and taken that poignant sense of discord and discontent, which is some preparation for what is to follow.

Martin's next visitors are a band of wandering natives, first the men with their long spears, throwing sticks and boomerangs, then the women and children carrying paraphernalia from the camp. They halt, watching the white man at his work. Martin feels a little uneasy but addresses them in their native language, asking about water. This gives them the assurance to come to him. They will show him where to find water and meanwhile examine his tools with a kind of surprised reverence. Martin is prepared for them when they request he should give them the tools. He clips off some short lengths of wire and distributes them, much to their delight. When they discover his food he gives them some meat and flour. They then make a fire and cook what they have with them. They go on their way but not before showing Martin a new and better water hole. They part on good terms and, gesticulating, assure him they will come back sometime. Martin finds that while they are showing him the waterhole, one has slunk back and stolen all his sugar. This is a serious loss but then he reflects they might have taken everything.

"It was easy to sympathize with their wandering wild life. If anyone knew the desert these men did. They were the real children of the land, primitive, unadorned, cheertul and unpretentious. They were utterly different from white men, in some ways superior", he reflected; "they were certainly gentler and less fierce. These poor fellows were like children, simple and trusting, unable to protect themselves. He had seen to what uses they were put by the white men; yet they lived where white men and women found it difficult to live. They had lived in the desert and had passed on their simple tradition from generation to generation. They went back to the beginning of human life and seemed little changed by the long passage of years. How well too their naked bodies and ugly faces, the liquid and guttural noises of their speech were harmonious to the desert noises. In some subtle way these qualities were in accord with the dry clear air, the powder dust of the soil, the rude gusts of wind during the midday heat, the silence of dawn and of dusk broken by the occasional plaintive whistle of the birds. These things were harmonious gendering a sympathy for the brown, nomad people."<sup>27</sup>

Through Martin's reflections, Grant Watson expresses a remarkable understanding of, and sympathy with, the Australian Aborigines as an essential part of the desert country he had himself grown to love – and to feel a special empathy with its original inhabitants – an empathy and understanding which is difficult to equal in Australian literature. As J. J. Healy

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 193.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp. 197–98.

has written: "In the first quarter century the Aboriginal presence was not recorded by Australian writers, this task was left to an Englishman, E. L. G. Watson. Watson was the great outsider of Australian Literature. He was the main recorder of black-white contact in a period which played down this element. Above all he was an alternative voice."<sup>28</sup>

When the fencing is finished Martin takes some leave in Perth where he finds the girl with whom he wants to share his life, regardless of Mackay's advice: "If you ever think of marrying, keep away from the desert. It's no place for women."

Maggie Linton, newly arrived from England with her father, with the purpose of setting up a jewellery business in Perth, responds to Martin's friendship and the assistance he gives to them as new arrivals. The friendship develops into romance and soon Martin is looking forward to taking Maggie to share his life. But first he must work and get his own land and a house. Then the unexpected tragedy of Clara Mackay's suicide solves Martin's problem as Mackay offers him the job as manager of Quinn's Springs and the house in which to live. However, he warns Martin, "Never bring a woman here, you see how it ends – it's hell for them."

Martin believes it is nothing more than the hysterical ravings of a broken man. He is not to be frightened by mere words. He had observed Clara Mackay as having a peculiar and depressed temperament.

Maggie feels that a heavy cloud has descended on her happiness, one to which she has to adjust. Her father, however, thinks Martin should accept the opportunity, though the circumstance is unfortunate. That, too, must be accepted, but should not be unduly magnified.

The first ten days of their marriage they spend camping in the hills which is a revelation to the girl from Birmingham. Yet when Martin speaks of the station life further north, the vastness of the property, the long rides, the flies, the dust and ants, he fails to perceive beneath her brave glance, the lines of her mouth betraying a certain doubt and fear. Yet as they set out finally by train towards their future life, Maggie is proud of the young man in the white tropical suit. He looks very fair and young, successful and confident. There is no shadow of regret for having trusted herself to his care.

As the train lumbers northward over the notoriously ill-laid metals of the midland line, she observes large areas of ring-barked trees, dead and gaunt, stretching their black and grey arms in nakedness to the sky as if in imprecation upon the men who have destroyed them. It seems to Maggie a shame that the beautiful trees should be killed this way, killed and burnt without ever the wood of the trunks being put to human service.

Such observations occur frequently in Grant Watson's writing. His concern for the seemingly mindless destruction of the environment is expressed throughout his Australian books.

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<sup>28</sup> J. J. Healy 'Innocence and Experience', *Literature and the Aborigines in Australia: 1770-1975*, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1978, p. 123. See also J. J. Healy, 'Grant Watson and the Aborigine: A tragic voice in an age of optimism', *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, May, 1975, p. 26.

After a journey of 300 miles Martin and Maggie spend a day and a night at Ruperttown. Here Maggie first enters upon the fringes of the North West, the streets full of men stained red with the dust of the desert. This squalid town of corrugated iron in which goats and donkeys wander in the streets is a link between the south and the great spaces of the north.

In the evening the hotel is full of the harsh vernacular of the bush, the oaths and blasphemes of drunken men. In the dining saloon they listen to talk from the goldfields. There is the beginnings of a rush. The Magenta claims which will soon become famous are beginning to be talked about. Martin speaks contemptuously of gold and of mining in general. "I'll never worry about that", he says, "While there is good work to be had on a station."

In Grant Watson's sequel *Daimon*, we see how Martin radically changes his view of gold prospecting which, sprung from deprivation of his passion for the desert country, forced upon him by Maggie, eventually destroys them both.

# **The Partners**

**by John Lovegood**

(pseudonym for E. L. Grant Watson)

London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1933

Title changed to

**Lost Man**

when published in the U.S.A.

*"Who knows if life is not death, and death life?"*

Euripides

Quotation from title page of *The Partners* (1933)

## The Partners

Grant Watson believed his novel, *The Partners*, was his best book. Previously his publisher had criticised him. "Why did he not take some sort of regard for what people wanted". Critics praised or blamed his previous novels as crude, fierce stories of the Australian bush, and even friends who had looked kindly on his earlier writings, questioned him, saying: "Why write such macabre and revolting, harrowing pictures?"

" 'Because,' I might have answered," he wrote in his autobiography, " 'I am trying to discover the original fears and hungers which are in myself and in all men.' "<sup>29</sup> When he sent the novel, *The Partners* to the publisher, Gollancz, the latter liked the book immensely and was glad to publish it, but offered the author less than usual because, according to Grant Watson's last publishers, the sales on his previous work had not been good. Being particularly hard up at the time, Grant Watson, caught in a dilemma, suggested he would publish the novel under a pseudonym, 'John Lovegood'. Later he regretted his action, admitting he was no match for the businessman, Gollancz.

This novel has a theme of gold – 'liquid sunlight', both symbolically and factually. The epigraph, "Who knows if life is not death and death life" by Euripides, becomes significant in the final scene of the dying Sam Lawson in the burning desert. The careful build-up of each character, by giving us insights into each of their thoughts, is important in helping us to understand Vera's shallowness and the physical attraction she has for the two men, Sam Lawson, her rich, successful, but rather gross husband and Sam's partner, Tim Kennedy, who becomes Vera's lover.

Vera has been married to Sam Lawson for six weeks. All the people she meets seem to think that she is very lucky to have married him. Her father had been delighted, believing it would end all their financial troubles. Yet, as she looks at the feathery-branched gum trees, at the tuft-headed 'black-boys', those curious fern-like plants with charred stems, and at the weeping green hair of the she-oaks, she feels that all that has been happening to her is like an accident which has befallen some part of herself.

Through Vera, Grant Watson also expresses his strong conservationist views of scenes he has observed in the Australian bush. On the way to Geraldton with her husband, Sam Lawson, Vera, newly arrived from England, observes the country, just as Grant Watson had observed it on the same train journey from Perth to Geraldton and beyond.

The train had turned northward and was passing through country which was in process of being transformed from virgin bush to cultivated land. There were forests of ring-barked trees, where every tree had had a deep cut made in a ring round the base of its stem. From these wounds the trees had bled to death, and were now standing in a gaunt host of gleaming skeletons as the evening light fell on their leafless branches, so bare and spectral, which seemed to the girl's fancy to call down

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<sup>29</sup> *But To What Purpose*, p. 204.

curses on the men who had murdered a countryside. At other places the train passed through vast smoking tracts where the dead trees had been burnt. Here the ground was white with fallen ash, and the heat and the smell of the scorched earth filled the air.<sup>30</sup>

Although the language of death is used in this depiction of a scene to which Australians are quite accustomed and accept as normal practice, the description is not sinister – as D. H. Lawrence has made his descriptions of the Australian bush – but tragic in its grieving for man's destruction of his environment.

Any small bushes that had once graced that place had been gnawed by the goats to their stumps, no leaf was to be seen. The land had been violated first by the sun, that had become a torment in the sky, and then by men, and by their hideous, starved animals. Vera felt she hated it. Was this the country where men came to find fortunes? Did this arid soil hide the gold that everyone wanted?<sup>31</sup>

Again Grant Watson graphically expresses through Vera his own first impressions of an environment strangely different to the English countryside. He sees it as arid, scorched by not only a destructive sun, but also a destructive civilization, yet he also shows his wonder at the rich promise of gold behind the facade of desolation.

In contrast, Vera sees the untouched desert's power to transform its aridity into

a carpet of flowers, mostly pure white – a vast snowfield of them, millions upon millions of blossoms. The earth seemed to have borrowed the lightness of the sky, and to be returning in gentle radiations that which it had accepted. Like the metallic blue butterflies the sea of delicate pink and white flowers was a wonder to suddenly appear in the arid desert, it was their overwhelming whiteness that touched her heart with awe.<sup>32</sup>

Like Grant Watson's other Australian novels, *The Partners* is in direct contrast to his gentle nature books centred in the English countryside. It revolves around the experiences of three characters on the early Australian goldfields: the gross, wealthy businessman, Sam; his beautiful but naively faithless wife, Vera; and her lover, Tim, the hardened, ruthless bushman who is also Sam's partner. The only survivor of the experience in the harsh Australian desert is Vera, to whom a fortune teller once told: "Your fate is full of accidents, you will have to be very careful if you avoid them but perhaps you will hardly recognize them as accidents."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *The Partners*, p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 132.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 136.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

The impact of Tim's violent death by snake bite is accentuated by its unexpectedness and made ironical by his secret idea, formulated during their search for a gold reef in the desert, to either abandon Sam in the desert or kill him off with one swift blow to the back of the head, so that he could have Vera as his own.

Dying by the bite of the sudden, vicious attack of a death adder, gives the previous incident of a death adder interrupting the lovemaking of Tim and Vera, in the seclusion of the bush, the significance of a foretelling of disaster. It reminds us of Jung's observation that in myths the snake is a frequent counterpart of the hero, with numerous accounts of their affinity. For example, the hero has eyes like a snake, or after his death he is changed into a snake and revered as such. In Jung's fantasy the presence of the snake was an indication of a hero-myth.<sup>34</sup>

In *The Partners*, the snake symbol is repeated again as Vera sees characteristics of the snake in Tim: "there was something cold in his passion; his very beseechingness and yearning sprang from a deep, cold source . . . there was something of the snake about him."<sup>35</sup>

The description of the sudden snake attack is as violent and realistic as it is unexpected and Grant Watson described it with all the knowledge he had of death adder attacks.

A snake was fastened on his flesh and clung there biting. Its white underside flashed in the sunlight as its thin writhing body was pulled clear of the bushes, following the head that bit with such tenacity . . . In that moment of quick reversal from hate to fear the snake's lithe body was to the man the image upon earth of the unreckoned evil of the depths. Its nature was that, which in his own nature he dare not know; sluggish in habit, irascible, the thing that might not be disturbed, but being moved was venomous and fierce and sudden.<sup>36</sup>

It is ironical that in his death agony from the snake bite, his pain is blended with pleasure, remembering his lovemaking with Vera, so that the double ecstasy of pain and pleasure produces in his violent death an involuntary orgasm.

Sam is left alone in the desert, totally helpless without the experienced Tim's knowledge of finding one's way across the seemingly endless plain. The description of Sam's struggle to find his way back to the horse and sulky through the burning desert, and his eventual capitulation to the inevitable, is disturbingly realistic. The thoughts of finding the horse and buggy and water become of far more importance than the gold.

"Pure gold brings no-one anything but good", the gipsy woman had told Vera as she gave her the gold ring. The end of the book is a denial of the prophecy for Sam and Tim. But of Vera's fate we are not told except it seems she would be happier without either Sam or Tim.

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<sup>34</sup> C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Flamingo, 1983, p. 206.

