



The Federal
and National
Impulse
in Australian
Literature
1890-1958

by

Julian Croft

Foundation for Australian Literary Studies 1989

The Colin Roderick Lectures: 1988

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Preface

The Colin Roderick Lectures, sponsored by the Townsville Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, are delivered annually by a distinguished Australian writer or academic at James Cook University, and subsequently published by the Foundation. The series is named for Emeritus Professor Colin Roderick, Foundation Professor of English at James Cook University and distinguished Lawson scholar. Colin Roderick also established the Foundation in Townsville in 1966 and continues in his retirement to play an active role as its Vice-Patron. The publication of the Lectures makes them available not only to members of the Foundation but to the world-wide literary and academic community interested in the study of Australian literature.

Julian Croft, the 1988 Lecturer, is a Senior Lecturer at the University of New England. He has published widely on Australian and Commonwealth literature, and was co-founder of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature in 1978. In 1976 he wrote a biography of the Anglo-Welsh poet T.H. Jones and co-edited with Don Dale-Jones the Collected Poems of the same writer. In 1983 he edited Kenneth Slessor's *Backless Betty from Bondi*. A collection of his own poetry, *Breakfasts in Shanghai*, won the British Airways Prize for the best first book of poetry published in Australia and New Zealand in 1984, and his novel, *Their Solitary Way*, was published in 1985.

Professor A J Hassall
Executive Director

Introduction

When Yeats published those famous lines 'The centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world' in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* in 1921, he was expressing a feeling common in Europe at that time of the imminent break-up the old orders and verities. He was not wrong. The first half of the twentieth century saw the dissolution of the old Empires of Europe and two disastrous global wars. But what was true of Europe was, as is often the case, quite untrue in the Antipodes; in fact it was the exact opposite. Instead of flying apart, Australia was created by an act of federation on the first day of the twentieth century. And instead of being reduced to a state of national shell-shock by the carnage of the first World War, Australian nationalism thrived on the defeat and futility of Gallipoli, and found in the war a newly realised identity as Australians rather than as Ma-Staters, Crow-Eaters, Sand-Gropers, Cabbage-Patchers or Banana-Benders as the *Bulletin* quaintly classified them at that time. The pessimism and anti-romanticism of post-war Europe did not find a ready audience in Australia; in fact late nineteenth-century romanticism in various guises continued to flourish well into the 1930s. That anti-modernist (for that is what it was) sentiment, allied itself with the increasing nationalism of the early decades of the twentieth century and produced some major works at the time of the next great Australian national celebration, the sesqui-centenary of 1938.

The three writers I have chosen to talk about are, I feel, representative of the sense of federation, of a centripetal movement toward union and unity, of the 1890s and the first decade of the new century, and of the expression of Australian nationalism during the 1930s. Those three writers are Joseph Furphy (otherwise Tom Collins), who wrote his single major work *Such is Life* in the 1890s, and had it published in a truncated form in 1903; Christopher Brennan, whose *Poems*

[1913] was written mainly in the period 1895 to 1902, but federated and expanded a little later; and Robert D. FitzGerald, who was born in the second year of the Australian Federation, and wrote and published his most ambitious (and successful) poems "The Hidden Bole", "Essay on Memory" and "The Face of the Waters" in 1938 and 1944. Anyone who follows Tom Collins' theory of nomenclology will see immediately that the three have something else in common - their Irish ancestry. It is my feeling that Irish-Australian writers of this period were probably more sensitive to notions of disunity and unity, of nationalism, and of swinging moods of deep pessimism and ringing optimism than were other groups within the writing community.

The three could not have been more different in their family and cultural backgrounds. Furphy's family were tenant farmers, Protestants from Ulster who were literate and self-educated followers of various Protestant faiths such as Methodism, Church of Christ, but behind whom stretched the inheritance of Northern Ireland: John Knox and Calvin. Furphy argued against Calvinist doctrine in his work, but he remained a committed Christian despite his rejection of the orthodox dissenting positions.

Brennan's family, also recent emigrants from Ireland, were Roman Catholic working-class, although the father did as many of his kind did - he ran a pub. Brennan was the inheritor of the Irish puritan strain of Roman Catholicism, and although he professed agnosticism, even atheism, he returned, happily it seems, to the church at the end of his life.

Robert D. FitzGerald was the third generation of FitzGeralds of that name. His father and grandfather were both distinguished servants of the colony of New South Wales - the grandfather had been the colonial botanist; and the poet grew up in a family which included by marriage the le Gay Breretons. Poet FitzGerald's uncle, Jack le Gay Brereton had been Professor of English at Sydney University at the same time as Brennan was sacked from his Associate Professorship of

Modern Literature. He was Brennan's longest and closest friend, and in his earlier years shared the bohemian values of that generation (though in a mild way - he scandalised the establishment by going hatless for most of his life). Unlike my two older subjects, FitzGerald was, fittingly for the climate of the early and mid twentieth century, an agnostic, perhaps an atheist, but his poetry, like Brennan's, was a search for an Absolute or an Ultimate within creation.

All three were conscious of their Irishness within the emerging social order of Australia, and all three still felt as strongly about their ancestors' native country as they did about their natal land.

I would like to suggest that the evolution of Australian national identity, in the progress to Federation and in the nationalist celebrations of 1938, was a catalyst or subsumed metaphor in the ways in which the three writers attempted to make sense of a divided world. A model of division which they perhaps inherited from their Irish families and which was reinforced in Australia by the virulent manifestations of sectarianism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Joseph Furphy - A 'Federation' Dedicated to Australia

It is fashionable nowadays to see everything in terms of binary divisions, of opposing, mutually exclusive states. In the 1890s the reverse perhaps was the case. Union, unity, a coalescing of identities, and an end to the division produced by the fissiparous history of political and cultural life of white society in this island continent was desired by many. Federation filled the papers; Federation fueled political debates; and Federation made people think seriously and deeply (perhaps for the first time?) about what it was to be Australian, as distinct from a colonial.

Federation was certainly on Furphy's mind when he wrote the first version of *Such is Life* in the 1890s. It was on a lot of people's minds, not alone because of its implications for the economic debate between free trade and protectionism, but also for the opportunity it might present for the implementation of socialist policies through the constantly growing support for the Australian Labor Party. That it was on Furphy's mind is apparent from his easy use of the term to respond to A. G. Stephens' suggestion that the original *Such is Life* be divided into two or more parts:

Just before transcribing current copy, I bitterly reviled myself for not having planned, say, five small books, loosely federated, so to speak, yet each travelling on its own merits.¹

Many years later, soon after the publication of *Such is Life*, Furphy used the same phrase to his friend the writer Cecil Winter: ". . . I made the point of loosely federating these yarns (if you understand me); till by-and-by the scheme of "S' Life" suggested itself."² Furphy described the 1897 version of the

novel to his friend Cathels as 'one long, involved lie in seven chapters',³ but after its revision in 1901, which produced the work we know to-day, that unity became more of the federal relationship to which Furphy referred in 1903. That federation was to give a 'the observant reader a fair picture of Life' (*SiL*, 2)⁴ and in the now much-quoted summary he gave to Archibald when first enquiring about publication, to have a 'temper, democratic; bias, offensively Australian.'⁵

Early readers were quick to see the democratic temper of the work, and to applaud or to ignore its offensively Australian nature. What few of them did comment on was the nature of the federal organisation of the work. There are several ways to come at a discussion of the structure of *Such is Life* from this point of view. The first is composition.

Such is Life as we know it to-day is a very different 'long lie' from the one Furphy first described in his covering letter to Archibald with the original manuscript. Chapters Two and Five have been removed and smaller substitutes put in their place. Chapter Three has been planed and dressed. The overall, mortised and tenoned in a different way to accommodate the dramatic changes made to the whole. Unlike Brennan's procrustean treatment of his poems to make them fit *Poems* [1913], Furphy compared his operation to the modification of a ship: a neat section removed and the shortened hull welded back together again.⁶ Again many readers, particularly first-time readers, would not be convinced by this metaphor. The book often seems to them shapeless and over-long by at least fifty percent. To the initiate, of course, it never seems long enough. Nevertheless Furphy re-engin eered the whole federal relationship, and the second version is what we know to-day.

How well was that work done? Was the book improved, or damaged by its radical surgery? We have no copy of the whole manuscript of the 1897 version of *Such is Life* (the present version is the one which was finally published by the Bulletin Book Company in 1903). We do have, however, some surviving

pages of the original typescript. (The first version of *Such is Life* which was sent to Stephens was in Furphy's handwriting - 1,125 pages of it. After promptings from the *Bulletin*, he bought a typewriter and typed it out; that is the typescript we have today.)

From these surviving pages we can get a good idea of how the original material in *Such is Life* was federated. The original Chapter 2 Furphy rewrote into the short novel *The Buln-Buln and the Brolga*, while Chapter 5 became *Rigby's Romance*. Neither of them were published in book form during Furphy's life.

In my opinion, when I look over the sections of the surviving 1897 manuscript and the published forms of the shorter derived novels, and try to imagine them all of a unit, I shudder. *Rigby's Romance* alone would be enough to push the ship of the original *Such is Life* down to its Plimsoll line; the addition of the *Buln-Buln* with its rather tedious parody of the lady authoress and her medieval fictions (with, I hasten to add, much other far more superior material) would sink it entirely. So it is a better book in my eyes, as far as the balance of narrative goes.

There were other changes Furphy made when he wrote his second version of *Such is Life*, and they were to do with the re-organisation of the ideas presented in the book. These revisions were made after Furphy's visit to Sydney in 1901 when he spent most of his time with the 'boys from the *Bulletin*'. Lois Hoffmann has suggested to me that we should see these revisions in the light of Furphy wanting to write for a specific audience whose tastes he now knew. This piece of federation is probably more important to my theme today. The original work, as far as I can see clearly, would have been much more focussed on the nature of fiction itself, and the choice for the author of writing in, what would appear to be mutually exclusive modes, either romance or realism.

Tom Collins starts the 1897 version by making claims for his realistic account of life in the Riverina, and supports it by

setting up an aleatory method of composition. We are then introduced, as we are today, to the caravanseraï of bullockies, and the various hidden plots which surface throughout the novel are put in train. That would then have been followed by Tom in Echuca meeting his old school fellow Freddie Falkland-Pritchard and his wife, the lady authoress. This section turns on the nature of lies and falsehoods - in other words the fictions which make up Freddie's life-story. His innocent wife believes what she has been told, and never questions the veracity of her husband's accounts of vanquishing pirates (the chief of whom turns out to be the school bully of Tom's old school), saving the French from annihilation in the Franco-Prussian war and capturing bushrangers in his youth. To underscore her romantic disposition, Furphy has her write write in her spare time vast Medieval Romances in archaic diction. Nevertheless she has been published by that Bible of the real, the *Bulletin* !

