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Publication Details

Crozier-De Rosa, S. M. 2012, 'Citizen of Australia...citizen of the world: an Australian new woman's feminist and nationalist vision', *Lilith: Feminist History Journal*, no. 17/18, pp. 34-71.

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Crozier-De Rosa, Sharon 2012: 'Citizen of Australia...citizen of the world: An Australian New Woman's feminist and nationalist vision', *Lilith: Feminist History Journal*, No 17 & 18, 2011-2012, pp. 34-71

Citizen of Australia ... Citizen of the World¹: An Australian New Woman's Feminist and Nationalist Vision

Sharon Crozier-De Rosa

Abstract

Writing in the 1890s, South Australian author Catherine Martin contributed to what John Docker has labelled 'those feverish years of utopian and dystopian visions'.² Her popular 1890 novel, *An Australian Girl*, presents modern historians with one *fin-de-siècle* vision for a newly emerging Australian nation, a vision that reveals itself as a utopian blend of feminist and nationalist aspirations. What emerges from this book is a sense of an Australian landscape that was as feminised as masculinised; a belief in a national identity that may have been transnationalist in that it was shaped by understandings of what it meant to be British or European, but also revealed itself as partially antagonistic to this identity to the extent that it pitted a new-world Australianness against an old-world Britishness; and a belief in a newly emerging Australian nation that, far from being insular or isolated, was, rather, integrally connected to the world community. Australia, Martin's writing affirmed, had the potential to be an ideal state, one that represented an escape for women as well as men from an overly-decadent, overly-civilised, decaying Old World.

Introduction

Writing about Australia and beyond, in what he terms the 'Nervous Nineties', John Docker states: 'Truly the late nineteenth century spilled over with utopian and dystopian texts, all haunted by an end-of-century spectre of civilisation in crisis, facing disaster and cataclysm'.³ Catherine Martin's 1890 novel, *An Australian Girl*, forms part of this *fin-de-siècle* utopian tradition. As a fictional text, it feeds into anxieties about the future, not only of the Australian colonies, but also of the human race. It diagnoses what is wrong with the world—the Old World and the New—and in response, it offers readers a vision for an alternative reality. It counters a 'reality' of colonial inequality, old-world civil unrest, and moral and physical degeneracy with visions of egalitarianism, individual opportunity and racial rejuvenation.

Although the book does not strictly conform to the mould of a classical utopian text, in that rather than depicting an existing utopian society *An Australian Girl* is firmly set in a *fin-de-siècle* present while promising aspects of an utopian future, the fact that it presents a fictional New Woman's workable blueprint for a perfect Australian future renders it much less 'abstract' or mere fantastical utopian thinking and much more a 'concrete' version of such thinking, to use Ernst Bloch's terms, terms that will be elaborated on later in the paper.⁴ No matter how visionary the dream of the novel's protagonist for a better Australian future, Martin's text contains elements that are both expansionary and restrictive, which is arguably a feature of all utopian thinking. On the eve of Australian Federation, Martin's protagonist, Stella Courtland, may have advocated a liberal ideal of a feminist and nationalist future, but with her simultaneous support for ideas of eugenics and Social Darwinism, she also championed restricted participation in that dream. Still, where *An Australian Girl's* vision proved more expansive in outlook than numerous other, more classical, utopias was in its transnationalism. Rather than shutting its doors to external influences as many utopias—and, indeed, many nations—were prone to do, Martin threw Australia's open to the old-world reserve of future migrants, if only to the more deserving and hard working of that community.

Summary of the Novel

Set for the most part in regional South Australia, *An Australian Girl* follows the story of Stella Courtland, a young woman who proudly asserts her Australianness, as well as the benefits of her keen intellect and thirst for knowledge. In addition to reading and discussing the works of numerous German philosophers, debating about nationalist loyalties, connections between Aboriginal legends and Greek mythology, and the future of civilisation, Stella is given the opportunity to air her views on the relevancy of marriage as an institution and the benefits of choosing a life partner on the basis of intellectual sympathies and rational reproduction. Beyond exercising her mind, this New Woman character also enjoys exploring the physical side of life by spending a great deal of time outdoors, riding horses, watching the habits of animals and insects and eating fruit straight from trees and vines. Despite a previous secret engagement to an Anglo-German doctor to whom she is intellectually and spiritually attuned, Stella eventually finds herself disappointed in love in an intellectually and spiritually unsuitable marriage to a devoted, thoughtful young Australian friend. After experiencing a nervous breakdown in Europe, brought about by the frustration of her passionate ambitions, Stella emerges from a fever to rediscover Christianity and a Christian-guided sense of

feminine duty, resolves to reform her alcoholic husband, and then plans to return to Australia and invest the larger portion of her life in purchasing and using 250 acres of South Australian land to help poor incoming European migrants to settle and farm, thereby helping the economic and social development of the newly emerging Australian nation. This combination of a feminine sense of morality and duty, and her very 'real', very grounded charity work in Europe and Australia, is behind the novel's description of Stella as 'an angel with a basket'⁵—a label that alludes to her power of activity but that also carries with it many of the more conservative and therefore restrictive elements of middle-class Victorian ideology exemplified by writings such as Coventry Patmore's 'Angel in the House' and John Ruskin's 'Of Queens' Gardens'.⁶

Published in three editions within four years, *An Australian Girl* was considered 'widely read at the time', in both England and Australia, particularly among the 'circles of the Intelligentsia'.⁷ Critically, it was also well received, both in the Australian colonies and the imperial metropole.⁸ On the basis of this positive reception and substantial circulation, this paper argues that, whatever the existing arguments about post-Federation Australia's promotion of a white, masculine, British Australia, there were ideas in motion in pre-Federation Australia that lauded a feminised, expansionist, even transnationalist, vision for the country.

