1 The Point of Departure

At the "point of departure" of Prichard's novel canon "trajectory" we can see the influences and early initiatives which indicate the direction her writing career would take. To understand and examine these influences and initiatives, however, it is essential to interrogate the conditions which inform them. It is not feasible to "determine" these conditions by positioning them within an historical context. Rather, I have chosen to examine the projected self-image which emerges from her autobiographical and semi-autobiographical texts. At this intersection of history and literary discourse we can see that the picture she paints of herself in the first three decades of her life indicates those attributes which she considered to be valuable to the writer of politically motivated fiction in Australia. Prichard's construction of a valuable literary heritage identifies her preoccupations and concerns within the realm of literary production. By establishing these procedures we are able to identify the influences and theories which contribute to her novel narratives.

The significance of biographical data for the critical analysis of literature has been a vexed and longstanding issue in literary theory. This is especially true of the research focused on Prichard, whose long and eventful life has provided ample material for biographical speculation. As suggested, the tendency of literary criticism to conflate Prichard's life and writing is a recurring problem. But her protracted involvement with and commitment to the CPA, the suicide of her father and her husband, her son's controversial diplomatic career and her friendship with David Helfgott (recently dramatised in the Australian motion picture *Shine*) have ensured her continued fame. The "entry point" I have chosen acknowledges a personal fascination with Prichard's life history, but at the

same time is suspicious of the appropriation of biographical data for literary analysis.

A large amount of biographical research on Prichard has already been conducted, and I do not intend to contribute further to this field of inquiry. Much of this biographical criticism shows little awareness of the problem that the main sources of information are Prichard's own autobiographical and semi-autobiographical texts. It is worth elaborating, briefly, on my approach to Prichard's autobiographical and semi-autobiographical writing. Recently the genre of autobiography has been the subject of considerable theoretical scrutiny. Research has concentrated on the problematic nature of the relationship between autobiography and fiction. Various theories have attempted to distance or, alternatively, conflate the two, concentrating on their differences and similarities.[1] The problem facing current research and researchers is to decide how and even if biographical data should be employed in critical commentary. My argument does not rely on biographical data and the related discussion is self-consciously speculative, especially when focused on the early decades of Prichard's life. Such data nevertheless fulfil valuable corroborative and illustrative roles within the structure of this thesis.

In searching for biographical "evidence" in Prichard's writing, we face the simple logistic problem of distinguishing between autobiographical, autographical and semi-autobiographical texts. The semi-autobiographical *The Wild Oats of Han* is based loosely on Prichard's early childhood in Tasmania.[2] In the foreword, she writes: "The first thing children ask about a story is usually: 'But is it true?' And

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[1] See David McCooey, *Artful Histories: Modern Australian Autobiography* (Melbourne: Cambridge UP, 1996); Joy Hooton, *Stories of Herself When Young: Autobiographies of Childhood by Australian Women* (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1990); John Colmer, *Australian Autobiography: The Personal Quest* (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1989); and John and Dorothy Colmer, *The Penguin Book of Australian Autobiography* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1987).

[2] Beasley speculates as to the reasons why the manuscript for this novel was not submitted to the publishers sooner after its completion. He suggests that Prichard did not want to be typecast as a children's author, a tactic which he claims was "scarely [sic] successful, for by 1928 it must have seemed quaintly old-fashioned to children of the day." He also suggests that Prichard was concerned that the character of Peter Barry, Han's somewhat "hapless" father, may have been read as an insensitive portrait of her own father who had committed suicide in 1907, the year before the novel's composition. This latter explanation, if true, bears an uncanny resemblance to the speculation regarding Prichard's motivation for rewriting the ending of her novel *Intimate Strangers* after the suicide of her husband in 1933. See Jack Beasley, *A Gallop of Fire* (Earlwood, NSW: Wedgetail Press, 1993) 31-32.

this one, it can be said, is a truly, really story. [...] Just here and there, a few details stray from the strict path."[3] Indeed, the stories within the novel closely mirror those told in Prichard's autobiography, *Child of the Hurricane.* There she claims that *The Wild Oats of Han* is "almost biographical."[4] She quotes at length from the novel and states : "It happened just like that" (*CH* 38). *Child of the Hurricane* appeared late in her life in 1963 and was written, according to her son Ric Throssell, "in sheer self-defence"[5] against the investigation of her life by literary critics and academics. In the foreword to his own biography of his mother, Throssell positions both *Child of the Hurricane* and *The Wild Oats of Han* in such a way as to further complicate their status as fiction or non-fiction:

> The naive young lady of *Child of the Hurricane* was a stranger, completely different from the woman I had come to know since my childhood [. ... N]one of the novels is autobiographical, except *The Wild Oats of Han*, the story of her childhood in Tasmania. [...] *Child of the Hurricane* was first conceived as a novel for which she had made notes long ago. It became instead her reluctant autobiography.[6]

The two texts do interweave dramatically and her autobiographical writing is augmented by the pamphlet *Why I Am a Communist* which traces her political development.[7] It follows the events of her life which led her to Communism and then devotes itself to an explanation of Communism and its hopes for the future. Even though *The Wild Oats of Han* was written at the beginning of her career and *Child of the Hurricane* and *Why I am a Communist* towards the end, they present a surprisingly homogeneous self-image.

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[3] Katharine Susannah Prichard, "Introduction," *The Wild Oats of Han,* rev. ed. (1928; Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1968) All further references to the text of *The Wild Oats of Han* will be denoted in the body of the thesis abbreviated as *WOH.*

[4] Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Child of the Hurricane* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1963) 38. All further references to the text of *Child of the Hurricane* will be denoted in the body of the thesis abbreviated as *CH.*

[5] Ric Throssell, *Wild Weeds and Windflowers: The Life and Letters of Katharine Susannah Prichard* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1975) ix. Kay Iseman agrees: "Katharine decided to write it in 1951 after a graduate student wrote a master's thesis which attributed her Marxism to an unconscious rejection of her father," Kay Iseman, "Katherine [sic] Susannah Prichard: Of an End a New Beginning," *Arena* 54 (1979): 76. Prichard discounted the autobiography in a letter to Jack Beasley in 1963, referring to it as "an innocuous account of my youthful struggles," quoted in Jack Beasley, "My Unilateral Debate: Katharine Susannah Prichard, Rebel Hero and Matters Pertaining," *Australian Literary Studies* 11.2 (1983): 246.

[6] Throssell, *Wild Weeds and Windflowers* ix-x. For a more detailed investigation of the similarities between *Child of the Hurricane* and *The Wild Oats of Han* see Iseman, "Katherine [sic] Susannah Prichard: Of an End a New Beginning" 73-76.

[7] Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Why I Am a Communist* (Sydney: Current Books, c. 1957). The pamphlet was presumably composed and distributed in the hope of attracting members to the cause of Communism and membership of the Communist Party.

In these autobiographical and semi-autobiographical texts, reading, writing and political agitation are retrospectively positioned as interdependent. Prichard insists that it was through writing as a journalist that she was "awakened" to the plight of the working people and was inspired to engage in political agitation and activism. The presentation of her early reading in these memoirs suggests that it provided her with a receptive attitude which enabled her to confront the images of poverty and urban despair. The resulting image is that her enthusiasm for reading kept her open to the developments of different theoretical approaches, her devotion to writing provided her with a medium through which she could explore these newly discovered theories, and her commitment to radical or progressive politics gave her inspiration, motivation, but perhaps most importantly, a goal to which her theoretical exploration could direct itself. It is clear that Prichard valued this interdependence which, I suspect, contributed markedly to the form of her novels. She actively pursued a wide variety of practical and theoretical interests and welcomed their influence on her fiction writing. Because of the relatively unsophisticated nature of the early narratives, the impact of these influences would best be described as potentially rather than actually contradictory. This is especially true in *Windlestraws* where the competing elements do not share a textual "space" where they come into direct dialectical conflict or contradiction with each other. *The Pioneers* demonstrates a more sophisticated plot and narrative through which the influences emerge and engage in overdetermined dialectical contradiction. We can see, however, that both of these novels are still a considerable distance from a state of *revolutionary rupture.*

The Weak Link: Reading, Writing and Agitation

David Carter has observed that "to become a committed communist or anti-fascist was not only to organise, to attend meetings and so on, it was also to *read.*"[8] One possible cause of the overdetermined nature of

[8] David Carter, "History Was On Our Side: Memoirs From the Australian Left," *Meanjin* 46.1 (1987): 112. Carter creates a reading list from various Communist memoirs. The reading lists which Prichard so frequently made in her work are similar to those listed by Carter. This indicates the pattern of autodidacticism which informed so much of the CPA membership.

