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Jennifer Strauss

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An unsentimental romance: Christina Stead's for love alone

Abstract

It is an odd aspect of Australian literature that the poets have been - at least until fairly recently - a rather sober lot stylistically. It is in the work of novelists like Patrick White and Christina Stead that we find Gothic extravagances of associative language and imagination, visions of the external world as charged, if not necessarily with the grandeur of God, at least with something more than mild pathetic fallacy. At the same time, both are uncomfortable writers, less because their intensity sometimes topples over into verbosity and portentousness than because the heat of their intensity co-exists with a chill generated by a strong distaste for, and often remarkably acute observation of, the flaws and the moral bankruptcies of human beings.

JENNIFER STRAUSS

An Unsentimental Romance: Christina Stead's *For Love Alone*¹

It is an odd aspect of Australian literature that the poets have been — at least until fairly recently — a rather sober lot stylistically. It is in the work of novelists like Patrick White and Christina Stead that we find Gothic extravagances of associative language and imagination, visions of the external world as charged, if not necessarily with the grandeur of God, at least with something more than mild pathetic fallacy. At the same time, both are uncomfortable writers, less because their intensity sometimes

topples over into verbosity and portentousness than because the heat of their intensity co-exists with a chill generated by a strong distaste for, and often remarkably acute observation of, the flaws and the moral bankruptcies of human beings.

It is an unsentimental writer who sets out to explore the theme of love in the romantically titled *For Love Alone*.² Published in 1945, it was her sixth major publication,³ a point which needs to be stressed because the critical memory has a treacherous tendency to slide this novel into an earlier position, directly after *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*. There are reasons of both style and content. Stylistically, *For Love Alone* has a less ambitious structural organization than *House of All Nations*, while it is less richly textured in its symbolism and has less sense of a world fully inhabited by characters than *The Man Who Loved Children*. Characters of considerable initial interest — Teresa's emotionally tyrannical father, depressed sister and disturbed brothers, the ebullient Aunt Bea, frustrated Anne and flirtatious Clara — rapidly fade from the scene. There is, however, a logic in this: thematically, the isolation of Jonathan and Teresa from other people is the cumulative result of his pathological selfishness and her obsessed absorption into her unsatisfactory relationship with him. The structural pattern, a classic Romantic one, also militates against full development of secondary characters: the protagonist, estranged from context by visionary demands, must voyage out on a *solitary* quest to a final single-handed fight for more than life with a formidable adversary. In this case, Stead gives a novel twist to the pattern by having the protagonist discover that the object of her quest is in fact the adversary to be overcome.

From the material of the novel, a relatively early date might be assumed because of the Australian setting and the apparently directly autobiographical nature of some of the material, notably that depicting Teresa's rejection of a 'career' as a teacher, her determination to leave Australia, and the body-destroying penury she endures while struggling, as an office-worker, to save up the money for her fare to England.

As far as the Australian setting is concerned, it is offered for the most part unselfconsciously. On the one hand Stead apparently did not feel in this case the extra-artistic pressure that moved her to transfer the action of *The Man Who Loved Children* to America lest her own family be too easily recognizable in that of the novel.⁴ On the other hand, Stead *in absentia* seems never to have felt obliged to take up the kind of task that White, coming uneasily home, set himself in *The Tree of Man*, i.e. the Joycean (or Dedeleian) artistic burden of articulating the unforged conscience of the native land. Rather, she presents the Australian setting

quite simply as the historically 'natural' habitat of the characters she is interested in. It is a city setting, Stead being essentially an urban novelist.⁵ But where the social-realist Australian novels such as Kylie Tennant's *Fouveau* produce a photographed city (even if tinted by both affection and outrage), Stead, stimulated like Dickens by the rich particularity-cum-generality of a large city, produces an imagined one. Indeed in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* that city, in the exuberance of its physical presence, often overshadows its inhabitants. In *For Love Alone*, with the focus narrowed from her earlier sweeping celebrations of the unmanageable energies of the phenomenal world, the lyrically effusive treatment has been disciplined. Although the essential method remains an elaboration of detail bonded by a dominant (or shifting) mood, that mood is here more clearly narratively involved with the experience and preoccupations of the characters. Probably the best instance of such writing is the extended passage at the beginning of Chapter 5 presenting Teresa's night walk back home after Malfi's wedding, of which this must serve as a representative sample:

In this hot night, not only the rocks above her, half-naked among twisted, tooth-leaved trees and spiny bushes, but the little open park she was now approaching, the grass above the dripping rocks of the military reserve, and the tram-shelters, were full of semitones and broken whispers. The roots, the trees, the timbers of the houses, stained by storms, the back yards full of plasterers' rubbish, the niches in the stony undercliff were refuges of love.

She came out from the lane, crossed the road and skirted the park. Near the seesaw, on the short grass, lay a black sharpe, unmoving. When she passed it, she saw it was a man over a woman, the woman's white gloves and bag lay on the grass beside them. They caught pickpockets in the Bay. Near the Old Hotel two mere, the woman on her back and the man on his elbow, lay looking into each other's eyeballs, reflecting the moon. There were none of them on the beach tonight, drowned under the high tide; none in the boats drawn up across the footpath. people sat in their moist warm gardens, talking and hitting out at the mosquitoes: the smell of eucalyptus oil and pipe-smoke reached out. Across the harbour, on the oyster-coloured water, a large Manly ferry full of lights moved southwards toward the city. She felt the swarm of lovers thick as locusts behind her when she turned into the beach path. Tied up to the fourth pile of the wharf was a rowing boat covered with a tarpaulin. Under the tarpaulin was a woman's body: she had been fished out of the sea just outside of the cliffs that afternoon; it did not cause much comment. They lived there, among the gardens of the sea, and knew their fruits: fish, storms, corpses, moontides, miracles. (pp.63-4).

The initial Australian setting does, however, lend a particular authenticity to the central element of the novel's very simple narrative line, the voyage away. This must not be confused with the voyage 'home' characteristic of novels concerned, like those of Martin Boyd, with an earlier

generation. By the time of which Stead writes, the intercontinental magnet drawing Australians was, as with the American earlier, a cultural one. Their sense of provincialism could not be assuaged by mere transition from Milwaukee to New York or Dimboola to Melbourne. It is this which is distinctive about Jonathan and Teresa. Apart from this the problems of poor, intellectually ambitious youth in an urban society where social and sexual restrictions are intensified by economic depression are not very specific to Australia as distinct from England or America.

There is, unfortunately, one grating moment of self-consciousness about the Australian setting: the Prologue, an awkward hybrid between ingratiating apology to the superior 'reality' of the Old World and an ill-judged, pared-down version of the prize-essay extravaganza on Australia delivered late in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* by Kol Blount. Even in a novel in which one had become acclimatized to verbal explosions being more or less loosely tied to the personages, that one seemed expendable. Its echo here seems inadequately justified by a possible function of introducing the voyager symbolism, foreshadowing, in its closing reference, the later characterization by Teresa of her own voyage as 'the rigmarole of a buffoon Odyssey' (p.348). Within an established context, this expresses with both pathos and sharpness Teresa's realization that her passion for Jonathan, and the consequent arduous journey towards a lover whom she has envisaged, not without encouragement, as faithfully awaiting her — that all this has been largely the result of her imperfect grasp of reality, her appetite for living mythologically, for being 'noble, loved, glorious'. We accept both the conventional symbol and the unconventional characterizing adjective as appropriate to the established character and situation. At the beginning, the Odyssean references are resisted as literary name-dropping, stylistic hectoring.

To revert from setting to the matter of autobiographical content and its bearing on our idea of the maturity of the art in the novel. Stead makes no secret of there being autobiographical elements scattered through the novels; what is interesting is the way in which such elements mutate as they become parts in distinct formal and thematic structures. She has said that Baruch Mendelsohn of *Seven Poor Men* 'is' the man she later married; it is probably more important that we discern something of the same character, differently selected and emphasized in both Alphendéry of *House of All Nations* and James Quick in *For Love Alone*. A measure of identification of herself when young with Teresa and with Louisa of *The Man Who Loved Children* is obvious; it would be impertinent to ask if she 'is' Catherine of *Seven Poor Men*, and yet any reader is

likely to see in Catherine a version of the others lost, as she goes under to the incestuous attachment to her brother which Teresa manages to avoid early in *For Love Alone* and as circumstances offer her the salvation neither of a lover nor an energetic talent.

