Introduction

On 26 December 1933 Katharine Susannah Prichard struggled down the gangplank onto the Fremantle wharf ill and thin. In London, on her return trip from a voyage to the Soviet Union, she had learned from a newspaper article that her husband, Captain Hugo Throssell, V.C., had committed suicide at their Greenmount home. Regardless of her fragile emotional and physical state, customs officials searched her luggage. Although the Boarding Inspector claimed that "[t]he examination of Mrs Throssell's luggage was conducted privately and without any undue unpleasantness,"[1] several items were removed from her luggage and confiscated. A Commonwealth Investigations Branch document, dated 12 January 1934 records: "Her baggage was carefully searched, and only three novels written in Russian were found. She also had some copies of International Press Correspondence, which is on our prohibited list, and these were confiscated."[2]

In *Exiles at Home* Drusilla Modjeska states:

> In 1933 Katharine Prichard went to the Soviet Union and she returned committed to socialist realism [...]. This was not a sudden or dramatic change for Katharine Prichard, rather a strengthening and confirmation of

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[1] Katharine Susannah Prichard security notes, 11 Dec. 1933, Richard Throssell Papers, National Library of Australia MS 8071/2/5/155. For a more detailed investigation of the security surveillance of Prichard see Fiona Capp, *Writers Defiled: Security Surveillance of Australian Authors and Intellectuals 1920-1960* (Ringwood, Vic.: McPhee Gribble, 1993).

[2] Ric Throssell, *My Father's Son* (Richmond, Vic.: William Heinemann, 1989) 141. The security notes detailing the events of the search report that "English Edition of International Press Correspondence" Vol. 13, Number 13, dated 14 Jul. 1933 was discovered in Prichard's luggage and confiscated.

> one aspect already in her work [, a]lthough she had moved towards socialist realism before 1933.[3]

Jack Beasley questions Modjeska's appraisal of Prichard's return to Australia and sarcastically criticises the work of Customs Department Officials who, on that "bright and sunny day in Fremantle,"[4] were responsible for the inspection of Prichard's luggage:

> what the negligent, or myopic, officers, no doubt anxious to get home to holiday gatherings, overlooked was to become a scourge, an introduced species that would overun [sic] the land like the rabbit, sparrows and starlings, foxes, cane toads and literary critics. For there, ingeniously concealed in Mrs. Katherine (sic) Throssell's baggage, was a foreign literary curse, a chancre called socialist realism which all too soon would claim Katharine Susannah Prichard as its first victim. We know this to be true also, because that is a reasonable inference to be drawn from a highly regarded analysis of these matters, Drusilla Modjeska's book *Exiles at Home*.[5]

Beasley refers to Socialist Realism[6] as "the convenient whipping boy" which has been used to undermine Prichard's "literary status"[7] but fails to see that he, too, is wielding a whip. For just as he takes Modjeska to task for the inadequacy of her definition of Socialist Realism, he too falls into the trap of writing from an assumed understanding of a term which is notoriously malleable and easily mis-defined. A recurring inadequacy of many critical arguments about Prichard's writing, and indeed about the work of any author involved in the Communist movement around this time, is a flippant or dismissive use of the term Socialist Realism.

First developed and defined in the early 1930s, Socialist Realism is one of the most maligned aesthetic theories of the twentieth century. It is also one of the most misunderstood. The aim of Socialist Realism was to project Soviet literary development into the socialist future and in so doing transform it from an artistic 'tendency' which was generally favourable to socialist doctrine into a conscious programme.[8] The first statutes of the Union, outlined in 1934, defined Socialist Realism as "the basic method of

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[3] Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1991) 120.
[4] Jack Beasley, *A Gallop of Fire* (Earlwood, NSW: Wedgetail Press, 1993) 142.
[5] Jack Beasley, *Gallop of Fire* 143.
[6] I have chosen to capitalise Socialist Realism in order to clearly differentiate it from social realism, which is often mistakenly referred to as socialist realism. Socialist Realism was a strictly defined and enforced credo of artistic production whereas social realism is a literary mode which is concerned with all that is 'typical' and which offers an accurate depiction of a particular scene.
[7] Jack Beasley, *Gallop of Fire* 157.
[8] C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1973) 84.

Soviet imaginative literature and literary criticism," and as demanding "from the artist a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development."[9] Beyond the controversial nature of its propagandist tendencies and its restrictive guidelines, undoubtedly the most striking characteristic of Socialist Realism is the extent to which its aims were codified into an enforceable set of practical guidelines. It is the tendency of most critics and commentators to focus on the first two, rather than the last, of these characteristics that has contributed to the general misapprehension which often accompanies the examination of practical applications of Socialist Realism. This is particularly true in the case of Prichard's writing. I discuss the development of Socialist Realism and Prichard's connection with it in greater detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.

A Pattern of Reading

A misunderstanding of Socialist Realism is not, however, the only area in which criticism of Prichard's fiction has been deficient. John Hay in his article "Katharine Susannah Prichard: The Perspectives of Bibliography and Criticism"[10] investigates the pattern of the critical reception of Prichard's work, the inadequacy of bibliographic details of her work, the lack of scholarly editions of her novels, the canonisation of her writing and the politics of reprinting the novels. He suggests that a critical orthodoxy has exercised a "tenacious hold" over the discussion of Prichard's work since the 1950s and insists that "[t]his orthodoxy is [...] an interpretive one and deals in aesthetic values, but it has nonetheless had a decisive role in defining the limits of the Prichardian canon."[11] He identifies the early criticism of G. A. Wilkes (especially his 1953 article "The Novels of Katharine Susannah Prichard" published in *Southerly*) as an "influential

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[9] Ronald Hingley, *Russian Writers and Soviet Society 1917 - 1978* (New York: Random, 1979) 198. Hingley offers one of many exhaustive investigations into the historical and ideological development of Socialist Realism. See also

[10] John Hay, "Katharine Susannah Prichard: The Perspectives of Bibliography and Criticism," *Katharine Susannah Prichard Centenary Essays*, ed John Hay and Brenda Walker (Nedlands: Centre of Studies in Australian Literature, U of Western Australia; London: Australian Studies Centre, U of London, 1984) 61-69.

[11] Hay, "Katharine Susannah Prichard: The Perspectives of Bibliography and Criticism" 64.

proponent" of this orthodoxy.[12] Wilkes, who became Professor of Australian Literature at Sydney University in the early 1960s, was a highly influential contributor to Australian literary criticism.[13] Hay provides a lengthy list of commentators whose work he sees as having been informed by Wilkes's "position," including a number of recent critics.

Undoubtedly a great many of Hay's fears have been assuaged in the decade since he published his overview. Indeed a large amount of critical commentary in the eighties and early nineties has successfully challenged this critical orthodoxy. Some critics have drawn upon the work of Foucault and Barthes in order to authorise readings which are suitably divorced from Prichard as author, person and historical figure.[14] For the most part, however, this pattern in the criticism of her writing persists. A great deal of the commentary focuses on a perceived tension or conflict in her life which is manifest in her work. Sandra Burchill observes that the critical commentary "has fixed itself on the dual nature of her life and writing."[15]

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[12] Amongst Wilkes's "arbitrations" are: that after reading *The Wild Oats of Han* "no one could have predicted from it what the author's later development would be"; that "[t]he adroitness of the plotting [of *Windlestraws*] shows that Katharine Prichard at this time could do well enough, if she chose, what was not worth doing"; and that *The Pioneers* "winning the Australian section of the Hodder and Stoughton Dominions Competition in 1915, is a sad commentary on the standard of the other entries." G. A. Wilkes, "The Novels of Katharine Susannah Prichard," *Southerly* 14.4 (1953): 220.

[13] For a more detailed examination of the impact of G.A. Wilkes's work on Australian literary studies, see the fourth chapter of John Docker, *In a Critical Condition* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1984), where he examines Wilkes's role in the emergence of the "metaphysical orthodoxy" in Australian literary criticism during the 1960s and 1970s.

[14] See Kateryna Arthur, "Katharine Susannah Prichard and the Negative Text," *Katharine Susannah Prichard Centenary Essays*, 35-47; and Kay Schaffer, "Critical Dilemmas: Looking for Katharine Susannah Prichard." *Hecate* 10. 2 (1984): 45-52.

[15] Sandra Burchill, "Katharine Susannah Prichard: Romance, Romanticism and Politics," diss., U of New South Wales (Australian Defence Force Academy), 1988, 2. Burchill lists seven critical commentaries which see a "fatal split" in Prichard's writing (3). This list includes Wilkes, "The Novels of Katharine Susannah Prichard"; J.A. Hay, "Betrayed Romantics and Compromised Stoics: K. S. Prichard's Women," *Who is She?*, ed. Shirley Walker (St. Lucia: UQP, 1983) 98-117; Bruce Bennett, "The Mask Beyond the Mask," *Meanjin Quarterly* 35. 3 (1976): 324-329; Kay Iseman, "Katherine [sic] Susannah Prichard: Of an End a New Beginning," *Arena* 54 (1979): 70-96; Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1991). Similarly Kateryna Arthur, "Katharine Susannah Prichard and the Negative Text," lists critics who have identified "two kinds of tendencies" in Prichard's work but in this instance observes those which oppose a particular tendency with realism. She claims realism is used as a "catch-all term describing a desire rather than an effect; it can comfortably swallow all the terms that have been placed in opposition to it" (38). She agrees with Burchill on the inclusion of Dorothy Hewett opposing "pagan and poetic on the one hand and moralizing Marxist on the other" in "Excess of Love: The Irreconcilable in Katharine Susannah Prichard," *Overland* 43 (1969): 27-31; and Richard Sadlier opposing the romantic to the realistic in "The writings of Katharine Susannah Prichard - A *Critical* Evaluation," *Westerly* 6.3 (1961): 31-35; and adds Jack Lindsay opposing the lyrical with the realistic in "The Novels of Katharine Susannah Prichard," *Decay and Renewal* (Sydney: Wild and Woolley, 1976); and Henrietta Drake-Brockman opposing the idealistic to the realistic in *Katharine Susannah Prichard* (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1967). Kay Schaffer has constructed a

This tension is perceived between politics and art, romanticism and realism, and feminism and Marxism. The collective impression is that Prichard's novels exist as a series flawed by unreconciled thematic polarities and that they are necessarily fragmented as a result.

For example, Modjeska argues that "much of the dramatic tension in those novels stems from the competing influences of a Marxism that was drawing on a realist tradition, and a Romanticism derived from a more poetic genre of fiction."[16] My own view is that this is accurate but, like so many other critical discussions on Prichard's novels, it oversimplifies by restricting conflict to two competing forces only and excludes other significant influences from consideration. As Kateryna Arthur has observed, binary analyses of Prichard's writing tend to conflate semantic and stylistic tendencies which invite and deserve closer analysis.[17] These inadequacies apply to many, if not all, of the major critical commentaries on Prichard's work which rely on some form of binary opposition or textual tension as a foundation for their arguments. In many cases these commentaries also tend to blur the distinction between writer and text and distract from the range of extraneous influences evident in her writing.

Kay Schaffer articulates what she believes to be a problem in a great deal of critical commentary on Prichard's writing. She notes that the perceived duality in Prichard's texts is judged by critics as a "failure to resolve the conflicts in the *text,* [which] slides imperceptibly into failures to resolve the conflicts in the *self.*"[18] In the work of these critics she has observed a desire to "discover and/or judge the 'real' Katharine Susannah

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similar list in "Critical Dilemmas: Looking for Katharine Susannah Prichard," which adds E.W. Irwin observing a conflict between the artist and the politician in "Australia's Katharine Susannah Prichard," *New Frontiers* 5.2 (1956); Justina Williams opposing the romantic and the socialist in "Rage That Engenders," *Southerly* 32.1 (1972): 17-29. My research adds the following: Ewa Gajer, "Australian Women Short Story Writers and the Realist Tradition," diss., U of New England, 1988, which views Prichard's work as a conflict between Romanticism and realism.

[16] Modjeska, *Exiles at Home* 135.

[17] Arthur, "Katharine Susannah Prichard and the Negative Text" 39. It is important to note, however, that Arthur's argument itself collapses into a binary analysis. Even though she invokes the pronouncements of an impressive collection of literary theorists and provides a refreshing analysis of Prichard's work, she eventually concludes rather anti-climactically that "Prichard's writing moves between [...] two kinds" of literary writing which are equivalent to the two kinds of literary criticism suggested by J. Hillis Miller: "One mode already knows what it is going to find. Such a mode is controlled by the presupposition of some centre. The other alternative mode of reading is more open to the inexhaustible strangeness of literary texts." Miller, "On Edge: The Crossways of Contemporary Criticism," *Bulletin: American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 32.4 (1979): 32.