Prichard's novels was her voracious and untutored reading of a wide variety of texts, both literary and theoretical. In addition, her experiences as a journalist had an enormous influence on the development of her work. The journalism and the reading are connected with the awakening of her political awareness, which matured into political action within radical agitational organisations. It was her commitment to progressive political activism which informed the direction of her reading, and which in turn influenced her writing. Further, the process and product of her writing was an important component in her political activism. Each of these activities is given a high profile in Prichard's autobiographical and semi-autobiographical writing and together they are presented as the three most important contributing influences on her early writing career.

Prichard establishes her attitude to reading in her autobiographical and semi-autobiographical writing. In *Why I Am a Communist* Prichard constructs a suitable motivation for her reading: "I devoured the work of all the great writers I could get hold of in order to learn something of craftsmanship and values in literature."[9] This is indicative of the ways in which Prichard's memories of reading and writing are interwoven. It is clear from her autobiographical and semi-autobiographical works that she places a considerable emphasis on the culturally rich environment of her childhood as well as her precocious reading and writing habits. These combine to present Prichard's literary career as blessed by a perfect literary heritage and incubated in an ideal environment. Her recollections of early reading experiences often involve images of hunger and eating, "devour[ing]" books and gazing "hungrily in shop windows" at them (*CH* 68). Prichard's decision to provide cumbersome reading lists which she "eats" her way through amounts to little more than literary "name dropping." Their inclusion in her autobiographical and semi-autobiographical texts is presumably intended to itemise Prichard's literary antecedents but also to establish an impressive literary and theoretical knowledge base on which her own writing career was built. The works listed in *The Wild Oats of Han*, ranging widely across eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, hint at a preoccupation with Romanticism in her early works.[10] Similarly her admission that she read

[9] Prichard, *Why I am a Communist* 5.

[10] J. A. Cuddon outlines some aspects of eighteenth-century Romanticism which are helpful to my discussion: "(a) an increasing interest in nature, and in the natural, primitive and uncivilized way of life; (b) a growing interest in scenery, especially its more untamed and disorderly manifestations; (c) an association of human moods with the 'moods' of Nature - and thus a subjective feeling for it and interpretation of it; (d) a

Darwin's *Origin of the Species* prefigures her ready acceptance of evolutionist notions of anthropology evident in *Coonardoo*. It is important to note, however, that she apparently read very few Australian books. The lack of Australian texts lining the bookshelves of Australian Communist or radical figures in the early decades of the twentieth century is a common phenomenon.[11] The reasons are twofold: an Australian market which was dominated by cheap American and English publications and the persistent "cultural cringe" in Australian intellectual circles.[12] Prichard was, no doubt, aware of this imbalance in her own early reading when she came to write *Child of the Hurricane* in the early 1960s. Certainly this is indicated by Prichard's decision to emphasise the fact that her father read mostly Australian poetry to her as a young child.

Reading is presented as a primal or instinctive part of her nature, an ever-present hunger for knowledge and information. She is keen to

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considerable emphasis on natural religion; (e) emphasis on the need for spontaneity in thought and action and in the expression of thought; (f) increasing importance attached to natural genius and the power of the imagination; (g) a tendency to exalt the individual and his needs and emphasis on the need for a freer and more personal expression; (h) the cult of the Noble Savage." J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 1992) 815.

[11] See for instance the list of books in J. M. Harcourt's novel *Upsurge*, facsimile ed. (1934; Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1986) 52; and A. F. Howells, *Against the Stream: The Memoirs of a Philosophical Anarchist, 1927-1939* (Melbourne: Hyland, 1983) 119.

[12] C. Hartley Grattan in his opening remarks to *Australian Literature* (Seattle: U of Washington Book Store, 1929) writes: "As in all young countries, the culture of Australia is to a very small extent an integral part of the national life. It has not worked itself into the social fabric. It is something tacked on. Something apart. [...] The dominant economic influence is British, and the literary culture derives from England also. It is to England that the writers of poetry, fiction, and drama have looked and do look" (13). He continues, "Australia goes to Britain for her books and magazines. American books usually arrive in English editions" (17). "Economicaly [sic], too, the Australian author has a hard row to hoe. There is no outlet through the home magazines for work of quality. There is no publisher in the country who undertakes to print worth-while things. Such books as are printed at home are done, as a rule, by obscure publishers in small editions, and quickly go out of print. There are at present a good half-dozen excellent Australian novels entirely out of print and obtainable with difficulty. The English publishers' readers, not knowing Australia, accept books haphazardly, acording [sic] to their notions of what Australian life is like. [...] But, worst of all, nobody but the writers seem to care anything about the situation. Australia, like America in the old days, suffers from a literary inferiority complex. Her readers feel safer with a third-rate English or American book than with a first-rate Australian book. They cannot believe that men they see and know can write good books. Familiarity once more breeds contempt" (37-38). As partial confirmation of these observations, Nettie Palmer in her introduction to Hartley Grattan's publication writes: "It seemed incredible that such a study could be written by an American visitor, when most of our own pundits were uninformed on the matter, and not much interested in it. Yet here it is - a kind of map of our literary Australia Deserta, showing the few drought-threatened streams, and hinting at possible springs. [...] And this was done by a visitor! [...] No English critic has done this for our growing literature" (7-8).

present herself as an ambitious child and precocious reader. Early in her autobiography, she recalls:

> Father looked amused when I told him I had decided to become a writer.
>
> "You'll need plenty of patience - and plenty of postage stamps," he said.
>
> Although Father did not take my efforts at story writing at all seriously, Mother began to give me books to read which, no doubt, she thought would develop any literary talent I might have.
>
> She gave me Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, Keats's *Endymion* and other poems, Longfellow's *Evangeline*, Thomas Moore's *Lallah Rookh*, Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, Blackmore's *Lorna Doone*, some of Scott's and Dickens's novels, *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot.
>
> Enchanting reading for a child! (*CH* 42)

Why I Am a Communist confirms that the interests of her parents were chiefly literary and artistic: "They talked to us about music, painting and poetry. Mother played on the little Broadwood piano that was a gift to her. She and father sang together: he often read to us in the evening, usually Australian poetry."[13] *The Wild Oats of Han* demonstrates similar preoccupations. The narrative endorses reading, exploration and other autodidactic pursuits as important elements in the development of human character. The free and almost bohemian environment in which Han lives is populated with creative and intellectual adults who influence her reading. Han's grandmother, for example, claims descent from Edmund Spenser "who wrote the greatest poem in the English language" (*WOH* 7). She reads to Han from *The Faerie Queene* and encourages her to learn passages for recitation. Later Han encounters a volume of Shakespeare plays, and, unable to understand them, she sets herself to "making her own stories for every picture" (*WOH* 39). She moves from Shakespeare to *Lemprière's Classical Dictionary*, where she discovers the stories of Ulysses and the sirens. She dismisses formal education as repetitive and boring, choosing instead to exercise her mind through the exploration of her environment.