Chapter Three is the same as today's version - Tom's naked wanderings along the bank of the Murray - except that a digression on "Orion" Horne has been deleted. This deleted section deals also with the collision of the romantic and the real. Now a penniless miner with the real problem of where his next meal is coming from, Tom has come to get some paper-work signed by the famous romantic poet, author of *Orion*, who is down on his luck in the colonies, but nevertheless occupies a safe government billet as a mining registrar. Tom is in the grip of the 'real' economic problem - famine, cold, and penury; while Horne, a gentleman and a romantic poet who is one of the (un)acknowledged legislators of the *canaille* is drinking cognac in a well-heated room, per virtue of his friends who have put him there.

Chapter Four presumably was much the same as it is today - the story of Warrigal Alf and the hidden story of Alf's love for Molly Cooper. Again the conflict is between Alf's real anguish of loss and guilt (and his real life story), and Tom's romantic perversion of it as a result of his reading too much romantic fiction in the form of novels by Ouida.

Chapter Five in the 1897 version is the present *Rigby's Romance*. Once more we are at, or near, Echuca on the Murray. This Chapter gives us another variation on the theme expressed in Chapter Two : male/female relations and the role of fantasy and reality in them. Kate Vanderdecken has never forgotten Jefferson Rigby, from the time that they quarrelled twenty-five years ago in their native Massachusetts and he left for the gold diggings in Australia. Rigby, the socialist and lover of mankind, has so successfully hidden his love for Kate and substituted for it his evangelical socialism for the past twenty-five years, that he quite forgets to turn up for a pre-arranged meeting he has made with Kate after she has arrived unexpectedly on the banks of the Murray in search of him. Where is romance, and where is reality in this very sad - even tragic - tale of a woman's patience and fidelity, and a man's intellectual preoccupation and total insensitivity? Kate accepts the reality of Jeff Rigby's shallow emotional nature and his self-centred commitment to the co-operative endeavour of socialism and quietly leaves. Rigby, who throughout the night has been arguing in a bullying and hectoring way the essential Christianity of the socialist message, is left with no new converts to his cause, except the reinforcement of belief in the converted, and loses his own chance to rectify an old wrong. Furphy, I would imagine, used this foregrounded story to contrast not only with the Falkland-Pritchards living in their happy mutual delusion, but also with the hidden story of Alf and Molly, another story of patience and fidelity - on the part of the woman - and guilt and pain, on the part of the man.

The remaining chapters, Six and Seven, of the 1897 *Such is Life* flesh out the end of the story of Alf and Molly, as well as the comic counterpart of all these male/female relationships, that between Tom and Maud Beaudesart. We do not know what happens to Alf and Molly. Alf has left to work for Stewart in Western Queensland. As soon as Molly hears of this she leaves Runnymede and is last seen on the track towards Queensland. Whether she ever reveals herself to Alf we do not know, but this romance has a far more satisfactory ending to it than any of the others. Kate leaves without ever establishing proper

contact with Rigby; Mrs Falkland-Pritchard has had no insight into her ineffectual lying husband; and Tom has weasled out, well at least we assume he has, of his relationship with Mrs Beaudesart by having a piece of scandalous gossip spread about him.

From this bare reduction of the original *Such is Life* we can see that the work was more concerned with gender relationships, and far more concerned with working out the nature of delusions, fantasies, and reality, both at the personal level, and at the fictional level. The latter can be seen in the debates between Rigby and the authoress; in Tom and his fictitious scandals and the fabricated life-histories of those he meets; in Falkland-Pritchard's elaborate lies and retellings of his life; and finally in the discussions of tale-telling and its techniques when each member of the cast in of the original Chapter Five (later *Rigby's Romance*) tells a love story on the banks of the Murray.

What did the re-writing of *Such is Life* do to this particular federation? The most important change was to reduce the importance of male/female relations and to shift the action from the settled areas around the Murray to the all-male world of the Riverina proper. The new Chapter Two brings in Rory O'Halloran, known by his nickname as Dan O'Connell after the famous Irish Home Rule figure, and the theme of sectarianism. Rory, a Catholic is married to Deborah Johnson also from Ulster, but a Protestant. (Interestingly enough, Furphy has made her come from the Furphy family's home town of Tanderagee in County Armagh.) It has to be said that this chapter is also about male/female relationships, but they are not foregrounded to the same extent as they are in the original second chapter. The new chapter shows a much grimmer view of men and women in its depiction of a most unpleasant marriage. But out of the tensions and bitterness between man and wife (representing the two Irelands) is to emerge the new Australia in the form of their daughter, Mary. Her name, common enough, nevertheless has deep significance for the father; and it is a name which the mother refuses to recognise. The daughter, the

mother claims, has no name; presumably because she has not been baptised, but perhaps also because the child bears the name of the Virgin.

Rory, we find out from Tom, has written in his spare time a long essay - "A Plea for Women" - in which he argues that at two crucial points in the history of mankind woman has been the focus of the historical process. Those two women are Eve and Mary: one for humanity's detriment; the other for our benefit. Tom reads the tract, amazed at the examples Rory quotes and the labour which has gone into it.

Here we have, yet again, another statement of the romance/realism opposition, but in a far more subtle and less obvious manner than in the deleted chapters. Rory has lost himself in a maze of idealism concerning women, and does not recognise the reality of his circumstance with the actual flesh and blood woman with whom he has to share his divided bedroom (Tom catches a glimpse of a partition bisecting the room). As a symbol both of Ireland and the 'sex problem', as Lawson called it, the few pages devoted to describing their domestic arrangements are some of Furphy's best writing. The tragedy is that Mary (and presumably Australia), because of the tensions between her parents, comes to grief when she loses her way following her father, and dies in the trackless paddocks of Goolumbulla a few minutes from help.

But male/female relations are not the main point of interest in this chapter. Its purpose in the new version of *Such is Life* is to introduce the federating device which Furphy hoped would pull the new structure together. That device is the theme of determinism and choice. It is introduced in the story of the blind swagman who dies not far from Rory's hut during the night that Tom pays his visit. Tom could have prevented the death had he chosen to disturb the man's sleep the afternoon before. The theme is returned to at length in a new digression inserted into Chapter Three and picked up again in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

To deal with this topic Furphy had to make sense of several intellectual inheritances. His Protestant (I would argue, basically Calvinist) background, his belief in socialism, and the current widely spread notions of determinism in nineteenth century biology, physics, and metaphysics in general.

The debate had been around a long time, but it intensified with the changes wrought by the Renaissance, but more particularly with the new theology of the Reformation. The new individualism which lay behind Calvin's repositioning of choice and election at the centre of theological debate had its effect on communities in strange ways. The nub of the problem was that although one was elected for damnation or salvation despite whatever acts one carried out, there was still the choice of recognising God or not. With its stress on works, Calvin's and Knox's Protestantism equated material success with the outward and visible signs of election. Furphy's brother John, the successful founder of the Shepparton foundry - a pun resonant in itself, was the Methodistical embodiment of all that Joseph was not. In a letter to Stephens, Furphy openly expressed his feelings about his brother: '. . . the foundry belongs to my elder brother (retired) and my nephews. My brother is even wealthy, but without a word of a joke, he is an intolerant Conservative, an enthusiastic loyalist, a valued contributor to the War Cry, and a local preacher of eminence.'⁷ After losing his bullocks in the drought of 1883, Joseph had to swallow his pride and return to take a job as a workman in his brother's business. It was at this time that the evidence of Furphy's socialistic leanings start.

Although the family were not Presbyterians - they were Methodists, Church of Christ, and even spiritualists; it would be an unusual family from the heartland of Ulster who had not been influenced by some of Knox's teaching. Joseph himself makes sarcastic reference to Knox in his writings, and argues with Calvin's teaching of election in the third Chapter of *Such is Life*, but his attempts to purge Calvin's inheritance from his intellectual make-up were not successful. The interpolated digressions on fate, destiny, and free-will which were added to

the 1903 *Such is Life* to make up the new federation, do not diverge far from the Protestant world-view of Northern Britain.

The reason Furphy could not break from the deterministic model of man and nature had to do with the main current of European thought at the time. Marx, Thermodynamics, Darwin, vitalism in general, all used a deterministic paradigm. When Tom describes events (and thereby destiny) as a set of railway lines, and choice as the act of switching from one set of pre-determined lines to another, he is merely restating the core belief of old-fashioned Calvinism.

In Chapter Three Tom is reading Jonathan Edward's "On Redemption" a work in which the New England divine reviews world history to find examples of God's mysterious ways at work, particularly in the rise of Protestantism. Edwards concludes, as a good Calvinist should, that basically the ways of God are unknowable. Vernon Parrington, the distinguished historian of American ideas, sums up New England Calvinism of Edward's time in this way:

The natural man . . . is free to serve God as the highest good if he desires, but he lacks the desire unless God reveals himself as that highest good, and such revelation rests with God's pleasure. 'Moral responsibility lies in the choice, not the cause of the choice.'⁸

It is not hard to see the closeness of Tom's ideas, embodied in their railway analogy, to these.

Before we leave this point to develop the argument further, there is one amplification to be made. I was careful to say 'Tom's ideas', because it is Tom who speaks them. Are they necessarily Furphy's? Tom is not an ideal hero. He is opinionated, verbose, and blind to most of the subtleties of behaviour which pass before his eyes. He loses himself in

abstraction and fails to notice what is going on in the real world. Are we to take him seriously here?

The metaphor of the railway lines is introduced as a digression in the new Chapter Two just after Tom sees George Murdoch the blind swagman and decides to let him sleep until it is time for the sun-downer to turn up at Rory's hut. That is definitely Tom speaking. But the long digression on the evils of Calvinism and pre-determinism, and aspects of orthodox Christianity in Chapter Three, is actually not Tom speaking, but his pipe. I am sure that Furphy poked gentle fun at Furphy's own sententiousness and verbosity by giving this long sermon to the pipe. His interpolations at the beginning of most paragraphs ('pleaded the pipe', 'pursued the pipe, with a touch of severity', 'concluded the infatuated pipe' etc) introduces a comic touch into what should be a serious message from the author. There is great difficulty in finding out just what it is in his fictions which Furphy endorses. Tom might say many things which Furphy would have agreed with, but he says a lot which Furphy would have rejected wholeheartedly.