[18] Schaffer, "Critical Dilemmas" 47

Prichard, somehow believed to be accessible beneath the surface of the text."[19] Some critics assume "that this 'irreconcilable tension' leads to a failed fiction; others to a flawed life."[20] For example, Ellen Malos insists that Prichard failed as a writer primarily because of her "very conception of life," particularly that she had failed to "assimilate Marxism to her personal view of life."[21] Similarly, Richard Sadlier argues:

> If we measure the nature of her convictions by their expression in the created world of her novels and short stories, it is clear that she is a romantic idealist, a non-conforming rebel, who frequently confuses her own identity with that of the people she is ostensibly writing about, the energy behind her writing coming largely from personal emotional impulses which she has never really tracked to their true source and which leave her incapable of final objective criticism and evaluation.[22]

Hay tries to avoid this critical practice, claiming that he is not interested in "analytical biography," but even he observes that "conspicuous self-referentiality *is* a characteristic quality of her fiction."[23] He goes on to assert that most of "the images of woman represented in Prichard's writings are reflections of herself."[24] This tendency to conflate the writing and life of Prichard is not restricted to academic criticism. Catherine Duncan in a letter to Prichard's son Ric Throssell declares that "[w]e can know much more about her by reading the novels than [her autobiography] *Child of the Hurricane*."[25]

Much of the critical discussion of Prichard's later works does little more than dismiss them as, or excuse them for, Socialist Realism. In Jack Beasley's own words the term Socialist Realism stands, in contemporary literary discourse, as "an accepted term of denigration [... used] to

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[19] Schaffer, "Critical Dilemmas" 46.
[20] Schaffer, "Critical Dilemmas" 47.
[21] Ellen Malos, "Some Major Themes and Problems in the Novels of K. S. Prichard," diss., U of Melbourne, 1961, quoted in Ric Throssell, *Wild Weeds and Windflowers* 168. Another rather astounding statement made by Malos appears in "Some Major Themes in The Novels of Katharine Susannah Prichard," *Australian Literary Studies* 1.1 (1963): "Fundamentally the duality in her work is not a failure of technique but a flaw at the heart of her vision of life" (40). Malos's approach to Prichard's writing relies, according to Schaffer, on one of the "two basic assumptions (held by critics) about the nature of the self" which have informed critical examinations of Prichard's writing. One of these two assumptions is what Schaffer calls "an essentialist position which interprets the writer as a failed romantic" with the other being a "culturally determined position which interprets her as a compromised socialist." Schaffer, "Critical Dilemmas" 47. This, she argues, is emblematised in a debate between Ellen Malos and Jack Lindsay in 1963. See Schaffer, "Critical Dilemmas" footnote 4.
[22] Sadlier, "The Writings of Katharine Susannah Prichard" 31.
[23] Hay, "Betrayed Romantics and Compromised Stoics" 98.
[24] Hay, "Betrayed Romantics and Compromised Stoics" 99.
[25] Ric Throssell, *Wild Weeds and Windflowers: The Life and Letters of Katharine Susannah Prichard* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1975) ix.

condemn any association of communism, through individuals or parties, with any form of art."[26] This has instigated a reaction by Communists and ex-Communists alike in self-defence. The positions adopted by Beasley and Modjeska are indicative of the respective attitudes of Communists and non-Communists in general. A brief examination of their attitudes will help to establish an understanding of the preoccupations and concerns which have motivated and informed discussion of Socialist Realism in the Australian literary context generally.

The extent to which Beasley's position on the subject of Socialist Realism has been influenced by its use as a term of denigration can be demonstrated by quotations from his earlier writings on the topic. One of his early articles on the subject is "Questions of Australian Literature: Report to 4th Conference of Communist Writers."[27] In this body of writing Beasley presents what is unquestionably a promotion of the theory of Socialist Realism which, by then, had been official Communist Party of Australia (CPA) literary policy for nearly a decade. In it he proclaims that Prichard's *Working Bullocks* "laid the foundations of socialist realism in Australia" and that the process it set into motion "is continuing and gaining strength."[28] He continues: "the trend is in one direction, along the path to Australia's shining future. All signs point to the next stage in our literary development being the stage in which the socialist realists come into their own."[29] Beasley's attitude to Socialist Realism in his 1979 *Red Letter Days,* whilst still decidedly critical of it as a theory, is much more accommodating than that expressed in *A Gallop of Fire:*

> it is often assumed that those who participated [in discussions concerning Socialist Realism in Australia] '... succeeded in smothering their own talents' a hypothesis which is hardly credible as [can be seen] in a run down of achievements. [...] It is entirely doubtful if any serious artist was destroyed during those years, though some were temporarily diverted, and the poets, writers, dramatists, painters mostly continued to create to the best of their ability. The greatest dissuader to the arts in our country has never been lively discussion of aesthetics, even when combined with politics [...].[30]

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[26] Jack Beasley, *Red Letter Days: Notes From Inside an Era* (Sydney, Australasian Book Soc., 1979) 171. Beasley was here referring to the term "Zhdanovism" which is, undoubtedly, a more evocative term and is even more frequently misunderstood and misused than its equivalent term Socialist Realism.

[27] Originally published in *Communist Review* Jan. 1960 and reprinted in Jack Beasley, *Journal of an Era: Notes from the Red Letter Days* (Earlwood, NSW: Wedgetail Press, 1988) 76-86.

[28] Beasley, *Journal of an Era* 77.

[29] Beasley, *Journal of an Era* 77.

[30] Beasley, *Red Letter Days* 180.

Beasley's shifting argument is indicative of the kind of ideological back-flips performed by Communist critics and writers during the century. It is also indicative of the extremely problematic nature of the position held by Socialist Realism in the Australian literary context.

Beasley implies that the introduction of the theory into Australian Communist circles was made much later than 1933. Indeed, the final chapter in *Red Letter Days* implies that discussion of the theory of Socialist Realism did not really begin in Australia until the late 1940s at the very earliest. Beasley does not, however, make any attempt to investigate the work of prominent Communist writers, particularly those who had visited the Soviet Union prior to this time, for any evidence of the theory in their work. His assertions are, I think, difficult to defend for this very reason.

Modjeska's argument develops along similar lines to my own in the sense that it views Prichard's early works as being enlivened by a dramatic tension which is the basis for her "creative power" and that her visit to the Soviet Union in 1933, due to a coincidental series of events, saw her turn to embrace and adopt Socialist Realism as a new and exciting approach to literary production. I agree with Modjeska that Prichard's later works suffer as a result of the application of Socialist Realism. Nevertheless, her investigation of the influence of Socialist Realism on Prichard's writing is, I believe, fundamentally inadequate. Modjeska uses the term Socialist Realism in an ambiguous and sometimes contradictory manner. Her definition of Socialist Realism in literature in relation to the Soviet Union in the early 1930s is "novels that would depict the heroic struggle of the proletariat, the victorious achievements of the Soviet Union and the wisdom of the Communist Party."[31] This is typical of the confused and poorly founded discussion of Socialist Realism within the work of non- and ex-Communist literary commentators, particularly in recent years, which ignores the strict nature of it as a political policy as well as its problematic position in the Australian literary context. To date there has been no detailed investigation of the theory of Socialist Realism in the Australian literary context and in Prichard's writing in particular. Without an adequate definition and demonstrated understanding of the implications of the use of the term within such a milieu it is impossible to assert with any degree of

[31] Modjeska, *Exiles at Home* 122. Modjeska is not alone in her inadequate definition and limited understanding of Socialist Realism. See also Julie Wells, "Red Witches: Perceptions of Communist Women Writers," *Wallflowers and Witches: Women and Culture in Australia 1910-1945*, ed. Maryanne Dever (St. Lucia: U Queensland Press, 1994) 150.

certainty that any writer practised Socialist Realism.[32] Socialist Realism has been used by both "sides" of the political spectrum for their own ends, as a "convenient whipping boy." It is in failing to acknowledge these factors that so many literary critics present essentially inadequate investigations of Prichard's work. Perhaps the most extreme example of the desire to defend the writing of Prichard against the "slur" of Socialist Realism is Gordon Adler's statement that "her work became influenced by the ideas of Zhdanov without her knowing it."[33] Such assertions are, from just about any angle, impossible to defend. Ignoring the influence of the theory on her novels in this way necessarily produces an unbalanced reading of them.

The general notion that Prichard's acceptance and practice of Socialist Realism was necessarily negative and unproductive runs parallel to a widely accepted thesis that her literary career was compromised by her commitment to politics. The idea that politics and art are necessarily incompatible has been widely held in literary circles throughout the twentieth century. Yet few writers have been criticised for attempting to promote or preach right-wing politics. Judah Waten articulated his distaste for this tendency in a paper given at the CPA Conference in Melbourne in 1980. He argues that "the concept of an 'uncontaminated' literature is illogical" and that it is perceived in Australia that "ideology only does violence to art if it is radical or communist."[34] He suggests that whilst Communist writers have been criticised for their practice of an ideologically inspired and committed literature, they have made an important contribution to Australian Literature. He also argues that T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound have produced literature which is a "systematic transcription of [their] ideological, political and philosophical outlook into poetical and fictional terms" but because this outlook is not radical or communist it has enabled them to be recognised as pure artists.[35] The capacity of Australian literary studies and literary criticism to define its canon by a process of control and exclusion is

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[32] Brenton Doecke is typical of a great many commentators who simply state that Prichard "subscribed" to Socialist Realism without any acknowledgment of the deeply problematical nature of such a statement. Brenton Doecke, "Historical Fictions: The Historical Novel in Australia During the 1930s and 1940s," diss., Deakin U 1989. 185.

[33] Gordon Adler, "Communists and Art," *Australian Left Review* 27 (1970): 53.

[34] Judah Waten, "Literature," audiotape, *Communists and the Labour Movement: Proceedings of a Communist Party of Australia Conference, Melbourne, 23-24 August 1980.* La Trobe Library reference number: TMS 374-5.

[35] Waten, "Literature." He arrives at the conclusion that "Socialist Realism still remains a valid literary theory and indeed the only way modern realism can go" which gives some indication of his bias on the matter.

examined by John Docker.[36] He argues that a "metaphysical ascendancy" became established in Australian literary criticism during the 1960s and 1970s which moved to exclude various modes of literature from its institutional courses of study. He itemises in some detail the writers who were neglected as subjects for university study, the vast majority of whom were left wing or progressive. This general rejection of literature inspired or motivated by left wing political theories has led to an apprehension of Communist writers as crippled by a foreign political theory of literary production.

A long time friend of Prichard's, Hilda Esson, consistently disapproved of her involvement in the Communist movement and, in 1919, described it as "at odds with her purely artistic personality."[37] Similarly, the writer of an overview of Prichard's literary achievements in *Book News* in September 1933 refused to acknowledge that her enthusiasm for left-wing activism was anything more than an example of her dedication to the gathering of material for her novels:

> Of recent years she has become obsessed with the "wrongs of the working class," and has got herself into disfavour with the conservative sections of the community by espousing Bolshevism. We may be sure that she is inspired by artistic and not by political reasons when she walks with the unemployed in street demonstrations. No doubt another great book will come out of it all, fierce with resentment against social injustices; but it will also be rich in poetry and artistry and imagination.[38]

But the notion that CPA membership and activism were necessarily incompatible with artistic work was not an attitude confined to the anti-Communists. For instance, Dorothy Hewett, when interviewed in the early eighties, talked about her feelings on leaving the CPA: "It was traumatic. But for eight years I didn't write anything except a bit of journalism for a few left-wing papers, so in one sense it was very liberating. One of the reasons I couldn't write was, I'm sure, because I was in the Communist Party."[39] Jean Devanny often commented on the difficulties faced by

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[36] Docker, *In a Critical Condition* 83-109. See also Leigh Dale, *The English Men: Professing Literature in Australian Universities* (Canberra: Assn for the Study of Australian Literature, 1997) 142; and Ian Syson "Towards a Poetics of Working Class Writing," *Southern Review* 26.1 (1993): 90.

[37] Hilda Esson quoted in Wells, "Red Witches" 154.

[38] "A Gallery of Australian Authors - Katherine [sic] Susannah Prichard," *Book News* 20 Sept. 1933: 15.

[39] Candida Baker, "Dorothy Hewett," *Yacker: Australian Writers Talk About Their Work* (Sydney: Picador, 1986) 189. See also Dorothy Hewett and Martin Smith, "... Being a Communist Almost Destroyed My Creativity ..." *Campaign* 14.26 (1977): 11-12, 14; Jim Davidson, *Sideways from the Page: The Meanjin Interviews* (Sydney: Collins, 1982) 184-208; and John Kinsella and Dorothy Hewett, "Dorothy Hewett in Conversation with John Kinsella on the Release of Her *Collected Poems*," *Westerly* 41.3 (1996): 31.

writers who were members of the CPA. In a 1941 letter to Eleanor Dark she wrote: "I am now paying the penalty of doing the work of two men in the movement to which I have given all the years so far of my life. If I could now quietly work at literature for twelve months, the ravaged body and mind might be repaired."[40] Many commentators agree that involvement in the CPA was necessarily a negative experience and that any attempts to function as a writer within this membership were inherently counter-productive. Julie Wells, for instance, chooses to present a picture of the writer who was also a member of the CPA as being mistrusted, misunderstood and undervalued by the general membership of the Party.[41] She indicates that the location of writers within the Party was problematic and that the members were suspicious of writers because they were seen to be middle-class intellectuals.