Martin's Utopian Elements

Before analysing the novel for its specific feminist, nationalist and transnationalist visions for Australia, it is useful to ask if *An Australian Girl* is an intrinsic part of, to cite Docker once more, 'those feverish years of utopian and dystopian visions'?⁹ To answer this question requires drawing, however briefly, on understandings and uses of utopias, and here the work of Anthony Stephens proves useful. In his essay, 'On the Condition of Utopian Writing', Stephens complains of the 'over-use' of terms like 'utopie' and 'utopisch' to 'signify almost anything preferable to the present state of affairs'.¹⁰ Utopian writing, he continues, was once understood as a work that set out to persuade readers of 'the excellence of a particular recipe for an ideal commonwealth'.¹¹ Therefore, rather than reducing this body of work to that which simply promotes a vague desire for something other than what currently exists, Stephens asserts that utopian writing can better be understood as a vision that negates 'a given social reality' by 'offering a preferable alternative as fiction'; that is, a concrete or structured alternative.¹² Eugene Kamenka builds on this notion further, arguing adds to this

the idea that utopias set out to construct a ‘perfect moral commonwealth’ based on notions of ‘moral regeneration’, that is to say, the ‘moral reformation of every individual in society and therefore every class and group, especially (...) those who wield power’.¹³ This is not to say that all utopias follow a similar pattern of construction. Using the work of Ernst Bloch, for example, Anne K. Mellor points out that some utopias are ‘abstract’, while others are ‘concrete’. That is to say, some utopias are mere fantasy generated out of desire or wish-fulfilment and are therefore cases of ‘abstract’ utopian thinking, whereas others offer practical suggestions for the fulfilment of those wishes. ‘Concrete’ utopian thinking, Mellor continues, has ‘a practical social purpose’ in that it attempts to portray ‘a potentially realizable world’, define what is wrong with that world, and then offers a detailed description of how that future state can be achieved.¹⁴ The ‘concrete’ model, it follows, is more than simply visionary, whereas the ‘abstract’ type relies less on material reality for its telos.¹⁵

In many ways, then, Catherine Martin’s novel does conform to understandings of utopia, particularly to Bloch’s ‘concrete’ utopian model. Through the voice of the main character, Stella, the text clarifies what is wrong with Australia at the end of the nineteenth century and then offers an alternative model of living that promises to rectify these wrongs. And although Stella does not exactly try to construct a ‘perfect moral commonwealth’, she at least promotes the idea that such a commonwealth is possible—that is, as one based wholly on the notion of ‘moral regeneration’. Moreover, this fictional New Woman clearly identifies those who are crucially in need of moral reformation, including the morally and physically degenerate, like the alcoholics and undeserving poor, but she also points particularly to ‘those who wield power’ as being in dire need of either reformation or exclusion, and here I am referring to the British aristocracy and their loyal followers in Australia, those whom Stella designates as the unwanted vestiges of a British colonial elite.

An Australian Girl also conforms to other notions of utopia in that it aligns itself, in many ways, with aspects of feminist utopias. As this novel is a narrative about an Australian woman with feminist visions, it is fitting that, like many other feminist utopias, this book is set in a frontier society where, as both Carol Fahey Kessler and Joanne Passet explain, ‘an ideal or experimental society can be created untainted by established practices’.¹⁶ Australia in the 1890s may have been a society that was in an advanced state of ‘frontier’, but it was still a place that was grappling with issues common to frontier societies such as continued Indigenous resistance, the complexities of intercultural mixing and the harshness of the native

land or, in Australia's case, the bush. The colonies' ongoing development combined with their newly emerging identity as a nation meant that there was still room for accommodating dreams in among their accepted or established practices and institutions.¹⁷ Not only that, but Australia's credentials as 'a social laboratory', and therefore as a fitting backdrop for utopian thinking, had already been accepted internationally by this stage, given its social innovation and development in areas like male suffrage (and in some regions female suffrage), an increasingly unionised workforce and expanding Labor Party movement.¹⁸

Yet despite all of the above, it would be entirely inaccurate to label this work of fiction a 'utopia' in the classical sense. Whereas classical utopias—like the 1879 novel, *Handfasted*, written by Martin's friend Catherine Helen Spence—tend to be set in a future world where the ideas and rules for a better world are already in existence, Martin's text is set firmly in a *fin-de-siècle* present that continually traces and develops ideas for a perfect state and that promises to institute those utopian ideals only after the novel's end (Stella only promises to establish her migrants' land scheme on her return to Australia).¹⁹ *An Australian Girl*, then, is a fiction that in telling its tale explores what is wrong with a set of colonies on the eve of Federation and then proceeds to offer its readers a new vision for the newly emerging nation; a vision that could rectify these identified wrongs before this new nation travels the same path to decay and chaos as that taken by the decadent, restless Old World.

Utopian writing, it follows, has its own history. As Stephens argues, utopian writing is more prolific in some periods than in others. Reacting to specific social, moral and economic contexts, it also emphasises different utopian aspects or ingredients.²⁰ Richard Toby Widdicombe agrees, drawing attention to two vital periods in the history of utopian thinking: the 1890s when socialism was widely considered to be a solution to severe economic crises and the 1930s when economic depression spurred a proliferation of alternative visions of the world.²¹ Utopian writing is intrinsically embedded in the context in which it is written, providing readers with a pathway into the concerns and aspirations of that society. What was the specific wrong Catherine Martin saw in Australia—and, indeed, in the wider global community—in the 1890s, which prompted her to draw up something of a blueprint for her New Woman's utopia?

Australia, Stella Courtland claimed, was the perfect site for a strong and healthy nation in its own right. It was a land

noble in its vast breadth, its virgin promise of fertility—fit to be the dwelling-place of a race strong, free and generous; careful not only for the things that advance man's material prosperity, but caring infinitely as well for all that touches the human spirit with quick recognition of its immortal kinships.²²

It had wide open unplanned and untilled spaces. It had the potential for material success. It was already inhabited largely by a population, small though it might yet be, of hard working, healthy people who believed in ideas of egalitarianism. It was a land filled with spiritual connections; filled with potential. Therefore, it was also a site that offered restitution to a suffering Old World, in that it was perfectly suited for the accommodation of the most deserving exiles from a decadently over-civilised, over-industrialised, over-crowded Europe characterised by socialist unrest. Finally, it was a site for the ultimate rejuvenation of humankind as a white race. Australia, Stella insisted, represented hope for its own inhabitants (excluding those who were Aboriginal), for deserving members of the Old World and for the human race in general.