In the deleted sections of *Such is Life* Tom shows far more of his conservative nature than he does in the present version. (Perhaps this was one of the consequences of Furphy's trip to Sydney.) Because of these deletions I think in the present version we are unprepared for the Tom of the present Chapters Six and Seven, where Tom shows his lack of concern for others and espouses all sorts of conservative heresies.

There is a similar problem in responding to the character of Rigby. Furphy admired the character he created in Rigby, and he gave Rigby plenty of speeches which carried the socialist message which Furphy in his letters endorses. But how can we, the readers, give full support for messages of universal brotherhood and love from such a deficient and deluded being as Rigby? It is as if Furphy, unconsciously undermined the very message he wanted to communicate. It is hard to believe that such a careful writer (and reader) as Furphy should have been

blind to the deconstructive forces he had let loose in his texts - perhaps he consciously exploited them. If on the one hand he rejected austere, unjust Calvinism, on the other he constructed a system which is just that to explain how his fictions work. If on the one hand he wanted to be the apostle of socialism and his texts to show how the socialist argument was unanswerable, the very structure of the narratives undermine the message he wanted to promote. All fictions are lies, and Furphy was very conscious of that paradox in the realist novel. Perhaps he felt that by federating the various lies, a larger truth might emerge. If that sounds a trifle flippant, I shall attempt to justify it by returning to my original ground.

Furphy's nature and his fictions were divided. They reflected a nature which, while trying to see the world sternly and clearly, was equally conscious of the mirage. What Tom sees is a world of hard necessity; a black and white world of Calvinist determination in which there is no room at all for grace. That is to be supplied by socialism whenever that comes - at least that is what the pipe (or is it Tom? *SiL*, 118) argues in Chapter Three. By the end of the work I doubt that Tom even believes in that. What Tom does not see though is just as important.

The most important thing which Tom does not see is the story of Molly and Alf. It is a story of romance, endorsing the traditions of romance: fidelity, thwarted love, repentance, and the quest to bring two separated lovers together. Such plots depend on coincidence and mistaken or disguised identity. They break all the normal rules of what is likely to happen and what could happen, for they show a world of grace, not immediately apparent in the world of hard causal necessity. Tom is blind to that world, but Furphy wrote it into his fictions. He did more than that; he systematically hid it.

He took a great risk. How many readers see the hidden story unaided? But he must have felt that that risk was worthwhile, for it is that story which remained to thread itself through the newly federated parts of *Such is Life*. One of

the questions which the regular reader of *Such is Life* must ask herself (Furphy sometimes assumes that its reader is feminine⁹) is why Furphy hid so thoroughly the metaphoric world of grace under the apparent realistic non-fictions of Tom Collins? I have argued elsewhere that this world is perhaps associated with the feminine.¹⁰ It could also be in his mind the very antithesis of the deterministic world of Protestant materialism which Tom relies so heavily to make sense of events around him. It is not sufficiently articulated to be able to say that it is perhaps a gesture to the other side of the sectarian divide in Australia and Ireland at the time, but we should take into account the connection between women, their rights, their aspirations, and their effects on men as outlined by Rory O'Halloran in his sincere and moving (even for Tom) tribute to the power of the Virgin Mary. That belief sustains Rory in his bitter relationship with his Protestant Ulster wife.

There is a further problem. Once one has read a critic, or seen the hidden story oneself, subsequent readings can never create the sense of mystery in the story of Nosey Alf (Molly Cooper). The progress of reading the text from my experience as a first-time naive reader who did not see the hidden story, but rejoiced in the demotic energy of the dialogue, the crazy learning of the narrator, and the great set-pieces of humorous writing, to the informed seeker after every possible hint of meaning in the accumulated detail of the book, is informative.

In order to develop strategies to deal with the text after its secrets were revealed, I applied the techniques I had learned reading Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. To do this the reader has to pay very close attention to every detail mentioned in the work and be constantly rearranging the material into a mini-universe. A census of characters is necessary; a detailed topological guide in the form of maps and gazeteers is needed; and a list of allusions and books and authors mentioned has to be assembled. As you can see, the reader starts then to concentrate on the very realism of the text, not on its metaphorical otherness.

It is a very curious procedure if we review it. At first one believes in the hierarchies Tom has established. This is a realistic picture of the Riverina in 1883-4, and we read the work as he says he composed it - of discrete pieces which have no relation to each other. After we realise that the pieces do have secret relationships with each other, and that there are hidden stories, the hierarchy is reversed. We read now to see the metaphoric and the manifestations of the world which Tom does not see. Finally after that is exhausted, and in search of further meaning which might have escaped Tom, or more importantly, for there is plenty of evidence for this, meaning which Tom might have suppressed for his own ends, we turn back to the code of realism - people, places, dates - and start to place the bits and pieces together in an order which re-establishes the hierarchy which Tom defined in his introduction to the work. No doubt when one has established further relationships between the metonymic parts of the text, the next step is to ask what metaphoric meaning such a story or relationship might have in the overall dialectic of the work. And so the cycle starts again. The very experience of reading *Such is Life* is indeed that of dealing with a 'loose federation' in which the federated pieces slip and slide in their hierarchy, but never lose their federal identity.

One of the set piece digressions (placed in square brackets and inserted despite Tom's resolve not to digress) in the 1903 *Such is Life* occurs in the new Chapter Two, and concerns Rory and Tom - one a Catholic Irishman, the other a Protestant Irish-Australian - and the sectarian division between them. Tom's argument is simple. The division occurs not because of doctrine - there is less difference between Roman Catholic and Episcopalian teaching than there is between the latter and Presbyterianism - but because of property. The Orange Lodges, which Tom uses very bitter language to describe, were the tools of the landlords and were (are) used to foment discord between the two sects of the working population in Northern Ireland. Tom gives evidence that by the end of the eighteenth century there was considerable amity between Roman Catholic and Protestant, but intervention by the men of property destroyed

all this. Further, the tragedy is that Orangeism along with rabbits and rabies has been imported into Australia. Tom concludes his digression with a curse on both houses, and by a cunning use of allusion we may be certain that Furphy, seeing himself in a similar situation to Josephus the historian of the Jews at the time of their defeat at the hands of the Romans, concurred with Tom:

O Catholic and Protestant slaves of dogma!
Zealots, Idumæans, partisans of ye know not
what! Fools all! - whooping for your Ananus,
your John of Giscala, your Simon of Bargioras;
and fighting among yourselves, whilst the
invincible legionaries of Science advance
confidently on your polluted Temple! Small
sympathy have ye from this Josephus. (*SiL*,
74)

Part of Tom's argument for the essential unity of Ireland, is that after the first generation, the Ulster immigrants settled into the native population and were indistinguishable from them - or would have been had it not been for the agitation of the Orange Lodges. The combination of the Anglo-Saxon and the native Irish has led, in Ulster, to a breed of people combining the best of both cultures:

. . . Ulster, where the native element of the
population, oblivious to Thrift, and
instinctively loyal to anything in the shape of
supremacy, had become alloyed with an
ingredient derived from the most contumacious
brood at that time in Western Europe, namely,
the so-called Anglo-Saxon - a people
unpleasantly apt in drawing a limit-line to
aggression on its pocket, and by no means likely
to content itself with an appeal to the Saint
and the Muses. (*SiL*, 72)

So it is fitting that Rory, from Ulster Armagh, shows the presence of these qualities in his character:

Rory's character was made up of two fine elements, the poetic and the prosaic, but these were not compounded. There was a dreamy, idealistic Rory, born of a legend-loving race; and there was a painfully parsimonious Rory, trained down to the standard of a model wealth-producer. The first was of imagination all compact, living in an atmosphere of charms, fairies, poetic justice, and angelic guidance: the second was primed with homely maxims respecting the neglected value of copper currency. (*SiL*, 75)

Note the term 'not compounded' Tom has used. The relation of the two Irelands within Rory is not a compound, but a mixture, a form of federation in which the constituent parts remain distinct.

These two strands of inheritance from Ireland also correspond to the binary division of *Such is Life*: the metaphoric native Irish and the metonymic Anglo-Saxon; the superstitious and the pragmatic; the fabulous and the real; the ideal spirit and the economic reality. By combining the two in the federal structure of *Such is Life*, I think Furphy was not only solving his own personal divisions, but carrying out the purpose of the dedication of the novel "For Australia". It was his hope that a new identity might emerge from the disparate parts of the continent, in much the same way as new readings and significances emerge from federating the unit of narrative in one's mind as one reads the novel.

At the level of deeper interpretation, we might say that Furphy's desire was not so much for restitution of a broken primal union, as it was for Brennan, but a creation of something new from independent parts. In this respect the difference between them is that one looked backward to a lost Eden, and

the other looked forward to a pluralist Utopia, and perhaps that might be the difference between the Roman Catholic temperament and that of the Protestant. The surprising thing is how closely each mirrored the other's search in work written during those two decades before and after the Act of Federation on New Year's Day 1901.

1. To Stephens, 30 May 1897. Quoted in John Barnes, *The Writer in Australia*, OUP, Melbourne: 1969, 121.
2. To Winter, 23 September 1903. in John Barnes (ed.), *Joseph Furphy (Portable Australian Authors)*, UQP, Brisbane: 1981, 428.
3. To Cathels, 10 August 1897, Kate Baker Papers, National Library of Australia, 2022.5.28.
4. Joseph Furphy ("Tom Collins"), *Such is Life*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney: 1944 (1975). All subsequent quotations are from this edition.
5. To Archibald, 4 April 1897, quoted in Miles Franklin, *Joseph Furphy*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney: 1944,50.
6. To Stephens, 29 March 1901, Franklin, 66.
7. To Stephens, 30 May 1897. Barnes, *The Writer in Australia*, 121.
8. Vernon L. Parrington, *The Romantic Revolution in America*, Vol. 2 of *Main Currents in American Thought*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York: 1927, 324.
9. In Joseph Furphy, *Rigby's Romance*, Rigby, Adelaide: 1971, 40, 249, 256.
10. Julian Croft, "Who is She? The Image of Women in the Novels of Joseph Furphy," in Shirley Walker (ed.), *Who is She?* University of Queensland Press, Brisbane: 1983, 1-11.