An extensive formal education is not regarded as imperative to the development of an energetic intellect in Prichard's autobiographical or

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[13] Prichard, *Why I Am a Communist* 4. The fact that Prichard chooses to highlight her culturally rich upbringing, at the risk of sounding like the product of a bourgeois family, emphasises the importance which such things held for her. She does make quite an effort to play down her middle class origins by stressing that her father's income was small, that the family suffered during the period of time when he was out of work, with her mother taking the responsibility of earning money by sewing and painting, and that the piano on which her mother played was little and was a gift. (4-5).

semi-autobiographical narratives.[14] She presents her own formal education as high-quality but sporadic, halting abruptly at her high-school matriculation. She is keen to emphasise, however, that her literary endeavours were encouraged by various influential teachers and school friends. In *Child of the Hurricane* she recalls studying French and German literature, Wordsworth, Carlyle and Elizabeth Browning as well as assorted political and sociological works. She takes great pride in the writing and reading abilities she demonstrated at a young age. This is particularly evident where she recalls that when her father, who was a journalist by trade, experienced a mental breakdown, she took over his writing responsibilities.

According to her autobiographical works, Prichard's appetite for reading did not diminish in the early years of her adulthood even though she was unable to attend university.[15] She is keen to emphasise, however, that her self-education continued. She recalls that she borrowed from the Public Lending Library all the books that her friends were reading for their university arts courses:

> I devoured the masterpieces of international literature: read Hugo, Balzac, Goethe, Maeterlinck, Ibsen, Cervantes, Georges Sand, Mme de Staël, de Maupassant, Molière, Anatole France, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Galsworthy, Shaw and a host of others, keeping up French and German by reading in both languages. (*CH* 68)

Readers of her autobiography are left with the impression that she considered her self-education to be more than adequate.[16] It is obvious that Prichard was keen to challenge accepted notions of reading, writing and learning. To read widely, enthusiastically and independently, and to explore both the physical and intellectual worlds with self-generated and genuine curiosity are valued more highly in Prichard's writing (including her autobiographical and semi-autobiographical works) than a traditional education. What this attitude fails to acknowledge, however, is what it inherently lacks: a disciplinary factor. In her "university of life" Prichard

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[14] The attitude to formal education presented in Prichard's autobiographical writing conforms to John and Dorothy Colmer's observation that "[i]t is not patriarchal religious authority that the growing Australian child has to escape but an authoritarian educational system and the demand for social conformity." *The Penguin Book of Australian Autobiography* 6.

[15] Later, she asserts that, as for Gorky life had been her university. *Why I Am a Communist* 5.

[16] For example: "[Hilda Esson] consoled me for not going to the university when she said: 'You're learning more, reading the way you're doing.' I realized she was right when I found one of my cousins, who had got her degree, knew very little French, and less of international literature" (*CH* 69).

was unable to temper her intellectual excursions with regular discussion and appraisal. This is manifest in the somewhat eclectic nature of influences which prevailed upon her writing and the naivety which is demonstrated in her consumption of them.

In constructing her personal history, Prichard presents a movement in her reading away from the literary classics which interested her as a child towards works of progressive political theory. After a brief period working in Melbourne, Prichard returned to London in 1912, when the city was alive with a new and exciting political activity as women fought for the suffrage enjoyed by their antipodean sisters and socialists gathered for discussion. In *Why I Am a Communist* she presents her own involvement with these fledgling feminist and socialist scenes: "In the studios and literary coteries of London, I had come in contact with Fabians, Guild Socialists, Syndicalists, Theosophists, Anarchist admirers of Kropotkin, Futurists, Surrealists, and the disciples of Aleister Crowley."[17] In her autobiography, however, Prichard admits: "I thought talk at the [Freewoman Discussion] Circle too feminist and anarchistic. Some of my friends argued that Syndicalism offered a more effective approach to the problems of industrial exploitation and poverty than Guild Socialism. I was myself more attracted to Syndicalism" (*CH* 178). Prichard once again indicates the extent of her reading, but this time the "bill of fare" is focused on progressive political and economic theory. These influences are presented as leading her "from Christianity to Rationalism, from Plato, Socrates and Epictetus to Buddhism, Theosophy and Christian Science":[18]

> For ten years I studied these theories, taking each one in turn, discussing them with all manner of people, but committed to none, never a member of any organisation; still not satisfied that I had found the answer to the questions my mind was asking: still not convinced that any of them offered logical solution [sic] to the problem of how the poverty and injustices suffered by so many innocent people could be prevented.[19]

The movement from reading left-wing social and political theory to political activism and agitation is presented as a natural progression. She is careful to emphasise that the theoretical basis of her early experiences in practical political action was more than adequate.

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[17] Katharine Susannah Prichard, "Some Perceptions and Aspirations," *Southerly* 28. 4 (1968): 240.
[18] Prichard, *Why I Am a Communist* 6.
[19] Prichard, *Why I Am a Communist* 6.

Having already itemised an extensive yet predominantly liberal background of reading and thinking, Prichard is able to present her reaction to the wealth gap of pre-World War I London as appropriately open minded. She recalls:

> My experiences ranged from visits to homes of the aristocracy and wealthy relations to excursions into the worst slums of the great city. I saw the extremes of wealth and poverty in brilliant receptions and children picking up food from rubbish bins. [...A]ll the time I was wondering how "the sorry state of things" which deprived men, women and children of decent living conditions could be changed. I talked to writers and politicians, millionaires and hunger marchers, attended lectures, went to meetings, almost despairing that there could even [sic] be any change in a social system designed to preserve the power and privileges of the rich and to keep the working class in subjection.[20]

In all of her biographical writing, Prichard is keen to establish her experiences in London as the final motivating factor for her involvement in Communism.[21] It is possible that Prichard's early movement into socialist and, to a lesser degree, feminist activism may have been motivated by a desire to achieve success in the commercial world of newspapers and publishing. Sandra Burchill investigates the impact that Prichard's early journalistic experience had on her life and writing: "Her career as a journalist had a major impact in three areas; it had brought an active involvement with feminism and the suffragette movement, first-hand experience with the war fought in France, and a physical and emotional contact with suffering and poverty."[22] This is particularly demonstrated in articles like "The Farthing Bundle" which Prichard published in the *Daily News and Leader* in London in December 1913.[23] It is difficult to dispute Burchill's assertions that Prichard's altruism was motivated, at this stage of her life, by "the romantic Victorian attitude to voluntary work for charity" where women who enjoyed a comfortable standard of living channelled their leisured energies into the performance

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[20] Prichard, *Why I Am A Communist* 6-7. Sandra Burchill reads Prichard's experiences in London and her early commitment to socialism somewhat differently: "Socialist philosophy was reduced to a simple benevolent and charitable attitude to the disadvantaged and poor, not dissimilar to the attitudes of wealthier women to whose philanthropic activities much attention was later given in her social columns. Socialism was therefore seen to be merely a means of helping the weak and poor, and easily equated with the nurturing role traditionally assigned to females," Sandra Burchill, "Katharine Susannah Prichard: 'She Did What She Could'," *The Time to Write: Australian Women Writers 1890-1930*, ed. Kay Ferres (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1993) 141.

[21] Throssell describes these experiences as "her blooding in the stuff of Revolution," *Wild Weeds and Windflowers* 21.

[22] Sandra Burchill, "Katharine Susannah Prichard: Romance, Romanticism and Politics," diss., U of New South Wales (Australian Defence Force Academy), 1988, 61.

[23] It is reprinted in Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Straight Left*, ed. Ric Throssell (Glebe, NSW: Wild and Woolley, 1982).

of good deeds.[24] But the fact that Prichard retained a commitment to human justice issues for the rest of her life indicates that her motives were not as superficial as Burchill suggests. Certainly Prichard's decision retrospectively to give her involvement with political activity a high profile in *Child of the Hurricane* indicates the value which she placed on it.