Patrick O'Brien presents a damning indictment of the cultural policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the CPA and of the writers who practised and defended the theory of Socialist Realism in Australia.[42] Whilst this is an extreme case which was published in a politically conservative periodical at a time when the Cold War was especially chilly, it presents rather starkly the impression that "Zhdanovism" made on the right wing of Australian aesthetics. Early in the article, O'Brien details his perception of the impact in Australia of Zhdanov's pronouncements defining the theory of Socialist Realism:

> In Australia, these injunctions from the holy of political holies were to be taken up with great fervour and enterprise by local communists and fellow travellers who manoeuvred themselves into play-acting the roles of cultural commissars. For nearly twenty-five years, these gentlemen quite faithfully, and no less absurdly, tried to impose Zhdanovite standards in prose, verse, painting, literary editorship and criticism within Australian literary and cultural circles, condemning as "pornographic", "degenerate", "fascist" and "reactionary" those who did not subscribe to the gospel according to Zhdanov.[43]

O'Brien's flippant and sarcastic tone is sustained throughout the article and his argument is supported by rather precarious statements and assertions. Undoubtedly the most disturbing aspect of O'Brien's article is his refusal to entertain the possibility that there is another, more positive side of Socialist

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[40] Jean Devanny, letter to Eleanor Dark 12 Jan. 1942, *As Good as a Yarn With You: Letters Between Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Jean Devanny, Marjorie Barnard, Flora Eldershaw and Eleanor Dark,* ed. Carole Ferrier (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 78.
[41] Wells, "Red Witches" 148.
[42] Patrick O'Brien, "Zhdanov in Australia," *Quadrant* October 18. 5 (1974): 37- 55.
[43] O'Brien, "Zhdanov in Australia" 38.

Realism, something which has been readily acknowledged and investigated by other less conservative cultural historians.[44] O'Brien's rather unbalanced impression of Socialist Realism is just one of many articles by right wing cultural theorists which have influenced the widely accepted, yet inadequate, understanding of what Socialist Realism was and how it was used by Australian writers.

The confusion and misunderstanding which surrounds the discussion of Socialist Realism in the Australian literary context has contributed, in particular, to the general apprehension of a gradual deterioration in the quality of Prichard's writing from the middle of her career. H. M. Green's *History of Australian Literature*, for example, outlines three main stages of development in Prichard's writing. The first, operating between 1914 and 1921, was when she learned "her trade as a novelist." The second period of her writing, to 1933, saw the production of her best work. The third, to the time of his history (1961), he sees as a period of decline.[45] The "pin-pointing" of this last "shift", by Green, at the year 1933, is mildly curious because no novel was published in that year. In other words, the threshold does not sit neatly between two of Prichard's novels but rather in the middle of the composition of one. In 1933, Prichard was in the middle of writing her eighth novel, *Intimate Strangers*. The date is derived, then, from something other than a perceived "shift" in her writing style between one novel and the next. Further articulating his theory of a shift at this time, Green asserts: "In Prichard's third phase her social sympathies assume more and more a political form and finally override the artist in her, so that her work becomes part social history, part sheer propaganda. In the first book of this phase, *Intimate Strangers* [...], the change is only beginning."[46] It appears, then, that the period of her life and writing around the year 1933, and in particular the novel *Intimate Strangers*, was, according to Green, an important time of transition for Prichard.

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[44] See Humphrey McQueen, *The Black Swan of Trespass: The Emergence of Modernist Painting in Australia to 1944* (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Cooperative Ltd, 1979) 66-76; and Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1981). See also Jack Beasley's *Red Letter Days* which, as John Docker asserts, "reminds us that the Australian social realists of the 1950s and '60s formed a varied and rich tradition, in theatre and film as well as in the novel, and that this tradition involved stimulating - as well as often very rigid - aesthetic arguments about 'socialist realism', literature, and politics." Docker, *In a Critical Condition* 96-97.

[45] H. M. Green, *History of Australian Literature* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1961) 998.

[46] Green, *History of Australian Literature* 1002.

Other critics and commentators have subscribed to Green's apprehension of Prichard's novel canon and very little critical commentary is focused on her later works (especially her last published work *Subtle Flame.*) Yet few critics have sought to investigate in any detail the possible influences, causes and theoretical foundations of such a shift in Prichard's writing between the two periods. Few critics have chosen to provide a critical appraisal of her works which takes into consideration her canon as a whole. Those who have sought an overview have, for the most part, resorted to the quick and easy dismissal of the later works as flawed by the influence of Socialist Realism.

Challenging the Pattern

There are several reasons to challenge this pattern of reading Prichard's novels. First, the tendency to read Prichard's work as either flawed or rendered more attractive by the energy of a single contradiction is usually the un-selfconscious consequence of proto-structuralist modes of establishing dichotomous or binary reading structures.[47] This enables establishment of a neat and concise argument, but it also requires an essentialist methodology which ignores the complexity of any other influences or motivations. The proliferation of allegedly exclusive binary oppositions is itself suggestive of the inadequacy of this mode of reading Prichard's work. Second, the tendency to conflate Prichard the author, Prichard the person (woman, Communist, activist, mother and lover) and the Prichard text has established criticism of her writing on a confusion of first principles. Kay Schaffer chooses to reaffirm her belief in the importance of challenging the autonomy of the author and the unified text, and initiating post-structuralist readings of Prichard's work. She argues that "[t]he task which remains now is not to say something *more* about Katharine Susannah Prichard but to say something different."[48] What is required, she argues, is the reading of both Prichard and her texts "as

[47] Richard Levin discusses this tendency of critics engaged in a thematic interpretation or reading of a literary text to collectively cultivate a list of themes or readings which exist apparently simultaneously in the same work as well as in a collection of apparently dissimilar literary works which enjoy the same central theme. He includes in his study the tendency of such analyses to settle upon a binary or dichotomous reading which is based on good vs. evil, order vs. chaos, freedom vs. restraint etc. He concludes with the assertion that "[p]erhaps, as in the Marxist dialectic, the success of this critical system necessarily carries within it the seed of its own destruction." Richard Levin, *New Readings vs. Old Plays: Recent Trends in the Reinterpretation of English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1979) 11-16.

[48] Schaffer, "Critical Dilemmas" 48.

signs, traversed by various discourses and contradictory codes of meaning."[49]

Third, much of the critical analysis of Prichard's work has been hampered by a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Socialist Realism. While many critics have blamed Prichard's over-enthusiastic commitment to the CPA for her "conversion" to Socialist Realism, I believe the theory offered a crystallisation and culmination of her ideas and ideals concerning the production of literature. The theory of Socialist Realism is unique in that it is an *artistic* theory which was written as *political* policy and for the practice of cultural production rather than as a way of approaching a completed work. It was formulated and instigated in a country which was experiencing enormous political upheaval and at a time of great uncertainty in world politics. For these reasons it is, on the one hand, quite strictly defined in various official policy documents, but on the other hand has proved to be a malleable and mercurial theory which readily bends to the demands of whoever chooses to use it to their own end. Whilst I agree that Prichard's commitment to Socialist Realism "was not a sudden or dramatic change [...] rather a strengthening and confirmation of one aspect already in her work," I cannot agree with Modjeska's statement that Prichard had "moved towards socialist realism before 1933."[50] The theory and practice of Socialist Realism had not even been formulated then, let alone become established as something that a non-Soviet writer could "move towards."[51]

The cultural policy of the CPA had less influence on Prichard's interest in Socialist Realism than she had on the Party's adoption of it as official literary policy in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It was, by many accounts, the fact that the Party had her as one of its founding members that caused it to keep cultural issues firmly on its agenda and indeed that enabled it to attract many other high-profile artists.[52] What many commentators

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[49] Schaffer, "Critical Dilemmas" 49.
[50] Modjeska, *Exiles at Home* 120.
[51] Even Carole Ferrier, who has conducted extensive research on Prichard's work as well as other Working-Class Literature in Australia, asserts that the rise of the "socialist realist" theory of literature in Australia dates from the early 1930s. Carole Ferrier, "The 'Working Class Novel' in Australia: Katharine Susannah Prichard and Jean Devanney [sic]," *Katharine Susannah Prichard Centenary Essays* 13.
[52] See David Carter, "Re-viewing Communism: *Communist Review* (Sydney), 1934-1966: A Checklist of Literary Material," *Australian Literary Studies* 12. 1 (1985), where he states: "The C.P.A. was formed in 1920, with Katharine Susannah Prichard as a foundation member. Writers, then, who belong to the broader Party category of 'intellectuals', were involved from the outset, and Prichard's involvement initiates a complicated, often volatile, often productive, always expressive history of relations

ignore is the fact that writers found membership of the Communist Party stimulating and ideologically satisfying as well as feeling that it compromised their writing and stifled their creativity. These writers were not only committed artists, but were also committed to the causes of peace and social justice. The CPA was for many anti-fascists and left-wing or progressive activists and intellectuals the only real alternative to the Australian Labor Party in the period immediately preceding and during the Second World War (in which time the CPA enjoyed its largest membership). For these writers, the idea that political and artistic activity were mutually exclusive was anathema. They were inspired to think they might have some influence on the movement towards a proletarian revolution and the achievement of a socialist state in Australia. They defended Socialist Realism and the pronouncements of Zhdanov, Gorky, et al. and, at times, viciously attacked the work of modernist artists, were strongly committed to Marxist-Leninism and worked untiringly for it. David Carter has written extensively on the relationship between the intelligentsia (particularly writers and artists) and the CPA. In his article "Re-viewing Communism" he argues:

> it is misleading to assume, as some commentators have, that writers, painters or 'middle-class intellectuals' were by definition on the doctrinairely-soft wing of the Party in either artistic or political matters - *as* misleading perhaps as to assume that all 'communist' artists were necessarily committed to the parroting of Socialist Realist doctrine and the aping of Socialist Realist works, either as innocents-duped or as Stalinist cultural police-agents. Further, it is misleading to assume that Stalinism, in either its political or philosophical forms, was a hindrance or deterrent rather than a positive attraction for intellectuals.[53]

In a later article entitled "History Was On Our Side" Carter suggests that involvement with the Communist movement or anti-fascist movements "meant both a political and intellectual break, and a political and intellectual enfranchisement [...: n]either history nor 'ideas' were any longer the

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between cultural policy and political policy, between intellectuals and Party leaders and amongst intellectuals themselves, both at the centre of the Party and on its fringes" (94). See also Beasley, *Red Letter Days*: The concept of art as a weapon in the class struggle, over and above being a concern of the artists themselves or a means of entertainment for members so inclined, took root in the Communist Party of Australia in very early times, long before Stalin called writers 'engineers of human souls' and before Zhdanov's voice was heard. Katharine Susannah Prichard had been a founding member, way back in 1920" (173). Charles Merewether asserts that the predominance of literature, in preference to art and other cultural activities, in the CPA was a result of Prichard's membership of the party, along with Jean Devanny, Judah Waten, Alan Marshall and Frank Hardy. Charles Merewether, "Social Realism: The Formative Years," *Arena* 46 (1977): 71. See also Pat Buckridge, "Critical Traditions in Australian Literature," *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, eds. Brian Head and James Walter (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1988) 188-213.

[53] Carter, "Re-viewing Communism" 94.

preserve of the ruling class or the bourgeoisie."[54] Carter goes on to investigate the role of "anti-intellectualism" and suspicion of "bourgeois intellectuals" in the CPA. He draws the conclusion that there was a somewhat inconsistent attitude to intellectuals within the Party, which on the one hand was deeply suspicious of them but on the other admired their knowledge and experience of the Australian tradition and political theory. Similarly, although Julie Wells argues forcibly that writers and artists did not enjoy an easy relationship with the Party, she also writes: "Many working-class people who joined the Party in the 1930s have written of the immense intellectual stimulation they gained from this experience, from lectures on political, scientific and philosophical subjects through to communist library circles, writers' groups, sporting and theatrical groups."[55] These "inconsistencies" highlight the extremely complicated and problematic nature of the relationship between artists and the CPA.

The effect which membership of the CPA had on writers is not, in any sense, uniform. The atmosphere of discussion of literary matters, both in periodicals and in meetings, and the understanding that in their writing they were carrying out important and valid work for the Party and for the cause of the working people was both a stimulus and motivation for many writers. Communist writers enjoyed a comradeship, not only amongst the membership of the Party, but also in the knowledge that a great many highly recognised and respected writers and artists were also members of the worldwide Communist movement. This was especially true in the period of the Popular Front when Communist writers were also working closely with non-Communist but progressive "fellow-travellers." With only a few exceptions, however, most of these writers and artists chose to leave the Party – usually at times of great confusion and turmoil in CPA and Soviet history (such as the revelations of the Kruschev secret speech and the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia). This resulted in a large number of ex-Communist writers, Hewett included, who were left to either explain or excuse their involvement in the organisation. Some of these people, like Hewett, look back on the period of their lives when they were members with some embarrassment; others, like Stephen Murray-

[54] David Carter, "History Was on Our Side: Memoirs From the Australian Left," *Meanjin* 46.1 (1987): 111. This article presents a valuable analysis of a variety of memoirs of "one-time communists".
[55] Wells, "Red Witches" 151.