Brennan - Viewless Winds

If we follow further the fashion for models which work on binary oppositions, there could be no greater example of polar opposites than Brennan and Furphy. While Furphy was an auto-didact, Protestant, politically aware, and a possible realist - a metonymic artist perhaps; Brennan was a Roman Catholic, highly educated and renowned for his scholarship, uninterested in politics until the Boer War and the first World War made claims on him, and a hermetic artist who worked through an arcane symbol system - an artist who tried to transcend both metonymy and metaphor to the irreducible symbol behind them. Both of them, however, shared working class origins and Irish sympathies, though Furphy was from Ulster stock, and Brennan from southern ancestry. I doubt that Furphy ever lost his faith in Christianity; but Brennan certainly did, though he returned to his church on his death-bed. Both wrote their major works during the 1890s and the first few years of the new century.

Brennan's major work is *Poems [1913]*, a collection which Brennan made long after most of the poems were written. In it he combined poems from three distinct periods of his life into five different sections. "Towards the Source 1894-97" brings together poems from his courtship in Germany of his future wife Elisabeth Werth, and his poems of longing written in Australia while he waited for her to join him. "The Forest of the Night 1898-1902" consists of poems of torment and quest during a period of domesticity - the central motif of the group is the fearsome female figure of Lilith, Adam's first wife, and the bringer of disorder and passion into the life of the family room and hearth (poems about which punctuate the sequence). This period saw Brennan's early married life and the birth of his first children, a relatively happy period according to contemporary observers. The remaining three sections, "The Wanderer 1902 - ", "Pauca Mea", and "Epilogues", show the

effect of the seductive powers of Lilith in the wanderer's dispossession from the domestic hearth, and his tortured wanderings in search of a peace which can only be found by recovering the old Eden he once had a vision of at the time of the poems of "Towards the Source". I feel *Poems [1913]* ends with an affirmation - others would disagree - with two epilogues, one written in 1897 and one in 1908. Reading them together produces, I will argue, a sense of federation and purpose in the whole work.

I used the word federation, not because Brennan took any interest that I have seen in the political events during the period of composition of most of the poems in *Poems [1913]*, but because I find no other word which can describe as accurately the structure of the whole work. I have not used the term *livre composé* which has the authority of the primary influences on Brennan, the symbolists, because that structure is synecdochic, that is, it assumes you can only understand a poem by relating it to the whole work. A federal relationship means that that the poem can stand alone, or be part of a larger structure. A poem's meaning is changed when we see it as part of a federation, but still has a meaning outside the federal relationship.

It seems particularly teasing that both Furphy and Brennan should have used such structures in their work; one self-acknowledged, the other not. Both are structures made up of seemingly unrelated bits and pieces, which confounded or misled their earliest readers. Such structures are basically metaphoric. They ask the reader to generate the connective tissue which should lie between the discrete pieces of the work. We are so used to doing this to-day that perhaps we forget how difficult it must have been for readers seventy years ago. To describe what this kind of federal unity is, I shall have to use an analogy. A motion film is made up of discrete shots, which when edited together, seem to make a logic which connects each shot with the next. The French called it montage. Many early viewers of film often found it hard to see the relationship between a series of shots, and often lost the thread of what was going on. Children, pre-TV, occasionally suffered from this

disadvantage. The same difficulty with montage is encountered in works like *Such is Life* and *Poems* [1913].

What is going on is a form of implied metaphor. The mind has to make leaps through illogicalities in order to understand how each poem is related to those around it and to the whole, in the same way as one has to put the narrative pieces together in *Such is Life* in order to make sense of the whole. Now while each poem, and each yarn, has an independent existence, just as a state has in a federation, by their coming together they make up a larger identity without compromising each unit's specific function. This is in fact how Brennan explained his kind of symbolism by a desire for Unity, a transcendent state in which Man and Nature were fused into one through the Beauty of poetry:

Shortly, then, as desired - that Beauty which poetry would achieve, is a new creation out of the old and lasting matter - Man and Nature: both being fused together in unity, that the soul may confer on outer beauty significance and in return receive, what belongs to it by right of birth, all splendour and glory - a nuptial exchange.¹

It might not be immediately clear from that, that the independent existence of the original terms are still preserved. In fact the implication seems to be that they are dissolved away in the awesome fusing Brennan is calling up. However, in the poetry at the personal level, as I will show in a minute, there is a strong and uncompromising belief in the absolute necessity for the preservation of the one's own individuality. To return to the notion of oppositions, we have another one here: a strong tugging towards dissolution in the Ultimate and the peace of an Eden unseparated from the Divine on the one hand, and on the other a fierce resistance and pull in the opposite direction toward individuation. It is not surprising then that Brennan's marriage came to grief under these intense pressures, nor that, despite his well-worked out aesthetic of his version of

symbolism, his poems should be often embarrassing failures in their attempts to evoke the ineffable and the unsayable. The corollary is that his most remembered poems are mostly those with a high content of immediate particularity.

There is one further and fundamental duality I would like to mention before I turn to a detailed consideration of some aspects of *Poems* [1913], for it is one which can be seen in all its exaggerated manifestations in Australian attitudes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and that is the duality of optimism and pessimism. We have already seen how there were two sides to Furphy's optimistic view of socialism, and we will see how the vitalistic optimism of FitzGerald became anæmic in the late 1930s and during the war. Brennan in particular shows all the volatility of a manic depressive, but he saw himself as at heart a pessimist. I have called this talk, 'viewless winds' to draw attention to this side of Brennan's nature. It is a phrase which is not used in the poetry, though 'viewless', meaning 'invisible' is far from that in the poetry - it is one of the most recurrent notes in the poetry. That is quite fitting considering Brennan's notion of the Ultimate and its manifesting symbol, the communication of which should be transparent or invisible. If the phrase does not appear in English, it does occur in the Latin epigraph to "The Wanderer" - *Atque annus peregrinationis meae / quasi annus ventorum invisibilium*. (trans: But the year of my wandering was, as it were, a year of viewless winds), and sums up much of the atmosphere of those poems. Winds, particularly winter winds, but most significantly the invisible winds of the divine, are evident throughout the sequence. But 'viewless winds'. The phrase, from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (III.i.), was used by Brennan's close friend and personal physician, H. M. Moran as the title of his memoirs, published in 1939. *Viewless Winds* tells of a similar puritan catholic childhood to Brennan's, and a successful entry through the University into the Protestant dominated profession of medicine. In his comments on various sensational medical cases, his tours as an Australian Rugby Union team member, and people known and places visited, Moran's basic puritanism and disturbance with

the human condition comes out strongly. That Moran should have chosen that phrase from the deeply pessimistic scene in *Measure for Measure*, where Claudio argues for his life with his sister, conjuring up for her the awful reality of death, and the grim and chilling 'viewless winds' which will give him no peace in death - retribution one imagines for his sinful life -

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bath in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world . . .

and that Brennan should have used the same phrase in Latin to sum up the pessimistic restlessness of his persona, the Wanderer, seems to me to indicate that their shared puritan inheritance from their Irish catholic upbringing imbued them with a deep pessimism when contemplating the human flesh; a pessimism which no amount of revelation of either the glowing radiance of the Ultimate, or the sufferings of Christ could atone for.

With so many dualities, dichotomies, polarisations, binary oppositions, it is not surprising that Brennan's poetic quest should have been for an articulation of a unity which he glimpsed as an Ultimate or Absolute in his Master of Arts' thesis "The Metaphysic of Nescience" in 1891. When Brennan came upon Mallarmé's poetry and the aesthetic of symbolism in Berlin in 1892-3, the way was prepared for the articulation of that vision in a series of poems. The years from 1900 to 1913 were a slow accretion of more poems and the federating process of bringing them together in 1913.

Federation itself is not a desire for union, but a coming together of different individual states in a loose combination

which preserves the individuality of each component part. Federation was an apt term for Furphy to use to describe his collection of yarns and the deep structure which he sensed lay behind them.

In Christopher Brennan's case the desire was similar, but the difficulty was different. The desire: a yearning to bring back into a unity the disparate parts of his longings - a return, as some commentators have suggested, to the certainties of his childhood's faith. The problem was a simple one: the adult body. How to integrate the male experience of sexuality, with the spiritual yearnings of the soul; how to mediate between the horns of the oldest male dilemma when dealing with the female sex - the saint and the witch, the madonna and the whore.

The poems which Brennan wrote out of his struggle, and which he then rearranged, changed, and added to over a long period, not to make a 'loose' federation of parts, but to achieve some mystical aesthetic unity, were all concerned with the erotic in both its destructive and domestic (constructive) manifestations. It is an old pattern which dates back to *Gilgamesh*, the first epic to survive from ancient times, which contrasts the safety of sedentary life and domestic sexuality, with the dangers of the forest and unbridled sexuality, as experienced by the wandering hero.²

There are doubts among commentators as to whether the work published as *Poems [1913]* and consisting of three separate and dated sections: "Towards the Source" 1894-97; "The Forest of the Night" 1898-1902; and "The Wanderer" 1902-, are an organic unity (Wilkes)³ or a collection of discrete poems with tenuous links (Stewart)⁴. As I have already indicated I am inclined to read them in the light of Brennan's evident desire to integrate them - whether he succeeded or not. In doing so I would not follow Wilkes to the end of his argument that the collection exhibits that sense of organic unity which Coleridge and the New Critics looked for so carefully in works of art; but neither would I side with Stewart in claiming there is a

disunity. If this sounds like having two-bob each way, then perhaps it is. I think, though, that I see something different in the collection/s, and I have to return to my basic metaphor of federation to explain it.

Organicism postulates a teleological process. The oak tree grows to a pre-determined design within the acorn, changed and distorted by the conditions which surround its growth; nevertheless it remains an oak tree not a gum. Unity exists in such products because of the pre-determined state of vital nature. Federations have no such unity; they are conglomerations of various units which are self-contained and have their own individual organic systems. They band together for mutual benefit. Such systems are often seen in the natural world in symbiotic relationships and complex ecological systems. If *Poems [1913]* is anything, it seems to me it is a federation of groups of poems which share dependent relationships. Whether the resulting Federation has an identity of its own is another question. And it was a political question which was being often asked in Australia at the time these poems were composed, and one which was not answered until the twenty-fifth of April 1915.