<sup>35</sup> *The Partners*, p. 125.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 214.



How easy it was to call a woman a prostitute! She was like that to both of them ... Men had no mercy ... She knew that Tim, in particular, had no mercy, for there was something cold in his passion; both of them, how she hated them both. They had gone through their antics in their different ways, and they had never thought about her as she really existed. What was there in all her acts that really belonged to herself? ... and the thought gave her pause, she had hardly ever thought about herself, in that way before. Herself, then she did exist? Of course, but not in that way ... One thought alone was a haven of refuge: tonight she would have a bed to herself, and perhaps, as when she was a child, she would say her prayers again.<sup>37</sup>

Vera knows both her lover and her husband have gone into the desert together to seek the reef of gold Tim had located earlier, but she does not know they have both perished in the desert. This was another accident foretold by the gipsy.

"Do you think me so very stupid?" Vera had questioned the gipsy.

"No not stupid my dear. Far from it. There are some of the wisest that are that way – like the fishes in the river, they go the way the water goes, and as often as not, when it is over the fall, they go with it, and find themselves swimming in another place."<sup>38</sup>

And although we are not told, it seems clear that Vera, because of her unruffled acceptance of the accidents that have so far befallen her, will calmly, like the fish, go with the tide and find herself – "swimming in another place".

In a publication entitled *All About Books*, February, 1934, Ken Barratt gave the following critique of the novel:

I have just completed reading a new Western Australian novel, *The Partners*, by John Lovegood, published by Gollancz London, and I hasten to draw attention to it lest in the ever-increasing stream of Australian books it should escape that immediate notice it merits. My attention was first drawn to it by a column-long review by Norman Callan in the English journal, *Everyman*. "There are but four characters in this remarkable book", wrote the critic. "Sam Lawson, Tim Kennedy, Vera Lawson and the Bush. Yet through these four, Mr. Lovegood has managed to express all that is elemental in the universe."

Only a man who has spent years in the bush could have written it, yet that is not all, for so sure is the writing, so unified is the construction, that only a man of deep reading could have attained all this in what is presumably a first novel, unless 'John Lovegood' hides a practised hand. So deft is the emotional development of the story that the sense of predestination that haunts Vera, that envelops Tim, and

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 125.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

finally overcomes Sam, weaves its web about the reader until he, too, begins to wonder if he is not dreaming all this, and turns to the quotation on the title page from Euripides, "Who knows if life is not death, and death life?"

There is nothing quite like this in English literature. It is a fine flowering of that emergent Australian literary tradition; the realism of Henry Lawson, of Katharine Prichard and lesser others, in the service of something whose final effect is purely spiritual. Beyond that, the author's affinities are with the Greek tragedians and the early Christian mystics.

If you are interested in Australian literature, you should read this book, but no one is to blame if you do not like it. A book like this is not meant to be liked; it is meant to be accepted.

Ken Barratt, in this critique, gave a keen insight into Grant Watson's writing of *The Partners* and his observation of the spiritual meaning behind the realism of the seekers of gold meeting a double death in the desert. Tim's ideas of treachery are defeated by the vicious death adder and Sam's greed for the promise of a rich reef of gold defeated by the treachery of the desert. Barratt rightly recognizes the author's affinities are with the Greek tragedians and the early Christian mystics, and that only a man of deep reading could have attained all this. He has also recognized that *The Partners* is not a first novel as is indicated but that 'John Lovegood' hides a practised hand.

# **Daimon**

**by E. L. Grant Watson**

London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1925

Title changed to

## **The Contracting Circle**

when published in the U.S.A.

'Between me and the Spirit of the Universe  
something interposes which reaches beyond  
me, but is not yet the same as divinity.  
This something is my daimon.'

Rudolf Steiner.<sup>39</sup>



Title page and quotation of *Daimon* (1925).

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<sup>39</sup> Rudolf Steiner, German writer and philosopher (1861–1925). Books include *Christianity as Mystical Fact*, Blauvelt, New York 10913, USA: Steiner Books, 1961, 1968.

## Daimon

The story opens with a happy Maggie after two years of marriage. She surveys her surroundings with satisfaction, knowing she has put her own stamp on Quinn's Springs homestead with small alterations to beautify and increase its comfort, and to make it her own. Her infant son sleeps in his pram, safe from the flies with the wire netting she has insisted must enclose the verandah. Two new water tanks have been added, making their supply the best of any homestead in the area. Martin employs the natives camped near the homestead, both to work in the house and on the property. Unlike his father, he values their services, paying them with food, clothing and occasional small presents. They consider it a privilege to be allowed regular service.

The servant, Gnilgie, is a colourful character who features in Grant Watson's collection of short stories, *Innocent Desires* (1924), in a story entitled 'Gnilgie'. In *Daimon* she is very much the same character, "A nice unconcerned human animal, dressed in one of Maggie's discarded dresses – too tight for her – and with a pink blouse wound in a turban on her head."<sup>40</sup>

Martin tells Maggie he has met Mackay, who is sorry he gave up the station as he has nothing to do down south. Maggie thinks they are strange creatures these men so enamoured of this land of desolation and dust. Martin tells Maggie that one day he will buy the place. She is daunted by the thought. "To be in possession of these plains of mulga scrub and the far-reaching expanse of salt bush; they loomed before her as a challenge and responsibility. It would be something irrevocable and it came then in a flash that the men of the bush never really possessed the land, it was the land that possessed the men."<sup>41</sup>

Visits by Maggie's father give us glimpses of life on the station, with descriptions of horse-breaking, trained cattle dogs at work and a sulky ride to a neighbour's property, some twenty-odd miles away, when the wheels crunch over dead, brittle branches, fallen upon the ground, and here and there, rise and bump over the trunk of a dead tree.

Maggie and her father were awed and kept silent by the quality of that wild land. There was about it something pitiless and fatal, and yet lovely. Here there met and mingled the indifference and the aloof cruelty of an inhuman world; these qualities were merged in an all-embracing serenity, they were touched, in some mystical and contradictory manner, with a tenderness which was the attribute of, surely, a human God. Here, indeed was a symbol large enough to include all life, august and limitless.<sup>42</sup>

Grant Watson uses his theme of 'opposites' in his reverie on the desert land, pitiless, fatal, yet lovely, mingled with cruelty yet serene.

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<sup>40</sup> *Daimon*, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 61.

Published in the USA by Boni and Liveright as *The Contracting Circle*, Martin, after seven years, buys the property from Mackay, but his pride in owning it is balanced by his personal problem. In the house is the confined and ever-contracting circle of a bitter and intellectual pity. There is a love which is no longer love as he had imagined. Maggie is unhappy. Although she has been able to visit her father in Perth several times, now her son is to go to her father for his schooling. Maggie has not been able to have more children for which she blames the parched environment. With Martin's obsession with the work of the station, the cattle, and the land in which she cannot share, she feels outside his centralized devotion, which keeps him out on the land while she is a prisoner of the house. She can only see that she is following the pattern of the lives of Martin's mother and Mackay's wife, both defeated by the loneliness of life in the desert, as well as the dust, the flies and the heat.

An overlanding trip with Martin, two Aborigines and Bob Carey, Martin's young assistant, makes a pleasant interlude for Maggie and gives a realistic picture of cross-country overlanding and camping along the way. A friendship develops with Carey, and Maggie wishes Martin would notice and show some concern, but Martin lacks such sensitive reaction; nor can he contemplate any possible thought of Maggie leaving him. However, in desperation, this she is prepared to do, finally acceding to Bob Carey's persuasion, in spite of the fact that she still loves Martin. There follows the exciting episode when Maggie, riding her mare 'Red Bud', is chased by the newly acquired blood stallion, 'Flying Fox'. Having jumped his fence, he would surely have overtaken 'Red Bud' had not Martin, quick to perceive the danger to Maggie, given immediate chase, shouting instructions to Maggie, and finally crashing his horse into the pursuing stallion, killing both horses as well as injuring himself.

Martin recovers, and the years go by until finally Maggie, unable to bear the loneliness any longer after a night spent alone in the house waiting for Martin to return, rides off early next morning across the desert. On an impulse, she decides to go to their distant neighbours, the Cameron women, with the hope that being able to talk to another woman, and to pour out her unhappiness, will be of some help to her.

Instead, she finds she has rushed headlong into the tragic circumstances of the lives of Mrs Cameron and her daughter, imprisoned as they are in their forbidding stone house with its iron furniture.

Maggie rides away in desperation, not caring where she goes, and Martin eventually finds her lost in the bush. Martin now realizes he must leave his beloved desert country, and take Maggie to the wheat country towards the coast.

The story takes us fifteen years later to 'Sea Orchard', a charming house overlooking the sea with a fine orchard and garden. With Maggie is her daughter-in-law and her two grandchildren, who have been spending a holiday with her, as a change from the north where her son John owns a property.

Martin is happy with his fine wheat crop, he has worked hard on the property and now has satisfaction in viewing the vast fields of wheat. But as he rides home after a day of work

with his labourers, a breath of wind on a hill-rise brings him a fragrant scent which makes him check his horse, sniffing the breeze – a strange vagrant scent, which brings memories with such vividness of his youth.

That was the scent the wild bush had at sun-down, away in the far north. This unexpected, yet familiar scent, like a wilful fancy, had touched his imagination, stirring to life memories. He thought of nights spent in the open, asleep upon the great plains. He thought of the starlight seen through the thin leaves, of acacia bushes, and of the waking at dawn.<sup>43</sup>

Angry with these thoughts, Martin thinks of this land he has changed from virgin forest to productive fields, the comfortable house and his wife, happy with the good friends she has made and her affection for their son John, his wife and children. "They are the recompense for what had one time been a great and bitter renunciation."

However, a visit to John in the north to give him advice on some new land he has acquired is the beginning of events over which Martin seems to have little control. It begins when Martin is awaiting the return train to Perth. The train going north arrives first and he sees two young bushmen on their way to the goldfields with their few possessions done up neatly in 'blueys'. Next a cattle train comes in loaded with sheep and is shunted to a siding to give the sheep a drink. The red soil on their wool brings back all the memories of when he was selling such flocks. On a sudden impulse he jumps aboard the northbound train.

His letter to Maggie is reassuring, that he is at Tharameeeka and will have a look at the old country. Yet the reassurance is tinged with fear: "That accursed country, where amidst those dry and brittle bushes, lurked mystery, and, yes, terror in that mystery, and an intimation of powers that went beyond." Grant Watson again invokes the desert country with a power of its own, when, through Maggie's words, he writes:

She had been wrong when she had said that the northern country was evil. It most certainly was not good in any human sense, and in the absence of good, evil manifested itself. That was somehow different from saying that it was evil.<sup>44</sup>

Beneath the surface of Martin's success and pride in his property at Sea Orchard, Grant Watson does not allow us to forget there is still this illimitable force that from his boyhood has drawn him into an inexpressible love for the desert country.

Thoughts of Mrs Cameron and her daughter still haunt Maggie. "Those women who had passed beyond all help, whose hatreds had grown, in an arid soil." Martin had been unperturbed when she told him the story of the daughter's illegitimate child, disposed of at birth by the mother, who was now held as an invalid prisoner in bitter retribution by her now

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 259.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 256.

middle-aged daughter. He seemed to take it very much as a matter of course, "and what, after all, was there to be said? Things were so, and unalterable."

At Tharameeka, Martin buys blue dungarees, a cotton shirt and also a 'bluey'. He leaves his bag and the clothes of a southern farmer at the hotel, and sets out to walk in the direction of Quinn's Springs. Towards evening he rests in the bush, eating some food and drinking from his water bottles. For some unaccountable reason his eyes are wet with tears. He cannot think why except for his joy in listening to the faint noises made by the trees and the insects, "the cracking of dry seed pods and the spidery manifestations, symbols, in their isolation and purity of God." "He breathed a deep sigh, and then, freed from the tension of those fifteen years of absence, he put his face in his hands and wept."<sup>45</sup>

Here back in his own country, he felt that by some miracle he had escaped from the contracting circle of human life: that horizon which, as the promise of those early aspirations remain unfulfilled, becomes always smaller.<sup>46</sup>

After a month Martin returns. His long absence and silence has wounded Maggie, and Martin feels the change in her attitude, and his efforts to regain the old happy relationship fails. Martin is resentful of her attitude; had he not given up Quinn's Springs for her, and must he now be forbidden a month's freedom? The decision comes upon him suddenly, and he has no thought of personal rancour. He goes straight from the fields where he is working, to the railway station. At Tharameeka, he regains his bushman's kit and sets out for the Kumana diggings, where, meeting up with miners, prospectors and rouseabouts, he feels a growing interest in the life of gold-seeking. After three days he finds that he can remain no longer an inactive spectator. In the presence of so much activity, it is impossible to remain aloof. He must take a hand if only for the fun of the thing.