It is after all an ill-founded assumption that autobiographical material is restricted to, and exhausted by, a writer's earliest work. Dickens, for instance, did not make use of his trials in the blacking factory until *David Copperfield*, and one may well consider that Stead achieves a more distanced art with Teresa's trials than Dickens does with David's; which is just as well, since in her case they constitute a major component of the novel. If they are long-drawn-out, it is not because Stead lacks emotional control of her material, or is not able to subdue style to structure. There are indeed times in her novels when the amplification of detail seems merely manic; Randall Jarrell has described her writing as having, at its worst, 'a kind of vivacious, mechanical over-abundance'.⁶ In this case, however, Stead is seriously addressing the problem of conveying poverty, not as spotlighted in moments of high melodrama, but as felt in the texture of its daily grinding pettinesses, especially when initial penuriousness is compounded by obsession into something very like avarice. It is a method that has integrity, if it lacks the pathos of the death of Jo the street-sweeper in *Bleak House* or the horror of the children's death in *Jude the Obscure*.

Apart from autobiographical elements, and more importantly, *For Love Alone* shares a number of thematic preoccupations with the preceding novels, for all their very different narratives. In each of them, Stead presents human life struggling against interwoven psychological and socio-economic pressures, pressures which militate against an individual's achievement (more or less conscious) of fulfillment of being for the natural self: the tensions of family bonds, the burdens of money and of poverty, the constraints of social values and expectations. Some characters follow the logic of despair to suicide — Michael Baguenault in *Seven Poor Men*, Henny in *The Man Who Loved Children*. Others, like Jo Baguenault or Miss Haviland in *For Love Alone*, retain in the acceptance of the limitations of their lives a survivor's integrity, untainted by either despair or envy. They are, however, and they recognize this, less *interesting* than the contenders, those who fight for their selfhood, pursuing it under various guises, notably those of truth, justice, freedom, love.

When such contenders take up ideas as the instrument of their quest, they run special risks: the hazards of corrosive fanaticism or, more frequently in Stead's novels, of fake idealisms which erode the character's

grasp of both self and the outside world. Stead seems at once fascinated by, and distrustful of, ideas. She understands their power to exhilarate, the opportunities they offer for verbal excitement and display indeed she seems to suggest that they are indispensable for full humanity; at the same time she is aware of ideas as tyrants and destroyers. Distrust of ideas is often regarded as an Australian characteristic, or as a feminine one, but Stead's attitude to ideas, and her presentation of them in action, probably owes quite as much to certain late nineteenth century authors whom she has cited as influencing her, notably Ibsen, Chekhov and Dostoyevsky. The generalizing, perhaps slightly 'old-fashioned' discussion dialogue of her novels is one aspect of this. More particularly, Sam Pollitt and Jonathan Crow are really more like Ibsen's sick souls than the monsters of critical labelling. It is ironic that Jonathan should cite, with approval, an Ibsen character, when he has clearly learnt so little from reading Ibsen's plays (p.336).

In the works preceding *For Love Alone*, some of the contenders meet fates which we may, rather mournfully, regard as characteristically modern: Catherine and Henny fall to madness and suicide; Jules of *House of All Nations*, on the other hand, cultivates hedonism, walking off unscathed, but somewhat inhuman, from the collapse of the financial *danse macabre* which makes up the action of that novel. It is Louisa of *The Man Who Loved Children* and Teresa retaining something of conventional heroic stature, who win through against odds to a point where they have at least gained growing space. That that growing space is in neither case the one traditionally allotted to heroines modifies the conventionality of the structure; it does not, I think, constitute a feminist manifesto.