Smith, look back with anger.[56] Still others look back with some ambivalence, notably Len Fox, who in his memoirs is rather cynical about CPA leadership, but remembers fondly his time as an active member of the Party.[57] The ways in which these retrospective analyses of CPA membership by writers discuss its literary policy has undoubtedly contributed to the generally accepted and recognised opinion of Socialist Realism as holding "Literature in a Straitjacket."[58] Dorothy Hewett's distaste for the effect which the CPA had on her own work, for instance, may be influenced more strongly than she would care to admit by her own perception that,

> [t]he Communist Party has become a historical incident. Things are only considered frightening and destructive to a way of life when they've got some strength, and the Communist Party has become so fragmented that it's virtually disappeared as a political force in Australia. I suspect to have been or to be a Communist in Queensland would still put you beyond the pale. In Sydney I think it's regarded as a bit passé and endearingly old.[59]

Similarly, Beasley's complete about-face on the validity of Socialist Realism and Prichard's subscription to it may indicate a desire to distance himself from a political and literary theory which is seen, by contemporary people, as obsolete and naive. Allan Gardiner observes that Communist writers,

> very often try to rewrite their own history. Like their non-literary comrades who of late have published so many 'memoirs of an ex-communist,' they often seek recognition in their twilight years by presenting themselves as being now and having always been politically 'respectable'. Writers who are directly marginalised by the dominant versions of literary history and who have spent a literary life in these cold margins, often wish, understandably, to present themselves as acceptable to the prejudices and preconceptions of publishers and reviewers and other sections of the literary establishment. Furthermore, they want researchers to help them present this distorted history of their involvement with the left. These attempts to manipulate history should be blamed not on the writers but on the forces of marginalisation.[60]

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[56] Stephen Murray-Smith, "Literature," audiotape, *Communists and the Labour Movement: Proceedings of a Communist Party of Australia Conference, Melbourne, 23-24 August 1980.* La Trobe Library reference number: TMS 374-5.

[57] See Len Fox, *Broad Left, Narrow Left* (Potts Point, NSW: L. Fox, 1982).

[58] See Susan McKernon, "Literature in a Straitjacket," *Australia's First Cold War, 1945-1953: Vol. 1. Society, Communism and Culture,* ed. Ann Curthoys and John Merritt (Sydney : Allen & Unwin, 1984) 137.

[59] Dorothy Hewett quoted in Baker, "Dorothy Hewett" 202. In addition Hewett shares the blame for her lack of productive creative work during her membership of the CPA on the fact that she was, at that time, caring for three young children and suffering through a period of emotional trauma (189).

[60] Allan Gardiner, "Ralph de Boissiere and Communist Cultural Discourse in Cold War Australia," diss., U of Queensland, 1994, 8.

It is interesting to note that those writers who retained their membership until later in their lives, like Waten and Prichard herself,[61] were careful to defend the Party and its literary policies even after it was generally being held to ridicule.

What this serves to highlight is the complex existence that Socialist Realism enjoyed in Australia from the time of its introduction in 1933. Whilst it was undoubtedly a theory that, in the end, stifled and discouraged more writers than it nourished, it was, for some, an exciting and stimulating new development in literary and aesthetic theory. Whilst I am in no way attempting to excuse the excesses and catastrophes of Socialist Realism, I am keen to redress some of the unbalanced, confused and hysterical statements which have been made about it from all points on the political spectrum. The influence and importance of Socialist Realism on Prichard's literary career will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

It is clear that the body of critical material provides valuable analytical understandings of Prichard's novels. I object, however, to the reductionist habit of reading Prichard's work as simplistically determined. This habit has viewed the relationship between the influences, elements and narrative effects evident in Prichard's work in an empiricist and essentialist manner. For instance, the "tension" which has been widely admired in her early novels has been traced to an exclusive binary or dichotomous contradiction embedded in the narrative. And the "failure" of Prichard's later works has been almost universally attributed to her "conversion" to Socialist Realism. The most effective theoretical approach to Prichard's novels is one which will acknowledge the premises on which the bulk of critical analysis is based, but which will effectively deconstruct the texts in a manner which avoids collapsing into essentialist determinism.

As Richard Wolff has pointed out, the value of antiessentialist theories is twofold: they join together in a resistance to unacceptable social institutions and they enable a deconstruction and critical denigration of essentialist theories *per se* as well as the apologetic justifications they

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[61] There is some indication in Ric Throssell's biography of Prichard, *Wild Weeds and Windflowers* and in Prichard's letters housed in the National Library of Australia Manuscript Collection that she had articulated severe differences of opinion with Party leadership and had, perhaps, considered resigning her membership (which by this time had run for nearly fifty years) just prior to her death in 1969. Throssell notes that her will indicated that she wanted the CPA in Western Australia to arrange her funeral, with her coffin draped with the red flag. But this may not have been what she had wanted in the last instance. See Throssell, *Wild Weeds and Windflowers* 251.

inform.[62] As part of his disqualification of essentialist explanations, Wolff argues that they:

> aim to bring closure to the questions to which they respond. Whatever aspects of society are absent from or relatively marginalized within these explanations are deemed irrelevant or relatively inconsequential to answering the questions. The absences and marginalizations are not recognized as problems, as signs of the particularity, partiality, and partisanship of the explanation. In essentialist explanation, there is no necessary component of justifying the exclusion of dimensions other than those essentialized on the grounds, say, of the social and political contexts and goals of the explainer and the explanation. Rather, the absences and marginalizations are rendered as absolutes, valid universally for all, rankings in the nature of objective reality rather than in the particular approach to reality of the theorist. What essentialists exclude in their explanations is not a problem posed for them to justify from a partisan position; it is rather a solution, beyond all partisanship, that they have found.[63]

A commitment to antiessentialist thinking has grown considerably over recent decades, principally as a rejection of the kinds of essentialist ways of thought associated with existing exploitative social conditions (for example capitalism, sexism, homophobia, racism). In particular, antiessentialism has been an important component of recent Marxist theoretical investigation. The attitude towards prevailing social constructions in Prichard's fiction invites an antiessentialist Marxist analysis. Apart from Jack Lindsay's *Decay and Renewal* there has not been a serious attempt at a Marxist analysis of Prichard's novels. It seems, then, that a rigorously theorised antiessentialist Marxist investigation of this body of work is long overdue.

Overdetermination

The problem of determinism has preoccupied Marxist theory in recent years. As Raymond Williams points out:

> According to its opponents, Marxism is a necessarily reductive and determinist kind of theory: no cultural activity is allowed to be real and significant in itself, but is always reduced to a direct or indirect expression of some preceding and controlling economic content, or of a political content determined by an economic position or situation. [...] Yet it can

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[62] Richard Wolff, "Althusser and Hegel: Making Marxist Explanations Antiessentialist and Dialectical," *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition*, eds Antonio Callarie and David F. Ruccio (Hanover : UP of New England, 1996) 152.

[63] Wolff, "Althusser and Hegel" 157.

> hardly be denied that [this description] came, with all its difficulties, from a common form of Marxism.[64]

The problem as Williams articulates it, is that "[a] Marxism without some concept of determination is in effect worthless. A Marxism with many of the concepts of determination it now has is quite radically disabled."[65] It is to precisely this problem that Louis Althusser addresses his philosophical research into the concept of overdetermination.

Althusser explains in some detail the motivation and methodology of his philosophical research in the introduction to *For Marx*. He argues that even though the aberrant interpretations of Marxist theory which were predominant in the first half of the twentieth century (particularly in the Soviet Union under Stalin's rule) have been widely recognised and acknowledged, Marxist philosophy has not been restored to "its integrity." Indeed he insists "it is never possible to liberate, even from dogmatism, more than already *exists*."[66] He goes on to argue:

> The end of dogmatism puts us face to face with this reality: that Marxist philosophy, founded by Marx in the very act of founding his theory of history, has still largely to be constituted, since, as Lenin said, only the corner-stones have been laid down; that the theoretical difficulties we debated in the dogmatist night were not completely artificial - rather they were largely the result of a meagrely elaborated Marxist philosophy; or better, that in the rigid caricatural forms we suffered or maintained [...] something of an unsettled problem was really present in grotesque and blind forms [...] and finally, that our lot and our duty today is quite simply to pose and confront these problems in the light of day, if Marxist philosophy is to acquire some real existence or achieve a little theoretical consistency.[67]

Indeed, it is towards the aim of explaining (rather than interpreting) Marxist theory in a non-essentialist manner (avoiding humanism, structuralism, empiricism and rationalism) that Althusser's philosophical research is directed.[68]

As Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff have observed, one of Althusser's most significant contributions to Marxist theory and specifically

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[64] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 83.
[65] Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 83
[66] Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," *For Marx*, 2nd ed., trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1979) 30.
[67] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" 30-31.
[68] As has often been observed, Althusser's intention in his writings on Marxist theory is not to update Marx but instead to re-present what Marx actually meant. As Ian Craib has observed "[t]his gives Althusserian work the air of biblical exegesis, the attempt to discover revealed truth." Ian Craib, *Modern Social Theory: From Parsons to Habermas*, 2nd ed. (Brighton: U of Essex, Harvester, 1992) 155.

Marxian dialectics is that of overdetermination.[69] The theory is discussed in most detail in the paper "Contradiction and Overdetermination" which was first published in *La Pensée* December 1962 and was reprinted in an essay collection entitled *Pour Marx* three years later. Its principal concerns are suggested by the epigraph taken from Marx's afterword to the second German edition of *Capital* : "With (Hegel) it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."[70] Indeed, Althusser's study of overdetermination presents an antireductionist reading of Marx's inversion of the Hegelian dialectic.

The precise nature of Hegel's influence on Marxism has been the focus of considerable debate.[71] Hegel, in his study of idealism, incorporates two notions of dialectic: as process and as reason. These two "strands," when operating in combination, result in the Hegelian Absolute – "a logical process or *dialectic* which actualizes itself by alienating itself, and restores its self-unity by recognizing this alienation as nothing other than its own free expression or manifestation."[72] Here we can see a distinction between Hegel and Kant who, while acknowledging the "necessity of the contradiction" in thought (which Kant argues deals with appearances only and is therefore subjective), refused to extend the role of contradiction any further into reality (which he argues is unknown and unknowable).[73] Hegel, on the other hand, explored what he calls the "positive side of contradiction" by characterising the dialectic as "the grasping of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative."[74] Although Marx was consistently critical of the Hegelian dialectic, he was nevertheless aware that the dialectic with which he worked was related to it. And, as indicated by the epigraph to "Contradiction and Overdetermination", it is clear that Marx's specific criticism of the Hegelian dialectic is of its mystifying side:

> My dialectical method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, *i.e.*, the process of thinking, which, under the name of "the Idea," he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world,

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[69] Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, "Althusser's Contribution," *Rethinking Marxism* 4.1 (1991): 13.
[70] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" 87.
[71] See Tom Bottomore, *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) 122; Lawrence Wilde, *Marx and Contradiction* (Aldershot, Eng.: Avebury, 1989) 19., Wolff, "Althusser and Hegel" 150-151.
[72] Bottomore, *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* 122
[73] Wilde, *Marx and Contradiction* 17.
[74] G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969) 442 and 56.

> and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of "the Idea." With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.[75]

Marx identifies, in some detail, the implications of his and Hegel's differing opinion on the nature of "the Idea" and reality:

> In its mystified form, dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and to glorify the existing state of things. In its rational form it is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.[76]

In explaining the methodology in his study of the relationship between Hegel and Marx, Althusser asserts: "Let us say [...] that if the Marxist dialectic is 'in principle' the opposite of the Hegelian dialectic, if it is rational and not mystical-mystified-mystificatory, this radical distinction must be manifest in its essence, that is, in its *characteristic determinations and structures.*"[77] Althusser's theory of overdetermination emerges from this search for the precise nature of Marx's "shelling of the kernel" and his inversion of the Hegelian dialectic.

The term "overdetermination" is derived, originally, from Freudian psychoanalysis and was adopted, rather reluctantly, by Althusser in his explanation of Marxism. Freud introduced the term to denote the way in which a dream image could be the manifestation of more than one unconscious desire. The term also denotes the process by which a plurality of determining factors in the unconscious may be arranged in a variety of patterns which each carried a level of validity and rationality at different levels of interpretation.[78] In his more detailed analysis of the phenomena in

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[75] Karl Marx, "Preface to the Second German Edition," *Capital,* ed. Frederick Engels, trans. from the third German edition by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954) 29.

[76] Marx, "Preface to the Second German Edition" 29.

[77] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" 93.

[78] For a more detailed comparison between the Freudian and Althusserian understandings of overdetermination see Miriam Glucksmann, *Structuralist Analysis in Contemporary Social Thought* (London: Routledge, 1974) 99-103. Robert Paul Resch notes, however, that Glucksmann "fails to consider the work of Jacques Lacan and its important influence on certain of Althusser's ideas, most notably the latter's theory of ideological interpellation but also the concepts of displacement and condensation." Robert Paul Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1992) 372. He refers readers to Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis* (London: Hogarth, 1980) 292-3 for further discussion in this area.

dream processes, Freud identified two distinct mechanisms by which overdetermination in dream work is achieved: *condensation* and *displacement.* They are used by Freud to indicate the phenomenon of the concentration of a number of dream thoughts into one image or the dispersal of psychical intensity from one image to another.