It was during her second visit to London that Prichard first embarked on public speaking. In each of her autobiographical works she presents the motivation for her involvement with political organisations as a desire for a politically progressive but distinctly practical approach to the alleviation of human suffering. A typical example is her reaction to the work of Mary McArthur and Margaret Bondfield in their organisation of trade unions among women: "[They] strengthened my growing conviction that activity to improve material conditions was more important than speculation about mysteries of the psyche and the influence of spiritual forces" (*CH* 179). Prichard's convictions are amply demonstrated in her newspaper articles. Her success in freelance journalism enabled her to interview visiting feminists and to write articles more closely connected with her recent ideological discoveries.[25] From her own accounts, this second period of time spent in London had a marked effect on the way she structured her reading and her writing. Prichard portrays it as a time of discovery and experimentation as she discarded one after another political, philosophical, economic, historical and literary theory of reform.

Virtually every source of biographical information on Prichard affirms that, from a very early age, she was extremely concerned with human justice issues. It is impossible to ignore the continual concern for

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[24] Burchill, "Katharine Susannah Prichard: 'She Did What She Could'" 146.

[25] Clippings of articles written by Prichard during her time as a journalist are collected in the manuscript library of the National Library of Australia (6201/7/1). Amongst the articles describing a lavender harvest and the charm of fruit preserving are reports of her visits to war hospitals in France, the role of women in the church, the hardships faced by flower sellers during the war in London and the benefits of co-operative housing. One of the more interesting articles in this collection is "Australia's Lesson in Women's Suffrage: How the System Works" published in the *Daily Herald* Apr. 17, 1912. Prichard writes: "I would like to spread a magic carpet for those who think that granting the suffrage to women would mean 'a social revolution' - battle, murder and sudden death - 'destructive turmoil,' 'the turning of men into nursemaids,' 'neglect of household duties.' I would like the carpet to be caught up in the air and wafted away to Australia. Then would those who stood upon it be convinced that they were wrong. When the federal constitution was framed and it was known that women were to have a voice in the Commonwealth, even some Australians thought the world would stand still, the affairs of the nation be at sixes and sevens because once in every three years women vote."

the poor, weak, sick and downtrodden in her autobiographical writing. Without exception, her writing is concerned with the forces which are active within the day-to-day lives of ordinary people and the suffering which they endure. Although Prichard's political interests (both practical and theoretical) were confined to the Left, they were nevertheless diverse. In her autobiographical writing it is clear that she does not give equal credence to the various theories with which she came into contact (and indeed a number were partially or completely discarded). The whole purpose of itemising them in the first place, it seems, is to emphasise that a huge variety of factors influenced her work. Even so, Prichard's political naivety (which has often been observed in her approach to political theory and doctrine[26]) and her readiness to approach even only vaguely convincing political arguments resulted in her acceptance of a variety of political theories which were not always compatible. Many of these political arguments and theories emerge in the narratives of Prichard's novels and simultaneously these discrepancies and contradictions also emerge.

The influences and motivations which Prichard has selected and emphasised in her autobiographical and semi-autobiographical writing provide an image of what *she* considered appropriate credentials and qualifications for a writer of Australian novels. As a retrospective self-image projected through her autobiographical writing, this construction emerges as an important indicator of Prichard's motivation as a fiction writer. From this position the elements which influence and determine her fictional writing can be both identified and examined.

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[26] Dorothy Hewett insists that Prichard "was incredibly naive about politics, and, in spite of her constant reference to her study of the Marxist classics, her understanding of politics and economics was essentially limited, fixed around a series of dogmas." She continues: "Katharine Prichard's development was made particularly difficult because she seemed to have no real built in critical sense," Dorothy Hewett, "Excess of Love: The Irreconcilable in Katharine Susannah Prichard," *Overland* 43. (1969): 27 and 30. Similarly, Jean Devanny in her autobiography *Point of Departure* (St Lucia: U of Queensland Press, 1986) observes Along with her powerful intellect, there went a streak of simplicity and a naïveté so marked as to be, on occasion, disconcerting. For instance, she would offer me kindly instruction on subjects which, to a speaker of my standing, were elementary. [...] By token of the same simplicity she seemed unable to distinguish at all times between the sycophancy of insincere elements, and true appreciation" (181-182). Jack Beasley suggests: "K.S.P. was not an ideologist [or] ... a 'theoretician'... There were gaps in Katharine's political understanding, but in the wilful K.S.P. way they were not conceded." Burchill, "Katharine Susannah Prichard: Romance, Romanticisim and Politics" 19. Jack Lindsay observes that "Her work can in no sense be described as an intelligent application of Marxism." Jack Lindsay, *Decay and Renewal* (Sydney: Wild and Woolley, 1976) 332.

Prichard's devotion to wide and voracious reading, whereby she devoured a disparate but predominantly progressive collection of books, informed her writing and the "tangle" of contradictory influences within it. It also suggests that her texts are, to employ Althusser's terminology, a "weak link" in the chain of fictional writing.[27] If we follow the observations of Althusser on the operations of overdetermined political activity, the notion of the "weak link" emerges as an important element. In Althusser's investigation of the movement towards revolutionary rupture he focuses on the successful Russian Revolution and appropriates "the Leninist theme of the '*weakest link*'."[28]

> Lenin gave this metaphor above all a practical meaning. A chain is as strong as its weakest link. In general, anyone who wants to control a given situation will look out for a weak point, in case it should render the whole system vulnerable. On the other hand, anyone who wants to attack it, even if the odds are apparently against him, need only discover this one weakness to make all its power precarious. [...I]f it is obvious that the theory of the weakest link guided Lenin in his theory of the revolutionary party [...] it was also the inspiration for his reflections on the revolution itself. How was this revolution *possible* in Russia, why was it *victorious* there?[29]

According to Althusser "This weakness was the product of this special feature: *the accumulation and exacerbation of all the historical contradictions then possible in a single State.*"[30] In other words, the realisation of revolution in Russia, even though the revolutionary situation faced every capitalist society, was the direct result of Russia's political condition being overdetermined, thus making it the weakest link in the chain of imperialist states.[31]

In devouring and then replicating a multitude of conflicting and contradictory influences, Prichard could not or would not commit herself to any one of them. At the time of the composition of her early novels socialist theory was an important part of her intellectual activity, but she had not yet subordinated her intellectual pursuits to its authority. Instead, each of the other competing, conflicting and ultimately contradictory influences was able to operate within the texts. The result is the often observed and admired textual tension in her novels as they move towards *revolutionary rupture.*

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[27] I do not argue that all literary texts are necessarily overdetermined in the same way or to the same extent as the works in Prichard's novel canon.
[28] Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," *For Marx,* 2nd ed., trans. Ben Brewster, (London: New Left Books, 1979) 94.
[29] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" 94-95.
[30] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" 95-96.
[31] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" 96-97.

Contradiction in *Windlestraws* and *The Pioneers*

The intermingling of numerous political, theoretical and aesthetic influences is manifest in Prichard's first published adult works *Windlestraws* and *The Pioneers*. In comparison with the novels which followed, the political content and aesthetic composition of these first two works are relatively insignificant. The more important implications of overdetermined dialectical activity do not become evident until her later novels. As a result, an application of the theoretical approaches outlined in the introduction is less appropriate for these earlier works. Consequently, these novels will be investigated in a more conventional manner and in terms of unresolved confusion. Nevertheless, Prichard's canon "trajectory" moves quickly away from its "point of departure."

Jack Beasley describes the first novel, *Windlestraws,* as an "aberration" in her work and a "jump backwards" from *The Wild Oats of Han.* He reports that Prichard herself suggested that he not bother with discussion of it in his first major study of her work.[32] Indeed, *Windlestraws,* has received very little critical attention and has never been reprinted. The only two commentators to give any real space to discussion of it are Beasley and Sandra Burchill, who establishes it as a significant element in her discussion of romance in Prichard's writing.[33] Whilst Burchill's examination of the text provides a more valuable reading of what is essentially a politically and aesthetically immature novel, Beasley's observation that it provides an indication of tendencies which were later to become important in her work is worth pursuing.[34]

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[32] Beasley, *A Gallop of Fire* 33.