There has been a good deal of confusion, and some heat, over Stead and feminism. Some has been due to excess of zeal, some to problems of terminological inexactitude so besetting that one hesitates to enter the fray. Nonetheless, it can be said that Stead takes, if by assumption rather than by argument, a position fundamental to philosophical feminism, namely that the experience of the female is as much primary human experience as that of the male. It is therefore obviously able to claim a novelist's serious attention, having a value as much essential, neither more nor less contingent than that of the male. James Quick rapidly discerns that Jonathan is incapable of accepting this, and that all his theories about the necessity of female independence are merely defensive against that dependence which he believes must result from his own centrality, a dependence indeed which gratifies him almost more than it terrifies.

The particular nature of Stead's seriousness however makes it unlikely that she will be a political feminist, interested in either the particular powers or, more probably, the particular powerlessness, the victimization, of women as a group. It is not merely that her clear perception that there are injustices unique to women does not lead her to conclude, even in polemic, that injustice itself is unique to women. The whole tenor of her mind, robustly romantic in its emphasis on the power, and indeed the obligation, of the individual to be itself, makes her finally more interested in what characters, male or female, do to themselves, rather than what is done to them.⁷

A close examination of Teresa and her experience may serve to test these propositions; it is also the best way to understand the novel, since it is Teresa's experience that is central to it, however striking Jonathan may be as a psychological study. It is above all through Teresa that Stead resolves one of the novelist's abiding problems, the tension between generality and specificity, a tension articulated within the novel by Teresa in Chap. 22, pp.252-3:

To solve the question of why students suffer when they come out into the world: for one thing, learning is too general, there are not enough particular sciences. If there are fifteen or sixteen shades, and more, in the sky we call sky-blue, and so in everything we have a simple name for, how can this one word, 'sky-blue', satisfy every perception? This sky-blue can be depicted in a hundred ways. Again, sensation is vague, the five senses boiling in the brain, a stew of insight, confuse us further, and so fifteen or sixteen blues can produce a hundred or more sensations.... The greatest sensations become the most general and the least concerned with that particular adjusted interlocking which is any kind of relation to the outside world. If the greatest sensations become hooked on to any outside thing or person, our heads are turned: our heads are turned by confusion. Language is simply not large enough and though English is said to have the most synonyms and the most words altogether, it still lacks hundreds of thousands of words. The words, joy, love, excitement, are bald and general. That is why love stories I suppose sound so dull, for the heroine or hero cannot feel just love, it must be one of a hundred kinds of love he feels.

The Teresa we find as the novel begins is a particularly suitable medium for the investigation of at least some of the hundred kinds of love. Her age places her at that awkward stage of transition from the 'given' ties of family to the games of choice played by adult love. Her sex, her social status, and the nature of her education make it all too probable that she should be engrossed by the idea of love, convinced that her value as a person is contingent upon receiving a love of which marriage will be the visible certification; convinced indeed at times with some desperation

that the outward and visible sign of marriage may be more important than the inward and spiritual grace of love, and thoroughly confused about the role of sex in either. This need hardly surprise as her society, which can and does talk about ideal, sentimental, and economic aspects of marriage, is incapable of talking about marriage as sexual except in innuendos, sighs, and smutty jokes.

Teresa speaks in the passage above of 'a stew of insight'; the reader may well feel that the first hundred or so pages of *For Love Alone* offer a stew of suppressed and/or distorted sexuality. Nonetheless, the picture Stead gives, although emphatically and sometimes idiosyncratically highlighted, has a great deal of essential truth about sexual attitudes in that society at that period. Teresa belongs to that society but is embarked upon the process of rebellion and separation. It is part of her innocence that she does not fully realize just how disturbing are the perceptions and ideas she insists on voicing. It is this, as much as the ideas themselves, that marks her off as an eccentric, an experience she finds painful rather than flattering. 'She did not want to be eccentric, but on the contrary to be noble, loved, glorious, admired; perfect as far as she could be perfect' (p.65).