As he trudges eastwards towards the desert, now a new purpose warms his heart. At Sea Orchard he is not *needed* any longer, not in any practical or useful sense, he is an old man, successful and done for.

Eventually Martin finds the gold that he has been seeking. Screened by some low bushes there is a rich vein of ore; and, once found, the gold is so obvious that, as he had foretold, one did not need to spit on it to see the colour shining. This is what he had been looking for, what he had sensed was somewhere hidden in that low ridge of ironstone. "Here under his hands is the rare essence of the desert, a symbol of power that all men longed for."<sup>47</sup>

That night he lay beside his treasure, feeling that he could not be near enough to the unrevealed yet promised wealth. In the morning he has a reluctance to disturb with further breakings of his hammer, that which for so long has lain hidden. "He had sought and found, and could now take his reward; yet his mood held him passive".

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 272.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 273.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 322.

It seems that for Martin, it is not just the wealth the gold could bring but that he has found the 'rare essence' of the desert, an essential part of the landscape which hitherto had no importance but is something he has missed and has had to discover for himself.

As he sits there, he suddenly sees a figure in the distance, approaching. As he rises to his feet he sees it is a woman, and gradually realizes in amazement that it is Maggie, who in the fever of his search he has almost forgotten. A travel-weary old tramp-woman, incredibly changed and aged. Yet under the dust and the dried sweat, in spite of those lines of tiredness, she is the same in essence as the woman that he has always loved.

It seems that Maggie was driven on by the wish to be with Martin before her life ended and finding him brings about a spiritual elation for both. All that had seemed in the past evil about the desert for Maggie, has changed and now extends a benign influence, and the mood of their happiness prevails.

Maggie's life ends in the desert in Martin's arms and Martin knows she wouldn't have had it any other way. He knows that she would have faced it all out before she set out to find him. "His thoughts strayed over the remote track of their lives, over the struggle of their opposed natures; and now, at the end, it seemed that in spite of the suffering of that conflict, life was more justified than he had ever dared to surmise."

At dawn he buries her, then looks toward the east where the sun is rising.

As the rim of red and palpitating light rose over the horizon, he carefully and deliberately took off his clothes. He was possessed with one last desire; to be free of all encumbrances; then with long strides, swinging his arms about him, he strode eastward towards the heart of the desert, singing to himself.

Perhaps it can be said that the desert claimed them both, although it seems Grant Watson wanted to show it was a happy ending and both their lives were fulfilled by the acknowledgment that the desert, after all, was their rightful home, and there they had found each other again. The inscription at the beginning of *Daimon* is by Rudolf Steiner – "Between me and the Spirit of the universe something interposes which reaches beyond me, and is not the same as divinity. This something is my daimon." So Martin's final act in the novel is to search for his essential self in the spirit of the desert.

The story of *Daimon* is told more from Maggie's consciousness than from Martin's so that the reader is impressed with Martin's silent stubbornness through Maggie's thoughts. She hates the desert because she fears Martin has more love for it than for her. She remembers the night ride when their horses had shied at some ghost or unseen thing. "Like a pagan or savage he believed in unseen spirits of the earth. There was communion between him and this desert country-it was more to him than she was, it was all the religion the man had."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 29.



Perhaps the following extract from David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life* (1978) could sum up the character of Martin O'Brien.

But the spirits have to be recognized to become real. They are not outside us, nor even entirely within, but flow back and forth between us and the objects we have made, the landscape we have shaped and move in. We have dreamed all these things in our deepest lives and they are ourselves. It is our self we are making out there<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> David Malouf, *An Imaginary Life*, Australia: Pan Books (Australia) Pty Ltd, 1980, p. 28. First pub. London: Chatto & Windus, 1978.

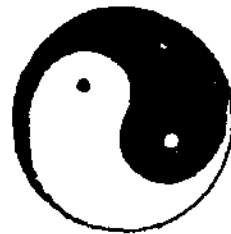
# **The Nun and the Bandit**

**by E. L. Grant Watson**

London: The Cresset Press Ltd, 1935

"Aus deinen Giften brauest du dir deinen Balsam"  
(Out of Thy Poison Brewest Thou Thy Healing)

Friedrich Nietzsche  
(1844–1900)



Title page and quotation from *The Nun and the Bandit* (1935)

Republished Sydney: Primavera Press, 1993  
following release of a film based on it by Paul Cox  
Melbourne: Illumination Films, 1993.

They drive far into the bush, and there the phases of their conflict unfold. They do not realise that a spiritual reality has claimed them as the divided halves of human life. They are held in the spell of a transcendant quality arising from their passionate opposition.<sup>50</sup>

The bush appears as a symbol of the unconscious, of all that civilisation has chosen to disregard. It is a vast interrogation mark, questioning itself.<sup>51</sup>

E L Grant Watson

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<sup>50</sup> From 'The Renegade Hero and the Anima', unpublished article on *The Nun and the Bandit* by Grant Watson, reproduced in my Afterword for the 1993 edition (Primavera Press).

<sup>51</sup> Grant Watson, *But To What Purpose*, London: The Cresset Press, p. 100.

## The Nun and the Bandit

In his autobiography, *But To What Purpose*, Grant Watson expressed his belief in Jung's contention that it is impossible to know what is good and what is evil, and arrogant to imagine we can separate them, even if we could recognize them. "Only by becoming familiar with the shadow side of our own natures will we be able to know how to deal with the evil of the world".<sup>52</sup>

This belief is projected strongly in most of his Australian novels but particularly in *The Nun and the Bandit*. The Nietzschean concept of the inextricability of good and evil is used as an epigraph for the novel – "Aus deinen Giften brauest du dir deinen Balsam" ("Out of Thy Poison Brewest Thou Thy Healing").

*The Nun and the Bandit* was Grant Watson's sixth novel set in what was for him the mystical environment of the Australian virgin bush of 1910. While the title may suggest a melodramatic tale, it is in fact a strong psychological study, derived from the author's mythological and Jungian readings, and his spiritual empathy with the Australian bush.

In his unpublished article, 'The Renegade Hero and the Anima', he wrote of the story line:

They drive far into the bush, a trackless way to the hut beside one of the half-dried-up pools made by the Ponton River, and there the phases of their conflict unfold. Neither recognises the inevitability of their meeting in opposition. They do not realize that a spiritual reality has claimed them as the divided halves of human life, and that by a rare quality of sincerity present in them both, they are held in the spell of a transcendent quality arising from their passionate opposition.

In this case the renegade hero is Michael Shanley who has suffered a life of deprivation but, as 'the Bandit', is fortunate in being able to make contact with a human being who unconsciously bears his *anima* projection but who, in herself, remains human and unyielding to any but spiritual motives. Grant Watson is concerned more with the spiritual than the physical aspects of his story and with projecting the impoverished Michael's regeneration through his passion for Lucy.

A poem from *The Grail Legend* states:

Every act has both good and evil results. Every act in life yields pairs of opposites in its results. The best we can do is lean towards the light – towards the harmonious relationship that comes from compassion with suffering, from understanding the other person.

This is what the Grail is about, and this is what emerges from the story. Lucy gradually makes her adjustment from hatred and repugnance to compassion.

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<sup>52</sup> *But To What Purpose*, p. 211.

The bush plays a major role in its influence on the characters, especially on Lucy the 'Nun', often left alone for long periods in the bush.

There were the natural features of the landscape, the pool and the bare rocks with their bare dark shadow, but not as in other landscapes. They were in some way enchanted and made unreal, or else more real by the silence and by the bright ocean of air, warm and impregnated through and through with sunlight. A buzz of insects, but so monotonous as to be but an emphasis to the silence which lay behind.<sup>53</sup>

As the days pass in the remote bush setting, the development of these two characters who belong to completely different worlds, and their increasing knowledge of each other, provides the solution to their separate problems. Lucy expresses her views on this concept in her own language at the end of the book.

The title is misleading. The woman, Lucy, has not yet taken her final vows as a nun, and the man is an impoverished farmer turned kidnapper and blackmailer, not a bandit. Michael Shanley is the eldest of three brothers who belong to the deprived half of the wealthy Shanley family. Bert, the brutish second brother, is much bigger and physically stronger than Michael, and Frankie, also physically strong, is a retarded adolescent. After the death of his father, Michael is determined to seek financial aid for their run-down sheep farm to the sum of £20,000 from his wealthy uncle, George Shanley – which he believes rightly belonged to his father as part of the grandfather's estate.

George Shanley, with his son, Richard, wealthy owners of a gold mine at Kalgoorlie, in the story called 'Balangoorlie', grudgingly receive the eldest of the disreputable branch of the Shanley family, but are obviously not prepared to listen to Michael's claim, on the grounds his father had not claimed his share at the time of the grandfather's death. Although Michael has been to a lawyer who confirms his claim is sound, George and Richard will take it to court and Michael does not have finance for a court case. As the Shanleys do not deny Michael has a claim, he asks for £4000 as a settlement, to which request George Shanley makes a long speech reprimanding Michael for allowing the station property to run down, adding he will not get a penny from Richard or himself, and finally calls the clerk to show Michael out the door.

Michael angrily returns and gains access to the Shanley paradisiacal garden, which is surrounded by a high wall and is irrigated at great cost by a 1500-mile pipeline across the desert from the Western Mountains. It is mentioned in several of Grant Watson's Australian books. From his hiding place in the bushes, Michael sees Richard with his attractive teenage daughter, Joy, and a young woman in the habit of a nun, who is Lucy Sheldon, visiting from England her Mother Superior's brother, George Shanley. Hearing plans discussed by Joy with her father, Richard Shanley, for a walk to the mines later that day to show Lucy

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<sup>53</sup> *The Nun and the Bandit*, p. 260.

something of the bush, Michael watches and listens with interest and decided on a crazy plan of kidnapping the daughter, to be returned on receipt of ransom money.

Michael's brother, Bert, on hearing of the plan, is sceptical, but Michael, still infuriated by the insulting refusal of any assistance, is bent on revenge and plans the kidnapping. The result is that he not only kidnaps the daughter but the young nun who happens to be accompanying her. Having persuaded them into the truck with a gullible story of having been sent by Joy's father, Michael drives his captives a short distance then stops and orders Lucy from the truck. Lucy, shocked and afraid, refuses, and there is a violent struggle when Michael first becomes aware of the unusual strength and beauty of this young woman in the strange novice habit; characteristics which he has never encountered before in his deprived life. As she fights against his violence in order to stay with the screaming girl, he observes "a passionate resolve, a mute resistance that would not yield – and how she had looked at him . . . as no other woman had ever looked."

He felt a sudden elation, his rage turned to wonderment, a beauty too if it wasn't for her clothes, why should he be in such a hurry to get rid of her?<sup>54</sup>

They drive all night far into the bush to a remote hiding place reached by a trackless cross-country route known only to them. It is obvious escape would be impossible for the girls, surrounded as they are by the interminable bush. Next day the two brothers are sent off with the ransom note, as well as back to the farm for food supplies. Thus begins the drama of the conflict between the beautiful novice and the 'primitive man' as described in a review in *The Daily Mirror*, (15 August 1935):

The struggle between their two natures and the gradual realization by both that good and evil somehow meet and mingle, is what makes the unusual appeal of this very impressive story.

Lucy comforts young Joy and copes bravely with the situation, gathering water from the river and sticks for a fire under Michael's rough guidance, while he makes tea and damper from supplies in the hut. All the time he talks to this "girl, the precious nun in her darned black clothes", sometimes decorously polite, then changing to baiting tones: "What makes you wear those grave clothes, to think yourself better than other folk?" At one stage he snatches off her black veil and exposes her short fair hair. She had struck his face and he is pleased with the blow. "No longer hidden by her nun's drapery, thank God! As much a woman as he was man, now that make-belief was gone. He had guessed it at that first tussle in the car, now he knew. He had never seen a girl like this."<sup>55</sup> Grant Watson, realistically continues to record Michael's thoughts, the development of his thinking, the fluctuation from

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 100.

his habitual loutishness and brutality to a new sense of sensitivity and wonderment for this woman's courage and beauty. He gives her back the starched gimp she needs to shade her head from the sun, but wraps the black veil around his waist in a sash and decides to be less cruel.

As an unnamed critic in *The Sunday Chronicle* (1935) wrote:

The story is necessarily cruel, there is no shirking of issues anywhere but the conflict between nun and bandit is never merely of the flesh. The evil that is in Michael, patricide and ruffian though he is, is mental in origin. Thus while the nun's beauty and courage make their own inevitable impression on the brute, her own conceptions of good and evil are profoundly modified by her recognition of forces and conditions of life hitherto beyond her imagination.