However, in order to realise that vast potential, Australia had to first rid itself of the unwanted or now obsolete vestiges of a colonial past, as well as to address the problem of moral weakness among some members of the population, such as alcoholism, brought about by a country that placed too great an emphasis on its material offerings and too little on culture and spirituality. The former, Stella argued, could be borrowed from the Old World and built on, and the latter could be sourced from within the country—those 'natives' born in Australia could recognise the spiritual connection they had with the land, a connection she presents as not altogether distant from that felt by the 'dying out' Indigenous inhabitants. Interestingly, it is those with Celtic blood, complete with an inbuilt proclivity for superstition and the supernatural, such as Stella, who are presented in this book as being particularly open to recognising such a spiritual connection with the land. Through the words and actions of her New Woman character, Stella, Catherine Martin paints a complex picture of a desirable Australian future that is simultaneously feminist and conservative, nationalist and transnationalist, individual and communal.

Feminist Visions

Martin injects many feminist elements into her character's vision for an Australian nation. However, as Catherine Martin's feminism has been discussed recently by renowned scholars of Australian feminist fiction, including Margaret Allen, Amanda Nettelbeck and Christopher

Lee, I will only briefly outline these aspects of her writing before going on to explore the depth of the text's nationalist and transnationalist visions as nationalist ideas that, although discussed by these eminent scholars, with the brief exception of John V. Byrnes in 1961, have not been placed within an Australian utopian tradition.²³

Martin's heroine champions female intellectuality over feminine frivolity. Stella Courtland not only reads philosophical, intellectual and cultural texts, including those by Goethe and Kant, but she also translates some of them from the German language.²⁴ She indulges in intellectual debates about, among other things, nationalist loyalties and symbolism, fiercely arguing with a visiting German academic about the infinite possibilities of Australian nationalist fervour despite the nation's relative youth²⁵; the links between Aboriginal legends and Greek mythology²⁶; and the future of civilisation.²⁷ Given the strength of her intellectual inclinations, she deplores the idea of the ornamental, insipid, vacuous, 'sweet' English rose, instead heavily favouring the strong, feisty female product of Australia; Australia is a country, she declares, where the former 'species' (that is the 'sweet' and demure rose) is so 'rare' that, thankfully, 'no specific name has had to be invented'.²⁸ Stella's feminist leanings reach beyond the individual female mind to embrace the body, the nation and the human race. At numerous points in the novel she supports marital breakdown, desertion or separation, even adultery, over the inevitable procreation that comes with most marriages. For instance, when discussing a female acquaintance's ill luck in being married to an alcoholic and her eventual desertion of that marriage for a relationship with another man after her 'paralytic and imbecile' baby dies, Stella leaves readers in no doubt as to the strength of her notions of eugenics and maternal feminism: 'What sort of crime would it have been against herself, and still more against society, if she had gone on adding to the probable criminals of the world—to its certain weaklings?'²⁹ Martin allows her New Woman to be a mouthpiece for scepticism about the relevancy of marriage as an institution³⁰, and, like fellow Australian feminist, Rose Scott, she also allows her to defend a woman's right to control her own body through choosing a life partner not only on the basis of intellectual sympathies but also rational reproduction.³¹

However, as liberal as these ideas might prove for her time, Stella's feminist visions are not without their limitations—and here she is no different from many of the moderate feminists of the era. Although the text champions a life for women beyond a conventional marriage and mere domesticity, its plot also confines them to marriage and to the only external or public

sphere of activity normally ascribed to them, that of philanthropy. In many ways, this is simply a pragmatic response to conditions for women at the end of the nineteenth century—conditions that confined men and women to different spheres of influence. As Stella explains to another character, Anselm Langdale, her true soul mate and a man with whom she contemplates adultery:

A man's life is so much more twofold than a woman's. He has his work and his place to fill in the world. She has the large leisure of the home; and if at her side the phantom comes of broken vows and duties trampled under foot, the spring of her life is poisoned at the source.³²

And in a vein equally as restrictive as Stella's allegiance to a morally decent marriage is Martin's insistence that her New Woman be confined to a conventionally feminine sphere of influence, that she be characterised as 'an angel with a basket'³³, that is to say, a 'good' woman performing a very earthly job of providing for the poor, a job directed by conservatively feminine moral ideals, again not unlike those of Patmore and Ruskin. For all her intellectualism and difference from ordinary vacuous girls, Stella selects a Victorian sense of duty and a feminine sense of domestic and philanthropic purpose over individual satisfaction. However, she does not do so lightly. Rather, she labours over her decision and its implications for womanhood, as observed in her conversation with Langdale above. So, despite her feminist intentions, Stella chooses to end the novel in an ordinary companionate marriage, pledging her life to the womanly duties of guiding her misguided, alcoholic husband and undertaking philanthropic activities, although her choice of philanthropic activities has major consequences for the nationalist and transnationalist visions depicted in the novel, as we will soon see.

Nationalist and Transnationalist Visions

Martin's narrative about a uniquely Australian girl living in the country in the decade before Federation offers invaluable insights about the many feminist aspirations in circulation at the *fin de siècle*, but it also comments on the varied forms of nationalist visions on offer in Australia in the years immediately before nationhood was legally recognised—visions that contributed toward the shaping of the nation, whether such a contribution was recognised or acknowledged by it. The two areas on which I would now like to focus are the ethnic origins of the new nation and the possible strategies employed in choosing those ethnic aspects—as an area that nationalism scholar John Hutchinson argues is still under-researched, but is, I believe, one to which Catherine Martin makes an invaluable contribution.

Recent scholars working on the issue of Australian national identity have based many of their arguments on the issue of whether Australian national identity was rooted in, co-existed with, or was hostile to, that of Britishness. Neville Meaney, for example, has argued that between the years 1870 and 1960, Australians ‘thought of themselves primarily as a British people’.³⁴ Broadly supporting this assertion, although differing on other points, Russell McGregor maintains that Australian national identity was not opposed to Britishness, nor did it simply co-exist with Britishness, rather, he argues, Britishness was inherent to Australianness.³⁵ It formed the repertoire of myth and symbol, the ethnic foundations necessary for the construction of a national identity. Britishness and Australianness, McGregor argues, were mutually interactive.