Teresa's intelligence is important. Its relative lack of formal training, along with her capacity to verbalize, allows the encounters between her experience and her intelligence to be very direct and personal, even when she is intent upon ordering them into abstractions as fast as possible. There might be a good deal of pathos in the spectacle of Teresa's gallant attempts to match her experience to the grab-bag of intellectual bits and pieces provided for her by discussion groups, libraries, lovers, if it were not for the toughness and resilience of her spirit and of her physicality.

For Teresa, as well as being intelligent, has a large stock of animal receptivity and energy, a capacity for joy which survives all her reckless depletion of it in her devotion to Jonathan, and which awaits her sexual awakening. The Teresa we meet initially, although having some theoretical acquaintance with sexuality, is not so much sexually awakened as in a diffuse state of sexual exacerbation. This leads at times to an irritable dismissal of the physical aspect of love, an acceptance of Jonathan's disparagement of it as lust so that it can be dismissed high-handedly from consideration — 'Love has nothing to do with all that' (p.248). It is the cultivation of this exacerbation and denial in her relationship with Jonathan that threatens to destroy her.

Jonathan, while bad for Teresa, is clearly extremely useful for Stead. The glib and perverse theoretician of love provides for plenty of dis-

cussion, as well as demonstrating that disillusion can be quite as delusive as illusion and, at least in this case, a good deal nastier. We are not really surprised to find him eventually a classic late Victorian figure of sexual repression, impotent except with a woman of the servant class, whom he can despise, and to whom he does not even have to make the payment that would be required by a prostitute. Even before he has been fully shown in action, Stead's first extended portrait of him (Chap. 17, pp.198-201) shows us a man threatened by joy, greedy for life but life-denying, essentially if not technically impotent: in short, and by name, a carrion bird.

From this fate — which is death — Teresa is 'saved' for life by the rather obviously named James Quick. This, the standard and by no means unreasonable reading of the final action, has led to some disappointment in feminist circles, being seen as an endorsement of the notion that females depend upon males for their identity.

Certainly Stead does not seem to entertain for Teresa either of the two possible endings we might find to a feminist fable: a switch to lesbian relationship(s) or a shift altogether away from sexual love as a central preoccupation, fulfillment being located in some engrossing cause or occupation. The former would have been a much more radical *dénouement* in 1945 than in 1982, but that would probably not have deterred Stead if she had, in fact, considered it a desirable conclusion for Teresa. This seems unlikely, if we can judge by *Cotter's England*, where the mere adumbration of such an outcome is enough to give final impetus to the suicidal Caroline. The latter resolution has been presented with considerable sympathy and power by a number of recent novelists but only Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* comes to mind as seriously suggesting this at the very outset of the heroine's sexual life. Moreover, Sybylla reminds us that nothing in Teresa's life has offered an engrossing alternative to love; certainly not teaching, the possibilities of which for someone with sensitivity but without vocation are sketched by Stead with deadly accuracy.

That Stead, in the end, simply seems to share Teresa's conviction that love is important, that commitment to the joy *and* the pain of loving is necessary for vitality, and that this applies to both sexes, is indicated by the final scene (pp.500-01) in which Jonathan appears. As the dreaded bogey of spinsterdom, which haunted Teresa at the beginning, is suddenly transferred to bachelorhood, we are amused by the neat working out in the action of Jonathan's repeated tag-line 'The whirligig of time brings its revenge' (pp. 169, 340-1). But Teresa was right to flee from spinsterhood, just as Jonathan has been wrong in choosing to be 'the

bachelor sucked into himself like a sea-anemone which suddenly sees something wrong and falls into itself, and both like a half-knit flesh wound'. His isolation contrasts unfavourably with the companionship of Teresa and Quick.