The scene on the Ponton River is realistically brought to life with Grant Watson's knowledge of and sensitive reaction to the Australian bush – the flies, the heat, the muddy pools of the Ponton River and the description of Michael killing and dissecting a sheep, thereupon hanging the meat in a muslin bag from a tree away from the ants. Lucy's calm strength in adapting to the situation, as well as her beauty, impresses the man who has never come in contact with someone like her before or even dreamed that there could be such a woman.

As Klaus Lambrecht has written in *The Saturday Review*, Vol. 24, 15 October 1941:

If Mr. Grant Watson had not already established his reputation as a writer of high sensitivity, poetic power and a very definite sense of taste, this book would certainly win it for him. For he has not only written a novel with a strongly appealing charm of its own, but has also presented a delicate problem which if less expertly handled might have been amazingly obtrusive. As for the development of his characters it seems that he has never quite so brilliantly succeeded as in his portrayal of the bandit and the nun.

Next day at the camp on the Ponton River, after breakfast of damper and tea and mutton chop, Michael feels a sense of elation as he looks at this nun in her "Dutch woman's hat", as he phrases it, "Kneeling on the other side of the fire with the girl, eating the bread he had made and the meal he had prepared and drinking the tea she had brewed for them both."<sup>56</sup> Then his mood changes and he walks off and leaves them, his mind absorbed with Lucy and how he can relate to her and claim her attention. He thinks of Sorrel, the girl back at the farm, and what she would think? Through his conflicting thoughts, Grant Watson shows the rough uncultured mind trying to come to grips with the feelings evoked by contact with this woman,

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

different to any human being with whom he had ever come in contact and one he never imagined could exist.

Meanwhile Lucy and Joy find a shady spot sheltered from the extreme heat further along the river bank where Joy goes down to fill the billy with water, while Lucy remains under the trees. "The air was vibrating with the sharp joyous song of the sun-intoxicated cicadas", but apart from that all pervading jubilation there was no other sound from any live thing. After listening for a while it seemed to the two girls that the singing, which was so loud at first, "became like a kind of veil, covering the silence in which the land remained steeped".<sup>57</sup>

Lucy comforts Joy: "We are alright, you see no harm has come to us." Joy longs to be home but Lucy tells her to just think how nice it is to be together because she says, "Events can be made to happen".

Once again that joyous outpouring of sound from the treetops seemed like the rustling of some angel's gown and both the sound and the silence behind the sound were one with that mysterious emotion that filled Lucy's heart that there should be so much beauty in so much loneliness.<sup>58</sup>

With the singing of the cicadas symbolizing for Lucy a sanctifying chorus, Grant Watson, as well as creating a vivid sense of the unique atmosphere of the Australian bush, relates the scene to the spiritual resources of Lucy's vocation – the inner life – in that she is desiring happiness and the absence of sorrow.

Michael finds them and peevishly complains they have taken the tea, matches and billy. The water collected from the river for tea is their only means of quenching their thirst in the extreme heat. His complaints and awkward, curious attempts at conversation reveal again the harsh deprived spirit of this warped character, one moment reaching out towards Lucy then reverting to his habitual rough violence.

*The Morning Post* (1935) (undated newspaper cutting from Grant Watson's collection) states:

The story is exciting and moves at a great pace from the start, and incidentally we learn much about Australia and the way people live in out-of-the-way places. His villain full of bitterness, resentment, cruelty and a strange kind of idealistic lust is perfectly plausible and so is his nun. We lose the allegory in the swing and humanity of the tale and rush on to see what is to happen.

In *The Birmingham Post* (1935) a critic writes of Lucy:

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 115.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 118.



Her religion is an essential force and its inner life sustains her in dread circumstances she and the child are in. The strength of her spiritual life is a vivifying factor in the drama, for it is brought at once into conflict with Michael's debased outlook and unrestrained appetites. In the bush, between these two, segregated from the brothers and Michael's woman, Sorrel, is a struggle as of good and evil. Mr. Watson has posed a significant situation with dramatic reality. His characterization particularly of the chief actors is definitely creative. He has imbued all these people good and bad with reality and the setting in the heat and primitive circumstances of the Australian bush is impressively realized.

Michael finally tells Lucy the story of his deprived life and Lucy sees the anguish with which this rough, incoherent man pours out his story. The presence of the *anima* is germinating the symbol that can reconcile the opposites. He tells her he thought it was the money he wanted and to get even with George Shanley but now he knows it is she he wanted. "That's why you came all the way to Australia," he tells her. Some element in his fantastic logic chills her heart. Driven to her last defence, she is speaking to herself, but aloud. "It is against my vow, against everything."<sup>59</sup>

Michael tells her he will release the girl and forego the reward if she will spend a week in the bush with him. If she refuses he will let his mentally deficient brother, Frankie, have the girl and he won't be the last. When the brothers return, Lucy's fear for Joy's safety is accentuated by the obvious attraction she has for Frankie. Michael plays on this to alarm Lucy, even telling her that Bert, too, is ready to take the girl and he may not be able to stop him. Sorrel, who has returned with the brothers, is amazed at the garments of the nun, her short uncovered hair, her youth and beauty, and just as she knows of Michael's anger at her return with the brothers, so she knows he must desire this woman in a way that he has never desired herself. More than a ransom is at stake here.

She is a strange figure, this woman from the beyond. Small, sturdy, and so scorched and tanned by the desert as to be almost as dark-skinned as a native. Her clothes are ragged and stained. Why is she alone with these men, beyond the confine of the world? There is nothing repellent in her face or bearing, yet the impression grows that "she was like a native, hardy and simple, accustomed to meet the seasons, and winning from that contact the subtle melancholy of the desert, its innocence and its pain."<sup>60</sup>

Lucy is left with Sorrel. Each is shy of being alone with the other. So much is unspoken between them. The stillness, the strange, innocent and expectant quality of the landscape is about them, above them, beneath them and within them, the buzzing of the flies and the singing of the cicadas. Sorrel is not unfriendly to Lucy but is astonished that any woman should be so innocent and enveloped in such ideas of chastity. Lucy, in this strange adventure finds her imagination able to encompass Sorrel and her history with a strange

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 242.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 185.

wonder. Sorrel is puzzled by Lucy's inhibitions and despite her admiration for this surprising woman in her torn black garment, she feels a sympathy for Michael's interest. She herself is quite used to worst things happening to her. Michael has confessed to Lucy that he had killed his father, following years of brutality to his mother and, after her death, his father had engaged Sorrel, as a young girl, ostensibly as housekeeper, but she was raped and forced to be his mistress. Sorrel tells Lucy how Michael had tried to protect her but was savagely beaten.

After their first shyness, they find a natural liking which flows easily between them.

It seems that Sorrel was neither concerned with good nor evil but not in that lost manner of the child, because in Sorrel there was warmth of heart – a warmth that spent itself like sunlight, and like the sunlight, an inevitable gift that returned from the centre of its source.<sup>61</sup>

When she had gone Lucy walks to the river. "To be alone again was both marvellous and terrible; and here once more by the dying and forded river the cicadas seemed to be singing louder than ever. She was a captive in a prison whose bounds were the far horizon." Sorrel, when she had asked for help, had deserted her. She had said with mild scorn, "Such things are not so terrible. Worse things had happened and the heavens had not fallen in."<sup>62</sup>

I'll take the girl back tonight if you'll come with me – Michael tells her, "but it will not be just once – you stay for a week – no-one will find us – after that they can have me – I don't care."

Lucy again refuses, telling him that Richard will pay the money. But Michael no longer cares about the money, "Not since you're here, you're what I want, you've lived on the other side of things." Was that why he wants her? For him she represents all the good things of a life he has never known.

"Do you think I would have lived here all my life, if I hadn't known there was something coming to me."<sup>63</sup>

There is no mistaking his final ultimatum of what would happen to the young girl if Lucy refuses.

The girl is safely returned, and driving all night Michael and Lucy arrive at dawn at a secluded bush setting with a large rock pool overshadowed by a cliff and shaded by trees. The clear fresh water is surrounded by flowering herbs, orchids and pale flowers. Filmed at Lerderderg Gorge near Bacchus Marsh, Victoria, the scene was vividly presented in its idyllic setting of typical Australian virgin bush by Paul Cox, when the film was shot in 1992.

In the silence and solitude of the remote bush setting, Grant Watson relates the idyllic silent surroundings to Lucy's sense of abandonment. It is almost as though Michael is purposely creating in her mind a sense of needing him to allay her feeling of isolation.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 252.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 231.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 244.

To be alone . . . utterly alone . . . and with so much light flooding the sky, clear and deep! Not yet the sun, only its rays shooting upwards over the edge of the rocks, filling the dome with light . . . So much light was more than she could bear . . . She had given her word.<sup>64</sup>

She was looking at the weeds that grew down into the shallow water, away from the extreme brightness of the sky. There was a faint movement amongst the herbs at her feet and a small red and black snake emerged from a tangle of rush and sun dew and as she stepped back in fear it darted with lithe alarm into the water. The symbol of the snake appears in several of Grant Watson's books in scenes of emotional crisis or impending disaster.

Here as she gazed, all things grew stranger and more changed. The substance of the rocks, which gleamed with a faint translucent purple, and the grey-blue foliage of the mulga bushes were alike pierced and made almost transparent by so much brilliance. Here in the desert was the presence of an all-pervading light, but how different this from that other light which, in her soul, she had imagined about the presence of the Saviour. This light had existed before any imaginings of man. God without man; a thought both terrible and strange. Around her, on all sides, sky and earth met in a purple haze, and nearer the earth was but the reflected sky; the light would penetrate right through. Amidst this blending and piercing, chaos was in conception. The silence was a vacuum . . . Only the tiny lives of insects: a faint indeterminate humming, to which accompaniment all things were fused.<sup>65</sup>

Here Grant Watson relates his impressions of the virgin Australian bush to Lucy's emotions of abandonment and despair. As in all his Australian books, the bush plays a leading role here, reflecting the anguish in Lucy's mind in the abandonment of her forthcoming vows of a religious life as a nun.

For Lucy, Grant Watson also creates a sense of threat in her eternally old surroundings – and all pervading light, that has existed before any imaginings of man. In his own experiences alone in the Australian bush, Grant Watson has described it as virgin bush – yet eternally old. And for him as a young Englishman, as for Lucy, the nun, there was a sense of threat and impending disaster until he came to terms with his surroundings. The conflict and chaos is illuminated in Lucy's consciousness through the strange landscape which to her is like no other landscape in its prehistoric brilliance, created by an all-powerful God, so terrifyingly different to the gentle God she has worshipped.

A critic from Western Australia wrote: "There are moments when Grant Watson is overpowered by a complex and highly personalised philosophy. Yet despite these lapses Watson's representation of the West Australian landscapes and the integration which he there

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 255.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 261.

perceived between the physical and psychical is extraordinary and retains a refreshing appeal. Explored with a delicate sensitivity these landscapes are seen to their best advantage in *The Nun and the Bandit*, the richly suggestive nature of which makes intriguing and challenging reading."<sup>66</sup>

Only the tiny lives of insects, a faint indeterminate humming, brings Lucy's senses back to the earth yet the suspense grows with each moment as she tries to break it by looking back to the pool, "blue, glossy and tranced". Thus the scene is hypnotic, "Where was she? Where where? Her ears drank up the silence. The same brilliance, the same complete and utter isolation – like that from the beginning: The rocks of faith, where she had stood so firmly, dissolved as did the solid earth into this meaningless ocean of light."<sup>67</sup>

In *The Illustrated London News*, 1935, an anonymous critic wrote:

E. L. Grant Watson challenges the common conceptions of good and evil. He has pitted a man and woman against each other, the man the very personification of evil, the woman young, pure of heart, and dedicated to the religious life.

...

If this were a conventional tale, she would have overcome evil with good, or being the victim of a man's lust, she would have killed herself. But what is good? What is evil? The man laid bare his savage tortured spirit. Lucy did not even go a little mad, like D. H. Lawrence's spinster on the mountain. Rather she had attained to a wider sanity, seeing how both he and she had been changed in their strange interlude; how she was turned from hatred to compassion, and his possession of her revealed less the brute than the primitive man. They were both equally insignificant. Lucy reflected, lying beside him under the stars and pondering their mystery in tremendous isolation of the wilderness. *The Nun and the Bandit* leaves a haunting impression, partly because of the superb setting of the final scene, and partly because it is a book in which harsh discords compose an arresting harmony.