[33] See Beasley, *A Gallop of Fire* 34-35. Burchill, "Katharine Susannah Prichard: 'She Did What She Could'" 147-148; and Burchill "Katharine Susannah Prichard: Romance, Romanticism and Politics" 64-70.

[34] Beasley observes that Prichard's novels involve "continuing aspects" that are established in these early novels and which recur throughout her work, in particular the motif of the theft of an article of material value (usually relating to jewellery). Certainly it is a motif which recurs in many of her novels, and also some of her plays. In *Windlestraws* a ring is stolen, in *The Pioneers* it is cattle, in *Black Opal* it is a box of opals, in *Moon of Desire* the plot hinges on a stolen pearl and in the Goldfields Trilogy it is gold. The plays "Her Place," "The Burglar" and "The Thief" each rely on the motif of a robbery of some description. In each case the theft is able to be explained, intellectualised and excused in the manner of the end justifying the means. Katharine Susannah Prichard, "Her Place: A Curtain Raiser," unpublished play, Campbell Howard Collection, Dixson Lib., U of New England c.1913; Katharine Susannah Prichard, "The

Windlestraws opens in London a few moments before midnight on New Year's Eve as Peter and Gene, who have separately made their way to the Embankment in order to end their lives, become aware of each other's presence. Within a short period of time the couple establish a friendship, rob a drunken gentleman of his sovereign case and ring, and settle for the night in the slums of London. There they cement their friendship by sharing a coffee, communing from the same cup, as well as sharing their dreams for self-redemption. The delicate balance between euphoria and despair, comradeship and loneliness are important early motifs and it is here that the significance of the title is established:

> "You're a windlestraw. So am I. [...] My father was always talking about them—windlestraws—muttering to himself—'Poor windlestraws ... on the whirling pool of Time ...' And I knew he meant us - people who drift and whirl. But the other day, near Chelsea Bridge ... where the people feed the gulls, I saw a bundle of straw thrown overboard by one of the barges going up the river. Some of the straws broke away from the bundle, and whirled off by themselves. One, that I thought was me ... went a long way and nearly went under ... Then another straw passing near, touched it. They clung together ... and I watched them out of sight."[35]

Lightly sidestepping the implication of "clutching at straws," the story develops into a contrived, complicated intrigue incorporating Russian royalty and West End London theatre, concerned with dressing up and fuelled by make-believe.

As Sandra Burchill observes, the novel conforms "to the demands of a popular form of romance" which uses "royalty, medieval and ancient mythology, dreams and theatre" to evoke "a glamorous view of life."[36] Other elements in the novel, such as the motifs of physical labour and affinity with the earth as a source of redemption and regeneration, indicate the influence of nineteenth-century Romanticism on the novel. These remain as important motifs throughout Prichard's work but exist in a

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Burglar," unpublished play, Campbell Howard Collection, Dixson Lib., U of New England, 1909. Katharine Susannah Prichard, "The Thief," unpublished play, Campbell Howard Collection, Dixson Lib., U of New England, n.d. See also Jack Bedson and Julian Croft, *The Campbell Howard Annotated Index of Australian Plays 1920-1955* (Armidale, NSW: Centre for Australian Language and Literature Studies, 1993). Burchill likens the theft in *Windlestraws* to a Robin Hood robbery which enables the characters to jump the barrier separating the rich from the poor. The justification of robbery in the later novels can similarly be equated with this reading. Prichard remained quite proud of the narrative in the Trilogy which recounts the extent to which the theft of gold from the mines was accepted in the mining towns of Western Australia. Prichard, "Some Perceptions and Aspirations" 239.

[35] Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Windlestraws* (London: Holden and Hardingham, 1916) 20. All further references to the text of *Windlestraws* will be denoted in the body of the thesis, abbreviated as *W.*

[36] Burchill "Katharine Susannah Prichard: Romance, Romanticism and Politics," 64-65.

simplified and somewhat naive form here. In *Windlestraws* Peter hides out in a village to avoid detection by Sir John Britten, who is the only threat to Peter and Gene's clever deceit. Peter is engaged by a local farmer to perform miscellaneous farm-hand duties: "The pain of his hands after a long day's ploughing, the ache of his limbs, were a satisfaction. They eased a vague pain of mind and heart. He was glad of the sweat that poured from his face, of his heavy thirst at mid-day, of every physical demand which ousted all others" (*W* 205). A return to health and strength enables Peter to see a solution to the problems which are facing the two Windlestraws in their quest for success. Established so securely within a popularised Romantic mode, *Windlestraws* eschews any exploration or discussion of social issues after the introductory pages. As Burchill suggests: "the first scene is the only detailed attempt to evoke a world in which rich and poor are sharply divided."[37]

The Romantic structure of *Windlestraws* is distinctly escapist and is punctuated only briefly by rationalist politics towards the end of the novel. Yet the politics is naive and idealistic in its understanding of socialism.[38] Peter's heritage is exposed in the concluding chapters as Russian and aristocratic. Peter's political motivation is uncovered in discussion between his mother, Princess Yelizavyéta, and his ex-girlfriend, Nadia Tchernowska, who have recently arrived in London. The purpose of their journey is to find Peter and convince him to return to Russia to depose his younger brother Serge as head of the family. Both women are concerned about Serge's rather radical and un-aristocratic intentions for the family fortune:

> "Serge is contemplating using what little money is left for your mother to live on—as he says—to reorganise the estate, Peter," Nadia said in her clear, even voice.
>
> "New cottages, hospitals, schools, irrigation plots—the Lord know what!" the Princess Yelizavyéta exclaimed. "He has been bitten with the ideas of Tolstoy, and wants to imitate his example at Vorafskaia. We are to live in the simplicity—indescribable. And all because a few wretched peasants die of fever in the villages. The peasants always have had—always will have—fever. It is the Heaven-ordained prerogative of peasants to have fever. Serge thinks he can create a new order of things with a wave of his hand. He accused me—me, his mother, Peter—of selfishness ... and inhumanity ... because I preferred spending the winter in Nice to giving him money to make drains with--yes, actually drains!" (*W* 266)

This, combined with Serge's decision to marry the coachman's daughter for love, indicates his progressive and socially liberal outlook. It serves

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[37] Sandra Burchill, "Katharine Susannah Prichard: 'She Did What She Could'" 148.
[38] See Sandra Burchill, "Katharine Susannah Prichard: 'She Did What She Could'" 148.

also to position the political villains neatly against the heroes of the story. By deciding to continue life as a Windlestraw, rather than returning to usurp his younger brother's control of the family fortunes, Peter's role as a romantic hero is assured.

Although the unmasking of Peter as a Prince dressed as a pauper is a standard romantic trope, the accompanying proto-socialist political motivation demonstrated by his brother Serge is a somewhat unexpected and in many ways unconventional component in the narrative. But because Serge's story occurs "off-stage" it never really challenges Peter and Gene's picaresque adventure. The lives of the princely brothers are separated (perhaps segregated) generically: Peter's romantic and Serge's socialist motivations do not share a textual "space" and as such are not able to engage in a meaningful overdetermined dialectical exchange.[39] Instead, the escapist romantic narrative continues unchecked or unchallenged to the conclusion. Although socialist politics does not constitute a significant part of the narrative or plot structure, *Windlestraws* offers the first indication of it in Prichard's novel canon. Prichard remembers *Windlestraws* as "an attempt to please English publishers not interested in Australian background" (*CH* 192). Her next manuscript, however, developed in a quite different direction.

By the time war descended on Europe, she had saved enough money to devote time to writing a second novel. In six months she produced *The Pioneers*, specifically for the Hodder and Stoughton All-Empire £1000 Novel Competition. Set in the Australian bush, it was written from notes taken during her time as a governess in the Gippsland area of Victoria.[40] *The Pioneers* was awarded £250 for the Australian section of the competition, and this success enabled her to establish her career as a writer. It also established her as a writer of Australian fiction since the competition required that the novel be set in Australia. And it was on this that her career was subsequently built. The setting of *The Pioneers* in Australia was not in itself unusual and nor was the ideology she attached

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[39] Two of Prichard's plays "The Burglar" and "Her Place" (which were written around the same time as *Windlestraws*) demonstrate a similar generic separation. In both plays a character articulates socialist or proto-socialist beliefs which do not share a generic of textual "space" with the popularist romantic motivation fueling the play's momentum. As such the two do not share a meaningful dialectical interaction. Prichard, "Her Place: A Curtain Raiser"; Prichard, "The Burglar."