Althusser did not adopt the term enthusiastically, stating that he was "not particularly taken by this term *overdetermination* [...] but I shall use it in the absence of anything better."[79] Althusser emphasises that his appropriation of the Freudian term was not simply an "arbitrary borrowing" but rather "a necessary one, *for the same theoretical problem is at stake in both cases: with what concept are we to think the determination of either an element or a structure by a structure?*"[80] Althusser was, however, not critical of Freud; in fact Althusser has written in detail on the similarities between the intellectual approaches and methodologies of Freud and Marx.[81] Robert Paul Resch suggests that Althusser was "attracted by Freud's effort to avoid extremes of reductionism and pluralism in his analysis of the unconscious and the drives"[82] and Althusser himself stated that the term "enables us to see clearly why we are dealing with something *quite different from the Hegelian contradiction.*"[83]

The Althusserian concept of overdetermination facilitates a more accurate explanation of the operations of contradiction in his conception of dialectics. Althusser argues that the Marxian understanding of dialectics is much more sophisticated and complicated than the Hegelian in that causal contradictions can be found at a multitude of levels in society. The effect

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[79] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" 101.
[80] Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital,* 2nd ed. trans. Ben Brewster, (London: New Left Books, 1977) 188.
[81] Althusser elaborates these observations in great detail in an article entitled "On Marx and Freud," trans.Warren Montag, *Rethinking Marxism* 4.1 (1991): 17-30. In it he argues that the discoveries of Marx and Freud were both "those of historical materialism"(17) and that they both offered "an example of *materialist and dialectical* thought" (18). He takes the opportunity in this article to indicate the nature of his debt to Freud: "Concerning the dialectic, Freud furnishes it with some surprising figures that he never treated as 'laws' (that questionable form of a certain Marxist tradition): for example, the categories of displacement, condensation, overdetermination, and so on as well as in the ultimate thesis, a meditation on which would take us a long way, that the 'unconscious does not know contradiction' and that the absence of contradiction is the condition of any contradiction. There is in this everything necessary to 'explode' the classical model of contradiction, a model too inspired by Hegel to serve the 'method' of Marxist analysis" (19). Althusser's admiration of Freud is also obvious throughout his autobiography *The Future Lasts a Long Time* ed. Olivier Corpet and Yann Moulier Boutang, trans. Richard Veasey (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993).
[82] Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* 372.
[83] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" 101.

which these have on society, he argues, is a result of the way these contradictions converge or conflate. Overdetermination describes the operation of contradictions in terms of their effect upon the social formation as a whole and how they react back on each level of social formation and other contradictions, in turn, at any particular moment in time.[84] Although Althusser's writing is notoriously difficult, his explanation of overdetermination is worth quoting at length:

> If [...] a vast accumulation of 'contradictions' comes into play *in the same court,* some of which are radically heterogeneous - of different origins, different sense, different *levels* and *points* of application - but which nevertheless 'merge' into a ruptural unity, we can no longer talk of the sole, unique power of the general 'contradiction'. Of course, the basic contradiction dominating the period (when the revolution is 'the task of the day') is active in all these 'contradictions' and even in their 'fusion'. But, strictly speaking, it cannot be claimed that these contradictions and their fusion are merely the *pure phenomena* of the general contradiction. The 'circumstances' and 'currents' which achieve it are more than its phenomena pure and simple. [...] This means that if the 'differences' that constitute each of the instances in play [...] '*merge*' into a real unity, they are not '*dissipated*' as pure *phenomena* in the internal unity of a *simple* contradiction. The *unity* they *constitute* in this 'fusion' into a revolutionary rupture, *is constituted by their own essence and effectivity*, by what they are, and according to the specific modalities of their action. In *constituting* this *unity*, they *reconstitute* and complete their basic animating unity, but at the same time they also bring out its *nature*: the 'contradiction' is inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found, inseparable from its formal *conditions* of existence, and even from the *instances* it governs; it is radically *affected by them*, determining, but also determined in one and the same movement, and determined by the various *levels* and *instances* of the social formation it animates; it might be called *overdetermined in its principle.*[85]

After grasping all this, it is somewhat deflating to read Craib's statement that *overdetermination* "in one sense [...] is another word for 'a lot going on out there'." Craib does, however, acknowledge that the term means something more than this, indeed, that it provides an account of how the different levels of contradiction "come together to reinforce each other or to inhibit each other's development."[86]

To reinforce his argument, Althusser refers to a document written by Lenin which recounts and considers the factors leading to the Russian revolution: "That the revolution succeeded so quickly ... is only due to the fact that, as a result of an extremely unique historical situation, *absolutely dissimilar currents, absolutely heterogeneous* class interests, *absolutely contrary* political and social strivings have *merged* ... in a strikingly

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[84] See Glucksmann, *Structuralist Analysis in Contemporary Social Thought* 100-101.
[85] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" 100-101.
[86] Craib, *Modern Social Theory: From Parsons to Habermas* 159.

"harmonious" manner..."[87] This "merging" of contradictory elements to produce a "harmonious" result is precisely the process leading towards revolutionary rupture which Althusser outlines in his theory of overdetermination.

Althusser emphasises also that, amidst the conglomeration of contradictions in the Marxist revolutionary experience, there remains a "general contradiction" which is "essentially embodied in the contradiction between two antagonistic classes."[88] This general contradiction, he argues,

> is sufficient to define the situation when revolution is the 'task of the day', it cannot of its own simple, direct power induce a 'revolutionary situation', nor *a fortiori* a situation of revolutionary rupture and the triumph of the revolution. If this contradiction is to become '*active*' in the strongest sense, to become a ruptural principle, there must be an accumulation of 'circumstances' and 'currents' so that whatever their origin and sense (and many of them will *necessarily* be paradoxically foreign to the revolution in origin and sense, or even its 'direct opponents'), they '*fuse*' into a *ruptural unity*: when they produce the result of the immense majority of the popular masses *grouped* in an assault on a regime which its ruling classes are *unable to defend.*[89]

In other words, whilst Althusser insists that the impact of Marxian dialectics on historical development cannot be explained in terms of simple determination, there remains within it a single, significant and powerful contradiction which exercises an enormous influence on the movement of capitalist society towards revolution. This general contradiction cannot, on its own or in itself, instigate successful revolutionary processes but rather must combine with other accumulated contradictions in order to effect revolutionary rupture or, in Marx's own words, the "universal crisis."[90]

Althusser perceived the "vast accumulation of contradictions" to be positioned in relationships of domination and subordination to each other according to two different modes of overdetermination. It is here that he extended his adoption of the Freudian notion of overdetermination to incorporate "condensation" and "displacement."[91] These two modes see contradictions in social formation act to reinforce each other or to cancel each other out as they do in Freudian dream analysis. Perhaps the best

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[87] V. I. Lenin, "Letters From Afar" cited in Louis Althusser, *For Marx* 99.
[88] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" 99.
[89] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" 99.
[90] Marx, *Capital* 29.
[91] Although Althusser does not use the Freudian terms condensation and displacement in "Contradiction and Overdetermination," it is clear from the context of his discussion that he appropriated these ideas along with that of overdetermination from Freud. This adoption of all three ideas in conjunction is further indicated in his article "Marx and Freud" (19). See footnote 78 above.

explanation of the relationship and role of condensation and displacement in Althusser's theory is the following description of his understanding of the practical conditions of overdetermination:

> To extend the analysis to all phenomena using this rule, I should like to suggest that an '*overdetermined contradiction*' may either be *overdetermined* in the direction of a *historical inhibition*, a real 'block' for the contradiction (for example, Wilhelmine Germany), or in the direction of *revolutionary rupture* (Russia in 1917), but in neither condition *is it ever found in the 'pure' state.*[92]

In comparing the operations of the progressive or potentially revolutionary parties of these two historical circumstances, Althusser hints at his understanding of condensation and displacement. As he has suggested, however, these conditions cannot occur in "the 'pure' state." Rather, the result or product of these two factors, a movement towards revolutionary rupture or towards historical inhibition respectively, is discernible. The Social Democratic Party in Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for a variety of reasons, was not prepared to operate solely as "a political vanguard of revolution that disregarded the demands of the masses clamoring for an early improvement of their living conditions."[93] Unlike the Russian Bolshevik Party, the Social Democrats of Wilhelmine Germany were not prepared to initiate a process of revolution which would ignore the desires of the population for a future governmental system based on democracy. A democratic organisation of the whole proletarian class was deemed sufficient for the realisation of a classless society, whereas for the Russian Bolsheviks a revolutionary organisation of the whole proletariat was desired and indeed required. The operations of the Social Democratic Party in Wilhelmine Germany were moving towards historical inhibition. In their own internal organisation and operation and in the ways in which they responded to and functioned within the parliamentary system, the Social Democrats were consistently prepared to defer responsibility and decision making to others. Hajo Holborn suggests:

> the freedom of the local party organizations was limited by the control exercised by the central party committee. [...T]he vast majority of all the local cells and clubs [...] complied with the demands of centralization [.... The party secretaries] were not readily willing to jeopardize the institutions of the party on which their own jobs depended for revolutionary adventures. To a greater extent than the party rank and file these party secretaries and editors of party journals were inclined to accept the orders and directives of the national and state chairman, whose influence on the appointment and,

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[92] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" 106.
[93] Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany 1840-1945* (New York: Knopf, 1969) 360.

> through the apportionment of funds, on the work of the functionaries was very great.[94]

Factors like these combined with the influence of revisionism instigated by Eduard Bernstein (which, in direct opposition to Karl Kautsky, saw increasingly conciliatory parliamentary practices evolve into an emphasis on "gradualism" and a questioning of the Marxist notion of the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism) to ensure that any potential revolutionary energy in the Party membership was diffused, deferred and ultimately displaced.

The Russian Bolsheviks, on the other hand, were actively and determinedly revolutionary even though they remained a "small militant elite of workers and intellectuals."[95] Inheritors of a radical revolutionary tradition, which included Bakunin, Herzen, Chernyshevsky and Tkachev, they orchestrated their revolutionary program in the midst of a sea of competing and conflicting organisations and institutions. The contradictory elements evident in Russian society at the beginning of the twentieth century contributed to the "condensation" of overdetermined political development and culminated in successful revolution in 1917. These elements were, in a very general sense, similar to those that existed in Wilhelmine Germany. For example, both nations had rapidly expanding and developing industrial sectors but remained primarily agrarian societies. Both nations were instigating ambitious imperialist advances but were themselves subject to the colonial desires of other nations. Both nations had a highly developed and complex parliamentary system, but were primarily driven by policy decisions from the monarchy. Yet in Russia the combination of a multitude of radical and revolutionary organisations with an unyielding and uncompromising parliamentary and governing organisation resulted in revolutionary rupture. In Germany, at the same time, the centralised and unified radical party was strongly aligned with an organised trade union movement. The trade unions, which were more concerned with reform than revolution, and a parliamentary system that was open to conciliation and compromise, ensured the displacement of revolutionary energy and activity. As a result, Althusser implies, Germany was not subject to a revolutionary upheaval.