The book can be seen as an illustration of Grant Watson's theme of opposites, in this case two people in direct opposition, coming together through Lucy's compassion, thus projecting the impoverished Michael's regeneration through his passion for Lucy. As well, Grant Watson believed – with Jung – that it is impossible and undesirable to separate the good and the evil, and that only by becoming familiar with the shadow side of our own natures will we be able to know how to deal with the evil in the world.

So Grant Watson wrote:

The crystalline pattern of her will had been resolved into willingness and her resistance together with her pride was gone. She had lost everything and now wanted nothing – she was acquiescent in her loss. Where gentleness had met with violence

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<sup>66</sup> Angeline O'Neill, *Westerly*, No. 3, Spring, 1993, p. 127.

<sup>67</sup> *The Nun*, p. 262.

she could not tell which had triumphed; in that bewildering embrace she had no thought of triumph or defeat.<sup>68</sup>

Silently and unperceived the native tribesmen gather about the water-hole during the night. They come drifting through the mulga scrub as softly as snowflakes through the branches of a tree. They look with curiosity at the white man and his woman among the bushes, they grin and make gestures but do not disturb the sleepers. The small tribe of men, women and children, on trek from one hunting ground to another, make their camp on the far side of the pool and as soon as their fire is kindled the women begin to sing. Later they come begging for flour which Michael gives them and an empty butter tin they have asked for. Before sundown they break camp and drift further southward and are lost to sight amongst the boulders and blue mulga.

In 1993, Geoffrey Dutton wrote: "when an Australian tribe drifts in and then fades out, Michael is not at all hostile to them, and they intend no harm to the lonely white couple. Grant Watson who had experienced Bernier Island, deftly uses this episode as a kind of reconciliation taking place in the vast presence of the land."<sup>69</sup> In most of Grant Watson's Australian novels, the Aborigines appear mostly in brief interludes but always he intelligently captures the true spirit of the Aboriginal people.

On the last morning Michael asks: "If there was a chance – would you make a break for it, you and me? We might get away. Australia is a big place . . . before they come and find us – If you said yes, I would manage it."

But Lucy reminds him it was only for a few days. "We are different, it may be God meant us to meet, but when this time ends I must find my own way."<sup>70</sup>

As the cars approach next day Lucy makes Michael sit beside her at the fire they have lighted and Michael smokes his last cigarette.

The scene changes to the garden of the convent in England. Mother Frances talks with Lucy, now in the ordinary clothes of a modern young woman, and Lucy tells her the memory of what had happened to her is like a dream. She tells Mother Frances how Michael had made no effort to get away and she resented their handcuffing him. They didn't understand his life had been changed. She tells about the trial and how George Shanley had been kind to her and had given her money which she gave to Sorrel.

She speaks, too, of how she saw people so clearly and so differently from the way she had seen them before. Richard she saw as just as cruel as Michael had been – he wanted revenge.

Michael had returned Joy unharmed and hadn't claimed the money, although he had taken them by fraud and force, but Lucy had refused to witness against him more than she

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 272.

<sup>69</sup> *The Weekend Australian*, 20 Oct., 1993.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 280.

could help. As a result and aided by George Shanley's reasonable attitude, Michael was sentenced to five years instead of fifteen as he might have been.

Angeline O'Neill sees the story as the kind of transformation which is significant throughout Grant Watson's work wherein he writes of "a great human metamorphosis", a theory inspired quite early in his career by his study of biology.

"We have all," he wrote, "emerged from the security and complacency of the nineteenth century into the preliminary stages of a great human metamorphosis."<sup>71</sup>

The story of Lucy, the nun, and Michael, the killer of his father, could surely be seen as a miniature of this concept.

In *All About Books*, 12 March, 1936, Frederick T. Macartney wrote:

This book is as enthralling as its theme is daringly plain, while sufficiently reticent in its wording. It has a concentrated grouping like right composition in a painting – the nun, the young girl, and the three crude brothers, dominated by the eldest of them, who, forgoing the material advantage which is his original motive, achieves, paradoxically, something like spiritual fulfilment in his brutal compulsion for the novitiate, while for her too the terrible experience extends to an apprehension of "Both the cruelty and the innocence; and everyone is seeing the cruelty in other people, and are afraid of it because of the same thing in themselves." This writer's habit of placing his characters in symbolic relation to their surroundings (here as previously, the inland of Western Australia) is again effective, being no mere resort to obvious allegory, but a vital emanation, illustrated most simply in the character of the girl Sorrel. This is not a book for squeamish readers, but its revelation of evil goes deeper than the logic of morality, touching the uncomprehended sources and meanings of evil, pervasively like D. H. Lawrence with his imminent 'dark god', though here, instead of Lawrence's esoteric waywardness, everything is pitilessly clear."<sup>72</sup>

At the end of the book Lucy asks Mother Frances' blessing in her decision to go out in the world and "even as her thoughts touched the fringes of inner darkness, there was mingled with its obscurity a radiance. She felt an elation within the soul at the thought she was to bear a child . . . the child of the ruthless slayer of his father, the unhung patricide, the outcast, the criminal – she would bring to birth her own dangerous happiness."

Paul Cox, well known for his disturbingly beautiful films, *A Woman's Tale*, *Man of Flowers*, *My First Wife* and *Lonely Hearts*, made the film in 1993. In the 'Book to Film' he wrote that his film was not faithful to the novel, but

I hope faithful to Grant Watson's spirit and his unique faith in the land. E. L. Grant Watson's belief and religion originated in the personification of the powers of nature. His prayers were directed towards the powers working behind the

<sup>71</sup> Angeline O'Neill, *Westerly*, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>72</sup> Frederick T. Macartney, *All About Books*, 12 Mar., 1936.

stupendous phenomena of nature. His cathedral was the landscape – large, vast and all embracing. His God was the God of spirit and faith nourished by his senses. The Father, the Child and the Ghost permeated his being, his spirit and the landscape.

In his novel, *The Nun and the Bandit*, however, in contrast to contemporary western thinking, Grant Watson transcended the limitations of the senses. The senses in the end didn't satisfy him. He went beyond, to The Dreaming – the most profound 'religion' of them all.<sup>73</sup>

An ideal bush setting at Lerderderg Gorge near Bacchus Marsh, Victoria was chosen for the film, which starred Chris Haywood, Norman Kaye and Gosia Dobrowolska.

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<sup>73</sup> Paul Cox, 'Book to Film', *The Nun and the Bandit*, Sydney: Primavera Press, 1993, pp. 308–09.

# **Innocent Desires**

**by E. L. Grant Watson**

Eleven Gower Street, London : Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1924



"Innocent Desires are those which can be satisfied with a good conscience."

Dedicated to Mrs. C. A. Dawson

Title page and dedication of *Innocent Desires* (1924)



## Innocent Desires

These fourteen short stories<sup>74</sup> are quite different in theme but all are based on Grant Watson's Australian experiences while in the Western Australian bush in 1910–1912. The outstanding stories are 'Out There' (which has been discussed in an earlier chapter), and 'Man and Beast' (which will be discussed in this chapter). 'Out There' was also published in *The English Review* in 1916, and 'White and Yellow' was published in *Daughters of the Sun: Short stories from Western Australia* (1994). 'A Farewell' appeared in *The New Statesman* and 'The Diamond' and 'Friend and Neighbour' appeared in *The Cornhill* magazine.<sup>75</sup>

### Black Wedgewood

This story gives another aspect of life in Western Australia in the early 1900s. It is related by a doctor in Geraldton, then an insignificant little place with iron- or canvas-built houses along the coast and desert scrub behind them. To the people of the region it figures as an important township, being the port and centre for a large hinterland. There is a fair-sized resident population and a great many outlying stations – usually shacks of 'squatters', men who had come to make a living out of the undeveloped land.

On the doctor's dresser there is a set of black wedgewood and it has often attracted the attention of a friend, to whom the doctor eventually relates the story.

The china initially came from England. Settlers brought with them beautiful pieces of china and glass, being totally unprepared for the sort of life they would have to live. The doctor describes how they brought their coaches, horses, jewellery, damask table cloths and all the extravagances of civilization. They landed on rough, wild coasts with no roads or even tracks into the bush. A good deal of useless paraphernalia was lost in the landings.

The doctor then relates how a man came to his house one day asking for help as his wife was in labour. The doctor was not impressed by the man, describing him as a scoundrel with the sort of good looks that other men instinctively dislike. The man asked the doctor to come to his wife, some ten miles along the coast. They rode together for two hours, over desolate sand dune country with patches of thin scrub, before finally reaching the hut.

The doctor was appalled at the sight of a young girl lying on a small mattress on the floor in a miserable little humpy. He helped her with the birth and attended her several times for a few weeks. He observed she was very different in quality from the man, and soon learned she came from a wealthy home. She would not divulge her name, but gave him to understand her family was held in respect. Gradually he was able to get her story. She had committed the great and unpardonable indiscretion of having run away from home with her father's groom. This was largely due, it seemed, to the repressed and unnatural life she had led under her father's roof.

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<sup>74</sup> Contents: 'Out There', 'The Case of Sir Reginald James Farquason', 'Man and Brute', 'The Cave of Corycus', 'Mediator', 'Boy and Girl', 'The Diamond', 'Black Wedgewood', 'White and Yellow', 'A Raison D'Etre', 'Gnillie', 'A Farewell', 'The Last Straw', 'Friends and Neighbour'.

<sup>75</sup> Noted in preface to *Innocent Desires*, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1935.

The man she had run off with had taken advantage of her inexperience and innocence and had hoped to get money from the family. In this he was disappointed. Her father had been unforgiving, for his pride had been too deeply hurt. With a small donation and certain personal possessions, she was told she could go her way. Her name was erased from the family. "As she had made her bed so she might lie on it."

The pair had come to Australia. The ex-groom, whose name was Jarvis, had hoped to become a farmer and had taken up a few acres of the poorer coastal land, spending the remainder of his wife's money on sheep and cattle. The squatter's life at that time was at its most primitive and Jarvis could make only a very poor living from the thinly-grassed sand dunes.

When the time came to pay the doctor the girl was embarrassed, saying her husband had possession of the money and she did not think he would be ready or willing to pay him. She was obviously mortified as Jarvis had made sure to be absent when the doctor called. She begged the doctor to take something for all his kind attention and produced a black wedgewood teapot, if not as payment then for remembrance. She hoped he would keep it.

Within a year the doctor was out there again. The girl was looking older and obviously wearing badly under the strain. The doctor told Jarvis his wife should not have more children for some time. Jarvis's reaction was unsympathetic and he obviously disregarded the advice as within six years the girl had six children. She worked hard and her husband obviously treated her badly with the occasional beatings. He never offered to pay the doctor, and disregarded the doctor's reprimand for the callous way he treated his wife. Each time he attended her, the girl gave the doctor another piece of the wedgewood set, but eventually all her things were gone, including the last two cups of black wedgewood and the sugar basin.

The doctor was absent from the district on a six-month furlough and on his return was called to Jarvis's wife by a man he did not know. When he arrived he found it was another woman, a young Australian girl. What had happened to the first Mrs. Jarvis he never knew. The woman in the hut knew nothing of her predecessor and the children said she had died a long time ago and their father had buried her in the sand.

The doctor reported the case to the local magistrate but it was not taken up. There were too many disappearances in the bush, the woman was dead and buried months ago, and it was too late to make a fuss.

At the end of the story, the doctor is surveying the black wedgewood and thinking of the proud and unforgiving old father and the family name, held by his daughter as too sacred to be divulged.

Grant Watson has created a story from his observations of the early settlers in Western Australia in the years 1910-1912 - one to which many Australians can relate. My Scottish ancestors settled in the same area during that period, with hopes of successful farming in the same hot sand dunes. They eventually relinquished their farming ambitions for Tasmania's more congenial climate. The more dedicated settlers stayed on, establishing the beginnings of an extensive pastoral industry in Western Australia.

## Gnilgie

'Gnilgie' is the story of the Aboriginal woman who appears in *Daimon* in the housekeeping service of Maggie and Martin O'Brien. But in this short story she is a colourful character very much in command of her own life. Gnilgie lives at the native camp at West Guildford, where the last survivors of the Aborigines, the one-time possessors of the land, are gathered together under Government control and protection. She has been brought up by the missionaries, however the influence of her early upbringing, according to Grant Watson, has fallen away considerably and it is doubted if it had ever made a very deep impression. The Aborigines gathered in the encampment are portrayed by Grant Watson as a remnant of a dying race, and they, too, believe they are dying. They are dying because they have lost hope. They have lost their traditions and their social integrity, all the standards by which their ancestors had survived. The ethical and moral rules by which they had once lived have been pronounced by the conquering white race as evil and obscene; in place of these satisfying and effective rules are offered fables of gods and trinities, incomprehensible to their understanding.