[40] See "Miss Bryde of England," *British-Australasian* 8 Apr. 1915: 17, as further confirmation of the general perception amongst foreign writers in England of the publishers' preference for an English setting.

to it. She spoke of the novel and its Australian content in distinctly nationalistic terms suggesting: "I have tried to crystallise my impressions in narrative form, humanising the story with an element of love and romance, and at the same time endeavouring to make young Australia realise how much it owes to the patient self-denying toil and industry of our pioneers."[41] This notion of the pioneering spirit is common to numerous literary and other artistic works composed around this period in the early twentieth century. The most notable of these, the triptych called *The Pioneer* by Frederick McCubbin,[42] was reproduced as an illustration of the first edition of Prichard's novel.[43] The nostalgia evident in this and other paintings of the time underpinned a burgeoning interest in Australian history, heritage and landscape. The nostalgic aspect of *The Pioneers* is positioned within the growth in nationalistic and patriotic Australian art in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The pioneering project of this novel carries distinctly imperialist as well as nationalistic overtones. The novel champions the construction of an Australian identity from a combination of other national characteristics. This multivalent national character is tempered against the particular set of demands and challenges imposed by the Australian context. Unlike *Windlestraws*, these conflicting and, in many cases, contradictory demands share the same generic and textual "space" within the narrative of *The Pioneers*. As a result, they *do* engage in an overdetermined dialectical discourse. In my discussion of this novel I will concentrate on two areas within the narrative where traits inherited from other nationalities are dialectically challenged by the demands of the

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[41] R.K., "A Young Victorian Novelist," *British-Australasian* 8 Apr. 1915: 17, quoted in Sandra Burchill, "Katharine Susannah Prichard: Romance, Romanticism and Politics," 71.

[42] Frederick McCubbin, *The Pioneer*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1906, it is a work which Prichard probably would have been very familiar with. It was reviewed by *The Age* in 1906 which hailed it as "by far the most significant picture yet produced in the history of Australian art." Bridget Whitelaw, *The Art of Frederick McCubbin* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1991) 78. Commentary on the painting, which was begun in 1903 but not completed until 1905, often refers to its nationalistic theme. Ann Galbally, in her discussion of McCubbin as an "Australian Mythmaker" views the work as following on from events at the end of the previous century: "The work came well after Federation and the sustained build-up of nationalistic fervour which occurred in the late 1890s. As the nineteenth century drew to a close there was a considerable amount of backward looking at the past century and the achievements of the colonists." Ann Galbally, *Frederick McCubbin* (Melbourne: Hutchinson, 1981) 95. An editorial published in *The Age* in October 1905 which discusses *The Pioneers* is reproduced in full in Andrew Mackenzie, *Frederick McCubbin 1855-1917: 'The Proff' and His Art* (Lilydale, Vic.: Mannagum Press, 1990) 121-123.

[43] Katharine Susannah Prichard, *The Pioneers* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915).

pioneering project: first, a distinct or specific avenging spirit of the wilderness which offers a direct and considerable challenge to the pioneering task; second, the characterisation of the novel which remains true to the societal paradigms inherited from Europe but also recognises the challenges to these paradigms which emerge from the specific demands of the Australian environment.

The opening passages of *The Pioneers* follow Mary and Donald Cameron as they make their way onto their newly acquired land in the South Gippsland of Victoria during the early pioneering days. They are associated with the ideal of the pioneering spirit. As a pioneering couple, Mary and Donald's primary motivation is the establishment of an agricultural property. The conquering of the wilderness by pastoralists is presented as a virtuous and commendable activity, particularly in the novel's concluding paragraphs, but the bush is not presented as completely passive. Donald Cameron, in his quest to establish grazing lands, uses a ring-barking method to clear the land. One of the dead ring-barked trees, however, hovers ominously over the narrative as it stands beside a road along which the characters ride:

> So gaunt and tall the dead tree stood. Its branches seemed to strike against the sky. They rattled with the sound of bones in the wind. The sun and thrashing winter storms had bleached it, and there were black wales and scars where a fire had eaten into the wood above the hacked zone the axe of the settler had made when he ring-barked it years ago. As long as she could remember the dead tree had stood there, gaunt and ghostly, with the tangle of living trees behind it. They were clad with their shifting, whispering garment of leaves all the year round, and decked with flowers in the springtime. But the dead tree was naked. It might have been an avenging spirit of the wilderness: it stood with an air of such tragic desolation by the wayside.[44]

Donald is eventually and rather freakishly felled by this tree which collapses on him as he rides past. The fact that this avenging spirit in its retribution is respected in the narrative stands in stark contrast to the positive and affirming support given to Donald and Mary's pioneering toil in their conquering of this very same spirit. The power of the bush to enact retribution, in particular the felling of men by trees, is a recurring characteristic of Prichard's texts (discussed in more detail in Chapter Two).

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[44] Katharine Susannah Prichard, *The Pioneers*, rev. ed. (1915; Adelaide: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963) 149. All further references to the text of *The Pioneers* are from this edition and will be denoted in the body of the thesis, abbreviated as *P.* The changes made to the revised edition of *The Pioneers* are minor (only a few words to the opening two lines). Prichard explains the reasons behind these revisions in *Child of the Hurricane* 203.

The character of Donald is introduced in a manner which is remarkably similar to the horses who "with dull, dumb patience and obstinacy" (*P* 7) lug the couple's belongings up the foothills. Similarly he, patiently and obstinately, dully and dumbly, conquers the land and the animals, gathers a prosperous farming business around him and hoards the wealth which it produces. Donald lords it over his possessions – his land, his stock and his family – with an attitude which does not take into consideration the needs or desires of others whom he considers under his authority. Yet this lack also renders him weak. We can see in the character of Donald an irreconcilable contradiction. Donald is weak and ineffectual as a lover, a parent and a husband, yet he commands a respect and authority from his wife, family and peers. The critical commentary which focuses on Prichard's characters emphasises the extent to which they resemble each other, their relation to one another and to the (con)texts in which they "live."[45] Undeniably, her major characters fall into identifiable groups or clusters of shared mannerisms, gender, characteristics and relationships. Some of these "groupings" share admirable attributes while others share abhorrent ones. Donald stands at the top of a long list of Prichard's male characters who do not fulfil the requirements established by her narratives for a noble, heroic and admirable man yet conversely occupy a position of significant social impact and influence within the narrative. These men are Arthur Henty in *Black Opal,* Leslie de Gaze in *Working Bullocks,* Sam Geary in *Coonardoo,* Greg Blackwood in *Intimate Strangers* and Morris Gough in the Goldfields Trilogy. The problematic position of these male characters remains as a motif throughout Prichard's work.