Scholars such as McGregor and Hutchinson base their theories on those of sociologist Anthony Smith—who has written extensively on ethnicity and nationalism—to assert that although the concept of the nation may be relatively new, in that it is rooted in the modern era, nations have their origins in ethnic myths that are far older than those nations.³⁶ New myths (such as ‘romantic acts of self-sacrifice by heroic elites’) may be manufactured in order to legitimise newly emerging nations, but these new myths do not override or obliterate older ethnic myths, rather, they overlie them. There is a strategy, then, involved in constructing a national identity. This is so whether the national identity being constructed is in the Old World or the New. However, as Hutchinson argues, if this national identity is being constructed where ‘ethnic traditions are absent’, and here I suggest that this applies to the New World at the end of the nineteenth century, then the strategies that have to be employed in this manufacture of nationalism are more complex. Those constructing the national identity, as Hutchinson points out, cannot simply overlay their new myths on existing ethnic myths; although they ‘have greater room for manoeuvre’, without ‘the raw materials on which to build, they are dependent on long, drawn out processes of intergroup conflict in order to achieve a sense of collective identity’.³⁷

This assumed absence of ethnic traditions naturally raises the question of Indigenous myths. The so-called New World was, of course, home to the myths and legends of the Aboriginal inhabitants, a repertoire that was in existence in Australia long before its British counterpart arrived. Why did these Aboriginal legends not form the ‘ethnic underlay’ so desired and needed by the new nation? In response to this question, McGregor argues that the idea of

annexing Aboriginal myths on which to base notions of Australian nationalism did not appeal to those constructing that nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, though, he adds, it may appeal to settler Australian nationalists today. Late nineteenth-century perceptions of an ‘inglorious’ Aboriginal past, ‘deplorable’ present and inevitable extinction, McGregor explains, did not recommend their ‘history’ as one on which to base a white settler society and nation.³⁸ British ethnicity, it would seem, was the most suitable ethnicity on offer.

Meaney and McGregor argue that in discounting the viability of Indigenous myths, but promoting the suitability of those of British origin in the nation-building exercise, the process of ‘intergroup conflict’ involved in forming new national identities was relatively, if not wholly, absent from Australia. Therefore, without competing ethnic myths, the strategies employed in order to build a new Australian national identity in line with the newly emerging federated nation should have been relatively simple or straightforward, or at least conflict-free.

In *An Australian Girl* the ethnic underlay promoted as the base on which to build the new nation is neither simply nor straightforwardly British—and this is where the nationalist and transnationalist visions in Martin’s text prove so fruitful in the endeavour to understand the makeup of Australian nationalist sentiments. What Martin—herself an immigrant to Australia from the Scottish Highlands and who spent considerable time in the culturally diverse community of Mount Gambier in South Australia³⁹—presents is an underlay that is a complex interweaving of Anglo, Celtic, Germanic and other forms of European ethnicities and cultures. What this novel illustrates, then, is that whatever the direction taken regarding the ethnic make-up of Australian nationalism after Federation, in the decade immediately preceding that year, there were ideas in circulation about the future shape of this new nation that diverged somewhat from one based solely or even primarily on notions of Britishness.

Moreover, there is no uncomplicated or straightforward rendering of Britishness in this novel. Instead, there is commentary on, and an appreciation of, the individual ethnicities often included under the term ‘British’. Rather than framing her Stella Courtland as an Anglo-Australian, Martin explains that she ‘is rooted in two nationalities’, both ‘a little eerie’ for all their superstitions: Australian and ‘Keltic’. Stella is a ‘fearless, fun-loving little Australian’ who has a connection with the Australian land that comes of her being born there, a spiritual

connection born of being a ‘native’—again, a not unproblematic issue in itself given the white Stella’s complicity in the colonising endeavour and therefore in Indigenous dispossession. But Stella also has ‘strong roots of the Keltic melancholy and superstition lying deep under all’, being of Scottish Highland blood.⁴⁰ This ‘Keltic’ past, rather than that of a more generic form of Britishness based on notions of Englishness or Anglo-Saxonism forms the mythic reserves for Stella’s Australian nationalism.

An Australian Girl’s multifaceted approach to Britishness—its distinction between the various ‘British’ ethnicities—speaks to current historiographical debate about the complex make up of British identity. As Robert J. C. Young argues in his absorbing study of English ethnicity, there are those who object, indeed, there are those who have always objected, to the idea that the English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh should all be lumped in together under the heading ‘British’.⁴¹ Late-Victorian and Edwardian Englishman, painter and writer Ford Madox Ford is one such example.⁴² Over the centuries Irish nationalists have certainly argued that Ireland has never been ‘British’ in that it has never been a part of Great Britain; rather, it has been a member, reluctant or otherwise, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (and formerly Ireland).⁴³ Britishness, Young argues, has more often been linked with prevailing notions about the existence of an Anglo-Saxon ‘race’, as opposed to that of a Celtic ‘race’ (including a diaspora population that American writer Henry James termed the ‘English-speaking fraternity of Saxon types’).⁴⁴ Indeed, during the nineteenth century and often beyond, any suggestion that ‘Celts’ and ‘Anglo-Saxons’ belonged equally under the same banner of Britishness was, at best, a complicated issue, and, at worst, a point of violent contention. This was so, whether in the countries forming the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, or outside that region, like Australia. (The recent ‘Not Just Ned: A true history of the Irish in Australia’ exhibition at the National Museum of Australia, for example, attests to many instances of Irish-voiced anti-British sentiments throughout the colonies’ and the country’s nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history.⁴⁵) Although Martin’s 1890s text does not enter into any fierce debates about the ethnic makeup of the British, its attention to Stella’s ‘Keltic’ origins does muddy the waters somewhat, thereby adding to historiographical debate about the ethnic makeup of Australian nationalism. It does send into doubt any notion that all Australians at the time thought of themselves as British by instead holding up a more transnational understanding of Australian identity.

