

☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

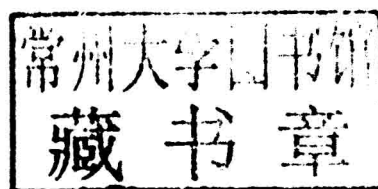
CLC 386

Volume 386

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short-Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers

Lawrence J. Trudeau
EDITOR



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Preface

Named “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 3,000 authors from 91 countries now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Before the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially necessary to today’s reader.

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CLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors of the twenty-first century. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 covered authors who died after December 31, 1959. Since January 2000, the series has covered authors who are living or who died after December 31, 1999; those who died between 1959 and 2000 are now included in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. There is minimal duplication of content between series.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science-fiction writers, literary and social critics, world authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews selected from hundreds of review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning an author’s career from its inception to current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other works that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

CLC is part of the survey of criticism and world literature that is contained in Gale’s *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*.

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- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the author’s name.

- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication information of each work is given. In the case of works not published in English, a translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is a published translated title or a free translation provided by the compiler of the entry. As a further aid to the reader, a list of **Principal English Translations** is provided for authors who did not publish in English; the list selects those translations most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, plays are dated by first performance, not first publication, and the location of the first performance is given, if known. Lists of **Representative Works** discussed in the entry appear with topic entries.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
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Wesley, Marilyn C. "Anne Hébert: The Tragic Melodramas." *Canadian Women Writing Fiction*. Ed. Mickey Pearlman. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1993. 41-52. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter. Vol. 246. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 276-82. Print.

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Gail Jones

1955-

Australian novelist and short-story writer.

INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial in outlook, Gail Jones's works often explore the complications of colonialism and modernity, including the repercussions of past injustices committed against indigenous Australians, as well as the traumatic consequences of those injustices for white Australians. Interweaving themes related to geography, regional culture, and history, Jones has used mood and nonlinear narration to create elegant meditations on history, loss, and modernity in her works, which have been widely translated.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Jones was born in Harvey, Western Australia. She attended the University of Western Australia in Perth and received her doctoral degree in 1995. A professor in the Writing and Society Research Centre at the University of Western Sydney, New South Wales, she is the author of two collections of short stories and six novels. Her first published work of fiction, *The House of Breathing* (1992), won the Federation of Australian Writers' Barbara Ramsden Award for Book of the Year, as well as the 1993 Steele Rudd Award. Jones has since won the Nita B. Kibble Literary Award in 2003 for *Black Mirror* (2002) and in 2012 for *Five Bells* (2011), as well as the Western Australian Premier's Award in 2004 and the Adelaide Festival Award for Fiction in 2006 for *Sixty Lights* (2004).

Other awards include the Age Book of the Year, the ASAL Gold Medal for Australian Writing, and the Philip Hodgins Memorial Medal (for a body of work). Jones's short story "Desolation" (2003) won a 2005 O. Henry Award for short fiction. She also received the 2001 Australian Universities Teaching Award in the Humanities and Arts and a PEN Sydney Award in 2011. Jones's research interests include postcolonialism, photography, cinema, and psychogeography, the study of the impact of geographical environment on people's emotions and behavior.

MAJOR WORKS

Jones's first book, *The House of Breathing*, is a collection of fourteen intellectually challenging short stories that feature such themes as history, grief, and memory. The title story is

about passengers on the doomed *Titanic* ocean liner; other pieces deal with political themes. "Dark Times" links the experience of a foreign scholar during India's state of emergency from 1975 to 1977, when Indira Ghandi initiated the state-sanctioned suppression of her political foes, with the 1819 Peterloo Massacre, a cavalry attack on a crowd of about sixty thousand people demanding parliamentary reform in Manchester, England. "Touching Tiananmen" traces the reaction of a tourist in China during the suppression of the pro-democracy demonstration in Tiananmen Square in 1989, and "Other Places" focuses on the experience of a garrison of soldiers on the Australian border during Indonesia's invasion of East Timor in 1975.