So what impact does all this have on the application of Althusser's theory of overdetermination to Prichard's novels? It is obvious that there

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[94] Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany* 356-7.
[95] Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany* 360.

remains a discrepancy between the application of Marxist *political* theory and the application of Marxist *literary* theory to literary analysis. For it is indeed the case that most of what was written by Marx or by others in his name does not specifically address literature or aesthetics. Althusser's theories are a case in point. Even though Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh confidently assert that "[r]ecent Marxist literary theory has been heavily influenced by the work of the French philosopher Louis Althusser,"[96] not all of his works are specifically or even remotely directed towards a theory of literary analysis. Rather, his analysis or explanation of Marxism encompasses a much broader scope of ideological and practical considerations. Resnick and Wolff proclaim, in their summation and tribute to his theories, that Althusser's legacy to Marxism is

> the means with and by which [Marxism can] free itself from the chains of determinism that heretofore had bound its epistemology, value theory, and social analysis to the religiosity of absolutes. [...] The radicalism of [overdetermination's] implications was clear: no part of life was to be given a determining "last-instance" priority over any other. Captured so subtly in that poetic sentence of his, "From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes," it created a new way to think the existence of entities. They were henceforth always overdetermined, hence contradictory, hence changing and thereby altering their influences on all other entities in a ceaseless play of constitution and deconstruction of one another.[97]

Although Althusser developed his theories for application in a socio-political realm, they can be used successfully as a means of deconstructing discourse and specifically narrative. The application of *any* non-literary theory (whether it be political, linguistic, psychoanalytic or drawn from any one of a number of other academic disciplines) to a work of literature is not without difficulties. The variety of Marxist theoretical approaches to literary criticism has aroused considerable discussion. Terry Eagleton, for example, argues that in the absence of a complete aesthetic theory in the writings of Marx and Engels, Marxist literary criticism "involves more than merely re-stating cases set out by the founders of Marxism"[98] and must accommodate a variety of theoretical approaches. Not all of these approaches contribute significantly to literary theory and/or remain true to Marxist theory. For instance Aijaz Ahmad has observed that much of what falls under the heading of "Marxist Literary Criticism" is preoccupied with "the structured inscriptions of class and gender in the very linguistic and

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[96] Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh, ed, *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1989) 52.
[97] Resnick and Wolff, "Althusser's Contribution" 13.
[98] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1976) 2. See also Tony Bennett, *Outside Literature* (London : Routledge, 1990) 117-120.

narrative constructions of [...] texts."[99] Alternatively, he argues, Marxism is used "as a method primarily of *reading*, an analytic of textual elucidation among other such analytics, so that discrete statements or concepts may be lifted out of the political praxis that is implicit in the theoretical unity of Marxism and combined, instead, with statements and concepts manifestly irreconcilable with any conceivable Marxist position."[100] Ahmad also identifies a much older tradition "which has treated Marxism essentially as an epistemology and mainly in the twin realms of culture and aesthetics."[101] He agrees with Perry Anderson's insistence that

> a certain distancing from political economy in favour of philosophy, the habit of reading Marx in relation both to great philosophers of the past and to the main developments in the bourgeois academy, and a preoccupation with cultural superstructures in general and literary production in particular, were all hallmarks of most of the more influential theorists of what has come to be known, largely due to Anderson's own characterization, as 'Western Marxism.'[102]

Another example of a contentious application of Marxist theory to literary criticism has been identified by Terry Eagleton as the "sociology of literature," which he insists "forms one aspect of Marxist criticism as a whole; but taken by itself [...] is neither particularly Marxist nor particularly critical."[103]

As Frederic Jameson argues, the application of a specifically political Marxist theory to literary criticism can be both a valid and a valuable practice:

> what is relatively transparent and demonstrable in the cultural realm, namely that change is essentially a function of content seeking its adequate expression in form, is precisely what is unclear in the reified world of political, social, and economic realities, where the notion that the underlying social or economic "raw material" develops according to a logic of its own comes with an explosive and liberating effect. History is the product of human labor just like the work of art itself, and obeys analogous dynamics: such is the force of this metaphorical transfer, which at the same time goes a long way toward accounting for that profound affinity between literary criticism and dialectical thinking in general[...].[104]

Eagleton agrees, suggesting that "[t]he originality of Marxist criticism, then, lies not in its historical approach to literature, but in its revolutionary understanding of history itself."[105]

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[99] Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso 1992) 7.
[100] Ahmad, *In Theory* 4.
[101] Ahmad, *In Theory* 4.
[102] Ahmad, *In Theory* 4.
[103] Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* 3.
[104] Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) 328.
[105] Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* 3.

It is apparent that the fundamental problem encountered by Marxist literary theorists is either that literature must be read as history or history must be read as literature. Peter Widdowson, in his discussion of how the terms "literature" and "history" relate to each other, outlines two approaches:

> *One:* do we wish to place literary works in the historical context of their moment of production in order to understand them better? In this case we are, of course, privileging literature - history is little more than an auxiliary in a study of literature. [...] So, *two:* do we wish to read literature as a form of historical knowledge, as a particular mode of access to the past? In this second case, we are privileging history - literature merely assists in the understanding of past societies.[106]

Tony Bennett discusses the inadequacies of both of these approaches to literary analysis focusing his argument on the arbitrary privileging of "one term of the couplet over the other."[107] Bennett is wary, however, of discarding this "couplet" altogether. Instead he explores ways in which history can be both adequately theorised *and* employed in literary analysis. In doing this he acknowledges the work of Stephen Greenblatt who "pins his colours to a conception of theory which will allow an understanding of literary works in the contingent and particular forms of their historical embeddedness."[108] According to Bennett, Greenblatt's work steers a course between deconstruction and "New Historicism" and allows him to make the rather remarkable claim that deconstruction alongside Marxism (which seems here to refer specifically to dialectical materialism) has contributed to subverting "the tendency to think of aesthetic representation as ultimately autonomous, separable from its cultural context and hence divorced from the social, ideological, and material matrix in which all art is produced and consumed."[109] The benefit of this approach, as Bennett sees it, is that:

> If deconstruction [...] helps to return literature to 'the slime of history', it also helps us to rethink the nature of the history to which it is returned. No longer a domain of solid extra-textual realities, history is rather thought of as a complex of relations between different regions of textuality, including the literary. Consequently, since this embroils history within

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[106] Peter Widdowson, "The acceptable failure of *Literature and History*," *Literature and History* 11.1 (1985): 15-16.
[107] Bennett, *Outside Literature* 46.
[108] Bennett, *Outside Literature* 68. As Bennett goes on to demonstrate, Greenblatt's argument is "partly Wittgensteinian ('meanings' equals 'use') and partly Foucaultian ('use' refers to a text's placement within institutional strategies and power relations rather than its functioning in inter-individual communication)" (70). He suggests that in both cases "it involves a displacement of the front/back, surface/depth model of the relations between literature and history" (70).
[109] Stephen Greenblatt quoted in Bennett, *Outside Literature* 69.

> the endless play of *différance* [..] the question as to what history is and what it signifies becomes forever undecidable.[110]

Bennett draws two important conclusions from Greenblatt's research. First, "to disqualify history from performing the role of a context or background in relation to which the meaning or effects of literary texts might be stabilised need not result in a perspective of radical indeterminacy." And second, "in place of the use of history as a means of deciding 'the meaning' of literary texts, [...] historical inquiry should aim to recover the specific institutional strategies within which, at particular moments, literary texts are circumstantially embedded and from which [...] they can be said to have functioned as the bearers of specific meanings and effects."[111] The achievement of this kind of theorised position of history then is that it

> no more serves as a means for the study of literature than literature serves as a means for the study of history. For the terms which allow these to be posed as opposites have been undercut. [...T]he analysis of the literary text is incorporated within a project of historical recovery where the history that is to be recovered - that of literature's deployment within and as a part of institutionalised strategies of power - includes the literary as one of its integral components.[112]

The goal for Marxist theory is, in Bennett's own words, to "weave a way between these two approaches" of deconstruction and New Historicism.[113]

To this end Bennett charts the work of John Frow who, in both using and moderating the insights of deconstruction, resists "the deconstructionist temptation to smudge the boundary between the literary and the nonliterary [but] argues the need to retain a category of the literary - not for aesthetic reasons, but for the purposes of a refined and differentiated historical analysis."[114] As Bennett observes:

> Arguing that 'the essentialist concept of "literature"' should be 'replaced by the concept of its particular historical occasions', Frow both relativises the concept while also institutionalising it. If the former move avoids the sense of any transcendent and necessary distinction between the literary and the nonliterary, the latter prevents a slide into total indeterminacy; a literary/nonliterary distinction is maintained, but only at the level of the institutional mechanisms which work to secure it in different ways in different circumstances.[115]

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[110] Bennett, *Outside Literature* 69-70.
[111] Bennett, *Outside Literature* 70.
[112] Bennett, *Outside Literature* 70-71.
[113] Tony Bennett, "Texts in History: The Determinations of Readings and Their Texts," *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, ed. Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington and Robert Young (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 74.
[114] Bennett, *Outside Literature* 72-73.
[115] Bennett, *Outside Literature* 73.

In his essay "Texts in History: The Determinations of Readings and Their Texts," Bennett discusses in considerable detail what this means in the practice of Marxist literary analysis under the sub-heading "Marxism, Discourse Theory and Textual Analysis":

> Ernesto Laclau [...] has sought to reformulate the concerns of Marxism in requiring it to acknowledge and accept the consequences of its own discursivity. [...] Laclau [argues], in effect, that Marxism is concerned with little else other than textual phenomena in the sense that even its primary object - the prevailing system of economic and social relationships - is [...] constituted entirely within discourses whose conditions of existence are largely textual.[116]

As Bennett later observes, this approach is extreme, yet it directs his discussion towards a rigorous investigation of the position of Marxism in the relationship between history and text:

> Laclau argues that Marxism, rather than seeking to efface its own discursivity, should conceive of itself as a set of discursive interventions - interventions which must prove their validity through their effects rather than by claiming any kind of prior ontological privilege. Such interventions, he argues, must seek to interrupt, uncouple and disrupt the prevailing array of discourses through which subject identities are formed - and, thereby, forms of political alliance and cleavage constructed - so as to produce new discursive articulations which will produce new subjects, new forms of political alliance and, above all, discursively construct relations of contradiction through which moments of possible historical rupture might be constituted.[117]

As suggested above, Bennett is wary of going as far as Laclau into "collapsing the social into the discursive" but he is attracted to Laclau's argument "sufficiently to think that the way Marxism represents its relationship to the textual phenomena it engages with is not merely a recondite theoretical question but one with far-reaching political implications."[118] I consider Bennett's research particularly valuable because it is from such a position that he is able to "dispute the view that Marxism should represent texts as possible objects of knowledge" and "take issue with the 'metaphysic of origin' which characterises scientistic representations of the relationship between Marxism and the literary texts with which it engages according to which such texts are construed as forms of the appearance of the real which Marxism 'knows'."[119] In other words, Bennett takes Marxist literary theory away from a preoccupation with discovering a text's objective historical meaning. My research is written against the tendency in Marxist literary theory which positions texts within

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[116] Bennett, "Texts in History" 67.
[117] Bennett, "Texts in History" 68.
[118] Bennett, "Texts in History" 68.
[119] Bennett, "Texts in History" 69.

history and which uses literature as a form of historical knowledge. Instead I move towards a discursive acknowledgment and understanding of history, political theory and specifically Marxist theory.

My deconstruction of Prichard's novels seeks to avoid the approach which prevails in the analysis of Australian Working Class Literature. This research is characterised by a heavy reliance on the historical circumstances from which literary texts emerge. One of the most prolific researchers in this field, Carole Ferrier, has concentrated on the "devaluing" of "cultural production that did not meet criteria of 'value' of bourgeois criticism (dominated by a largely white, male, middle or upper class elite)."[120] In her re-evaluation of the Working Class Novels of Prichard and Jean Devanny, however, she presents a somewhat ambiguous definition of Working Class Literature. The definition takes into consideration specific, objective, historically determined impulses. For example, the criteria considered in the definition include "literature *by* working class people, literature *about* them, or literature *addressed to* them."[121] Having qualified these domains, Ferrier considers Prichard's novels to be a suitable subject for her research into Working Class Literature, a position made all the more secure after the notion of "commitment" is factored into her definition. Ian Syson argues along similar lines to Ferrier. He insists that "The 'value' of writing by working class people can only be fully apprehended through the critical recognition of the circumstances of initial production and subsequent reproductions."[122] Like Ferrier, he argues that aesthetics has been privileged over propaganda (which he sees as a distinctly political action in itself) and that "by bringing particular kinds of aesthetic values to bear [...] we are in danger of ignoring the fundamentally agitational intentions of [working-class] writing."[123] In other words, to disqualify or ignore the political and historical circumstances in which these novels were produced,

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[120] Carole Ferrier "The 'Working Class Novel' in Australia" 13.

[121] Ferrier "The 'Working Class Novel' in Australia" 14. Paul Lauter in his essay "Working-Class Women's Literature: An Introduction to Study," *Women in Print, Vol. 1*, ed Joan E. Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow (New York: MLA, 1982) 109, poses *precisely* the same questions in his attempts to define "working class literature." Ian Syson, in turn, quotes Lauter's questions as a basis for *his* definition of "Working Class Writing" in his article "Towards a Poetics of Working Class Writing" 87.

[122] Syson, "Towards a Poetics of Working Class Writing" 86.

[123] Syson, "Towards a Poetics of Working Class Writing" 90. See also Ferrier, "The 'Working Class Novel' in Australia," where she argues: "To read Prichard and Devanny now with any adequacy we need to take full account of at least all the factors I have mentioned in order to understand more fully not just their texts but the whole institution of literature, the class component and interests reflected in most aesthetic judgements, the political and social life of the period and the situation of Devanny and Prichard as communist women writers in relation to all these things" (23).

and indeed the author's intentions for them, is to politically disempower them. In direct opposition to this approach, I argue that a Marxist analysis of Prichard's work, which is rigorously theorised along the lines suggested above, does not disempower the novels or rely on the privileging of either history or literature. In addition, by denying history a role which renders her novels meaningful I am not suggesting that they are radically indetermined.