What Martin's text is much more explicit about, on the other hand, is Australia's future as a nation, free from direct governance from the imperial metropole. One of the 'natural' born Australians in the book, Ted Ritchie, demonstrates this when he writes a letter to Stella, informing her of his jealousy when he meets independent Americans and his sense of indignity when he hears the English refer to Australia as 'our colony'—a letter in which he exclaims: 'We must have a country of our own, governed by ourselves, and not have the name of being ruled by fellows sent out of the heart of London ...'; it's a sentiment with which the Australian New Woman, Stella, agrees.⁴⁶ As previously suggested, where Martin's text does deviate from much of the current historiographical debate about Australian nationalism is in its explicit rejection of the suitability of a British past as the sole basis for this nationalist project. What Australia had that it did not need, according to Martin's main characters, was the unwanted vestiges of colonialism, namely an inherited British history that was strewn with examples of class inequality, injustices and a policy of aristocratic entitlement that had no place in the egalitarian New World. (Martin cites many examples of a Melbourne society that irrationally and superficially paid homage to the remnants of such an obsolete and unequal system.) On the other hand, what Australia wanted but did not have was a cultural repertoire that was needed to balance the material aspects of the country. Martin's heroine recognised that a country offering material advancement, but lacking in cultural offerings was destined to fall far short of its utopian ideal. It needed to borrow that cultural heritage. Stella's source for the myths and symbols needed by Australia as the cultural underlay for her utopian society was the educated classes of the Old World, whether in Britain or Germany or any other part of Europe. Her blueprint for a new nation, then, was built on a set of cultural artefacts that were drawn from sources far more universal than simply that of a British metropole: the works of German philosophers, texts of the classical eras, European literature, and the Bible. (With the exception of the Bible, Stella rarely looked outside Europe for suitable cultural artefacts.) World civilisation—if a restricted understanding of that civilisation—supplied the underlay for her vision of a new federation. And her eventual utopian nation would contribute to that world civilisation through providing the optimum site for staging the rejuvenation of humankind.

Forward-thinking Immigration Nation

Using Stella as her visionary, Martin also paints a picture of a transnational utopian nation that, unlike many newly establishing nations, is principally forward-thinking, not backward-looking in character. Although Stella recognises some of the benefits that come from

connections with ‘old civilizations firmly rooted in the past’,⁴⁷ not least of which being the cultural repertoire accumulated over that time, she is also acutely aware of the restrictions that accompany the obligated loyalty to that past, including loyalty to an inherited history of inequality. Moreover, Stella fervently denies any assertions that new nations cannot equal older civilisations in the intensity of love and loyalty owed to and felt for that nation.⁴⁸

As something of a counter narrative to that of a nationalism guided by a sense of connection with a past, Martin presents her readers with the story of a nation whose bonds with other regions is more important than its bonds with the past, that is to say, a community stressing its geographical rather than temporal importance. She connects the newly emerging Australian nation to the European community of ‘old’ countries. She does not advocate an isolated, insular or inward-thinking nation pre-occupied with its own development or its own problems. Such a sentiment has strong parallels with Stella’s personal inclinations, as when she declares a firm opposition to being ‘self-complaisant’, to wrapping herself up in her own ‘prosperity like a cocoon’, and instead pledges to use that prosperity to help others.⁴⁹ Stella does not support nationalist self-interests to the exclusion or detriment of other members of the global community. Instead, she promotes Australia as a ‘vast island-continent, so remote from all the great international centres of activity’, yet ‘in such curious close touch with all the far ends of the earth’.⁵⁰ She offers Australia up as something of a transnationalist site, as a meeting place for ‘deserving’ members of the global community, and a site that not only has the potential to form a perfect nation but one that also has the potential to release some of the pressure on the cities of the Old World where civil unrest threatens.

Immigrants play a pivotal role in this nationalist and transnationalist vision. It is not only global cultural artefacts and ideas, for example, that form the transnational component of her utopian thinking. It is also human beings, in this case, in the form of migrants to the New World. At one point Stella exclaims,

If our fathers were crowded out of the old world—or left it because they feared their children might sink into poverty—was not that an added reason to love the new one, which had offered them comfort and prosperity, and a fair field for the energies of their sons?⁵¹

Australia, this portion of the text reveals, offered immigrants hope, opportunity and fairness. However, Stella also realised that the relationship was reciprocal. Immigrants offered Australia their lives, labour and love—as Stella says, when reproaching Ted, who was born in

Australia of immigrant parents, ‘You’re like a good many more Australians. You’ll never do as much for your native land as your fathers did for their adopted one.’⁵² Immigrants had the potential to regenerate the country, power the nation and, by extension, help to heal the world. To harness that potential, Stella devised a scheme where she would buy up a large quantity of land and allow poor, but ‘deserving’, European migrants to settle and farm and slowly repay her faith in their dedication and hard work while paying back her financial investment. The New Woman’s dream for Australia, then, was a transnationalist one, transcending rigid national boundaries and joining all together.

Given all of this, there is little doubt that, in many ways, the visions that this 1890s novel offered for Australia were optimistic, inclusive and liberal-minded. However, in many other respects, they were also restrictive and revealing of a *fin-de-siècle* strain of cynicism. What this pre-Federation fictional text strongly has in common with the tradition of utopian thinking is a belief in the ‘tradition of moral guardianship’, that is, ‘the claim to know what is best for people better than they themselves know’.⁵³ Utopias naturally enforce conditions on those living within the utopia. There is, as Anthony Stephens explains, the inherent dualism with utopias of the ‘Sun State’ and its ‘shadow’.⁵⁴ Those with the capacity for visions have to impose the benefits of their foresight on those who have no such capability; otherwise the utopia will fail. Utopian thinking, therefore, has both an expansive dimension as well as a more sinister dimension. So what is particularly sinister about this Australian New Woman’s vision?