Fetish Lives (1997), Jones's second collection of short fiction, scrutinizes how biography becomes commodified in the modern world. The stories feature such diverse subjects as the nineteenth-century American poet Walt Whitman, the twentieth-century Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, and the notorious twentieth-century Dutch spy Mata Hari, placing them in fictional scenarios so that they can be viewed differently from the way they have historically been portrayed. In "Snow," Jones depicted the ailing nineteenth-century Russian writer Anton Chekhov as he recuperates in Ceylon and falls in love with a local woman whom he cannot take back to Russia, and in "The Veil," she renders Mata Hari as a woman scarred by the experiences of her son's death by poisoning.

Black Mirror, Jones's first novel, establishes many of the themes that reappear in her later novels, including grief, trauma, ethics, and the experiences of Australians abroad. Narrated in nonlinear fashion, the novel follows Australian art historian Anna Griffin, who has come to London to write the biography of Victoria Morrell, a famous avant-garde artist who left Australia in the 1930s to live first in Paris and later in London. As the two women, both of whom spent their childhoods in Western Australia, get to know each other, Victoria's imminent death—and her obvious need to tell her life story—lends a sense of urgency and poignancy to their interactions. Throughout the novel, Anna wrestles with the professional difficulty of how to order the biography and with the personal problem of sorting out the ethics of friendship, mourning, and the representation of another individual.

Like *Black Mirror*, the novel *Sixty Lights* has as its protagonist an Australian expatriate, this time a young woman living in the Victorian era. Lucy Strange, fascinated by the new technology of photography, travels first to London and then to India, honing her skills as a photographer and

dealing with an accidental pregnancy and marriage before she dies of consumption at the age of twenty-four. A keen observer and interpreter of her surroundings, Lucy keeps two folders, one titled "Special Things Seen," and the other, "Photographs Not Taken." As much about the early days of photography as it is about Lucy's life, the novel is written in a complex style and structured as a series of photographic images. Lucy's impressions of India are conveyed through lush imagery, but the novel suggests that photography cannot, ultimately, capture either history or the complexities and ambiguities of individual lives.

Linked with *Sixty Lights* by the motif of an Australian woman living in Europe, as well as by its exploration of the role of technology, *Dreams of Speaking* (2006) tells the story of Alice Black, a Western Australian academic who is in Paris to conduct research for her book *The Poetics of Modernity*. While there, she befriends an elderly Japanese man, Mr. Sakamoto, who is working on a biography of Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone. When Alice later receives a message from Mr. Sakamoto's daughter that he has suffered a stroke, she flies to Nagasaki. She is aware that Mr. Sakamoto and his uncle survived the atomic bomb attack on Nagasaki but that the rest of the family was killed. Alice has an epiphany as she looks down on the city from the airplane, realizing that modernity is never free of the past and that each person's life experience is intertwined with history and geography. She abandons work on her book and flies back to Perth, Australia, to confront vestiges of her own uncomfortable past.

In *Sorry* (2007), the historical injustices perpetrated by Australian colonists on indigenous Australians, a theme Jones touched on in her earlier novels, take center stage. Set in Broome, Western Australia, in the 1930s, *Sorry* is the tale of an English anthropologist and his family, whom he has brought to Australia, much to the displeasure of his wife, Stella. She suffers from bouts of serious depression, which are alleviated only when she immerses herself in the plays of Shakespeare. Perdita, their ten-year-old daughter, is lonely and neglected, but she finds companionship and affection with the family's Aboriginal servant, Mary, and Billy, the deaf-mute son of their neighbors. While Stella is hospitalized for depression, Perdita returns home one day to find her father raping Mary. Perdita stabs and kills her father, but her memory becomes blocked, and she develops a severe stutter as a result. Mary takes the blame for the murder. Perdita and her mother move to Perth several years later and, when Stella is again hospitalized, foster parents Ted and Flora Ramsay care for Perdita. With the help of speech therapist Dr. Victor Oblov, a Russian émigré, Perdita gradually recovers normal speech. While reciting a passage from a Shakespearean play, she experiences a psychic breakthrough and is able to recall that she killed her father. Having learned that Mary has died of appendicitis, Perdita realizes that any acknowledgment of Mary's sacrifice would be too little, too late. She can neither apologize to Mary nor testify on her behalf. Jones's emotionally compelling novel, narrated

alternately in the first and third person, implicitly indicts the actions of the Australian government, which throughout much of the twentieth century removed thousands of indigenous children, known as the Stolen Generations, from their families to institutions and foster homes in order to westernize them. Although Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issued an official apology for the practice in 2008, many Australian citizens considered it belated and inadequate.