The problem remains then as to how Althusser's contribution to Marxist theory (particularly his understanding and identification of overdetermination) can be applied to the practice of analysing literature and, in particular, Prichard's novels. Althusser gives his own endorsement of the application of overdetermination to literary analysis in the concluding remarks of his essay "Lenin and Philosophy" where he states:

> What is new in Marxism's contribution to philosophy is a new *practice of philosophy. Marxism is not a (new) philosophy of praxis, but a (new) practice of philosophy.*
> This new practice of philosophy can transform philosophy. And in addition it can to some extent assist in the transformation of the world.[124]

But such an application remains problematic. Resnick and Wolff address it when they argue:

> For expository simplicity, we organize the many, diverse aspects or processes of social life into three groups: economic, political and cultural. Any particular aspect falls within one of these three groups by definition. Any particular aspect is overdetermined by the complex interaction among all the other aspects[,] both those within its group and those in the other two groups.[125]

Of course the cultural "social aspect" encompasses both the literary text and literary production.[126] In addition. Althusser's concept of ideology could be accommodated to authorise my application of overdetermination to literary analysis. But these approaches are superfluous to the requirements of this study.

According to Resnick and Wolff, "to theoretically construct the overdetermination of any social aspect is to constitute its particular relative

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[124] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971) 67.
[125] Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, "The Theory of Transitional Conjunctures and the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism in Western Europe," *The Review of Radical Political Economics* 11.3 (1979): 6.
[126] See Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, "Althusser's Liberation of Marxian Theory," *The Althusserian Legacy*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1993) 63.

autonomy as the site of influences (effectivities) of other aspects pushing in different, i.e. contradictory, directions. Marxist theory seeks to construct the internal contradictions of each aspect of the social formations which comprise the objects of its knowledge."[127] This in turn allows "the final step and thus goal of our concept of the Marxist theoretical process [which] involves the elaboration of the specific contradictions of social formations."[128] Williams agrees with this assessment of the application of overdetermination:

> The concept of 'overdetermination' is an attempt to avoid the isolation of autonomous *categories* but at the same time to emphasize relatively autonomous yet of course interactive *practices*. In its most positive forms - that is, in its recognition of multiple forces, rather than the isolated forces of modes or techniques of production, and in its further recognition of these forces as structured, in particular historical situations, rather than elements of an ideal totality or, worse, merely adjacent - the concept of 'overdetermination' is more useful than any other as a way of understanding historically lived situations and the authentic complexities of practice. It is especially useful as a way of understanding 'contradictions' and the ordinary version of 'the dialectic', which can so easily be abstracted as features of a theoretically isolated (determining) situation or movement, which is then expected to develop according to certain (determinist) laws. In any whole society, both the relative autonomy and the relative unevenness of different practices (forms of practical consciousness) decisively affect actual development, and affect it, in the sense of pressures and limits, as determinants.[129]

Resnick and Wolff insist that the implications of overdetermination are even more far reaching than Williams acknowledges. They argue that:

> From the overdetermination and contradictions of each social entity [...] all entities are in ceaseless change, since a change in any social entity alters the influence it exerts on all others. The image of Althusserian theory, then, is one of the ceaseless play of change in all entitites. Everything exists in change.[130]

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[127] Resnick and Wolff, "The Theory of Transitional Conjunctures" 6.
[128] Resnick and Wolff, "The Theory of Transitional Conjunctures" 6.
[129] Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 88. As indicated at the beginning of this quotation, Williams does go on to itemise the "difficulties" in the concept of overdetermination. These are focused towards its alleged "structuralism": a Marxist theoretical tendency of which Williams was particularly critical. The exact relationship between Althusser's theories and "structuralism" is debatable. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh, for instance, point out that whilst Althusser and his colleagues "claim not to be structuralists, and have explicitly criticized structuralism, their theories exhibit striking similarities to aspects of structuralist thought [...] and critics who have drawn upon Althusser's work are likely also to draw upon structuralist/semiotic theories," Rice and Waugh, *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* 52. Similarly, Resnick and Wolff argue: "Whether as a philosopher or as a social theorist, Althusser, like Marx before him and postmodernists today, tried to formulate an approach that would be free of the inherent conservatism represented by foundationalism, last-instance determinism, and reductionism in all of their different guises, from positivism and realism in philosophy to structuralism and humanism in social theory," Resnick and Wolff, "Althusser's Contribution" 14.
[130] Resnick and Wolff, "Althusser's Liberation of Marxian Theory" 63.

The capacity for an antiessentialist explanation to resist closure is, perhaps, one of the most attractive aspects of an overdeterminist approach to literary analysis. Resnick and Wolff suggest that a truly antiessentialist account

> exceeds human capability and would require so much time that the object of explanation would have changed beyond recognition and perhaps beyond any interest for us by the time the explanation was complete. The answer to this problem is that one implication of the notion of overdetermination lies in the recognition that all explanations are inherently and unavoidably incomplete.[131]

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak encounters this problem in an overdeterminist analysis of a literary text: "To grasp this narrative's overdeterminations (the many telescoped lines – sometimes noncoherent, often contradictory, perhaps discontinuous – that allow us to determine the reference point of a single 'event' or cluster of 'events') would require a complicated analysis."[132] Elsewhere she encourages a "*strategic* use of positive essentialism" as an approach to an antiessentialist problem.[133]

Although the most attractive aspects of Althusser's theory of overdetermination are its antiessentialist and anti-reductionist characteristics, Spivak's research immediately raises a significant question, articulated by Wolff: "is it possible consistently to think in antiessentialist ways, or is some essentialist or reductionist argument inevitably reached in any constructed knowledge? In other words, notwithstanding antiessentialist disclaimers, are not all explanations of events ultimately essentialist?"[134] This problem is further complicated by the infinite and hence ceaselessly changing nature of any overdeterminist explanation. As Wolff asks: "What, then, can explanation – especially overdeterminist explanation – possibly mean?"[135] He begins to answer this question by assessing the specific problem of antiessentialist explanation:

> [Antiessentialism's] very different explanatory presumption has held that the causes of any possible object of thought are irreducibly multiple, to infinity, and cannot be comparatively rank-ordered as to their effectivities. Thus, *no* explanation can come close to grasping the infinity of causal relations consitituting any object. [...] It follows that the number of

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[131] Resnick and Wolff, "Althusser's Liberation of Marxist Theory" 64-65.
[132] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Feminism and Critical Theory," *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, ed Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (New York: Routledge, 1996) 68.
[133] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* 214; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Criticism, Feminism and the Institution," *The Postcolonial Critic* ed. S. Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990) 11-12.
[134] Wolff "Althusser and Hegel" 151.
[135] Wolff "Althusser and Hegel" 153.

> possible explanations is thus also infinite and that each particular explanation is unavoidably partial.[136]

Wolff goes on to argue for an approach which radically recasts "the concept of explanation itself."[137] He proposes a dialectical solution where overdetermination is reformulated as containing its own negation: essentialism. He suggests that:

> To set out to construct overdeterminist analysis entails, then, immediately and unavoidably, its own annulment by an initial essentialist moment. [...] Yet this essentialist moment, insofar as it figures within an overdeterminist explanation, is a *determinate* negation of that perspective and thus dependent on it. Moreover, the essentialist moment will, in turn, be negated or annulled by overdetermination in a rather classical Hegelian rhythm.[138]

Wolff's suggestion for an antiessentialist overdeterminist explanation which embraces a dialectical procedure is especially valuable for literary analysis. Within the context of Prichard's novel canon it enables the fluid and interdependent nature of the dialectical contradictions within Prichard's texts to be taken into account. From this we can see that Prichard's novels display an overdetermined textual structure but the precise meaning of this is not necessarily immediately apparent.

As Resnick and Wolff have observed: "The contradictions of any theory, thusly overdetermined, give it a tension, a movement, a relative autonomy of its own."[139] It is precisely the relationship between contradiction and narrative tensions in Prichard's work to which my research is directed. It is only with the research of commentators like Sneja Gunew – who asserts that "when I speak of the contradictory meanings in Katharine Prichard's writings, it will emphatically not imply that I am saying that she is a bad writer" [40] – that the notions of conflict and contradiction have been viewed as positive elements of her writing and indeed as contributors to the tension in her texts. My research continues

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[136] Wolff "Althusser and Hegel" 154. Later in his argument, Wolff indicates that the word "explain" is itself problematic: "[it] is just too implicated in essentialist thought. It connotes fullness, completeness, fixity, closure, and the image of a statement about an object of interest that is not itself contradictory, particular and evanescent." He argues that it should be "displaced in favor of 'intervention,' 'position,' or 'story'" (161).

[137] Wolff "Althusser and Hegel" 155.

[138] Wolff, "Althusser and Hegel" 156.

[139] Resnick and Wolff, "The Theory of Transitional Conjunctures" 8.

[140] Sneja Gunew, "Katharine Prichard's Political Writings and the Politics of Her Writing," *Katharine Susannah Prichard Centenary Essays* 50. Similarly, Hegel reminds us that "[i]n general, our consideration of the nature of contradiction has shown that it is not, so to speak, a blemish, an imperfection or a defect in something if a contradiction can be pointed out in it." Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic* 442.

this approach in focusing on the tension evident in Prichard's work and ascribing to it a sense of value.

As Gayatri Spivak points out:

> The issue of value surfaces in literary criticism with reference to canon formation. From this narrowed perspective, the first move is a counter-question: *Why* a canon? What is the ethico-political agenda that operates a canon? By way of a critique of phallogocentrism, the deconstructive impulse attempts to decenter the desire for the canon. Charting the agenda of phallocentrism involves the feminist, that of logocentrism the Marxist interested in patterns of *domination*. Yet for a deconstructive critic it is a truism that a full undoing of the canon-apocrypha opposition, like the undoing of any opposition, is impossible. ("The impossibility of a full undoing" is the curious definitive predication of deconstruction.) When we feminist Marxists are ourselves moved by a desire for alternative canon formations, we work with varieties of and variations upon the old standards. Here the critic's obligation seems to be a scrupulous declaration of "interest."[141]

My approach to the Prichard canon does not presuppose the desire for an alternative one. Rather it is to "chart" and theorise its trajectory. It is here that the notions of *revolutionary rupture* and *historical inhibition* are significant. As we have seen, Althusser argues that neither condition can ever be realised in the "'pure' state," that they are instead "the two limit positions."[142] In other words, we may be aware of a movement closer to one and away from the other but the complete realisation of either state is impossible. The terms represent extreme limits of a continuum along which historical conditions or, in the case of my argument, literary texts move. What, then, is the meaning of these two extreme limits within literary analysis? Because the two limits can never be realised in the "'pure' state" (with, as Althusser argues, the exception of "Purity") the literary equivalents can only ever be hypothesised. The two variables which influence the movement of Prichard's texts in this continuum are political potency and aesthetic power. Hypothetically and phenomenologically speaking, a novel which realises *revolutionary rupture* would be aesthetically "pure" and at the same time would exercise the maximum political impact on all readers and upon the society in which they live. At the other extreme, a novel which realises *historical inhibition* would be aesthetically void and would exercise no political impact.

In summary, my research concentrates on the ability of contradictions in Prichard's novels to create their own effects by reacting against and

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[141] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* 109-110.
[142] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" 106.

operating with each other (whether it be in a movement towards *revolutionary rupture* or towards *historical inhibition*) without any directing influence or authorial intention. A reading of Prichard using Althusserian theory goes beyond an essentialist reading of her texts as simplistically determined by a homogeneously perceived historical conjuncture, and embraces a plenitude of influences on her work.

Methodology

To examine the various overdeterminants on a textual level, the methodological implications of an antiessentialist approach need to be addressed. As part of his quest to make Marxist explanations antiessentialist and dialectical, Wolff provides a "sketch" of an overdeterminist explanation. Following the presentation of an initial momentary essentialism he suggests the following "sequential steps":

> First, the caveat is articulated that the momentary essentialism is just that: an initial approach to the object of explanation that relates it to a subset of its overdeterminants. Next, a second subset of its overdeterminants is explored both in terms of its connection to the object of explanation *and also in terms of how its inclusion in the explanation changes the relation posed in the initial essentialism.* In other words, each essentialist moment is understood to be true - it illuminates a connection - *and* false - it obscures other connections that, if and when considered, will show all previously elaborated connections to have been true and false in this sense. There is no completion or closure to this process of explanation. Each essentialist moment, necessary for any overdeterminist explanation, is also necessarily negated by the selfsame overdeterminist quality of such explanation. Overdeterminist explanation is this sequence of moments.[143]

The benefits of this procedure to a study of literature are numerous. First it proposes an achievable methodological framework which does not collapse into essentialist "closed fixities resisting change"[144] and instead provides an open process of analysis. Second, the moments in the sequence are self-consciously presented within a dialectic of affirmation and negation: as true *and* false. Third, by celebrating its incompleteness, an overdeterminist approach to literary analysis remains open to integration with other particular theories. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, it acknowledges that any explanation is in a process of ceaseless change. That is, every explanation is part of an ongoing dialectical process. "Explanations are

[143] Wolff, "Althusser and Hegel" 156.
[144] Wolff, "Althusser and Hegel" 157.

thus all rather fragile and evanescent."[145] But Wolff insists that this fragility is also a kind of strength: "Just because overdeterminist explanation admits that it excludes at every step, it must offer justification for doing so."[146] In other words, whereas an essentialist explanation claims to be complete and hence closed, an antiessentialist (and specifically overdeterminist) explanation "recognizes, engages, and justifies its own contradiction (it is essentialist *and* antiessentialist)."[147] Because "[n]o one can analyse everything, every aspect of any object of scrutiny," every antiessentialist analyst must identify a specific field of analysis and choose an "entry point."[148] The "entry point" chosen by essentialists is "literally [to] enter into the theoretical process [...] at a point defined by their underlying essentialist presumptions."[149] An antiessentialist's choice of "entry point," on the other hand,