On the face of it, Stella’s vision seems placid and moderate enough. She shies away from distasteful and uncivilised displays of social unrest and denies the efficiency of radical socialist activism—each prevalent in a chaotic, decaying old-world Europe—opting, instead, for a much more ordered and humane plan for land provision for the hard working and deserving needy. However, for those of us reading from the vantage-point of the twenty-first century, many of the ideas propelling Stella’s vision are disturbing. In a post-Holocaust world, her eugenics agenda, fuelled by her fear of the ‘crime of adding to the morally-paralyzed lives in the world’, is highly ominous.⁵⁵ However, she was very much in tune with many of her own time, moderate and radical feminists included, who regarded a eugenics agenda as the only solution for the salvation of the human race.⁵⁶ Equally ominous, from this twenty-first century perspective, but also equally reflective of the spirit of the time, is this Australian New Woman’s fundamental belief in the inevitable extinction of the primitive or

‘savage’ Indigenous inhabitants of the land. Stella’s vision for Australia makes no place for the weak or the doomed, no place for people like the unchampioned alcoholics (only with the devoted attentions of someone as morally strong as Stella Courtland can an alcoholic like Ted Ritchie hope to get through); the undeserving poor (as testified by her passages on the inefficiency of colonial charity administrations, the ‘charity mongers’, that indiscriminately feed the moral weakness of the ‘professional pauper’⁵⁷); the ‘imbeciles’ or the children of the morally weak; those condemned by the tenets of Social Darwinism; weak-willed women (like those insipid and mentally or physically non-robust girls of English origin or loyalties); and those without an expansive and internationalist vision for Australia, particularly those who pledge sole allegiance to an Australia of colonial origins, one that is a slave to a past of class inequity and dismissive of the invaluable contributions of a variety of settling migrants. But as a New Woman novel supporting sometimes radical, sometimes moderate or conservative notions of late nineteenth-century feminism, neither does it explicitly reserve a place for radical feminists, those who deny the advantages wrought by a very Christian, middle-class, Ruskinian notion of feminine domesticity and philanthropy.

However, what is uniquely expansive about *An Australian Girl*’s utopia is that unlike many other utopian visions, it is not insular. This utopian future is not closed to external influence. Indeed, this New Woman’s vision for Australia only works if the utopian state she champions is open to the world, particularly to those deserving and hard working (white) members of the world’s growing reserve of potential migrants, those eager to flee the crumbling conditions of the decadent Old World and contribute towards the utopian construction of the New. Stella’s vision for Australia is truly expansive and internationalist in outlook, with all the complicity for the further dispossession of the Indigenous inhabitants of the land that this plan implies.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Catherine Martin’s 1890 text, *An Australian Girl*, provides valuable insight into how an astute Australian commentator composed strategies on behalf of her protagonist for the aligning of various, sometimes competing, cultural influences that could potentially form the underlay of the future nation in the decade immediately before Federation. Martin’s New Woman’s vision for an Australian future was transnational in that Stella firmly championed the interflow of people and ideas between Australia and various European regions or nations. However, in reaching and consolidating nationhood after Federation, an increasingly protectionist, increasingly racialised, increasingly masculinised Australia acted to restrict this

intercultural and interpersonal flow. The visions that Martin presented for a feminised Australian bush and for a progressive nation as a site for transnationalism, then, seemed out of place in a post-Federation environment. Accordingly, Martin, like many other female writers, was written out of the Australian national narrative, only to be recovered in the later decades of the twentieth century.

Although it now seems straightforward to claim that Martin's feminised conceptualisation of a country that was out of keeping with a masculinised view of the nation led to her exclusion from the Australian story—which is a much researched aspect of Australian literary culture⁵⁸—what presents itself as a little more problematic is the placement of her text's nationalist and transnationalist visions. Scholars such as Susan Sheridan and Christopher Lee have claimed that Martin and many of her female contemporaries were written out of the national narrative because they were classified as Anglo-Australian novelists, as writers of a feminised colonial romance and so were deemed to be out of touch with newly emerging nationalist priorities that privileged a masculine form of literary realism, a charge that Miles Franklin famously laid at Martin's feet.⁵⁹ Yet given the transnational character of *An Australian Girl's* blueprint for a nationalist utopia, it seems more likely that Martin was written out of the narrative because she was *not* Anglo-Australian *enough*, in the sense that her text was much more open to an Australia that was built on something more than just a pan-Britannic understanding of the new nation's ethnic identity. In a new nation championing a restrictive White Australia Policy, underscored by a notion of Britishness, if Meaney and McGregor are correct, there was little room for Stella Courtland's transnationalist visions.

As we have seen, questions about the relationships between Australianness and Britishness, colonialism and nationalism are at the heart of current discussions about the construction of an Australian identity around the time of Federation, as are issues surrounding gender, about the degree to which the new nation was constructed by women and men, shaped by masculinity and femininity. Whereas some historians argue that Australianness was always at odds with Britishness, others contend that one was reliant on the other; and where various histories of nineteenth-century Australia portray the landscape as a place of manliness, others argue that those at all ends of the imperial spectrum were being offered literary and visual images of the Australian frontier that were more than simply masculinised. Martin's *An Australian Girl* provides a valuable insight into these contentious issues by offering an important commentary on understandings of Australianness and the future of the Australian

nation that were in circulation at the time of Federation. This text presents modern historians with one Australian New Woman's vision for a newly emerging Australian nation, a vision that reveals itself as a utopian blend of feminist and nationalist aspirations. As was asserted in the Introduction to this essay, what emerges from Martin's writing is a sense of an Australian landscape that was as feminised as masculinised; a belief in a national identity that may have been pan-nationalist in that it was shaped by understandings of what it meant to be British or European but that also revealed itself as partially antagonistic to an old-world identity in pitting a new-world Australianness against an old-world Britishness; and, a belief in a newly emerging Australian nation that, far from being insular or isolated, was integrally connected to the world community. Australia, Martin's New Woman affirmed, had the potential to be an ideal state, one that represented an escape for women, as well as men, from an overly-decadent, overly-civilised, decaying Old World. Awareness of this fictional New Woman's insistence on recognising Australia's place in a global community—albeit an overwhelmingly white European community—forms part of a growing body of work that acknowledges that 'Australian lives are intricately enmeshed with the world, bound by ties of allegiance and affinity, intellect and imagination'.⁶⁰ Australia has never existed in isolation from 'the conflicts and crises elsewhere around the globe' and, as Martin asserts through the character of Stella Courtland, nor should it.