It is my opinion, however, that *Poems [1913]* does have a federal identity, tentative, often hidden, but clearly seen in the latter sections of "The Wanderer" and in the 1908 "Epilogue". That identity is one of acceptance and a restatement of faith: in the former case where The Wanderer knows that there is an untouchable part of him in which faith dwells:

... and saying this to myself as a simple thing
I feel a peace fall in the heart of the winds
and a clear dusk settle, somewhere, far in me.
("The Wanderer, 99")⁵

and in the latter where the Wanderer realises in the middle of the poem that his final goal is his own soul:

So from beneath that choiring tent [the church]
I stepp'd, and tho' my spirit's bent
was dark to me as yet, I sought
a sphere appeas'd and undistraught;
and found viaticum and goal
in that hard atom of the soul,
that final grain of deathless mind,
which Satan's watch-fiends shall not find
nor the seven mills of darkness bruise,
for all permission to abuse . . .;

("Epilogue, 1908", 105)

and finally at the end of that poem, and the collection of *Poems [1913]* as a whole, Brennan pledges his faith to that soul, rejecting the despair of Baudelaire's 'foul city' and Brennan's own failures in the church (one spire), and at the university (the other):

. . . and many an evening hour shall bring
the dark crowd's dreary loitering
to me who pass and see the tale
of all my striving, bliss or bale,
dated from either spire that strives
clear of the shoal of shiftless lives,
and promise, in all years' despite,
fidelity to old delight.

("Epilogue, 1908", 105)

It might be argued that both these poems are late additions to the collection, and were written by Brennan to cast a procrustean sheet over his collection of uneasy bed-fellows. Perhaps. But Brennan has also printed at the end of *Poems [1913]* another "Epilogue" which he dates as 1897, and has invited us to see the two, one from his earlier phase and one from the later, as a federated conclusion to the whole work.

What then are the differences and the similarities between Epilogues 1897 and 1908? The differences are immediate. In 1897 the images are taken from the natural world - the glacial

Hyperborea of Europe perhaps - and the giant deities of ancient myths - night is a naked woman with, surprisingly, blonde hair; while in 1908 the city streets of Sydney, garishly illuminated by recently introduced electricity and swept by winter winds, are the setting. The persona of 1897 is an active adventurer, climbing the metaphysical peaks of eternity empowered by total self-confidence; that of 1908, an ageing passenger in a droning tram, carried passively through late-night throngs of the city poor seeking out in company some respite from their poverty. The verse, too, moves in diametrically opposite ways. That of 1897 is written in lyrical stanzas which are, for Brennan, surprisingly graceful examples of alternating four and three stress lines; while 1908 invokes in its movement late Milton, perhaps *Samson Agonistes* which Brennan admired from his very early youth, but carries in it also the prosy rhythms of the twentieth century - despite its awkward rhyming tetrameter. Those are the differences; and they are substantial - as different as Queensland and Tasmania perhaps.

But there are similarities: a similarity of purpose in ideas and a similarity of rhetorical movement.

In their treatment of ideas the two poems are designed to make a compact with each other. The end of 1908 is an evocation of the search for Eden which the persona of *Poems [1913]* has struggled towards through forest, desert, icy wastes, the streets of Sydney and three separate poem sequences; and it is a stirring statement that Eden still remains within us. But what is Eden? There are many interpretations; the Ultimate Symbol being the most inclusive. It surely must have been part of his plan for the volume as a whole, that in bringing together the two Epilogues he would answer the question of Eden. The conclusions of the two poems ask to be brought together, and if we do, then there seems to be a simple answer.

The search of the 1897 Epilogue is carried on within the persona. The famous opening stanza with its hint of the impossibility of even writing of such things sets the scene:

Deep in my hidden country stands a peak,
and none hath know its name
and none, save I, hath even skill to seek:
thence my wild spirit came.

("Epilogue, 1897", 104)

To that peak the poet turns when the quotidian gets too much, and there he finds, as Keats did, with his visions in the first version of "Hyperion", the overwhelming presence of an erotic female figure who puts the poet in contact with the divine. The message is simple. Only through self, and inward journeying, can one find God, can one find the unity and peace of Eden. The poet must at all times be capable of looking inward and of finding the unity within himself - that is where Eden is, and where both Eve and Lilith look at themselves in those pools 'of clearest blue, / glad wells of simple sooth' ("Epilogue, 1897", 104). If Eden and God are within himself, it is not surprising that Brennan felt that by combining these two poems as his coda to the whole work, he would give the work a sense of wholeness. That wholeness is not one of an organic unity, though; it is rather the federation of disparate elements under a loose regime. That regime is the poet's ego.

Both poems have the same rhetorical structure. They show a search, a questioning, and then a resolve to celebrate after the search has revealed that irreducible ultimate. Despite obvious differences in style - a Miltonic vocabulary and Keatsian rapture in the first, and a flat descriptive prosiness in the second - both poems use the structure of the quest: one eastward towards life and a dawn-like radiance, the other westward towards old-age and death. The quest is differently realised in each. In 1897 the adventurer 'turns' inward to his solitary peak, away from the 'garish world' ; in 1908 there is no sense of will or control - the wanderer is in a tram, its pre-determined track 'swings' him westward through that same garish world. In both poems the questers have found their homes: the 'topmost height' in 1897, and on the inside of a window (portable and changing in view, for it is in a tram) in 1908.

Throughout the three sequences, Brennan has used the window as a symbol of estrangement, a focus for the feelings of exclusion felt so strongly by the Wanderer. At last in 1908, we find him on the right side of the window, but it is not a window of a room close to the domestic hearth, instead it is a compartment which progresses fixedly past the sights and sounds of his youth. The rhetoric of the quest continues, but the poet is no longer in control, and Eden recedes. All he can do is to promise to be true to the glimpse he once had of it, and, like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, bless the wretched and their narrow lives.

If there is a basic metaphor, or symbol, which can unlock the collection as a whole, it is not Eden specifically, as Wilkes suggests - but a variant of the *hortus conclusus*, the suburban room with a window. In 1897 the journey looks inward into the soul and arrives at the top of the solitary peak of individuality confronted by a great flood of intoxicating and divine light. In 1908 the tram's window reveals the nature of ordinary human life, and forces the poet to look inward again, this time to his childhood's Christian faith and the church itself, to a vision of the lazar-pit of lost and tortured souls on which the church rests, and finally a reaffirmation of the sanctity of the memory of Eden and its nuptial bliss. The poem ends with the explicit affirmation of the poet's faith, not only in poetry, but in the unity of the Edenic vision; faith to the old prelapsarian delight we experienced in our relation with God before the primal unity was broken. The last section of the poem unites both the inward looking to the soul, and the outward looking through the tram window. The pilgrim's search for his soul finds it in a shell, the traditional scallop shell of the pilgrim, and opening that shell with the 'lucid diamond-probe of thought' reveals the pearl of Eden. The poet imagines himself and the crowd at some time in the future as 'orbed' in the translucent unity of the pearl, but until then his view on similar evenings as he is transported passively through life, watching it through a window, will be imbued with faith - 'fidelity to old delight'.

Thus the end of 1908, the reference to 'old delight' is explicable in terms of the old delight of 1897, that is, an uncompromising sense of self, which is in turn dedicated to God whose radiance is seen in the glowing pearl of Eden.

Those of Brennan's friends who were surprised, and repelled, by his death-bed reversion to the church in 1932 should not have been. The cross on his door had been made by himself, and not the angel as it had for Rilke, many years before in 1913 when he concluded his major work in such a way. The similarities in the two "Epilogues" are produced by faith: faith in an irreducible and immarcescible (one of Brennan's favourite words) unit of identity, which he was not afraid to call his soul.

I said earlier that a federation was a collection of individual units which came together for mutual benefit. I have attempted to show that Brennan in his use of the epilogues to *Poems [1913]* tried to bring together the two periods of his art: early Edenic seeking and hopefulness and later wandering disillusionment; and the two views from and of his psyche: seeking God within, seeing purposelessness without. I would now like to look briefly at the constituent parts of the whole federation to see what centripetal and centrifugal forces are there.

First the centripetal. These are all variations of the *hortus conclusus*, the enclosed garden which was representative of Eden in Medieval times. This motif appears in images of pastoral and lyrical landscapes of love, with imagery drawn from classical poetry. These are the landscapes of the bounded and the domesticated - nature methodised as Pope in another age called it: the meadows, woodlands, and plantations which Brennan uses in "Towards the Source" especially. We find them contrasted with city-scapes, where idealised reality does not exist. In the city we have images of unlit hearths, dead churches, corrupted seas all caused by the diseased hearts of human beings. Flood and fire are the only salvation of that world. The centripetal force is love, particularly domestic love. The final poem of "Towards the Source" gathers together these

images of the enclosed landscape and the love of the wife at the centre of the *hortus conclusus*:

*The winter eve is clear and chill:
the world of air is folded still;
the quiet hour expects the moon;
and yon my home awaits me soon
behind the panes that come and go
with dusk and firelight wavering low:
and I must bid the prompting cease
that bids me, in this charmed peace,
- as tho' the hour would last my will -
follow the roads and follow still
the dream that holds my heart in trance
and lures it to the fabled chance
to find, beyond these evening ways,
the morning and the woodland days
and meadows clear with gold, and you -
as once, ere I might dare to woo.*

("Towards the Source", 30)

Against this are arrayed the centrifugal forces of the winds which start to blow in "The Forest of the Night" and rage around that lonely peak of the poet's soul. The sub-section "Twilight of Disquietude" opens with a poem which painfully shows the poet's divided mind: there is the peace of the domestic hearth, but there is also the beckoning attractions of distant stars, high winds and adventure. He decides not to risk the journey (at this point) because of the dangers to home and peace, in case, as he depicts, he return and find the *hortus conclusus* destroyed:

- No roof-tree join'd the unfinish'd walls;
no lamp might shine, nor hearth-fire burn:
only the wind - the wind that calls -
may sing me welcome . . . who return.

("The Twilight of Disquietude", 35)

The landscapes now are quite different. When the poet does leave the hearth for that land outside the casement, it is into savage lands: icy wastes, level deserts, wild forests, and the luxuriant tropical eroticism of a new kind Eden - one under the dominion of the serpent-female Lilith. There he is inducted into knowledge which is to haunt him long after his nuptial with his Eve in the true Garden. That knowledge is what disturbs and makes him restless. It is blasphemous thought based on logic, not faith. Such thought is the engine of wars and disputes which will plague man, and which will strip away faith and leave Man destitute, blown hither and thither by viewless winds, until he becomes the Wanderer, his centre lost, no longer holding to a true course. It is a typically nineteenth-century message: the loss of faith, the erosion of belief by science, and the contamination of the ideal by the dread and fear brought about by too much reliance on human thought - the sin of pride. As Lilith exults to the poet:

I, Lilith, on his tomb immensely throned,
with viewless face and viewless vans outspread;
in the wide waste of his unhallow'd work,
calm coils of fear, my serpent-brood hall lurk;
and I shall muse above the little dust
that was the flesh that held my word in trust.
("Lilith", 8)

Now outside the window and the casement, the Wanderer in his despair looks into the hearth-rooms of the settled, conscious of the peace he has given up in leaving Eden, until at the end of that section, still fighting the influence of Lilith, he realises that if he is to find peace it will be through an acceptance of the wind and his dislocated life. That peace, however, is evanescent.