The word 'companionship' is important. It is not accurate to say that Quick 'saves' Teresa, and one very rapid way to be convinced of this is to compare their situation with that of a couple who are unequivocally represented in these terms, such as Caro and Adam in Shirley Hazzard's *Transit of Venus*. In *For Love Alone*, Quick is less a determinant in Teresa's life than a fortunate circumstance which proves her capacities. He is the opportunity, but she must seize it to save herself. It is important that she is the first to say 'I love you', making towards him the positive move that she has never been able to make towards Jonathan at the crucial moment and in his actual presence. Granted that Jonathan has been playing a specially devious game of invitation and rebuffal, while Quick is unambiguously open to such a move, it is Teresa who must make it, and in so doing, abandon self-denial. Throughout the novel, she has been torn between rebellious pride and self-blame. Her misery after her first rejection by Jonathan (Chap. 29, *You Do Not Stand Anywhere*) is a classic portrait of female self-denigration. The theorist might point out how well-conditioned she has been by her father and brothers. But it is no mere stereotype; it bears very clearly Teresa's individualizing hallmarks: intellectual curiosity, physical resilience, and an underlying awareness of power rather than powerlessness. Although her judgement has been so confused that she embarks on a letter of apology to Jonathan, she is restrained from completing the letter by some stubborn fibre of selfhood. It is this which finally validates what must otherwise look like an extravagant flourish when we find this passage a few pages later:

'And so you are getting to know yourself?' Johnny said and to Teresa he appeared to be shifting ground. She said listlessly: 'Yes.'

'Know thyself, a difficult injunction. We don't always like what we find.'

'I do,' she said.

'Yes? And what do you find?'

'Don't ask me, you don't want to hear that, Johnny. I'm going to write a book about Miss Haviland.' (p.353)

For a very minor character, Miss Haviland has a good deal of importance. Later (p.426) she is to write to assure Teresa that there is no necessity for her to be destroyed by the discovery of Jonathan's charlatanism. The reader feels an invitation to share her attitude to Teresa: 'You interest me. Don't die. Live.' And it is Teresa's prospective novel,

changed into her notes on the Seven Houses, A System by which the Chaste can Know Love, that precipitates the crisis between Teresa and Quick.

If there remains an element of the mysterious in Teresa's capacity for salvation and in the arrangement of events to afford her the opportunity to exercise that capacity, then this is because of a view expressed by Stead in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* that 'the ranges of human experience go beyond human belief'.⁸ Teresa will allow in it something of 'what is called fate' (p.458), but will think of her relationship with Quick as one involving neither dependence nor diminution.

Nor are we to think of it as terminal. Rather, Stead is at pains to present it as dynamic and complex, capable of creating problems as well as of solving them, and this causes a degree of raggedness in the conclusion of the novel.

A warning against the simplistic reduction of relationships has already been given in the case of that between Jonathan and Teresa. Aware perhaps of the possibility that it will be schematized as a study in sado-masochism, Stead short-circuits this response in the reader by allowing it to be voiced within the novel by a manifestly perverse witness, Jonathan himself (pp.359-60 and 442-3). His unreliability as witness is of course manifold. It is not only that he prefers ideas to flesh; his ideas are, as Quick perceives, not only nasty in themselves, and hypocritically at odds with his actions, but also full of unacknowledged confusions as ideas. It is the lack of acknowledgement that is heinous, not the confusion in itself. Indeed, it seems that Stead in presenting some of those hundred kinds of love wants to demonstrate that the confusions concerning love, lust, and marriage are real confusions, cases not of mere mistaken identity, but of identities overlapping and intertwining.⁹ A notion of free love which means no more than that lust no longer requires legalizing is no complete answer because lust and legality do not constitute the whole story, nor do our feelings obligingly freeze at what looks like the achievement of well-being.

In following Teresa past the point of initial consummation of her love for Quick and showing that the effect of satisfaction is to free her appetite for other men, Stead is not merely striving to avoid the clichés of 'happily ever after', nor is she merely trying to *épater le bourgeois* by insisting upon her heroine's being in a condition which is perfectly plausible psychologically, but not conventionally admissible. It is not anti-romanticism either; rather a version of the romantic notion that major experiences expand the human horizon, not contract it, and that

growth continues in the exploration of these expansions. Teresa, Harry and Quick are not freed from problems by the absence of marriage contracts; they are obliged instead to struggle with a reality not pre-fabricated by institutionalized forms and responses. The balance they achieve is a rather sketchy and fortuitous one, relying as it does on the Spanish Civil War as a kind of *deus ex machina* to whisk Harry from the scene. In the final pages the art is less achieved than the content is interesting, especially in the extension of one of the sub-themes, that of truth, like love, one of the ideal values of western society.