> cannot function as a causal essence of social events, structures or changes. They can never justify their chosen field of analysis, their specific entry points into that field, by reference - implicit or explicit - to some rule of presumption regarding last instance determinism. Instead they are constrained to question and explain how it came to be that they choose this rather than that theoretical entry point at this time in this place.[150]

Moreover, the procedure whereby an "entry point" is chosen by an antiessentialist overdeterminist analyst is itself overdetermined:

> Of course, for an overdeterminist to explain anything, including his/her own choice of theoretical entry point, is to discourse about its overdetermination by all the aspects of the social totality. Hence, a Marxist overdeterminist must explain his/her choice of theoretical entry point, by referring to the specific influences - political, cultural, economic and natural - that combined to produce just that choice at this time and in this place. [151]

The entry point for my antiessentialist analysis is the beginning of Prichard's novel writing career. But because my research identifies a distinct shift in the nature of Prichard's novel narratives it is important to clarify the order in which they were produced. I shall be looking beyond the dates of publication to set the works in chronological order. Many of

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[145] Wolff, "Althusser and Hegel" 158.
[146] Wolff, "Althusser and Hegel" 158.
[147] Wolff, "Althusser and Hegel" 160.
[148] Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, "Introduction: Solutions and Problems" *Rethinking Marxism: Struggles in Marxist Theory: Essays for Harry Magdoff and Paul Sweezy*, ed Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1985) xxviii-xxix.
[149] Resnick and Wolff, "Introduction" xxix.
[150] Resnick and Wolff, "Introduction" xxix.
[151] Resnick and Wolff, "Introduction" xxix.

her works overlapped in their production; for example, when her first novel was published, she had two other novel manuscripts partially completed.

Although Prichard worked in a wide range of literary genres (including short stories, poetry and plays) she is most highly regarded as a novelist. Her first attempt at novel writing was in 1908 when she began *The Wild Oats of Han*, a children's book which she completed in the 1920s. It was published in serial form in the *Home* journal in 1926-27 and in book form in 1928. Her second novel, *Windlestraws* was written during her second period in London and but was not published until 1916. The first novel she published, *The Pioneers*, was also written during this second period in London and was published in 1915, having won the Colonial section of the Hodder and Stoughton Novel Competition. After the end of the First World War and her return to Australia, Prichard worked on her fourth novel, *Black Opal,* which was written in 1918 and published in 1921. Her fifth novel, *Working Bullocks,* begun from notes made at a racing and log-chop meeting in the south-west of Western Australia in 1919, was finished in manuscript six years later and published in 1926. The manuscript of *Haxby's Circus* was nearly complete by then and in her search for a "quiet spot" to complete the novel, she decided to travel to the Pilbara, having been invited to visit Turee Station situated between the towns Parabadoo and Newman. There she was inspired to write *Coonardoo* which she completed and submitted for the *Bulletin* novel prize in 1928. It came equal first with Vance Palmer's *Men Are Human* and was serialised in the journal during 1928. It was published in book form the following year, by which time Prichard had returned to the nearly finished manuscript of *Haxby's Circus* – which was published in 1930. Her next novel *Intimate Strangers* was begun in 1930 and was complete in manuscript form by 1933, but the ending was revised and the manuscript was not sent to the publisher until the middle of 1936. *The Real Russia,* a work of reportage, was composed and published quickly in 1934. Her ninth published novel *Moon of Desire* was written in 1940 and published the following year. Her next three novels were written as a trilogy. *The Roaring Nineties* was published in 1946 and *Golden Miles* in 1948, both with Cape, but the third in the trilogy, *Winged Seeds,* was published by the Australasian Publishing Company in conjunction with Cape in 1950. Collectively they are known as the Goldfields Trilogy. She had made notes for her autobiography *Child of the Hurricane* for many years, and it was eventually published in 1963 by Angus and Robertson. Her last written

and published novel, *Subtle Flame*, was published in 1967, only two years before her death.

I will argue that her work can be fruitfully understood as falling fairly neatly into two main groups: her early work up to *Haxby's Circus* and her later novels, from *Moon of Desire* on. This, of course, leaves one novel, *Intimate Strangers* – which I consider in conjunction with her travelogue *The Real Russia.* For it is the case, I believe, that Prichard's writing went through a process of transformation between the two main groups of novels, and that this corresponds with a shift in her attitude to literary production. It is in these intermediate works that the nature of this transformation can be perceived and the textual difference of her later works can be explained.

Like many author's, Prichard's career experienced a process of maturation, experimentation and change, but in her case it also experienced a fundamental and revolutionary shift in purpose and motivation. Any failure to acknowledge this shift and its causes results in a necessarily inadequate examination of her novels. It is important, however, to remember that during the course of her career, Prichard developed a style and a particular manner of literary construction. Sneja Gunew has demonstrated the importance of discerning the idiolect which is evident in Prichard's political essays, even at the risk of ahistoricism, and it is equally important to recognise and define the idiolect in her fiction writing.[152] No one novel can be established as representative of her canon, but they do share a great many characteristics in their style, characterisation and composition.

This thesis examines the ways in which two bodies of writing differ from each other, not only in their textual differences, but also in the difference between their critical and popular reception. Prichard's early novels are characterised, I argue, by a number of influences and elements which are inherently contradictory in their nature. These elements emerge in the texts without any significant alteration. Each influence or element which is evident in the texts is, within its own theoretical motivations and constraints, interested in addressing the problems of the human condition. The machinations of these influences and elements in Prichard's texts are such that each struggles with the others in a fluid, ceaseless and

[152] Gunew, "Katharine Prichard's Political Writings and the Politics of her Writing" 53.

interdependent manner. My argument is concerned with the way in which a multitude of conflicting and often directly contradictory ideological, political, aesthetic, theological, mythological, psychoanalytical and historical influences operate in her texts. The texts themselves quest for an answer to the problems of the "human condition," a quest which is distinctly dialectical in both its method and its outcome. Indeed, the act of writing as process and the positioning of these ideas adjacent to each other serves to develop a dialogue or discussion within the texts which is confused yet curiously effective. It appears that this questing leaves the texts pondering the paradox that by asking questions regarding the problems of the human condition they discover that there can be no satisfactory solitary answer. The narratives are thus unable to settle on a single prescriptive theory as an adequate and convincing model of social organisation. This inability, however, should not be read as a failure. For indeed this narrative questing moves through a dialectical process. Although no single answer to the problem of the human condition is discovered in Prichard's novels, the dialectical discourse employed in the narratives addresses the problem in a rigorous and intriguing way. As we have seen, the tension in these novels cannot be adequately explained by one contradictory or dialectical "dispute." It can only be explained by the numerous and complex collection of contradictions within the narratives.

As I have indicated, Prichard's later novels are generally perceived to concentrate on Communism, and the mass of contradictory influences which were active in her earlier works appears to have been re-appropriated by the texts to serve a distinctly political purpose. The contradictions which these inherently and necessarily produce are no longer welcomed by the texts or even allowed to play freely within them, but rather operate as renegade elements which the narratives attempt to suppress, control and redirect into that which is of primary interest to them: progressive politics. In attempting to conform to the rigorous requirements of Socialist Realism, her fiction struggles to re-position each of the elements which previously operated discursively and dialectically. Instead they now operate with a contrived political motivation and serve a distinctly political purpose. In other words, the energy which an influential element had previously exerted as part of the overdetermined dialectical process operating within the text, is overwhelmed by the political momentum of the narrative. The novels' newly acquired political conviction interrupts and displaces the overdetermined dialectical process within the narrative.

We can then view her *early* novels as moving along the "continuum" towards a state of *revolutionary rupture*. Even though the conglomeration of influences originates from a similar political position, they are nevertheless diverse and represent antagonistic sets of belief. The overdetermined dialectical debate which operates amongst these elements produces a tension which is distinctly political. So even though Prichard did not write these novels with the specific intention of producing politically effective or inspirational books, they are in fact powerful, politically charged narratives. This accounts for both their popular and critical attraction much better than the simpler determinist, reductionist or essentialist explanations which have prevailed in critical commentary on Prichard's work. It is no accident that the novel that demonstrates the most acute levels of textual activity and tension, *Coonardoo,* remains today her most popular, widely read and well-known novel. The elements which emerge in the narratives of these early novels are influenced by a variety of progressive, left-wing or radical political, philosophical and social theories.

Her *later* novels move towards a state of *historical inhibition*. In fact, the narrative tension of these novels is diffused through this inhibition to the point where they are politically and aesthetically impotent. The novel which demonstrates this best, *Subtle Flame,* is arguably her least known and analysed novel. The fact that the Trilogy has not received the same critical acclaim or "canonisation" as earlier works such as *Coonardoo* or *Working Bullocks* suggests that it lacks some quality that is admired in her earlier novels. Indeed, the narratives of these later novels are *not* characterised by a questing tension. They are much more determined and assured. The shift from rupture toward inhibition goes some way towards explaining why the later novels received a poor critical and popular reception.

This shift was unarguably motivated and informed by Prichard's changed attitude to literary production after her voyage to the Soviet Union in 1933 and her exposure to the theory of Socialist Realism. But it is too simple to say that these novels "fail" because they *are* Socialist Realist. In attempting to achieve the practical application of the theory in the Australian context Prichard was indeed aiming to produce works which would project a distinct and powerful political message. As we shall see, however, the production of truly Socialist Realist literature in a non-socialist or pre-revolutionary society is virtually impossible. In her attempts to produce

Socialist Realist literature, Prichard simply infused every aspect of her narratives with a progressive political motivation. Rather than producing works of significant political impact, however, this practice rendered the previous power of her writing impotent. Prichard's despair at the poor reception of what she considered her greatest works – inspired by a unique and, in her mind, revolutionary theory of literary production – is laden with irony. For it was precisely the attempt to apply this new and revolutionary theory which served to disempower her writing. Whilst Prichard's intention may have been to produce novels which were politically powerful and inspirational, the impact of the theory of Socialist Realism on her writing in fact rendered them incapable of this.

The trajectory of Prichard's novel canon is clear. Her earlier novels, whilst each demonstrating a textual tension, are not in any sense uniform. Instead, we can see a gradual but distinct development of this tension within the novels, beginning with *Windlestraws* and climaxing in *Intimate Strangers,* with the texts moving discernibly closer to a state of *revolutionary rupture.* From the conclusion of *Intimate Strangers* to the end of her career we can see a relatively rapid and significant movement away from this state of *revolutionary rupture* towards *historical inhibition.*

Following the sketch of overdeterminist explanation provided by Wolff, the first Chapter of this thesis defines my "entry point." It considers the factors which contribute to the "trajectory" of Prichard's writing career. This investigation begins by focusing on the autobiographical, semi-autobiographical and biographical texts. An investigation of her first published novels, *Windlestraws* and *The Pioneers,* uncovers the starting point from which the "trajectory" begins. I argue that her first published novels provide an indication of the direction in which her novel-writing would move – that is a movement towards *revolutionary rupture.*

The second chapter articulates the initial momentary essentialism. This subset of overdeterminants is concentrated on a more detailed examination of the operations of contradiction in her next two novels *Black Opal* and *Working Bullocks.* This chapter concentrates on the General

Contradiction which is evident within Prichard's novels between Moralist Socialism inherited from Romanticist British Marxism and a Rationalist Marxism influenced by Bolshevism. The ensuing tension provides one of the best examples of the operation of contradiction within Prichard's writing.

The second subset of overdeterminants is explored in Chapter Three. In *Coonardoo* and *Haxby's Circus*, the concentration of contradictions is at its most acute and the textual tension is similarly intense as a result. This chapter investigates the overdetermined dialectical questing that results from the tension between contradictory elements and influences, as it contributes to the tragic structure of these novels. It considers also the impact of this second set of overdeterminants on Prichard's novel canon and on the initial momentary essentialism examined in the previous chapter.

To continue the overdeterminist explanation of Prichard's novel canon, my argument continues as a sequence of moments in the fourth chapter. Focusing on *Intimate Strangers* (and with extensive reference to *The Real Russia*) this chapter investigates the motivations for and manifestations of the shift away from *revolutionary rupture* towards *historical inhibition*. It discusses in detail the impact which Prichard's voyage to the Soviet Union and in particular her encounter with the theory of Socialist Realism had on her work. The changes made to the ending of *Intimate Strangers* (prior to publication but after Prichard's conversion to the theory of Socialist Realism) demonstrate this "shift" within a single novel.

In the final chapter the manifestations of an inhibited mode of textual construction are examined in Prichard's later novels: The Goldfields Trilogy and *Subtle Flame*. This chapter examines the ways in which the overdetermined dialectical discourse is interrupted and displaced by the narrative's political pre-occupations. The political motivation which is obvious in the construction of these novels is contrasted with their political impact.