The novel *Five Bells* is about the relationships among four characters—Ellie, James, Pei Xing, and Catherine—at Sydney's Circular Quay. The action takes place over the course of a single day and involves the disappearance of a girl, about which two of the four are questioned. Now a teacher, James is suffering from the trauma of having one of his pupils drown on a field trip, and Ellie, who was James's teenage sweetheart, is a postgraduate student in literature. Pei Xing, an elderly migrant from Shanghai, China, is dealing with painful memories of the Cultural Revolution, in which the Communist Party violently attempted to purge the country of "impure" elements. Catherine, a visiting Irish journalist, is coping with the death of her older brother. All of the characters are engulfed by their personal griefs and their efforts to preserve their memories and mourn their losses. Jones delivers probing psychological profiles of the foursome against the poetically rendered, sound- and image-rich backdrop of Sydney Harbour.

The ensemble novel *A Guide to Berlin* (2015) references the 1925 short story of the same name by Russian author Vladimir Nabokov. Jones's novel brings together six characters—strangers to one another—who meet in Berlin as a result of their interest in Nabokov's work. Two are Japanese, two Italian, one American, and one Australian. Cass, a young Australian woman, is the focus of the novel. The six form friendships and share details about their past and present lives. All are enthralled by the city of Berlin, but each perceives it differently and experiences the violent event on which the plot turns in an individual manner.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critics have admired Jones's compelling treatment of individuals dealing with loss, her use of geography and urban landscapes in her fiction, and her forthright introduction of sensitive political issues concerning Australia's past and present. Although most reviewers have found her style engaging and her treatment of personal and social trauma insightful, others have commented that her prose is overly extravagant and demanding. Robert Dixon (2012) argued that Jones's fictional works "cannot be understood fully without making connections between them and the essays she publishes as an academic." Pointing out literary and historical allusions throughout her works, Dixon demonstrated that her output "demands to be read as a whole: that is to say, her novels are often ways of thinking through in

fictional form the theoretical issues that preoccupy her in her essays.”

In his comments on *Sorry*, Christopher Eagle (2012) associated stuttering with women’s difficulty in articulating their views, especially their ability to speak out on behalf of people treated unfairly in society. He likened Perdita’s struggle to recover her speech and her memory of killing her father with that of Merry in American novelist Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral* (1997). Eagle discussed Jones’s linking of memory and language in terms of Perdita’s search “to find the right space in which to give voice and shape to her words.” Approaching *Sorry* from the theoretical standpoints of postcolonial studies and globalism, Diana Brydon (2013) emphasized Jones’s analysis in the novel of the implications of “remembering differently,” noting that they require an ethical response to the “difficult forms of knowing” about historical injustice. In his analysis of *Dreams of Speaking*, Dixon (2008) concentrated on the protagonist’s attempt to “write a poetics of modernity.” Though Alice sets out to complete her theoretical project, Dixon observes that upon meeting Mr. Sakamoto, she abandons her initial efforts in order to reflect on their relationship, which “transforms her poetics of modernity into a meditation on the ethics of friendship.”

Recollection is also the topic of Leigh Dale’s 2013 essay (see Further Reading) on Jones’s *Five Bells*. Dale asserted that the failure to remember, voice, and grieve for his student’s drowning makes James’s suicide “a kind of atonement but also a bleak failure.” Dale focused on Jones’s use of sounds and images in the novel, pointing out that the background drone of the Aboriginal didgeridoo “is not simply metonymic of Aboriginal presence” but is also “a kind of structuring device for the novel’s meditation on presence, memory, and forgetting.” Kate Mitchell (2008) and Sukhmani Khorana (2007; see Further Reading) considered Jones’s use of photography in *Sixty Lights*. Mitchell compared photography in her novel in relation to its employment in Canadian author Helen Humphreys’s *Afterimage* (2000). Khorana examined Jones’s work alongside Jane Campion’s film *The Piano* (1993) to measure the passage and the effects of time in women’s lives. Khorana suggested that both works “argue for and present a new discourse for representing time in general, and the history of women and postcolonial people in particular.”