Certainly Stead values truth. It is part of the sickness of Jonathan's soul that he is not merely hypocritical, but very actively and always self-aggrandizingly, deceitful, especially in his relationships with women.¹⁰ Stead begins supplying the reader, but not Teresa, with unequivocal evidence of this shortly after Teresa's arrival in England. This increases our apprehensions on her behalf, especially if we remember that, in the early part of the novel, her passionate regard for truthfulness is such an established family fact that it is also a family joke to send her into a tantrum by a teasing accusation of lying. Teresa's idea of truth, like her idea of love, while fundamentally admirable, is somewhat naïve; the action of the novel requires her to think rather more deeply. When, at the end of Chap. 28, she detects Jonathan in a minor piece of lover's deceit, she does not react very fiercely, perhaps because the deceit flatters her mildly. What she does do, very characteristically, is to emerge shortly after with a speculative theory about lying in general (p.352).

Teresa's personal capacity to deal truthfully is tested in her relationship with Quick, and here she begins to suspect that lies may come from love, as well as from fear and weakness. It looks for a time as if she is to be condemned to playing the role of the happy woman for Quick, just as she was condemned to play the role of the unhappy woman for Jonathan: 'She thought that each day would be a step farther into the labyrinth of concealment and loving mendacity' (p.460). One needs to be very careful however in basing any final judgement on what any character 'thinks', especially under the stress of a particular situation. It is positively misleading for a critic to alter the verb to 'knows' and proceed with the rest of the passage as quotation, as is done by R.G. Geering.¹¹

This passage needs to be placed against the later scene in which she and Quick are skirting nervously round the question of Teresa and Harry 'and then she felt she could not bear any ambiguities in their life' (p.500). It is, of course, largely because Quick is a man with whom she can risk telling the truth that she manages to dispel this one without disaster. The

reader may be more aware than she is that ambiguities will continue to form; but we are likely to be content to see the novel end with the balance on the positive side for Teresa, for truth and for love.

NOTES

1. References throughout are to the edition published by Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1965.
2. The title is tonally ambiguous; the play of irony over its aspect of sentimental romanticism does not prevent the existence of another level, a serious one, of romanticism.
3. Its predecessors were *The Salzburg Tales* (1934), *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934), *The Beauties and the Furies* (1936), *House of All Nations* (1938), *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940).
4. Stead herself states this quite matter-of-factly: e.g. in the hearing of the present writer at a seminar at Monash University in 1976.
5. Cf. her classification under City Novels by H.M. Green in *A History of Australian Literature*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, rpt. & rvd, 1962, Vol. 2, p.1007: If Christina Stead comes naturally under discussion here, because not only most of her settings, but also her characters, attitudes, method and manner generally are those of modernity and of the cities, it does not follow that she is comparable with any other city novelist.
6. Randall Jarrell, 'An Unread Book': Introduction to *The Man Who Loved Children*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, N.Y., 1965, p.xxxvii.
7. Despite apparent inconsistency, such an attitude often co-exists with a residue of the notion of the heroic protagonist as divinely, or fatally, elected to certain roles and actions. So Teresa thinks 'involuntarily' that her life with Quick, if not fate, 'is what is called fate' (p.458).
8. *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, rpt. 1965, p.270.
9. On p.458 however the reader may well be not merely confused but positively misled into thinking that Teresa and Quick are legally married. The accumulation of terms — husband, marriage, connubial life, marital union — is too insistent to be accidental. Perhaps Stead is trying to claim for the essential union of the lovers those words usually reserved for unions conventionally sanctioned. If so, the reader, left without benefit of explanation, is unlikely to view as successful this attempt to force language to meet Teresa's complaint that it is not large enough (see supra p.).
10. Consider pp.317-22 and p.334 versus p.342.
11. R.G. Geering, *Christina Stead, Writers & Their Work*, O.U.P., Melbourne, 1969, p.27.