Donald's authoritarian attitudes derive from a patriarchal tradition whereby women are denied agency, especially within marriage. Yet *The Pioneers*, like the majority of Prichard's novels, is focused around the life

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[45] See for example Ellen Malos, "Some Major Themes in the Novels of Katharine Susannah Prichard," *Australian Literary Studies* 1.1 (1963): 32-41; Jennifer Breen, "Katharine Susannah Prichard's Fiction: Women, Sexuality and Work," in *Katharine Susannah Prichard Centenary Essays* eds John Hay and Brenda Walker (Nedlands: Centre of Studies in Australian Literature, University of Western Australia; London: Australian Studies Centre, University of London, 1984) 29-34; Sneja Gunew, "Katharine Prichard's Political Writings and the Politics of Her Writing," *Katharine Susannah Prichard Centenary Essays* 49-60; Jane Sunderland, "'Lines Driven Deep': Radical Departures, or the Same Old Story, For Prichard's Women?" *Hecate* 4.1 (1978): 7-24; Richard Sadlier, "The Writings of Katharine Susannah Prichard – A *Critical* Evaluation," *Westerly* 6.3 (1961): 31-35; J.A. Hay "Betrayed Romantics and Compromised Stoics: K. S. Prichard's Women," *Who is She?*, ed. Shirley Walker (St Lucia: U of Queensland Press, 1983) 98-117.

of a female protagonist. Mary Cameron, like all of the other strong women who populate Prichard's novels, is drawn as a woman of integrity: she is morally sound, industrious, enjoys a sense of close harmony with the earth and the bush, demonstrates genuine compassion and is receptive to others who are similarly virtuous. The list of strong female characters who emerge in Prichard's texts includes Sophie Rouminof in *Black Opal*, Deb Burke in *Working Bullocks*, Mrs Bessie in *Coonardoo*, Gina Haxby in *Haxby's Circus*, Elodie Blackwood in *Intimate Strangers* and Sally Gough in the Goldfields Trilogy. The fact that these female characters are strong and articulate is not a coincidence and does, to a certain extent, reflect the feminist instincts and desires of the texts. Although Dorothy Hewett has argued that Prichard's novels present a "matriarchal universe,"[46] it would more correctly be defined as matrifocal because it is clear that the real power rests with men.

Mary performs a role or occupation which sees her fulfilling a useful and active life, just like the other strong women. Her integrity rests heavily on her ability to serenely shoulder the responsibilities of managing her family and home in the absence of these skills in her husband. In Chapter 5, for instance, we witness her within her domestic environment: "Mary did everything in a serene, methodical way, going from one task to another as though she were happy in each, and in no hurry to be done with it" (*P* 31). Early in *The Pioneers* Mary produces a baby boy: an accomplishment which recurs in Prichard's texts as an important indicator of moral fortitude in female characters.[47] This is, perhaps, the earliest indication that Prichard's female characters experience an ambiguous and problematic relation with men and with their own feminist instincts. Prichard consistently denied that she was a feminist and many commentators have tried in vain to uncover an uncompromised feminist program in her novels. The primary reason for their failure is that each of the principal female characters in Prichard's novels struggles between contradictory forces. Mary Cameron is the first and, in some ways, best demonstration or example of this struggle.

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[46] Dorothy Hewett, "Excess of Love: The Irreconcilable in Katharine Susannah Prichard" 29.

[47] As Kay Iseman has observed, "Interestingly, the best women, like Sally Gough in the trilogy, give birth to (five) [sic] sons. The worst, like city-born Molly in *Coonardoo* have (five) daughters." In "Katherine [sic] Susannah Prichard: Of an End a New Begininning" 76. Sally Gough has only four sons.

Mary is a strong-minded and strong-limbed woman who stands up to the authority of her husband and asserts her own desires. Equally, and inexplicably, she is quick to succumb to her husband's demands. The reader witnesses here a strongly constructed female character who meets the challenges imposed by the Australian environment but who retains an unbending respect for the institution of marriage and the authority of her husband. This contradiction is complicated by the fact that the man to whose authority Mary subjects herself is abhorrent, ineffectual and weak and by the fact that her strength of character is drawn from her confinement in the domestic sphere, where she is efficient and stoic in her capacity to hold hearth and home together in the face of conflict and the absence or incompetence of her husband.

Almost without exception Mary Cameron is presented within the domain of her home, or on her errands. She demonstrates a natural and instinctive desire to protect and support human life regardless of the dangers which such actions may invite. She is domestically adept to the point where Dan Farrell entrusts the domestic eduction of his daughter Deirdre to her care. Yet Mary is not delicate or precious. When fires threaten her house and livestock she enthusiastically fights the blaze until defeat is inevitable. She nevertheless displays a self-indulgent Romanticism that remains unreconciled with attributes of stoicism and strength.[48] Mary occasionally attempts to confront Donald's dominant role in their relationship but she never succeeds in challenging his authority:

> "Be quiet, will you not woman," he said.
> "I will not!" There was a spark in her eyes. "I've got to say what I'm thinking, now, Donald Cameron. I've held my tongue long enough. You've had your way, and I've hardly dared to breathe when you spoke, for years. Your always laying your will on people crushes the spirit in them! The dominating way you have wants to lay down everything before it. [...]"
> Donald Cameron moved restively.
> "It's from his mother he's taken his liking for clacking words, then," he said.
> She fell back from him with a desperate gesture seeing she had made so little headway against the stone-wall of his mind. (*P* 132 -3)

Even with an assertiveness fired from years of suppressed anger the fact that she is unable to crack his stubborn will says more about the character of Mary than it does about her husband. Despite her inability to fulfil her desires or influence her husband's thinking, she nevertheless chooses to

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[48] J. A. Hay, "Betrayed Romantics and Compromised Stoics" 98.

remain subject to his authority. Her inability to influence her husband is judged by the narrative as her defeat rather than an indication of his inadequacy. It is precisely her submission to his authority which empowers him.

Mary and her domestic apprentice Deirdre are linked together into what Kay Iseman has called an hereditary pair (again a recurrent aspect of Prichard's fiction).[49] The young Deirdre is similar to Han: a wild, impulsive yet charming creature who is instinctively and intimately connected with nature and the bush. The text establishes her as a manifestation of the "pellings" which inhabit Davey's favourite childhood fairystory in which a farmer's son marries a fairy. Deirdre's veins flow with fairy blood just like the "pellings" in the story and she too marries a farmer's son. Deirdre is established as an "apprentice" to Mary, learning from her the craft of domesticity and moral integrity. Deirdre's apprenticeship, however, is not without cost. Her education in the craft of domesticity subdues her instinctive urges to the point where she, who once considered "the proposition of a 'possum hunt [...] irresistible," is found methodically counting "Knit one, slip one" and declares "No, I can't go 'possuming to-night, Davey [...] I want to finish turning this heel" (*P* 67-68). Davey Cameron inherits attributes from both his mother and his father. Like Donald, he is stubborn and impressionable. But like Mary, he displays moral integrity and an instinctive connection with nature. When Davey and Donald come into contact, the unbending nature of their personalities results in conflict. Conversely Davey and Mary's relationship is strengthened by the similarities in their personalities.

The inherently contradictory nature of Prichard's strong women who subjugate themselves to the authority of their husbands is most poignantly demonstrated within matrimonial relationships. Mary, like many of the other strong women in Prichard's novels, is financially dependent on her husband.[50] She enjoys little physical or intellectual independence and is both sexually and emotionally unfulfilled. Regardless of her industrious nature and her initiative, she is consistently trapped within the domestic sphere. It is against the bonds of marriage and commitment or comradeship that all of these women struggle. Whilst

[49] Kay Iseman, "Katherine [sic] Susannah Prichard: Of an End a New Beginning" 92.
[50] The strong female characters who do become financially independent of their husbands or fathers, namely Gina Haxby in *Haxby's Circus*, Elodie Blackwood in *Intimate Strangers* and Sally Gough in the Goldfields Trilogy, have been forced to do so because of the inadequacy or selfishness of these men and in order to support young children.

on one level this struggle is between the desires and passions of a strong and romantic woman and the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood, it can also be read as a conflict between the two contradictory forces of love and work.