Jelena Krstovic

PRINCIPAL WORKS

**The House of Breathing*. South Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre, 1992. (Short stories)

†*Fetish Lives*. South Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre, 1997. (Short stories)

Black Mirror. Sydney: Picador, 2002. (Novel)

“Desolation.” *Kenyon Review* ns 25.1 (2003): 9-17. (Short story)

Sixty Lights. London: Harvill, 2004. (Novel)

Dreams of Speaking. London: Harvill Secker, 2006. (Novel)

The Piano. Sydney: Currency, 2007. (Essay)

Sorry. London: Harvill Secker, 2007. (Novel)

Five Bells. Sydney: Vintage, 2011. (Novel)

A Guide to Berlin. Sydney: Vintage, 2015. (Novel)

*Includes “The House of Breathing,” “Dark Times,” “Touching Tiananmen,” and “Other Places.”

†Includes “Snow” and “The Veil.”

CRITICISM

Paul Genoni (essay date 2004)

SOURCE: Genoni, Paul. “‘Art Is the Windowpane’: Novels of Australian Women and Modernism in Inter-war Europe.” *JASAL: Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 3 (2004): 159-72. Web. 11 June 2015.

[In the following essay, Genoni examines three contemporary novels that reflect on the relationship between Australian women and modernism in war-torn Europe: Jones’s *Black Mirror*, Rodney Hall’s *The Day We Had Hitler Home* (2000), and Alex Miller’s *Conditions of Faith* (2000). Genoni discusses how the events in *Black Mirror* allow the reader to experience and thus understand Victoria’s “exposure to a compelling but troubled Europe.”]

During the 1990s there was a growing interest in the role played by women in the development of Australian modernist art. Books by Caroline Ambrus, *Australian Women Artists: First Fleet to 1945* (1992), and Helen Topliss, *Modernism and Feminism: Australian Women Artists 1900-1940* (1996), were particularly influential. Ambrus and Topliss argued that women had been effectively removed from the prevailing history of Australian art, and in particular they sought to highlight the vital role they had played in the engagement with modernism between the wars.

The contribution made by women to Australian modernism received further attention in 1999, when Drusilla Modjeska’s *Stravinsky’s Lunch* was published. This dual biography of Stella Bowen and Grace Cossington Smith traced the life stories of two very different women, both of whom had been significant early Australian practitioners of modernist styles. Despite their important and seemingly obvious accomplishments, Bowen and Cossington Smith were, along with other women painters of the period, slow in being acknowledged.

Following the publication of *Stravinsky’s Lunch*, the *Modern Australian Women: Paintings and Prints 1925-1945*

exhibition toured several Australian cities in 2000 and 2001. The exhibition featured paintings by Bowen and Cossington Smith, plus other women whose art had also made an important contribution to Australian modernism. In the exhibition catalogue Ron Radford argued that although the modernist heroes of Australian art were almost entirely men who achieved their fame in the 1940s and 50s—Arthur Boyd, Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale, Albert Tucker, John Perceval—that the most accomplished of their forerunners were nearly all women. Radford wrote that:

now there is general acknowledgment in Australian art literature that artists like Margaret Preston, Clarice Beckett, Grace Cossington Smith, Grace Crowley, Dorrit Black and Kathleen O'Connor were the major Australian artists of the 1920s and 1930s. It is now fully understood that women outshone men in both painting and printmaking of the period as they did also in the crafts.

(113)

Part of what Ambrus, Topliss, Modjeska and Radford achieved was to trace the lineage of influence and learning in the art of these women, thereby establishing their credentials as self-conscious and reflective practitioners rather than merely mimics or dabblers. The foremost evidence for this claim to seriousness of purpose was attached to what was a rite of passage for embryonic artists of the period, the first hand exposure to the galleries and art schools of Europe.