"Pauca Mea", poems written in the depths of his marital troubles, ends with a poem written in the same year as the 1908 "Epilogue" and shows the same resolve. He must escape the crushing misery of the 'dismal room' and find the freedom of the 'mother-night'. Out on the beach he sees the stars, and through

the roar of the surf he hears the 'heroic note of living will'. An act of will will free him from earthly cares to join the stars 'breaking the elder dark'. It is Lilith's temptation again. The exercise of human will and revolt, to 'speed beyond each tramelling gyre' until things fall apart:

and all my soul sprang up to feel
as one among the stars that reel
in rhyme on their rejoicing way,
braking the elder dark, nor stay
but speed beyond each tramelling gyre,
till time and sorrow fall away
and night be wither'd up, and fire
consume the sickness of desire.

("Pauca Mea", 103)

As we have seen in the "Epilogue 1908", this revolt has been put behind him. Instead he is the passive passenger, his will bound to the pre-ordained evolution of his life. Acceptance and faith have returned after this last flirtation with the temptations of Lilith. The tram drones westward, but the poet within submits to his fate, for he knows within himself is that core of identity, his soul: the pearl of Eden whose elusive light has driven his poetry over the years.

What the federation of the parts of *Poems [1913]* means to me is a treatment of faith - of whether, as we have seen in Furphy and as we are to see in FitzGerald, we should keep with the pessimistic 'heat-death' mechanistic view of the universe which haunted the late nineteenth century, and lies, I suspect, behind Lilith's temptations, and which 'Symbolism' (see Brennan's prose) was a reaction against; or believe in a transcendent metaphysical reality which is essentially optimistic. Brennan's cultivation of the pessimistic but his stubborn clutching to his intuitive belief that there was slow human progress toward unifying 'fact' and 'idea', of healing the rift brought about by Cartesian dualism, saw pendulum-like swings between a materialist pessimism and a tantalising vision of an 'Eden' of Absolutes, the latter producing a rush of

blood to the organ most responsible for his occasional outbursts of romantic optimism, his pen.

Faith in absolutes for Brennan located itself in sex and art: his shining lights were first of all his wife, and then his poetic mentor, Mallarmé. Both, one in the erotic realm, the other in art, promised a new unity out of the fragmented experience of life, a foretaste of a state where 'thought would be like a quivering flame, inseparable from sense, emotion, and imagination.'⁶ "Towards the Source" describes the former, while the dedicatory poem to Mallarmé at the beginning of "The Forest of the Night" describes the latter. Brennan was not able to achieve this sense of unity in thought. Too often sordid materialism pulled him down - down to the gutter in some cases.

The Protestant establishment of Sydney University could not understand Brennan's single-minded pursuit of the ideal. When he found resonances of it in Vi Singer and fell in love with all the fervour that he felt as an adolescent for the church, he was pilloried and persecuted. After her death, his mind, not overly concerned with physical, retreated into the metaphysical leaving his grossness to be observed by everyone. Cast out of Eden and unable to return, Brennan lived on until the 1930s, a shocking example of the delusion of the ideal in an age wedded to realism, but his sense of the Absolute did not desert him. He returned to the church in his last hours, and his style based on a symbolism which was to unite the warring parts of his own desires (and those of the nation) passed on to a poet far removed from Brennan's background, but sharing like him, the essentially Irish belief that the metaphysical was more important than Protestant materialism. That poet is my next subject: R. D. FitzGerald.

1. A.R. Chisholm and J.J. Quinn (eds), *The Prose of Christopher Brennan*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney: 1962, 190.
2. *Gilgamesh* combines two views of the city and the country. For Gilgamesh himself the forest is a place of extreme danger and so is the goddess of love, Ishtar, while for his companion, the wild man Enkidu, the city is a place of licence and destruction.
3. G. A Wilkes, "New Perspectives on Brennan's Poetry, I-V", *Southerly*, XIII (1952), 10-21, 86-96, 138-49, 203-14; XIV (1953), 160-71.
4. A. M. Stewart, "Christopher Brennan: The Disunity of *Poems [1913]*", *Meanjin*, 3 (1970), 281-302.
5. All quotations are from A. R. Chisholm and J. J. Quinn, *The Verse of Christopher Brennan*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney: 1960, and use that edition's title and number system.
6. *The Prose of Christopher Brennan*, "Fact and Idea", 11.

Robert D. FitzGerald - Winds Across the Face of the Waters

Did Australian intellectual life immediately after World War One suffer the sea-change which was so dramatically evident, at least in hindsight, in Europe? It is fashionable to say that it did not, and that there was a time lag of (fill in whatever number suits your prejudice) years before the new styles and attitudes of the post-war world were seen in Australian literature. Prejudice, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

As in Britain, so in Australia. If you looked in the right places in Britain at that time you would find unreconstructed Georgians still at work - and certainly they dominated the mass of publication in volumes in the 1920s; but if you looked at the *The Calendar of Modern Letters*, co-edited by an unjustly neglected Australian poet, Bertram Higgins, or Eliot's *Criterion* you would see the new. If you were a reader in Australia and followed the *Bulletin*, or the more up-market *Lone Hand* (filled with Zora Cross's love poems and McKee Wright's celtic twilight), you would think that 1890s nationalism and its forms, the ballad and narrative poems in light verse metres, were still the order of the day. If you read *Art in Australia* or the University literary magazines you would see versions of Australian Georgianism - but you would also see in those same magazines something of the new: the influence of the Americans, Carl Sandburg for example; the results of Brennan's proselytising of symbolism; the newly-arrived cult of Imagism; and a certain world-weary *ennui* creeping into Australian poetry.

There were significant reactions in Australia against the spread of Modernism, and by Modernism I mean free verse, cultivation of the ugly and the quotidian, lyrics depicting interior states, and self-referential allusions incorporating mythic and anthropological dimensions. The reaction came

from some very powerful cultural heroes. Norman Lindsay in particular.

Before I pass on to Lindsay I would like to make the point that Australia was not unusual in this reaction against Modernism. In Britain in the fields of Art, Music, and Literature there was considerable popular resistance to the new. Often it took the same form as was seen in Australia: Modernism was cosmopolitanism - Jewish taste and money polluting the pure well of national identity (think of the debates in *Howard's End*, or in *Lucinda Brayford* on this matter); it was retreat to barbarity and primitivism; it was sex and filth; and it was an abandonment of three thousand years of cultural standards.

Lindsay's influence on the young poets of Sydney in the years after the publication of Brennan's *Poems* [1913] was profound. Both Slessor and FitzGerald wrote their early poetry to Lindsay's programme. The difference between these poets and those in Melbourne removed from Lindsay's influence is quite striking. Frank Wilmot ('Furnley Maurice') and Bertram Higgins responded quickly to the new examples coming from Europe and the United States, while in Sydney, both Slessor and FitzGerald produced poems which echoed Lindsay's demands for craft, pursuit of the ideals of the past, and his compelling aesthetic compounded from Nietzsche and nineteenth-century vitalism. Slessor's poems of the 1920s are quite Parnassian in their elegance and imagery, while FitzGerald, as Wilkes noted many years ago, instinctively chose the metaphysical line articulated by Brennan in his experiments with Symbolism.

The metaphysical certainly dominates FitzGerald's work in the 1920s, so much so, that his first major work, written after the death of his mother, was published in 1927 as *The Greater Apollo - Seven Metaphysical Songs*. The imagery, following Lindsay's teaching, is concrete and precise, but it is used to deal with abstractions which conjure up Brennan's grappling with the Absolute. In the case of FitzGerald's poems, the Absolute is

Time: a common theme in the 1920s and 1930s following on the radical changes in physics after Einstein, and the popularity of the theories of Bergson and Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*.

The metrics, too, are familiarly Brennan's in their slavish attention to regularity, proper rhymes, and four-square academic correctness.¹ In the same way, FitzGerald took this aspect of composition very seriously. In fact in 1930 FitzGerald wrote on the versification of "The Wanderer" and his comments were taken up by Brennan in a letter to Richard Pennington.² We can see from FitzGerald's published criticism that he judged his fellow poets as much by their craftsmanship as by what they had to say, and in doing so he followed Brennan who quotes William James with approval that 'the true artist and philosopher is more interested in methods than in results'.³ Which is not so surprising given that Brennan's search for that immarcescible Eden was impossible and he knew it.

A similar search for an Absolute, to be found in the vitalistic energies in the natural world around us, was the programme FitzGerald set for himself. It first gained dramatic expression in his poem "The Sea-Eagles" of 1927, where the eagles are seen as the embodiment of survival in the flux of time - the very spirit of the life-force. Life for the young FitzGerald was striving and action, the heroic in both the individual and the nation, and it is the symbol of the sea-eagle he uses to combine both the metaphysical and the national:

The eagles wait for ever over the wavering coastline
because this place,
being not land nor air nor deep sea-water,
is still their home in uncreated space;
and they, still wheeling, still the same untroubled
warders of chaos, guardians of the dawn,
watch for the moment when the dark shall swallow
the crowding worlds that once it sowed like spawn.

... Lungs that were ours draw quickened breath.

Our visions have not dulled to death
but, from live hearts that yet beat on,
they swerve like eagle-flights across
arches of sky where time's at loss
to sever now from nows long gone
or sift tomorrow's multitude
from what was our barbaric brood -
its flourish of spears and throb of drums.

("The Sea-Eagles")⁴

The mood of Australian nationalism changed in the 1930s, as it did over much of the world. The growth of totalitarian states, the effects of the Depression, and, in Australia, the approach of the Sesqui-centennial produced a state-based nationalism, quite different from that of the 1890s.