In *The Pioneers* the attitude to marriage, as a bond of work or as a bond of love, is inherently contradictory. The novel denounces marriage as an institution founded on property rather than sex-love (as it is discussed in Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*).[51] Yet, as with many of Prichard's novels, the narrative progress of *The Pioneers* is the movement of a pair of lovers towards matrimony. So, marriage is also presented as the goal of romantic love and, hence, an integral part of the novel's narrative resolution. Neither of the novel's two marriages escape the contradiction which these inherently incompatible attitudes to marriage impose upon them. The implication that marriage is a capitalist construction is best demonstrated by the fact that Donald and Mary marry as a matter of convenience: Donald needs the thirty pound bounty granted to married couples emigrating to Australia and Mary needs to escape public trial by condemning herself to transportation (*P* 249-250). Once established in their pioneering setting, Donald and Mary work together to establish property which will eventually form an inheritance for their son Davey. Donald and Mary's relationship is not characterised by emotional or sexual passion. Early in *The Pioneers* Donald admits "[t]here was not what you might call much sentiment about our mating." Mary's main concern in their partnership is that she "may [...] be a true and faithful wife to [him]"(*P* 11). In the opening pages Mary declares that she considers herself not worthy of her husband who, in turn, reassures her with the words "[y]ou're my woman—my wife"(*P* 11). Regardless of this rather inauspicious beginning, Mary and Donald's marriage survives until death. Mary's loyalty to her husband remains despite the sexual tension which develops between Dan and her. Dan's admiration of her is complex but is focused in her eyes which have him transfixed:

> "That's what she has, Deirdre, [...] eyes with the twilight in them - twilight eyes - you can see her thoughts gathering in them, brooding and dark, or glimmering like the light of the day, dying. [...] That one [...] is like the Mother of God to me." (*P* 113)

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[51] The impact of Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Propety and the State* on Prichard's work will be investigated in more detail in Chapter Three.

In spite of the strength of their mutual attraction and admiration they never act upon their desires. It is clearly established in the narrative, however, that Mary has found her "soul mate" in Dan. It is the bond to her "yoke mate" rather than her "soul mate," however, that Mary respects. This is demonstrated by the fact that her loyalty to her husband remains true even after his death, regardless of the disappointment which they have endured and the lack of shared passion in their relationship. In this way, Mary and Donald's marriage, like so many other marriages and relationships throughout Prichard's novels, is based on comradeship in toil. Mary's reminiscences at the end of the novel (at the end of her life) reinforce this:

> Her eyes went down the slope of the hill to the spot under the light-leafed trees where Donald Cameron had been laid to rest, her heart crying an assurance of fidelity to the yoke mate.
>
> They had set a seed in the country [...]. All the labour of their pioneering had not been in vain. Donald Cameron['s ...] name would go on, she realised, and his children's children would talk with pride of their grandfather who had come from the old country, a poor man, and had made a name for himself in the new land. (*P* 252-253)

Even though her marriage does not fulfil her emotional and romantic needs, it is nevertheless presented and supported by the narrative as fulfilling her need for commitment and comradeship. Donald and Mary's dispassionate marriage is set in relief against the sense of satisfaction which is gleaned from it by both husband and wife as they join together as pioneers. The pioneering myth in which this marriage is firmly placed is informed by Romantic, humanist and organicist notions of toil, endeavour and contact with nature as well as the imperialist project of colonisation. This work ethic which is uniformly admired in *The Pioneers* resembles that embedded within socialism. Conversely the construction of marriage within the narrative resists any attribution of romantic motivation or foundation.

When the contradictions inherent within the pairing of Deirdre and Davey are taken into consideration, this "tangle" becomes even more complicated. Their pending marriage provides a satisfying romantic conclusion to the main body of the novel. In contrast to the marriage of Donald and Mary, their relationship is built on sex-love and is cemented by an instinctive and passionate bond. The main body of the narrative is not at all concerned with their capacity to work together. It traces their relationship from childhood playmates through to adulthood where, having negotiated the obstacles which circumstance puts in their way,

they are established as a romantic couple at the conclusion of the novel. The final chapter of the novel, however, is set fifteen years later. In this projection we again meet Deirdre who has just told the "terrible old story" of the preceding chapters to her son Dan, thus establishing the previous forty-seven chapters as a frame story. Deirdre contains no hint of her "pelling" heritage and although she has "peace in her deep-welled eyes" it is significant that she is drawn as "graver" and with "an undefinable shadow rest[ing] on her face" (*P* 254). The character of Deirdre has, by this stage, metamorphosed into a replica of her mother-in-law. Although we don't meet Davey in these concluding pages there is a hint that the irritability and authoritarian stubbornness he has inherited from his father are predominant in his character. The suggestion that after fifteen years as "yoke mates" Deirdre and Davey's marriage has grown to resemble that of Mary and Donald is significant. In this concluding chapter, there is no indication of the shared and instinctive passion on which their relationship was founded and with which the bulk of the novel's narrative has been preoccupied.

The Pioneers struggles to resolve the contradiction between Donald and Mary's dispassionate yet comradely marriage and the instinctive and passionate pairing of Deirdre and Davey. The narrative indicates that Davey and Deirdre's marriage will be different to Donald and Mary's because it is based in the first instance on sex-love; marriage remains a capitalist and, in the novel's terms, inadequate institution. The contradictions between (and even within) these two presentations of marriage are considerable. Yet the lovers are drawn to each other by forces and instincts which are beyond their control. Deirdre and Davey's decision to marry is both denounced and admired. This contradictory presentation of matrimony remains a significant element throughout Prichard's novel canon. In all her novels, the narratives' attitude to marriage is embedded in the wives. In these early novels it is clear that wives are prepared to subjugate themselves to the authority of their husbands out of respect for their wedding vows and the patriarchal capitalist society of which it is a part. We shall see that, in *Coonardoo* and *Haxby's Circus*, marriage is incapable of satisfying the characters' desires, in *Intimate Strangers* it is directly challenged, but in the later novels marriage aquires respect once again. This does not signal a simple retreat. As I will show, the women of Prichard's later fiction justify their subjugation in terms of socialist rather than capitalist value structures.

The dialectical contradictions active within both the narrative and the characterisation of *The Pioneers* derive from an inherited European social tradition as it confronts the demands imposed upon it by the imperialist pioneering project in the Australian environment. But the conclusion evades these contradictions by resolving them within an explanatory paradigm of racial difference. The final chapter offers foreclosure on the ideal formation of the Australian character with the introduction of Deirdre and Davey's son Dan and his historical self-awareness.

> "I remember, [Mary Cameron] said to me once," he said thoughtfully. "'You ought to be a great man, Dan, because four great nations have gone to the making of you.' I didn't know what she meant at first. Then she told me my four grandparents were English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh. 'They have quarrelled and fought among themselves, but you are a gathering of them in a new country, Dan,' she said. 'There will be a great future for the nation that comes of you and the boys and girls like you. It will be a nation of pioneers, with all the adventurous, toiling strain of the men and women who came over the sea and conquered the wilderness. You belong to the hunted too, and suffering has taught you.'"[...]
>
> "'You will be a pioneer too, Dan,' grandmother said," the boy continued with shy reverence, "'a pioneer of paths that will make the world a better, happier place to live in. You will, because you won't be able to help it. There's the blood of pioneers in you.'" (*P* 256)

Dan's mother is presumably part Scottish and part fairy, but is heavily influenced by her natural Australian surroundings. His father is a similar mixture of cultures and is equally influenced by the Australian context in which he grows. Dan is an even more complex mixture, and this compaction of cultures is spiked with the pioneering spirit and the Australian bush to identify the truly Australian character. The novel's failure to acknowledge the overwhelmingly contradictory nature of this Australian "identity" is indicated by the closure that is forced upon it.

As we shall see, the novels which follow *Windlestraws* and *The Pioneers* in the Prichard canon continue to struggle towards narrative closure in the face of an increasing number of dialectically antagonistic contradictions. But it is in these early novels that we see the emergence of dialectical contradiction as a significant component in Prichard's writing. There is a considerable development from the unrealised potential contradiction in *Windlestraws*, where the opposing elements do not share a generic or textual "space," to the actual contradiction in *The Pioneers*. Neither novel demonstrates characteristics which could be described as aesthetically valuable or politically potent and they are a long way from a state of *revolutionary rupture*. Yet both novels indicate the ways in which

competing elements become manifest within the narratives of Prichard's novels and point towards the more sophisticated and intricate works which follow in her canon.