Ann Galbally, in an account of Australian artists who travelled to Europe before the First War, concluded that, "In the years 1881-1899 seventeen significant artists left Australia [for Europe]" (58). All of those she names were men. Travelling in search of an art education inevitably meant time in Paris, but Galbally points out that for most of these men this was an essentially conservative experience. For while they were drawn to Paris "as the most vital and daring place to be studying, their social aspirations remained fervently directed towards London" (64). Even more tellingly, the Paris schools and ateliers at which they chose to study were amongst the least adventurous and largely immune from the emerging practice of modernism.

During the years immediately before and following the first world war, however, a generation of women artists began to join their male counterparts in Europe. Belying their perceived role as amateurs, they not only found their way to London and Paris, but particularly in the post war years they made increasingly adventurous decisions as to exactly where they would pursue their education. At a time when, as John Williams argued in his book *Quarantined Culture: Australian Reactions to Modernism*, Australians generally took a reactionary and anti-modern backstep following the war, there was a core group of women who consciously sought out the opportunity to engage with the modernist forms of representation emerging in Europe, particularly on the continent. Amongst those who made the pilgrimage were Bessie Davidson, Stella Bowen, Margaret Preston,

Hilda Rix Nicholas, Thea Proctor, Jessie Traill, Kathleen O'Connor, Agnes Goodsir, Dorrit Black, Grace Crowley, Anne Dangar and Ethel Spowers. Some of them such as Davidson, Bowen and Goodsir spent most or all of their lives thereafter in Europe, while others continually moved between Europe and Australia.

The academic interest in the role of women artists in embracing modernism has also been reflected in fiction. This essay considers three recent novels—Gail Jones' *Black Mirror* (2002), Rodney Hall's *The Day We Had Hitler Home* (2000), and Alex Miller's *Conditions of Faith* (2000)—each of which provides a reflection on the role of Australian women and their encounter with modernism in Europe in the inter-war years.

The theme of the return to the ancestral European home is of course not new in Australian fiction. In a 1988 essay Tony Hassall nominated "the quest for 'home' in Europe" as one of "three interrelated quests which have haunted the imagination of European Australians" (390). Referring to novels by Henry Handel Richardson, Martin Boyd, Patrick White and Christina Stead, Hassall presented this quest as a nostalgic longing for a lost and declining world and he argued that it attains its "classic expression" in Boyd's *Lucinda Brayford*, where Europe is revealed to be "a cultural museum, full of gorgeous buildings, but in the process of losing its cultural wealth and acquiring [...] corrupted values" (401). In contrast, Australia is represented as being a last land of opportunity, and a final chance to slough off the skin of the moribund Old World.

More recently Elizabeth Webby has noted the importance of the "travelling heroine" in contemporary Australian fiction. Webby noted that while novels featuring stories of arrival and departure are to be expected of a settler culture in its formative period, it was "a surprise" to still find so many novels featuring travel. She noted in particular the number of contemporary novels set in the first half of the twentieth century and featuring a central female character who travels to Europe.

This essay addresses the manner in which the three novels under consideration break down the Old World/New World dichotomy of the "quest" novel discussed by Hassall. It examines why contemporary Australian novelists—armed with an awareness of the ongoing revision of the histories of modernism—have found the woman artist travelling in Europe and encountering a world that is paradoxically both Old and New, to be a fertile point of departure for an interrogation of established narratives of modernism and post-colonialism.

GAIL JONES, *BLACK MIRROR*

In *Black Mirror* Gail Jones tells the dual stories of artist Victoria Morrell and her biographer Anna Griffin. From the novel's opening Anna is seen as projecting herself into the world of her subject, by imagining herself as the focus of a modernist painting.

She pops open her umbrella, holds it close above her, and is transformed to a domed shape [...].

For some reason this is the way she imagines herself, as a modernist composition in a hypothetical artwork, caught in the possibilities of the elements and their visual trickery.

(1)

Anna finds an iconic representation of the experience of the female modernist artist—a talent distorted and neglected due to her role as model and concubine—in Victoria's life.