In the 1890s the Australia to which Furphy dedicated his novel did not exist - it was an idea. By the 1930s Australia was a reality and in its fourth decade as a Federated nation. It had been to war, successfully in its own eyes, prospered and gone broke. 1890s nationalism was allegiance to a nation based on ideology - mainly socialistic. Nationalism in the 1930s was different manifestation. It took as its model the notion of state-directed progress for the middle-class. Its heroes were those figures enshrined in the school text books, the explorers: heroic individuals who had tamed a continent to the will of the white Australian people. That the explorers, and the early colonial administrations - gallant Phillip, honest Hunter *et al* - were the heroes in this vision of Australia was not surprising. It was through them and their agents that property had been secured in Australia. Where Furphy had shown the evils of the expropriation of land by squatters, and Brennan the folly of Empire at the time of the Boer War, the 1930s took over the Imperial myths of *pax britannica* explorers and warrior heroes (Brennan had a hand in this in his *Chant of Doom*, 1918), and turned it into a hagiolatry of white explorers as embodying the right combination of vitality and daring to be models for a coming generation of nation-builders.

Already in "The Sea-Eagles", we can see FitzGerald's metaphysical interests being turned toward the larger, more heroic, and more realist theme of nationalism. This could be in part, poetry's response to the growing influence of realism in literature throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, and a consequent attempt by FitzGerald to apply his metaphysical visions to some practical end. Where the implied metaphor in Furphy's and Brennan's work in 1890s could be seen as federation, the implied metaphor in FitzGerald's work up to the second world war might be called organic nationalism: that is, not a federation, but a unity of purpose produced from the vitalist blue-print of the state. These were not unusual ideas at the time; extreme forms could be found in Germany and Italy, but they were also present in the United States in the New Deal under Roosevelt.

The most obvious expression of this metaphor (obvious but not simple), is in FitzGerald's greatest poem of the 1930s, "The Hidden Bole". The poem was started in the early 'thirties while FitzGerald was in Fiji, and finished in one form back in Australia while he was on sick leave. According to the poet it did not achieve its final form until 1938, and was published in book form in *Moonlight Acre* in the same year. It is truly a product of that 'low dishonest decade' which moved Auden to despair in 1939.

The subject of the poem is Beauty and Time. The immediate motive for its writing was the death of the dancer Pavlova who had toured Australia in 1926 and whose famous rendition of the lead rôle in the ballet *Giselle* was obviously well-remembered by FitzGerald. The basic metaphor of the poem, and the point of the title, is the Banyan tree. This tree, which FitzGerald would have seen by the hundreds in Fiji, has no central bole. It propagates itself by parasitising a host tree and then sending aerial roots from its growing point to the ground. Once established it chokes its host and develops into a thicket of roots, none of which could be seen as the central growing point of the tree. Nevertheless it is a single organic unit. This puzzle of where in the multiplicity of tree trunks lies the organic

centre of the tree was the vehicle FitzGerald used to make his metaphor that the central vitalistic impulse in life is equally hidden, but gains manifestations in shoots and leaves, transient and beautiful, in the same way as Pavlova's life and dancing were.

The poem is a long essay on time, purpose, and beauty in some ways similar to Brennan's thoughts in "The Wanderer", though FitzGerald's verse is stanzaic and handled with a grace and skill which sees him rising above his often finger-tapping regularity.

In the poem FitzGerald reviews various theories concerning the nature of time, and then the substance of Beauty. Is it instinctive in humans to seek it out? Is Beauty a Platonic essence? Is it a good or a possible evil? Is it a product of nature, or is it only resident in the human mind? What is the purpose of Beauty and mankind in the vast impersonal forces which make up the universe? This last question emerges at the centre of the poem, perhaps mimicing the search for the central bole of the banyan tree itself, and the answers take the poem in a new direction. The argument now turns to the organic nationalist metaphor. What is the provenance of Australia in this system? How secure are we as a nation? What does the future hold? There are no reassuring answers; in fact FitzGerald's vision of the future for Australia, if not bleak, is not very positive. His main recommendation is one of *carpe diem* and to be prepared for a decline which has been the fate of many other nations and empires:

And when hid workings of commingled tides,
conspiracy of current, wind and swell,
cast on the shores of consciousness some shell
from the unknown, uncomprehended deep;
or chance, or cosmic will, or what besides,
pricks a revealed, mapped atoll on time's chart
upflung as Buonaparte;
these also, struggle spares not. Storms will sweep
reinlessly on - till ripples, feeble, spent,

lap at one grain their might had once far-hurled,
which silts Atlantis a new continent
in the last thundering quarter of the world.

Into whose hands will float the ripe tomorrow?
This drift sets to no beacon, wavers, is vague:
ice brought our dominance; and quake or plague
might well supplant us with the developed bat,
give bees inheritance of our masque of sorrow.
Nor needs it judgement of volcanic hail
to make our weakness fail:
nature could tip her balance with a gnat -
could, for all's strange, even save her elder whelp,
granting, when hordes and famines overrun,
unlikely leads - say, dark infusion or help
from those by-tribes now lagging long in the sun

We ask no more than let our joy be frail,
since its whole wisdom is its passing hence;
nor would we stamp on you the permanence
which, only, is death. Ay, roots of a new growth
strangle the column in the woods, impale
crevices of old carvings, lion-headed,
which are moss-embedded
dreams of dead chiselling hands; and out of both -
from the dead hands and that they sought to freeze
static in stone - the contending jungle twines,
through whose thick ferment every fresh dawn sees
your flowers that flourish - to flutter from the vines.
("The Hidden Bole")

Individuality cannot be held in the long term - as Keynes said from the depths of Carlyle's dismal science, 'in the long run we are all dead'. The economic depression of the 1930s (which ruined FitzGerald's private practice) and its effect of FitzGerald's innate optimism are all evident in this poem, where individual striving has to be given over to the direction of the vitalist principle. The life-force is what decides the destiny of individuals and nations, not the will alone. It was an

issue which Judith Wright would take up again, especially from a woman's point of view, in the 1950s.

FitzGerald's extended meditation on the nature of time in a universe which no longer ran on Newton's clock-work, and in a world where economic laws seemed also very relative, ends with an acceptance of transience and of the triumph of human thought in the form of memory. Pavlova is dead and her art, based as it was on ephemeral performance is now doubly lost; yet there is memory, a faculty which could not exist without time. Thought and poetry can use time for its own ends, and the nation can survive in the organic memory of its people. As another poem of the mid-1930s ended: ' . . .so Cook sailed westabout, / So men write poems in Australia.' FitzGerald, unlike Slessor in the mid-'thirties, was more concerned at the end of his "Hidden Bole" to make his point that ideas can be made in fact by poetry (The same point was made by Brennan in his "Fact and Idea" in 1898 and developed at length by FitzGerald in his lecture "Poetry's Approach to Reality" in 1959.):

Only one age could reach her, being stacked
on the thick labour of piled other ages:
only one page among time's handwrit pages
could find context, turn of phrase, wise word,
to form her sentence, rhyme her into fact.
So does she crown our thought, all thought involve -
as all sweet tones resolve
into the twilight chiming of a bird.
Fade twilight; bird give over: the immense
murmur of night halts at your edge of,air -
I praise your triumph for its transience,
that the notes pass and fair dies into.fair.
("The Hidden Bole")

As the economy recovered and the sesqui-centennial approached FitzGerald turned his attention to a poem which he had begun while he was in Fiji but which he finished off when he returned to Australia permanently in 1936. The poem

was a long Essay in the form of the verse essay of the eighteenth-century, but not in heroic couplets, and its subject was memory. It picks up the theme introduced at the end of "The Hidden Bole", and develops it in a much more self-consciously nationalistic way. It seems to me at times to be the poetic equivalent of Norman Lindsay's picture of heroic Australian nationalism in 1933 "Apollo's Vanguard"⁵ and to have some of the same striving and vulgarly dramatic tone about it.

You might notice in Lindsay's picture how the artist has gone to great pains to impose a thrusting-upward composition on the discrete elements in the work, as if there were an organic unity arising from Apollo himself, who though totally and unrecognisably Australian is somehow part of the thrusting mass of representatives of Australian white male civilisation. As much as Lindsay might have wanted to believe that this was the case, his abilities as an illustrator have overcome his capacity as a painter in this work. The individuals may have life; the whole mass does not. There is no sense of unity produced by a national identity founded on the radiant but lifeless figure of the sun God.

Something of the same kind has happened to the "Essay on Memory". No matter how much rhetorical pressure the poet puts into his nationalistic peroration at the end of the poem, the ideas are not made fact:

We'll slit gloom's gullet, oracling defeat,
and crack great barrels of song in open street,
free for the drinking. We'll make fabulous
this world, in honour of them who gave it us,
not just the Nelsons, Newtons, of our race,
the Phillips grounding at a landing-place
continent-wide, but all whom violence.of mind,
violence of action, gave such singleness
that if they did but grow, ambitionless
except to live in the sun, they served their kind
with that straight growth of will which bears for seed

zest to create; which, grasping at blind air,
graves flowers from veriest nothing and makes fair
all that we have. Theirs was that splendid greed,
hewer of men and vineyards, nation-maker,
destroyer of hate and weakness, tyrant-breaker,
whose slow attrition, whetstone of advance,
grinds laws, arts, customs, from steel circumstance.

("Essay on Memory")

The sense of material progress, the political agenda from the end of the 1930s until the late 1970s, and the metaphor of a vitalist upward growth toward some counsel of political and economic perfection, the propaganda beloved of Australian government from the time of post-war reconstruction until the Whitlam government of 1972, are present in both Lindsay's picture and this section of the "Essay on Memory". In fact they are gathered together in the penultimate section of the "Essay" when FitzGerald, like Slessor before him, felt that to betray the manifest destiny of white civilisation in Australia would be to betray the whole sense of progress in mankind:

Whatever the task, it lies in front: we must
build upward though we guess not to what skies,
and though the eruptive Babels that we thrust
vital in air will fritter back to dust;
else we betray the lamp behind our eyes,
the quickening in our veins, both held in trust
since long before the scumming of the germ
upon first seas. We will serve out our term:
not yet the impetus flags whose course began
when at the blank mouth of our stinking lair
we saw night's infinite curtain shake with grey,
and so went forth determined to be Man,
standing at last erect, and watched new day
wrap back the dark and strip the valley bare.