Endnotes

¹ For reference to Martin's view of Australians, including her character Stella, as 'citizens of the world', see Margaret Allen, 'Three South Australian Women Writers, 1854—1923: Matilda Evans, Catherine Spence and Catherine Martin' (PhD thesis, Flinders University of South Australia, 1991), 328.

² John Docker, *The Nervous Nineties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 23.

³ Docker, 73.

⁴ Quoted in Anne K. Mellor, 'On Feminist Utopias', *Women's Studies* 9 (1982): 241-263, 242.

⁵ Martin, 410.

⁶ See Coventry Patmore's poem, 'The Angel in the House' (in *The Poems of Coventry Patmore*, ed. Frederick Page (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949); and John Ruskin's Lecture II: 'Of Queens' Gardens' (in John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies: The Two Paths & The King of the Golden River* (London: Dent, 1970).

⁷ See Margaret Allen, "'She Seems to Have Composed Her Own Life": Thinking about Catherine Martin', *Australian Feminist Studies* 19, no. 43 (2004): 29-42, 29). The first edition was published anonymously in London in three volumes; the second was published in London in one volume in 1891; and the third, released in 1894, was published as an Australian edition (Amanda Nettelbeck, 'Introduction', in *An Australian Girl*, Catherine Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), vii-xxxi, xii). Margaret Allen quotes the critic Patchett Martin, who claimed that the book was widely recognised, adding the comment that the 'clever novel is now receiving in the higher social and literary circles of London' (Allen, "'She Seems to Have Composed Her Own Life'", 29).

⁸ For more on the colonial and metropolitan reception of the novel, see Christopher Lee, 'Romance and the Nation: The Reception of Catherine Martin's *An Australian Girl*', *Australian Feminist Studies* 8, no. 17 (1993): 67-80.

⁹ Docker, 23.

¹⁰ Anthony Stephens, 'The Sun State and Its Shadow: On the Condition of Utopian Writing', in *Utopias: Papers from the Annual Symposium of the Australian Academy of the Humanities*, ed. Eugene Kamenka (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987): 1-19, 3.

¹¹ Stephens, 2.

¹² Stephens, 8.

¹³ Eugene Kamenka, 'Socialism and Utopia', in *Utopias: Papers from the Annual Symposium of the Australian Academy of the Humanities*, ed. Eugene Kamenka (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987), 69-82, 72. Whether Martin's visions for Australia could be labelled socialist, or whether Martin herself could be labelled a socialist, is a point of contention between commentators on Martin's work. See, for example, one of the early revivalists of Martin's work, John V. Byrnes, who, in 1961, claimed that Stella returned to Australia at the end of the novel to 'devote her life to socialism' (John V. Byrnes, 'Catherine Martin and the Critics', *Australian Letters* 3, no. 4 (June 1961): 15-24, 22); and Margaret Allen, who wrote that there is no evidence that Martin ever involved herself in philanthropic movements that led to 'some sort of socialism' or 'Fabianism', however, by the end of her life she did call herself a socialist. (Margaret Allen, 'Catherine Martin, Writer: Her Life and Ideas', *Australian Literary Studies* 13, no. 2: 184-197, 194.) The line followed by this article is that some aspects of Martin's vision may align themselves with an earlier form of socialism in that, tentatively similar to early nineteenth-century socialist, Robert Owen's establishment of agricultural and industrial communities, she advocates the communal buying up of land and the sharing of that land among interested workers, in her case incoming migrants. However, there is nothing in *An Australian Girl* to suggest that Martin opposed the advantages of capitalist system. As her protagonist, Stella, makes clear when explaining her visions to her husband, she does not plan to lose anything on her capital investment for this 'philanthropic' scheme. Capitalist gain is not wholly overcome by philanthropic intentions.

¹⁴ Mellor, 242.

¹⁵ The question of whether utopian thinkers are visionaries, rather than realists, has occupied the minds of many considering the history of utopianism. See Richard Toby Widdicombe, 'Early Histories of Utopian Thought (to 1950)', *Utopian Studies*, 1992: 1-38, 3.

¹⁶ See Carol Farley Kessler (ed.), *Daring to Dream: Utopian Fiction by United States Women before 1950* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), xxi; and Joanne E. Passet, 'Reading Hilda's Home: Gender, Print Culture, and the Dissemination of Utopian Thought in Late-Nineteenth-Century America', *Libraries & Culture* 40, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 307-323, 309-10.

¹⁷ The question of whether Australia can be defined as a frontier society in the 1890s when many white settlers considered the issue of Indigenous resistance to be overcome is a highly complex area of Australian historiography. There is little room to deal adequately with this question in this paper. However, this issue is a central concern in another paper on Catherine Martin's writing, 'Identifying with the Frontier: Federation New Woman and Empire' due to be published in an edited collection by The University of Adelaide Press later in 2011.

¹⁸ For a detailed comparison of utopian writing in 1890s and 1930s Australia, see Verity Burgmann and David Milner, 'Futures without Financial Crises: Utopian Literature in the 1890s and 1930s', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 23, no. 6 (December 2009): 839-853, especially 840.

¹⁹ For discussion of Spence's utopian novel, *Handfasted*, which although written in 1878 was not published until 1984, see Nan Bowman Albinski, 'Handfasted: An Australian Feminist's American Utopia', *Journal of Popular Culture* 22, no. 2 (Fall, 1989): 15-31.

²⁰ Stephens, 3.

²¹ Widdicombe, 2-3.

²² Martin, 257.

²³ See, for example: Allen, 'Three South Australian Women Writers', 199; Margaret Allen, 'Reading Catherine Martin's *An Australian Girl*', in *Southwords: Essays on South Australian Writing*, ed. Philip Butterss, (Adelaide: Wakefield, 1995): 46-61; Nettelbeck, vii-xxxi; Christopher Lee, 'Strategies of Power and Catherine Martin's *An Australian Girl*', *Southerly* 51, no. 2 (June 1991): 189-206; and, Lee, 'Romance and the Nation', 67-80. For Byrnes's brief discussion of Stella Courtland's 'search for the Utopian society', see Byrnes, 'Catherine Martin and The Critics', 18.