Grant Watson describes the camp, perched on a sandhill close under the stem of a gigantic jarrah, as squalid and untidy. Pieces of sacking, waterproofing and old clothes are stretched roughly upon boughs, forming low huts in which the natives live. About these huts there lie scattered the usual refuse of civilization – old rags, battered kerosene tins, jam tins and empty bottles.

In the sunlight the sand on which the little black babies crawl and scamper, looks dazzlingly white. There are a good many babies at the camp, for natives passing from one part of the country to another leave their younger children to be looked after by the permanent residents. Six men and nine women are the regular occupants of the West Guildford reserve. These people, Grant Watson observes as having forgotten the hard-and-fast laws of their own tribes, and being by nature unable to comprehend the religion of missionaries and other well-meaning white men, live in a state of sexual promiscuity.

From time to time natives passing from one part of the country to another stay at the reserve. On such occasions there are sometimes disturbances, occasioned by the changing of domestic partners with accompanying jealousies. Sometimes the white people from the town employ them on light jobs in their gardens or outhouses. The listless and pathetic indolence of these Aborigines make an appeal. They will smile with their engaging, wonderful smiles; they will joke and laugh, in spite of that deep, unconscious knowledge that they all possess, that they are a stricken and doomed people whose days are numbered. Thus we have Grant Watson's keen observation and sympathetic description of the Aborigines of 1910-12, camped on the outskirts of a country town. He differs from other writers – both Australian and European – in his sympathetic understanding of their decline from a unique race of people with their own skills and intellect completely in tune with the natural environment in which they had once flourished. Gnilgie lives at the camp; she is its leading figure and different from the others. This difference, Grant Watson believes, is perhaps due to her having been brought

up from an early age amongst white people. She manages to catch at the values, if not the professed standards of civilization, and unlike the others, she is constitutionally happy. She is not stricken by the blight from which the others suffer, but with the *naiveté* of a child stretches out her hands towards the new things that life offers. She realizes the importance of money, is a rich woman, and daily becomes richer. She possesses the best hut in the compound; it is made of tarred canvas, and has for the roof two pieces of corrugated iron. 'My house' she calls it. Not feeling, as did the others, the loss of tribal laws and religion, she forms for herself a small centre of gravity among the things which are hers, and, within the limited world of her acquisitions, she becomes content, smiling, and fat.

She is, besides all this, known to be a good worker, and three times a week hires herself out as a washerwoman among the white population of West Guildford. She can earn three shillings for a half-day's work, but sometimes she will be given clothes in lieu of money. She has an eye for colours and wears for preference gay cottons. Round her head, in place of a hat, she wears a pink blouse twisted like a turban. Her smiling face appears beneath, and round her deep bosoms is stretched a canary-coloured blouse, which on certain days changes places with the pink one which she wears on her head. On her nose is a pair of horn spectacles. She has excellent rows of white teeth, worn flat and short by the grinding and gnawing of bones. These she shows in a broad smile. From the age of thirteen she has been used to the management of husbands, and has learnt that fundamental principle that to keep a man subservient to her wishes she must make them comfortable.

She is now sixty, and has three more-or-less permanent husbands and several temporary ones. She will say cheerfully: "Good thing to have plenty of men about. They fetch my wood, carry my water, clean up my pans, and fetch me things from town." In return for these services she will give them pennies to buy tobacco. Gnilgie nearly always has money. She gropes in the deep pockets of her skirt and produces pennies and shillings. If one of these coins should fall by any chance, her brown, naked toes fasten on it and lift it to her hand.

Grant Watson in the story of Gnilgie shows a different picture of the Aborigines living within the areas of civilization as a contrast to the tribes of Aborigines with which he came in contact in the bush.

### **Man and Brute**

The theme of the juxtaposition of good and evil is seen in the short story 'Man and Brute'. Dr Lawrence is called to a sick shepherd fifteen miles out of the town of Armidale, New South Wales, in the evening following a full day's work. Having lately come from the city he is nervous driving in his sulky across open scrub after dark. The drive is so difficult and he is so tired that, had he not been a kind-hearted man, he would have turned back. The thought of the sick shepherd keeps him going. As he leaves his horse and sulky to walk the rest of the way, he becomes conscious of the extreme stillness of the night. He feels the silence as if it is a concrete and tangible thing. He is conscious of an all-pervading power that broods over the land and which lends it a quality of poignancy and sweetness. He is glad he has come, not

only glad to be on an errand of mercy, and performing his duty, but glad also to savour, in this unexpected way, the rich sweetness of the hushed and vigorous earth.

The build-up of the sick man's long wait for help with his faithful dog, and his gradual loss of speech in increasing paralysis following a stroke, give some reason for the dog's attack on the unsuspecting doctor, fresh from all the mysterious beauty of a summer's night. The doctor understands the loyal nature that prompts the mistaken savagery, but realizes he has to fight for his life as the shepherd is powerless to move or speak. The ensuing struggle, watched by the sick, helpless shepherd, develops into a savage enjoyment of man versus beast. The doctor's expression changes from manly determination to anger and rage then the hysterical joy of conflict. Motives of loyalty, generosity and mercy are changed to a mad excitement of killing between man and dog, both now oblivious to the sick man's existence.

Finally, with cruel joy, the doctor strangles the dog, whose eyes look to his master with a despairing appeal for help. The shepherd cannot speak to stop the killing and in his effort to do so, dies.

It was with supreme elation that the doctor saw fear and defeat creep into the dog's eyes and not till long after the breath had ceased to be drawn through the expanded nostrils did he relinquish his hold. That joy of killing as it died down gave place to a sudden knowledge of the surrounding quietness. In spite of the hammering of his own blood in his ears and the short gasps of his own breath, he became conscious of a great stillness . . . the surrounding expanse of the Australian bush . . . he sucked at his torn hands, then for a time was motionless, as if enchanted by the quiet of the night. He felt he must break that spell. The shepherd's eyes filled with horror and despair, stared glassily into his own. The doctor as if to protect himself from that glance, covered them quickly with his hand. He bent his head, listening for the heart-beats. He could hear no sound. The silence of that desolate land was all-pervading.<sup>76</sup>

The contrast between the calm, peaceful night and the doctor's sense of serenity and the change to violence within the hut, gives the story the same sense of shock and savagery as projected in *Out There*. The over-zealous loyalty of the faithful dog changes him into savage brute, while the doctor's sense of first defending himself in shock, changes into "the whining, hysterical joy of conflict. The shepherd saw that they gloried in and enjoyed the naked fierceness of the fight . . . hidden and unsuspected forces, blind and cruel, had stripped first one, then the other of reason: and the mind that had the knowledge and power to avert that loosing of the bestial which lurks in all nature, was held ironically dumb".

*Innocent Desires* was reviewed by E. C. Beckwith in the *New York Evening Post* (20 December 1924):

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<sup>76</sup> *Innocent Desires*, p. 69.

Each of these fourteen stories takes for its theme the hypothesis that without consciousness of sin, there can be no consciousness of guilt, no matter how dire the consequence to others of the wrongdoing. The author indubitably succeeds in proving his theory, at least to the extent of convincing us that those of his characters whose desires are victorious over other people to the injury of the latter, feel no remorse for what they have accomplished. He raises no question of moral sense or its lack, of altruism, of self-denial in the face of temptation; nor are there any mock heroics on display to extol the triumph of will power over the flesh. In a word there is no preaching. The people of these tales act their own parts, be they ruthless or passive, apparently as life and their own natures intended, without perceptible direction by the author. His detachment from them could not be more remote, except in the two or three stories which he enters as an inactive onlooker, and narrator. None of the fourteen presentations of various desires, either in mute tumult within the human breast or in conflict with external factors, is strained beyond the limits of a strong and careful realism. They are soundly written, distinct, thoughtfully conceived, substantial, but in nearly all of them there is a want of sympathetic appeal, of cumulative interest, of emotional grip and suspense which renders them, for us, imperfectly successful.

However, each story is completely different in characters and theme, all presenting some aspect of Australian life in the Western Australian bush of 1910-1912 and each presenting a realistic picture of life in those times and places.

# Shadow and Sunlight

## A Romance of the Tropics

by E. L. Grant Watson

Jonathan Cape, Eleven Gower Street, London, 1920.

Published in New York 1921 as *The Other Magic*

To

Katharine Grant Watson



If the red slayer think he slays  
Or if the slain think he is slain,  
They know not well the subtle ways  
I keep, and pass, and turn again

For or forgot to me is near;  
Shadow and sunlight are the same;  
The vanish'd gods to me appear;  
And one to me are shame and fear

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Title page and poem of *Shadow and Sunlight* (1920).

## Shadow and Sunlight

*Shadow and Sunlight* is based on Grant Watson's experiences in Fiji and the South Sea islands, in which he creates a different scenario to that of his previous books. He writes of the lush tropical jungle and lagoons rich in tropical fruits and flowers, the natives, unpredictable and superstitious, and the terrible voices of Matana, the evil spirits screaming in the jungle at night.

There is also the conflict between the visiting missionary, Matherson, and the natives of Matana, in the well-meaning efforts of Matherson to convert the heathens to Christianity. Established at the neighbouring island of Nathamaki, Matherson has been successful in converting the natives on that island but, at Matana, he is met with opposition to his efforts from Blunt, the owner of a copra plantation, who is not in favour of converting the natives. "We leave each other alone. I appreciate them for what they are. I never interfere". Such is his reply when Matherson endeavours to seek his help in converting them:

When I heard you were coming to Nathamaki two years ago I was sorry. I had long ceased to be a Christian and I didn't want my natives christianised. I had got to understand something of their religion. There is a wonder and a wildness, a magic which is both simple and extraordinarily deep meaning. There is more in me of pagan than of Christian. I could never help you to convert them.<sup>77</sup>

Blunt is satisfied with his life on the island, having already survived there quite well for eight years, and is at peace with the natives. However, Matherson feels impelled to reproach Blunt for his sin of fornication in having as his mistress one of the native girls. He urges Blunt to advertise for a white housekeeper, with the view that if all goes well she may become his wife. Blunt cannot see any logic in this suggestion. He realizes he is neither white man nor black, but a hybrid fashioned by the tropics; he is an outcast from both races. When he becomes ill after canoeing among the islands at night, the natives are superstitious and unsympathetic and leave him alone to suffer. When he mentions it to Uloto, his native wife, she reproaches him for visiting the islands at night and alone, "where there was bad magic in that place".<sup>78</sup> He is made to suffer alone with the fever and terrible nightmares of native cruelty. Eventually, he sends for Matherson who arrives with a selection of medicine and stays for a week to take care of him. Before leaving Matana, he finally persuades Blunt to write and advertise for a housekeeper as a preliminary step towards, if all goes well, a wife. To assist in the plan, the missionary writes to Blunt's sister in England.

Meanwhile at Nathamaki, Matherson has not failed to make an impression on the natives and after two years of work, his mission is well established. However, he continues to have little success at Matana, although he is determined not to give up. Blunt, on the other hand, attends the sacred dances regularly, observing the heathenish ritual. He assures the

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<sup>77</sup> *Shadow and Sunlight*, p. 22.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38.



concerned missionary that it is from a scientific interest, but admits that there is also an emotional appeal. "These people are in the process of creating their own Gods," he says. "Gods in their own likeness, but possessing all the wonder of the unknown. They are involved in the natal labours of the first abstract ideas, the first abstract ideas that have dawned upon their world. This is the very progeniture of God."<sup>79</sup>

Matherson tells him not to pretend to a paganism alien to his nature and civilization. In return Blunt urges Matherson to attend their ceremonies and to widen his imagination, for "a man with his religious perception could not fail to appreciate their pious and mystical sincerity."<sup>80</sup>

Seven months after writing the letter to Blunt's sister, Matherson receives a letter from Eva Dixon, who claims she is a distant relative of Blunt's and has a slight remembrance of meeting him as a child. She fully realizes how unusual the venture might seem but she is willing to take the position as housekeeper at Matana. She is twenty-eight years old and is fully aware that she will probably be expected to marry Blunt before very long. She feels it is a definite call to offer her help to another human being who is in need. "Call" was the very word Matherson himself had used. His heart beats fast with excitement as he reads: "The men who are pioneers and workers in distant lands get too little sympathy, women, I think, should be willing to come to their assistance. I will confess that the idea has taken a great hold on me, giving a new joy to my life."<sup>81</sup>

However, Blunt is not happy and wishes Matherson had not persuaded him to consider the idea. He prefers to be left alone in the life he has chosen to live. He can foresee trouble with Ebu and Uloto, the two native women who rule his domestic life at his house. It is no place for a white woman. At the same time, he knows with a vivid perception that this new adventure is an ordered part of his fate. He must let go his solitude and his wild passion for Matana. "To be able to let go that was perhaps the secret of life . . . and to take up new threads."<sup>82</sup> He sends the two native women, Ebu and Uloto back to their native village, both women bewildered and very angry.