The two women are connected by childhoods spent in the Western Australian goldfields. Whereas Anna was born on the goldfields, Victoria was born in Melbourne in 1910, moved to Kalgoorlie as a child, and then to London at the age of twenty. This goldfields connection is a powerful element in the novel. The young Anna realises that the "desert around here was a forest of symbols" (125). These symbols unite the two women, in particular the spectre of the intricate maze of the underground mine which Victoria's father—a personification of the modern, industrial spirit—has brought to the goldfields. As Anna writes, "*We share images* [...]. What could be more intimate? The desert. The mines. The search in darkness for gold" (35).

The mines form part of a web of fantastic symbols and images which Jones represents as a dream awaiting expression by a surrealist's brush. It is a landscape where small animals are tossed through the air by violent winds, where trees dangle upside down in mirage twinned by a "vague and spectral duplication" (73), where men spend their lives in a "night-shaded other-world," their faces revealed only by a "splash of circular light" (126). Jones writes that Victoria was a "child who knew that horizons swung and that the look of things converted, and understood that marvelous conjunctions reconfigure the ordinary as excitement." And as she absorbed her landscape and its symbols, it is said that "She was practicing Surrealism" (174).

The Kalgoorlie of Victoria's childhood is being exposed to the first experience of some of the defining symbols of modernism. Her father buys and flies one of the first planes in the country and in doing so introduces the girl to new versions of familiar landscapes where, "the shape of wings skimmed over the ground and Victoria understood that this was their own projected shadow, their inhuman shape cast over an altered geography" (167). The Lyric Theatre is built, and in the darkened cinema the young Victoria is exposed to a "completely new empire of signs" (193). These signs and the other dreamlike images which crowd Victoria's world can't, however, find an appropriate artistic expression in Australia at this time.

Eventually with her mother dead and estranged from the rest of the family, Victoria travels to London. The city presents Victoria with an intense exposure to the urban face of modernism. She is catapulted into a twentieth-century city, one that magnifies and condenses the industrial and tech-

nological precursors to modernism which were appearing in her goldfields town. The single cinema has become an industry; the one plane transformed into a network of mass transportation; and the subterranean world of the mine has become a labyrinthine underground rail network. It is also a world of startling juxtapositions—unimaginable in Australia—where a visit to the British Museum provides a kaleidoscopic view of other worlds, all based on "Surrealism [and] its presumption of peep-showing the world's everything" (36).

Victoria commences art studies, but she doesn't yet have the means to express an understanding of her image-saturated life or the world in which she now lives. She is she says "A colonial. Lost" (36). Her epiphany arrives, however, when at a moment when she is feeling most nostalgic for desert landscapes, she attends a Surrealist exhibition in London. Here she encounters the work of continental artists such as Ernst, Oppenheim and Dali, and is "overwhelmed with a sense of providential culmination" by an exhibition that supplies her with a "new intelligibility" (69).

Fired by her enthusiasm Victoria immediately decamps for Paris where she is drawn into an *avant-garde* surrealist and masculine circle that includes Pablo Picasso, Max Ernst, Man Ray and Andre Breton. It is a world of experimentation, excitement and challenge, but also of casual cruelty, insult and disregard. It is a world Victoria finds both fascinating and appalling, and so unlike the Australia she left behind. Jones writes that to Victoria:

Breton signified Paris itself. He was what Victoria wanted, and also what repelled her. He was Europe. He was Surrealism. He was high-aestheticism. Victoria had carried her own nationality like an inferiority complex, convinced of the superiority of all-things-European [...]. She felt unknown to herself. Lost in Paris. And when she said out loud the word Australian [...] she heard resident in her own voice an apology and deviation.

[145]

In this milieu Victoria plays her assigned roles of temptress, lover and model, all the while learning to paint her own surreal vision of the world in the shadow of the great names. But although she learns to paint in a style capable of expressing the complex symbolic web that connects her childhood landscapes, her relationship with her dysfunctional family, and her exposure to a compelling but troubled Europe, she receives scant recognition in the obdurately male circle in which she moves. Her personal life dissolves into drunkenness and casual sex, while Paris is thrown into the darkest pit of the modern experience during the wartime occupation. Her Jewish lover is lost to a concentration camp and Victoria is humiliated and raped by German soldiers.

After the war Victoria retreats to London to continue painting. She eventually establishes a reputation as a minor surrealist painter, although it is only late in her life—when she is located by Anna—that her work is being favourably reappraised.