²⁴ For example, she translates Goethe's *Faust*. See Martin, 66.

²⁵ Martin, 72.

²⁶ Martin, 66.

²⁷ For instances of Stella thinking about or discussing culture and civilisation, see, for example, Martin, 63, 179, 203 and 298.

²⁸ Martin, 327.

²⁹ Martin, 27.

³⁰ At one stage she refers to marriage as 'the most foolish, faulty old institution going'. See Martin, 38.

- ³¹ For Rose Scott's opinions on women controlling their own bodies, see Rose Scott, 'The Future of the Race', *Woman Voter*, 15 July 1913, reprinted in *Freedom Bound II: Documents on Women in Modern Australia*, eds. Katie Holmes and Marilyn Lake (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1995): 18-19.
- ³² Martin, 431.
- ³³ Martin, 410.
- ³⁴ Neville Meaney, 'Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian History and Historiography', *Australian Historical Studies* 116 (2001): 76-90, 79.
- ³⁵ Russell McGregor, 'The Necessity of Britishness: Ethno-cultural Roots of Australian Nationalism', *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 3 (2006): 493-511.
- ³⁶ John Hutchinson, 'Myth Against Myth: The Nation as Ethnic Overlay', *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 1/2, (2004): 109-123.
- ³⁷ Hutchinson, 122.
- ³⁸ McGregor, 502.
- ³⁹ Mount Gambier, despite being classified as 'provincial', never mind Australian, exhibited much in the way of artistic and cultural diversity. Writer and character, then, also benefited from the learning derived from an 'immediate environment' where 'people from different cultural groups with different histories—Scots, English, Irish, Germans and Aboriginal Buandig people—interacted'. See Allen, 'She Seems to Have Composed Her Own Life', 30. For more on the German influence on Martin's life and writing, see: Margaret Allen, 'What Katie Might Have Learnt in Mount Gambier or Some Early Influences on C.E.M. Martin', *Barcelona University Australian Studies Series*, no. 1 (1996) 1-19; and also Enid Sedgwick, 'An Australian Germanophile: Formative Influences in the Early Development of the Writer Catherine Martin', *Westerly* 55, no. 1 (2010): 186-203.
- ⁴⁰ Martin, 377, 254, 296.
- ⁴¹ See Robert J. C. Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), particularly Chapter 1 'Saxonism': 1-39. For more discussion of Britishness as opposed, for example, to Englishness, see Krishan Kumar, 'Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective', *Theory and Society* 29, no. 5 (2000): 575-608; John Hutchinson, Susan Reynolds, Anthony D. Smith, Robert Colls and Krishan Kumar, 'Debate on Krishan Kumar's *The Making of English National Identity*', *Nations and Nationalism* 13, no. 2 (2007): 179-203; and for Kumar's appraisal of Young's *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, see Krishan Kumar, 'Negotiating English Identity: Englishness, Britishness and the Future of the United Kingdom', *Nations and Nationalism* 16, no. 3 (2010): 496-487.
- ⁴² Cited in Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 11.
- ⁴³ See Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 12.
- ⁴⁴ Quoted in Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 10.
- ⁴⁵ See the exhibition's publication for examples of this. Richard Reid, *Not Just Ned: A True History of the Irish in Australia* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2011).
- ⁴⁶ Martin, 371.
- ⁴⁷ Martin, 179 and 298.
- ⁴⁸ Martin, 70-1.
- ⁴⁹ Martin, 258.
- ⁵⁰ Martin, 375.
- ⁵¹ Martin, 71.
- ⁵² Martin, 15.
- ⁵³ Kamenka, 82.
- ⁵⁴ Stephens, 5.
- ⁵⁵ Martin, 27.
- ⁵⁶ Unfortunately, the constraints of space do not allow for further discussion on attitudes towards eugenics in Australia. However, for a discussion of radical and feminist approaches to racial decline in Australia at the end of the nineteenth- and beginning of the twentieth century, see, for example, Jane Carey, "'Wanted—A Real White Australia": The Women's Movement, Whiteness and the Settler-colonial Project', in eds. Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington, *Studies in Settler Colonialism: Politics, Identity, Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2011): 122-139; Jane Carey, "'Women's Objective—A Perfect Race": Whiteness, Eugenics and the Articulation of Race', in eds. Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus, *Re-Orienting Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the History of an Identity* (New York: Palgrave, 2009): 183-198; Jane Carey, "'Not only a white race, but a race of the best whites": The Women's Movement, White Australia and Eugenics between the Wars', in eds. Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus, *Historicising Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the Emergence of an Identity* (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing, 2007): 162-70; and, Frank Bongiorno, 'Every Woman a Mother: radical intellectuals, sex reform and the "woman question: in Australia, 1890-1918', *Hecate*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2001): 44-64. For a detailed discussion of the history of eugenics in Australia and New Zealand, see; Martin Crotty, John Germov, Grant Rodwell eds., *A race for a place* :

Eugenics, Darwinism and social thought and practice in Australia : proceedings of the History & Sociology of Eugenics Conference, University of Newcastle, 27-28 April 2000 (Newcastle, NSW: University of Newcastle Press, 2000); Stephan Garton, 'Eugenics in Australia and New Zealand: Laboratories of Racial Science', in eds. Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, *The Oxford handbook of the History of Eugenics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 243-57; Angela Wanhalla, "'To Better the Breed of Men": Women and Eugenics in New Zealand, 1900-1945', *Women's History Review*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2007): 163-182; and, Diana Wyndham, *Eugenics in Australia: Striving for National Fitness* (London: Galton Institute, 2003). For a discussion of eugenics and feminism generally, see Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵⁷ Martin, 90.

⁵⁸ Susan Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women's Writing 1880s—1930s* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1995), particularly Chapter 3 "'Temper, Romantic; Bias, Offensively Feminine': Australian Women Writers and Literary Nationalism", 27-35.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Christopher Lee's article, 'Romance and the Nation', 67-80; and Sheridan, 27. For reference to Miles Franklin's view of Catherine Martin as an Anglo-Australian novelist, see Allen, 'Catherine Martin, Writer', 184.

⁶⁰ Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott, 'Introduction', in *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World*, eds. Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008): xiii-xxi, xiii.