Then the night before Eva's expected arrival, Blunt joins the natives in the dances and magic ritual of a corroboree:

intoxicated by the wild violence, he felt as he had felt when he first witnessed these dances. They carried him away into the labyrinths of past existence. His being was enfolded by the mystical, physical emanations, and the hot scent of human bodies. His heart was pierced by those cries, as of earth become articulate.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

There is a difference between Grant Watson's descriptions of the natives of Matana and those of the Australian Aborigines and their corroborees. The Matanans appear to be based on his experience of the natives of the Fijian islands, who gave the impression of more sadistic rituals and practices in their corroborees.

The description of Eva Dixon's arrival at Matana, viewed by the whole tribe, is filled with foreboding as they watch – mostly silent – but occasionally flinging short remarks to one another, and in Ebu's mocking laugh it is easy to discern both hatred and malice. Never before has Blunt been mocked at openly, but he is determined to teach them who is master. Eva, disconcerted by their attitude, nevertheless wishes to make friends with them. Blunt, too, has to become accustomed to the presence of a white woman after eight years on the island, and he is worried as to how he can help her to adjust, just as he himself has to do, and also how he can protect her. As for Eva, she feels that it is a venture in which she can be useful, something that during her life in a quiet English village, she felt was meant to happen. She is religious and wears a silver cross on a chain around her neck. Blunt, by contrast, would not help Matherson to Christianise the natives at Matana, preferring them as they are. He believes that "one knows more where one is with an unspoiled pagan. They are not ready for it. All that the missionaries do on this coast is to destroy what religion the natives already have, and leave nothing in its place."<sup>84</sup>

The first threat to Eva comes with the sudden arrival of Ebu, when she knows Eva is alone in the house. Armed with a heavy digging stick she advances towards Eva, her face convulsed with hatred. Eva, raising her hand to protect herself, clutches the silver cross on the chain around her neck as she prays aloud. Terrified, Ebu flees back to the tribe, telling them of the magic practised by the white woman with a small white magic stick, as she utters her spell. The natives fear magic more than they fear death, and there is no doubt that the white woman has invoked magic. As for Eva, she feels that a miracle has happened – that she had been saved by a divine power.

Thus Grant Watson shows the conflict between the religion of the natives and that of the Christian woman, Eva. Eva now feels she is protected by God and talks with Blunt who says, "It must be very pleasant and very comfortable to believe in an all-directing and all-loving God. I have tried to do so but have never succeeded."<sup>85</sup> "Faith itself is perhaps one of God's most precious gifts," she replies. "Yet it is so easy to believe." But for Blunt and perhaps for Grant Watson, it was different, as he has shown in his autobiographies. Thus Blunt replies:

"I cannot believe in that sort of God – when I was a boy, He always seemed to hide in Sunday schools and churches and He fed upon false worship."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 104.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 115.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

And again through Blunt, we can see Grant Watson speaking on the theme of opposites:

I have not believed, belief has seemed to me irrelevant and contrary to experience. I have seen existence as a balance between contradictions, a meeting place of disharmonies. It is because of and through contradiction that life is. As soon as there is an approach to harmony, a universal spirit of oneness, or whatever it may be called, then life falls placid and limp. Where there is a God there is no life, and vice versa.<sup>87</sup>

"I have sometimes," he continues, "been able to get a glimpse of a negative, non-existent kind of a god who lives in nothing. Once in the north I saw bare open snow-fields miles and miles of them, and then, when the veil of life seemed to be withdrawn, I could fancy that God breathed in the silence."<sup>88</sup> For Blunt and Grant Watson, God is not to be found in churches and Sunday schools but in nature – such as in the silent snow-fields.

Blunt tells Eva that it seems a miracle that she has come to Matana. But just as he feels the impulse to reach towards her to take her hand, the air is cut by a sharp sound and a spear flies between them, burying itself in the boards of the house. Blunt urges Eva to go inside. Instead, she stands in the moonlight holding up the cross in defiance of all evil spirits, and Blunt feels he has no power to interfere. Later she challenges him: "Can you not see the power of God when it is so plainly manifested?" She then tells him of Ebu's attack during that afternoon. This prompts him to tell Eva the reason for Ebu's attack, that he had taken native girls from the village to live with him, that it was the custom of white traders and was considered a necessity. "In living with the native girls," he tells her, "I took them that they might lead me nearer to the heart of the wilderness from where they had sprung. Perhaps you will hardly understand me, but in them I divined some essence of the primal religion of primitive man."<sup>89</sup>

Ebu had lived with him longer than the others and he had sent her away when he knew Eva was coming. He had not expected the difficulties which had eventuated. He tells Eva he respects her beliefs, though he cannot pretend to share them. The natives are great believers in magic, and have implicit faith in their magic sticks. Eva's cross they believe to be the white woman's magic stick. However, Eva is not afraid and refuses Blunt's suggestion that he should help her to leave Matana. She will stay and yet is unable to consider thoughts of marrying Blunt. Both feel they have changed from what they thought they were.

The natives are now afraid to go near the house, which means that Blunt feels Eva is safe for the time being, but when Matherson arrives on one of his visits, he thinks Blunt should persuade Eva to leave. Blunt explains that Eva is too courageous to think of leaving, and now he is glad that she has come. Meanwhile, the natives working in the copra fields, observe Matherson with suspicion during his visit to the island of Matana. They question the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

reason for his visit, although in Nathamaki they know he has friends among the chiefs and the people whom he has converted. Blunt they still respect, but there is danger, they believe, should the woman living in his house use her magic against them.

Pinjaroo, the head man in the copra fields, speaking of Matherson, tells the natives: "He is possessed of an evil spirit that drives him and gives him power." He then adds: "The woman is also possessed of strong mana. An evil spirit is in her which took the strength from Ebu's arm, making her as weak as a child." Looking towards the house he continues: "Even now they talk together. They are slaves of the same spirit. They carry the same magic stick about their necks."<sup>90</sup>

Meanwhile at the house Matherson talks with Eva. He has come to persuade her to leave Matana, but soon realizes that in the spirit in which she has come to the island, she is not likely to be persuaded.

In the weeks that follow, Blunt takes more time off from his work to take Eva on expeditions away from Matana, through the many beautiful reefs and lagoons, catching lobster and crayfish and enjoying the beauty of their surroundings while they get to know one another. Blunt comes to see that the tropics are gradually working their magic change. Life is touching Eva, life is changing her. He has only to wait. At the same time, he feels the estrangement of the natives and realises that it is changing into hostility. They do not treat him as they had done in the time previous to Eva's arrival. He feels that they hate her. Yet the daily life continues with only this difference: that he and Eva take longer and more frequent expeditions into the adjoining country. At first they take only an evening hour on the lagoon or on the beach; later they think it usual to be away for a long half-day. Through it all, the doubts remain.

Again he looked back at the waves, and knew that he was glad – partly glad at any rate to leave that long loved valley where shadow and sunlight so magically mingled. With another wrench at his heart he questioned whether Matana had not turned against him.<sup>91</sup>

Returning from one of their expeditions, during which she had finally responded to Blunt's lovemaking, Eva finds a large, evil-looking bone placed in her bed, foul with blood stains and fragments of adhering flesh. In her shock and terror, she feels she has been punished by God and kneels before her crucifix to pray for forgiveness.

As Grant Watson observes in his autobiography, *But To What Purpose*, the purpose of pointing the bone impregnated with evil (he had witnessed the success of its practice), was to scare the victim to death. Blunt's anger overcomes his prudence in savagely thrashing Pinjaroo, the head man in the copra field, watched by the natives. Afterwards he realizes his mistake in not killing him. As in his short story *Out There*, Grant Watson is illustrating here

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 138.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 155.

the conflict suffered by white men who live in remote areas and assimilate the culture of an alien race, only to be confronted with the bonds of their own culture, in the form of white women who have retained the standards of their race.

Despite Blunt's efforts to persuade Eva to leave and the differences that lie between them she refuses and is prepared to marry him. The marriage is performed by Matherson, with two natives of his island acting as witnesses. Later, when Eva and Blunt find the beheaded bodies of Matherson and the two natives in the jungle, they realize their fate is sealed. The natives set fire to the house, and when Blunt bravely confronts them, he is speared. Eva now alone in the house, praying on her knees, awaits death. In time, Matana returns to the rule of Pinjaroo and his native tribe. 'Civilization' has been driven back. It watches grudgingly from Tomanta, mourning its lost riches. Among the palm trees of Matana, the spirit voices still move, screaming to one another.

The story follows Grant Watson's experiences and observations during his stay in the Fijian islands where he found the natives quite different in their culture, beliefs and lifestyle from the Aborigines of the Western Australian desert. The Fijians had a strong streak of cruelty in their traditions, and Grant Watson never felt quite the same degree of ease that he had felt when living and working with the Australian Aborigines.

In the *Bookman*, May 1921, p. 108, an anonymous critic wrote of *Shadow and Sunlight*:

The landscape and seascape panorama with which the Pacific dazzles the imagination have left, as a rule, all too little scope for anything else, and that is why so many tropical novels in this region hitherto have fallen short of anything beyond the merely picturesque. In the present case Mr. Grant Watson shows perfect familiarity with the splendours of the tropic seas "down under", but he makes his motive a conflict of East and West in the persons of his two main characters. James Blunt, planter and hedonist, has long ago found wealth and abandoned the beliefs of his fathers, preferring self-indulgence and pagan lines under the cover of a philosophic interest in the life and crude superstitions of the islanders.

And further:

At the moment of seeming defeat, Eva's religion comforts her with the thought that her sacrifice is an expiation, and the West vanquishes the East in a spiritual sense. Mr. Grant Watson never spoils his effect by descending to didactics, and never impairs his characters by making them merely the mouthpiece of an attitude or phase of mind. The story is a genuine piece of artistry from beginning to end.

This is all very true except that I believe that Blunt's philosophic interest in the life and beliefs of the islanders was as genuine as it was for Grant Watson – and not a cover for self-

indulgence or anything else. However, Grant Watson's philosophic interest was more in sympathy with the beliefs and magic of the Australian Aborigines than with those of the Fijian natives, with whom he lived for some time after leaving Australia. The conflict in religious beliefs is foremost throughout the book, in the contrast between the fanaticism of Eva's Christian faith and Blunt's inability to find God in churches and religious dogma, possibly preferring to seek Him in "the silence of miles and miles of bare open snow fields".

**Appendix B**  
**Selected Poems**  
**of**  
**E. L. Grant Watson**

## Introduction

When in 1998 Grant Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence, sent to me a copy of his little book of poems written when he was in his seventies, I found them to be a revelation, or a celebration, of his life, which took him in so many diverse directions – myths and memories woven together in dreamlike verse, projecting dreamlike images.

I agree with his daughter, when she writes, "The poems are not sad". Like her I find them contemplative as he looks back over a long and rich life. From them we perceive that his relationship with Ida, when both were old, was also rich. Glimpses can be seen of her in the poems "The Four Sacred Women"<sup>1</sup>, especially Kore, and the communion both shared with nature.

Grant Watson did not fear dying. As his daughter has written, "He was half in love with death and looked on it as a great adventure".

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<sup>1</sup> *The Four Sacred Women and Other Poems* is the title of his printed book. His own rough copy gives the title as 'The Four Sacred Ones'.



## THE FOUR SACRED WOMEN

### Eve

#### I

Within the sleeping turba of his soul  
A spark, by nature of the eternal coils,  
Lit the moist magma, shone towards the stars,  
Weaving the spindle, dancing to and fro,  
Gathering a substance from the invisible.  
(So seemed his dream) to swell within him  
To a thought, reaching beyond himself:  
An urgent tight impulsions that might burst  
His body, break his new-found world.  
A pulsing wound opened two bleeding lips:—  
This alien thing, engendering in himself,  
Will burst him all asunder, Dream or  
Reality, he must be rid of it.  
Ah! Void it forth he must,  
Though loth to let it go. So sad to part,  
That from the distant mist it might be reabsorbed.

He, in the dust, had thought to know himself;  
The Breath abiding, and the creatures named.  
Asleep, unready and without resistance,  
How might he know this monster of his bowels?  
Head, shoulders, pushing through his ribs,  
Her lovely breasts, all her slim body's length,  
Moist with his inner sweat.  
Her feet stepped from his wound, and she,  
This silver fish, from out his sea of pain,  
Turned as she stood on earth beside him there,  
And looking down upon his troubled sleep,  
Leant over him and whispered:  
He could not hear her words.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In the published book given to the author by Grant Watson's daughter, Josephine Spence, the line 'He could not hear her words.' was crossed out, apparently by Grant Watson himself.