("Essay on Memory")

Even the prospect of a future state of Australia as the deserts of Ozymandias could not defeat FitzGerald's vitalist optimism

based on the capacity of memory to control time. There is no need to look on the decay of human works and despair, FitzGerald argues, for there will always be memory and action so long as the human spirit remains unbowed. "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself" was the economic message of President Roosevelt at the time of Lindsay's "Apollo's Vanguard" in 1933, and it was one which was endorsed at the time by FitzGerald in the concluding lines of his tribute to the organic nationalism of the sesqui-centenary. That optimism and those beliefs were to be profoundly shaken in the matter of only a few years:

So, should our best work fail us, walls we planned
stifle in years blown over fine like sand,
or life itself reach gulfs and lorn extremes -
even some crag of ending - where bled dreams
kite in the wind weightless and the past
unclaws our very world, lets go at last,
but still remains, being Memory, one live link
of gone with all-to-come, and from the brink
peers out beyond; then, launched above that steep,
venture shall cant bold wings and with their sweep
splinter such clogging silence as they met
in older abyss where time slept stirless yet.
("Essay on Memory")

The years from 1941 to 1944 were probably the most critical for the survival of Anglo-Celtic Australia since the time between the first settlement and the arrival of the second fleet. It was also during this period that FitzGerald's father died. Perhaps the combination of national calamity and personal loss took the edge off the optimism of the 'thirties. Something deep-seated certainly happened to the poet, for not only did his attitude change, but his style did as well. His major work of these years is his daunting treatment of the first verse of the book of *Genesis*, "The Face of the Waters". It is a complicated retelling of the creation myth within the terms of modern physics, specifically Alfred North Whitehead's ideas about time. But it also shows a deep pessimism and a turning away

(at least until the final section of the poem) from the organic nationalism of the 1930s, and it could possibly be seen as a precursor for his more radical positions of the 1960s: his opposition to Australia's involvement in Vietnam, and his support for the Republican cause in Ireland.

"The Face of the Waters" seems to be a development of some of the fears of "The Hidden Bole" and the "Essay on Memory": of what happens after individual death and after the decay of empires. The model we are given at the beginning of the poem is one of *l'éternel retour*, a cyclic process of growth, migration, and collapse somewhat like the yugas and mahayugas of Hindu cosmology. It also the model that Whitehead proposes for each instant of time: an actualising in each instant of one possibility out of many potentialities; the unrealised potentialities returning to a pool to be faced with possible actualisation in the next instant.

If Brennan was never able to articulate the full radiance of Eden, FitzGerald had no inhibitions in searching out the proper concrete images to convey the moment of creation. This is not symbolism, but the vivid translation of the metaphysical into the physical through the power of poetry to evoke something from our experience of material reality and invest it with aura of ideas, a programme which FitzGerald described in 1959 in "Poetry's Approach to Reality". The landscapes of FitzGerald's vision are not those that Brennan used, settings which he had inherited from Milton, but those an austere twentieth-century cosmology of reflexive and infinitely recessive forces and powers.

The poem starts and ends with an easily realised particularity: at the beginning, migration in the form of escaping insects, collected and put back at that beginning by the hand of much greater powers; and at the end in the image of the egg-shell as the instant collapsing under the inwards directed pressure of process, and breaking outward under the pressure of life escaping from within.

Unlike Brennan's, this poem is not a search for meaning within the individual, but a search for meaning and purpose in the structure of the universe itself. Its initial tone is quite pessimistic and the images and ideas thrown at us are very frightening. Here is a system which is unfathomable, and seems to be run by a malicious deity. There is none of the traditional reassurance of either a father-creator forming the world with care and purpose, or the equal reassurance that the powers of evil and malice have mankind in their sights; instead it is cruelty without purpose and carried out in a space without end:

Once again the scurry of feet - those myriads
crossing the black granite; and again
laughter cruelly in pursuit; and then
the twang like a harpstring or the spring of a trap,
and the swerve on the polished surface: the soft little
pads
sidling and skidding and avoiding; but soon caught up
in the hand of laughter and put back

There is no release from the rack
of darkness for the unformed shape,
the unexisting thought
stretched half-and-half
in the shadow of beginning and that denser black
under the imminence of huge pylons -
the deeper nought;
but neither is there anything to escape,
or to laugh,
or to twang that string which is not a string but silence
plucked at the heart of silence.

Nor can there be a floor to the bottomless;
except in so far as conjecture must arrive,
lungs cracking, at the depth of its dive;
where downward further is further distress
with no change in it; as if a mile and an inch
are equally squeezed into a pinch,

and retreating limits of cold mind
frozen, smoothed, defined.

("The Face of the Waters")

The Face of the Waters, across which in *Genesis* the spirit of God moved, is not in FitzGerald's vision a void without form, but a stretched point in which there is no beginning and no end, within and on which in endless flux the natural forces of the universe compete. If there is a unity in this creation it is one which the mind cannot comprehend. We only see part of an enormous pattern, which the mind cannot complete. It is at this point, given revelations such as these, that the Romantic artist staggers back and faints if he is Keats, or lapses into destructive pessimism if he is Brennan. But for FitzGerald even at the extremities of thought and fact, and in the face of existential dread, there is always something to celebrate, and that is life. As the fist of the creator/destroyer closes on the fragile egg-shell, there is an equal force opposing it, the hatching life thrusting outwards. Here then is FitzGerald's Eden, his sense of a unity in life - the balanced powers of creation and destruction contained in that most fragile image, the egg-shell:

The egg-shell collapses
in the fist of the eternal instant;
all is what it was before.

Yet is that eternal instant
the pinpoint bursting into reality,
the possibilities and perhapses,
the feet scurrying on the floor.

It is the suspense also
with which the outward thrust
holds the inward surrender -
the stresses in the shell before it buckles under:
the struggle to magpie-morning and all life's clamour
and lust;

the part breaking through the whole;
light and the clear day and so simple a goal.

("The Face of the Waters")

By 1945 and under the pressure of war and the desire for a period of reconstruction in which the horrors of the pre-war depression would be banished, a new nationalism grew in Australia. It was one which had grown from the fears of near-invasion and the possibility that white Australia might cease to exist in those few months in 1942, to a confidence that anything was possible with enough planning and effort. The perilous balance between the creation of the new and the destruction of the old was FitzGerald's message to a post-war Australia about to embark on its particular 'face of the waters'. It happens also to fall neatly between Furphy's 'loose Federation' which might have become a Utopia, and Brennan's 'viewless winds' which swept the cold hearths of a lost Eden.

But the post-war world, now secure in peace, still had winds which troubled the strong growths of organic nationalism fostered during the war. Australia had won a war which had threatened its very existence, but the question still remained as to who we were? It was all very well to believe in Primary school that we were the descendents of heroic imperial nation builders whose righteousness it would be unpatriotic to question, but there was increasing evidence from the behaviour of the civilian population during the war, that we were far from being heroic, and did we really deserve to be an independent nation if we could not look after ourselves unaided? And anyway what was heroism and national identity?

To answer these questions FitzGerald turned to his Irish forebears. In his search for roots beyond and within Australia led to one of his major poems written in 1958, "The Wind at Your Door". Unlike Brennan's 'viewless winds' the wind in this poem is far from invisible and brings with it very unpleasant memories from the past.

The germ of the poem came to FitzGerald when he read Geoffrey Ingleton's *True Patriots All* in which there was an account of a flogging of a convict at Toongabbie after the Castle Hill revolt in 1804. Martin Mason, the doctor supervising the

punishment (which was carried out while a strong westerly wind was blowing), was a direct ancestor of FitzGerald. Mason's reputation as a harsh commander at Coal River (Newcastle) was tempered by his charity towards the settlers on the Hawkesbury. The man who is flogged in the eye-witness account in *True Patriots All* is a convict named Maurice FitzGarrill - no relation, but the poet responded immediately to the significance of the description. Here was a perfect example of the inequalities and divisions of Australia on class, religious, and national grounds. Mason the professional, the Protestant, the representative of Imperial power supervising the torture of the convict worker, the Catholic, and the Irishman. It is (or was in 1958) an inescapable inheritance for all Australians:

There was a high wind blowing on that day;
for one who would not watch but looked aside,
said that when twice he turned it blew his way
splashes of blood and strips of human hide
shaken out form the lashes that were plied
by one right-handed, one left-handed tough,
sweating at this paid task, and skilled enough.

That wind blows to your door down all these years.
Have you not known it when some breath you drew
tasted of blood? Your comfort is in arrears
of just thanks to a savagery tamed in you
only as subtler fears may serve in lieu
of thong and noose - old savagery which has built
your world and laws out of the lives it spilt.

("The Wind at Your Door")

The poem mediates between these two sides of the sectarian divide. FitzGerald recognises his debt to convicts such as FitzGarrill and the necessity of accepting him: 'could I announce / that Maurice as my kin I say aloud / I'd take his irons as heraldry, and be proud.' But he knows, also, that he shares an equal bond with Mason, through blood and family tradition. The resolution of the poem, as it was for the "Face of

the Waters", is an acceptance of both extremes and a sense of balance between them. Maurice is a bright 'star of courage . . . a bar against surrenders: faith' - the heroic in us and the nation. Mason, on the other hand, part sadist and part philanthropist, is the compromising, unheroic side of our natures - and that must be accepted as well.

Furphy's Utopia will have to wait; Brennan's Eden is abandoned. This is a fallen world full of compromise and self-doubt. The wind blows but it only brings questions not answers.

Australian nationalism after World War Two entered a period of quiescence and doubt, which was not to pass until the 1970s. The end of the FitzGerald's "The Wind at Door" sums up accurately the sense of federal compromise which settled on the nation during the 1950s and which was not disturbed until the retirement of Menzies:

Yet I can live with Mason. What is told
and what my heart knows of his heart, can sort
much truth from falsehood, much there that I hold
good clearly or good clouded by report;
and for things bad, ill grows where ills resort:
they were bad times. None know what in his place
they might have done. I've my own faults to face.
("The Wind at Your Door")

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1. For an indication of Brennan's taste and his notion of correctness, see his annotations on Zora Cross's *Songs of Love and Life* in Terry Sturm (ed), *Christopher Brennan (Portable Australian Authors)*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane: 1984, 351-4.
 2. A.R. Chisholm and J.J. Quinn (eds), *The Prose of Christopher Brennan*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney: 1962, "On the Scansion

of Poems in *The Wanderer*," a letter to Richard Pennington, 16 June 1930, 254-6.

3. *The Prose of Christopher Brennan*, "Methods of Love", 444.
4. All quotations are from Julian Croft (ed.) *Robert D. FitzGerald (Portable Australian Authors)*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane: 1987.
5. The original is in the Howard Hinton collection of the New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, NSW. It is reproduced here with the permission of Mrs Jane Glad.

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