## II

They walked in springtime through the woodland leaves  
From trampled poverty of hungry soul  
To ply, each one, the shuttle that can weave  
The inner to the outer, and make whole  
The sickness of submission and despair;  
To find each other fair.

They sensed the elementals that abound  
In branch-divided spaces; the un-named,  
Active, invisible, making no sound,  
Possessing every moment, and untamed  
As primrose perfume. To the human touch  
Too little yet too much.

Though Adam's world was yet so newly made  
His gentle Eve had taught him to know shame,  
And in her doubt, he was himself afraid;  
And though the sun should rise ever the same  
In glory, earth was changed, the flower's bloom  
Decayed, and dead too soon.

He watched the river swirling towards the sea.  
Although so near and standing by his side,  
On its far bank she sometimes seemed to be,  
Away from him, divided by the wide  
Width of life's stream. This often-suffered pain!  
The birth pangs once again.

There was a bridge of rainbow coloured spray  
That overspanned the onward rushing stream—  
For Gods to tread on. Man must go the humbler way,  
Into the river, there to save his dream  
Of Paradise, his first unspoiled delight,  
Not yet forgotten quite.

Under the bridge—to sink, perhaps to drown;  
In green illumination, and in black  
Shadows to find her; and yet further down  
To dive with open eyes amid the wrack  
Of human generations yet to come,  
Their tragic race to run.

From there to find recurring pain  
That grows with knowledge of the good and ill;  
The serpent fruit, with its ensuing gain  
Of pleasure in her woman's changeful will.  
Her bitter sweetness that her Adam savours  
As to and fro she havers.

Must she forever doubt, although his courage seemed  
To hold them both? The waters were so deep,  
Was there no way they both might be redeemed?  
She could not guess, only could laugh or weep;  
They must accept the paradox of life,  
Hidden or open strife.

## Helen

Fair Helen comes in dreams, not from the sea,  
But to man's heart,  
The living image of desire, to be,  
In cunning tenderness, the counterpart  
Of all his longing, half-remembered joy,  
When by her near divinity of being,  
Her magic touch can wake the Eternal Boy  
In the grown man, changing his dimmest seeing  
Of earth and sky, filling his dearth  
With magic gendered with those shards of shell  
Once broken in god-given birth.  
For him the kisses that her lips so well  
Can give, open and moist, responsive  
To those dim, uncertain things  
That in his secret darkness move and live—  
Now charged with ecstasy her sweet breath brings.  
Now they her meanings share; they faint and dive  
Into oblivion; rise to die,  
And rise again, to rush into the tide  
Of life-in-death, sealed in eternity.

## Mary

### I

When man first senses the tremendous thought  
In his great Mother Nature; vision and apprehension  
Of sun, moon, mountains and streams,  
Plants and all living things, ocean and sky,  
He is no longer blind. Meaning is born.  
He then exists, and these exist in him.  
Nature is then a virgin to his soul;  
In guessing what she holds, he finds himself,  
Feeling his wonder grow to make him man.  
Woman the lens to focus in her glass  
The instant life, yet more divine than she,  
Who to his infant gropings gave the breast;  
Fleshly communion sealed in heavenly love,  
The total of his all.

### II

How may she learn to know the deep intention  
Of His smile divine,  
That, glancing up, bestows the benediction,  
To change and to refine  
The gross reality of incarnation,  
Giving a secret hint of his own being,  
Remote, celestial,  
Knowing all past and present, seeing  
This life, terrestrial  
As the dear bond that holds him to his mother  
Whose virgin glance  
Directed from *her* world towards that *other*,  
Free from all chance,  
Smiles in an aura of effulgent light,  
Distant and pure;  
Containing each, each in the other's sight  
Assurance doubly sure?

## Kore

*Note:* Kore is one of the names of the goddess of death. The word also signifies the Maiden, the young virgin. As Maiden she also signifies life: Death in Life.

First seen on a hilltop,  
Face averted, and a rough wind blowing—  
Some distance off, and lighted  
With the same fire that quickens  
Swelling buds. All her being  
Given to air and springtime.  
On the wind's breath she faded,  
And I did not see her face.

As Nature's changeling, changeling  
Because confronted by isolation  
Of an awakening mind,  
I stayed the seasons, for birds,  
For snakes, insects and worms,  
For earth's enduring substance;  
Till in that solitude  
She came to me as essence,  
Ruffling river and lake.

In my sailing cutter, lying off shore,  
Ripples plashing the boat's side;  
The sunlight shifting, piercing,  
Sparkling on the evasive water.  
There, close beside me; within me  
Her blood pulsed as my blood,  
There in the stern, so close,  
Her hair blown across my lips,  
Yet with her face averted.

Together we have watched a butterfly  
Opening its wings to sunlight,  
Absorbing, meditating a deep thought,  
Closing its wings as a cloud passed,  
Opening again as the bright ray returned.  
Our looks have threaded there  
Amongst those tiny plumes.  
"Will you not turn and look at me?"  
I asked. She gave no answer.

The Robin like a falling leaf  
Flutters to earth as darkness  
Follows day, and colours change;  
Then, when his voice alone  
In fitful burst of song  
Pierces the stillness; in that flushed  
Moment she has touched my hand.  
I pause and stare into the mist  
That stays my human sight.

In the dark night she found me.  
Together feeling the deep space  
Above us, present to blood and nerve,  
We waited in night's shadow,  
Guessing how Pharoah's falcon,  
With great wings uplifted  
Enclosed his mighty king.  
Under the sky-vault ocean  
With all the stars reflected,  
We lived as one, together.

Now near the end of seeking,  
She, in dark gateway standing,  
Turns searching eyes upon me,  
I see her radiant face.

## Now is the Time for Plaintive Robin Song

The Robin with his piccolo of song,  
So pure, so clear and liquid in the note,  
Sits on the bench beside me, while his throat  
Ruffles its feathers. No least thought of wrong  
Enters his tiny brain, and his bright eye  
Looks on this world of wonder without doubt.  
Content. He draws all things that are without  
Into the Now of his eternity.  
No surmise his of future or of past,  
Only anticipation of content  
With God's sweet worms, bestowed as his birthright.  
All is for him while heaven and earth do last;  
The spade that turns the soil for him is meant,  
And in the grass, small spiders of delight.



## **To Be**

How often I forget to be  
Falcon or hare, or flying spray.  
Deaf ears to hear, dim eyes to see,  
An ageing man, in a dying day.  
A wounding light, a dawning pain,  
Lifts Time into Eternity,  
And I remember myself again,  
Both root and flower, Myself to be.

## **Camus**

How rich his artifice of cunning stands;  
A clock in ormolu with phosphor hands.  
He ticks the present in the what has been;  
Only through darkness is his glimmer seen.

## **The Waters Beneath the Firmament**

How far can seeing penetrate the dark,  
To sense the undertides that ebb and flow  
Like those the moon moves,  
Upper and under, and the indivisible divide?  
Thought slowly sinks, dips in a darkening gloom,  
To glide,  
White as the under surface of a fish,  
Fading, uncertain, towards the primal dust  
Where rest, discarded by the ocean streams,  
The otoliths of archetypal whales.

### **Friends that have Died**

Like fallen apples hidden in the grass  
They are detached; they are not on the tree,  
And when we seek to touch with earthly thought  
They are not there; only their whispers say:  
"Eternal memories stir the waters  
Of our Lethe; we interpenetrate,  
We weave the world, and flow beyond the world.  
We are each other and ourselves;  
We give our sanction as your Time demands."

### **Reincarnation**

In future lives, when we shall meet,  
Shall we remember our past pain?  
Will bitterness be turned to sweet?  
In the future lives when we shall meet,  
How shall we then each other greet?  
What then, perchance, will be our gain  
In future lives? When we shall meet  
Shall we remember our past pain?

### **When I should dare to Look**

I have been visited by rare delights,  
Distilled euphoria, Nature's second birth,  
The human touch and far horizon sights  
Of heavenly thoughts made visible on earth.  
I have been visited by rare delights.

I have been daunted by the endless pain,  
The long procession of the unfulfilled,  
The ever-cheated. My frail life is vain,  
So I must think, and find my actions willed  
By other thoughts than mine; the way is pain.

I have been loosed to go a little way,  
To learn to walk and by good chance to run,  
My tether not so long but I must stay  
Where I now find my journey but begun.  
I have been loosed to go a little way.

I would be stayed when I should dare to look  
Into the mirror whose clear depths contain  
The prologue and the index of the book  
Whose leaves are my life's ecstasies and pain.  
I would be stayed when I dare wish to look.

### **To Karen Blixen**

You who have loved the dreamer and his dream,  
Have known the darkness of the winter night,  
Have held the golden circle in your hand  
To drop it in the sea, have caught the fish  
That brought it safe to shore. "The Immortal Tale,"  
The love that falters, ere it knows itself;  
Alcmene's cruel birth, the witch's guile  
That dare not find its end: rare, subtle riches  
Gleaned from many mansions on a distant shore;  
And fire from phoenix' nest that welds in one  
Austerity and joy. You who have dipped your hands  
In gross mortality need not, like Lear  
To wipe them, lest the scent of the incarnate  
Smirch the lips of blinded Gloucester's kiss.

## **The Solitary**

**C. G. Jung**

On the high mountain, there the pit gaped wide:  
Spirits and ghosts and throng of shadows  
Cast by distant thoughts, gleaming in darkness.  
Madness was there, that he might struggle with,  
To find at last what he might call himself.  
Wisdom the shore whereon his feet  
Were washed by waves from the abyss:  
Only the gold, the green-flushed gold secure,  
Voices of bird and child and distant echo  
From the soul that dwells within twelve senses,  
Which from the dead, are seen as dead on earth.  
In solitude he gives his light  
That men may guess and ponder, strive and live,  
and learn the way to death.

## Ladybird and Scientist

Plop on my page alights a ladybird.  
Sees, as she crawls, the letters one by one:  
Could she philosophise, might read the sum  
Of stroke and hieroglyph that make a word.  
For sign succeeding sign she has no sense;  
She stands so close, she sees but black on white;  
Of what the print can mean, no least experience.  
The modern scientist, in just such wise,  
Raises his face to see the clouds take shape:  
Vapour and air! He does not read the script.  
From eyes, so charged with thought, meanings escape  
Of that great testament of holy writ.  
He only sees the everchanging skies.

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### General Statements – Letters Consulted

*Unless otherwise indicated, all correspondence consulted is stored in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, manuscript collection, MS4950, Grant Watson papers. Letters to Dorothy Green are held at the James Cook University of Northern Queensland, Townsville.*

Grant Watson to his mother at Perth (year not stated but probably 1910), from the following locations:

Cue	undated; 20 Oct.
Camp near Sandstone	29 Oct.
Sandstone	31 Oct.
Bernier Island	25 Nov.; 4 Dec.; 22 Dec.
Dorre Island	14 Dec.
Geraldton	16 Dec.

Grant Watson's mother in Italy to E. L. Grant Watson in London – 17 Jan., 1907; 12 Dec., 1913; 15 Jan., 1913.

Grant Watson's mother, The Astor, Macquarie St., Sydney to Peter (E. L. Grant Watson) in London – 5 Dec., 1911.

A. R. Brown in Birmingham to E. L. Grant Watson in London – 10 Jan., 1914.

Grant Watson's mother, The Strand on the Green, to E. L. Grant Watson in London – 31 Aug., 1915.

Ida Bedford from the nursing home at 67 Hedland Park, WII to Grant Watson – 13 Oct., 1966.

Kathleen Raine (poet) to Dorothy Green re E. L. Grant Watson and Ida Bedford – 25 Feb., 1967; 11 Jan., 1979.

Grant Watson to Kathleen Raine – 23 Oct., 1967.

Katharine Grant Watson to Dorothy Green, re:

'Peter before his time' – 11 Oct., 1974

E. L. Grant Watson's line of thinking,

'Where Science stops but life transcends.' – 27 Aug., 1975.

The story of Ida, her young life and marriage and how her story comes into all Grant Watson's books – 20 July, 1976.

Peter's (E. L. Grant Watson's) mother – 8 Feb., 1979.

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Owen Barfield to Dorothy Green re E. L. Grant Watson – 16 Oct., 1981.

J. J. Healy, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada to the writer re E. L. Grant Watson (personal collection) – 15 July, 1985.

Frank Horner to Dorothy Green re articles on Shark Bay – 5 June, 1989.

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