Ralph Rashleigh

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JAMES TUCKER's novel, *Ralph Rashleigh*,[1] divides into four parts: experience in England, convict life, adventures with bushrangers, and adventures among aborigines. There is no plot to the novel; its four parts are held together by the presence of the hero, whose name, Rashleigh, summarises his character in the way that Roderick Random's does in Smollett's novel. Of Smollett's novel, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* says 'much of the story is repulsive'; and the same can be said of Tucker's. This is not its only interest, but it is an important one. The novel deals with a repulsive period in Australia's history; but unlike Caroline Leakey's *The Broad Arrow*[2] or John Lang's *The Convict's Life*,[3] it deals with that period as though it mattered.

The only predictable aspect of Tucker's novel is its form: this is eighteenth century picaresque, its emblem the open road. There are several possible reasons for this old-fashioned air. The first is that early Australia was in much the same condition as England often appeared to the educated metropolitan in the eighteenth century. Beyond the roads and tracks there was little but trees, hills, scrub, and the fear that accompanies the unknown. A further reason for the similarity between eighteenth century novels and Tucker's is Tucker's wish to tell his English readers, even those few who were members of the Port Macquarie Literary Club and Tucker's first audience in 1845, of the variety of Australian conditions. Obviously, one of the best ways was to move his hero around the continent and allow him to comment, the author correcting or supporting where necessary. The only disadvantage to this form was the difficulty in keeping the hero alive long enough to cover the course. Coincidence was the answer, and

[1] *Ralph Rashleigh*, ed. Colin Roderick, Pacific Books, Sydney and London, 1962, (original edition 1952).

[2] Caroline Leakey ('Oline Keese'), *The Broad Arrow: Being Passages from the History of Maida Gwynnham, a Lifer*, 2 vols., 1859.

[3] *The Forger's Wife, or Emily Orford*, 1855.

implausibility often the result. Because Tucker was not alone in recognising the form's advantages for his purpose, nor in his ways of overcoming its difficulties, we are left with the interesting speculation that the demands of English readers helped to create the Australian myth of the invincible bushman of the outback. It must, of course, be added that the myth has been well sustained by Australian readers in the six capital cities.

One result of Tucker's following the earlier novel form — or one reason why he did so — is that much of *Ralph Rashleigh* is what may be called realistic, by which is meant here a particular tone as well as the completeness of actuality. The tone is quickly evident:

> One day three of the patients died, and as deceased convicts were then usually buried in a graveyard near a number of ruined buildings on the Gosport side which were among the prisoners called 'Rats' Castle', some of the convalescent patients, of whom Rashleigh was one, were selected to go there and dig the graves. (p. 52)

The phrase 'Rats' Castle' is the idiom of the people, to whom death came frequently, brutally, and early. There was no protection for them in an aesthetic response which excised those aspects of death. The poor were obliged to rely on a grim merriment of the kind that describes a chief constable as one 'who had formerly been a member of that fraternity, so useful to anatomical science, yclept *stiff-hunters,* or body snatchers.' (p. 71)

Some of the merriment comes from the juxtaposition of such an idiom with an inflated style; but it is safe to say that Tucker shares this view of the world because he has been compelled by experience. It enables him later to describe a scene of brutality that is almost devoid of authorial comment even in the form of imagery; but because we are accustomed to his tone, the comment is implied in the accurate details:

> Foxley sprang upon the wounded wretch with his knife and stabbed him repeatedly until the yells of the dying man, which had at first rung through the forest, died away in inarticulate sobs, whereupon McCoy, who had stood threateningly over the prostrate wretch with the broken musket barrel but feared to strike while Foxley was engaged in his brutal work, now rained a shower of blows upon the victim's skull until it was actually smashed into a shapeless pulp of hair and brains. Both bodies were now stripped and hauled to a deep waterhole close by, into which they were finally thrown and a number of large loose masses of stone piled on them. (p. 162)

For such a visualised description of killing, we must return to Smollett in the eighteenth century, or Nashe in the sixteenth; for, in the nineteenth, hair, brains, and the pulp of a crushed skull had become merely 'gore', and no man died inarticulately sobbing. Similarly absent from almost all nineteenth-century literature is the willingness Tucker displays of allowing the action to speak for itself, unaided by the author's or the hero's apologies, encouragement, or even delight. Its presence in *Ralph Rashleigh* is one reason why the novel is important. Like *Wuthering Heights, Ralph Rashleigh* reasserts a literary tradition which itself is based on life, of which death forms an inexcusable part.

On those occasions, however, when Tucker considers the quality of the action not sufficiently evident in its description, he directs our attention to it with comment, italics or an inflated style. Like some master of ceremonies at a music-hall, he invites his audience to hiss and cheer; but it is never quite clear who it is that he considers villainous and who virtuous. This unpredictability of authorial response is a further attraction in the novel: it suggests an author often constrained by circumstance to observe a literary convention which experience had taught him to question. The constraint is similar to Henry Savery's, though not as pressing: *Ralph Rashleigh* was not published till long after Tucker's death. Obviously, he did not fear a charge of libel, even in a society where it was easy for a convict to be so charged. The constraint is rather that of a man unsure where literature ends and life begins. He is certain in his scorn for hypocrisy, vindictiveness and brutality, but he is aware that even the most unreasonable action is not without its cause. The strain is evident in his habit of completing the life-stories of even the most minor characters, no matter how much the process involves him in implausibility and coincidence, and disfigures the shape of his novel. He remains true to the poor man's conviction that only death makes life whole, and therefore explicable. It is the dilemma of the realist writer.

The dilemma has as its source the contradiction inherent in the realist's situation: as a novelist, he must select; and selection is determined by matters that have little or nothing to do with a desire to record the wholeness of experience. Australia's earlier novelists had been more or less anxious to convey as much as they

could of the new country in which they found themselves; yet the aim of each is compromised by personal motives, as in Savery, or ideas of what form a novel should usefully take, as in Rowcroft and McCombie. Tucker's situation is slightly different in that he abandons all suggestion of a plot; but his success is greater because, coming later than the others, he can assume so much more in his readers. He does not have to explain why Australia became a convict settlement, or what bushrangers are, or comment on the antagonisms of the aborigines to the advent of white settlement. By the time he is writing, these are known; he takes them for granted and uses convicts, bushrangers, aborigines as the conventional ingredients by which even a realistic novel is recognised as Australian. Far from cramping him, the assumption leaves him free to exercise the realist's conviction that there is more in heaven and earth than this world dreams of. The result is symbolism.

This large vision is evident in the motto he attaches to the chapter recording Rashleigh's arrival in Australia:

> The breed of Romulus, it is most certain,
> Were ruffian stabbers and vile cutpurse knaves;
> Yet did this outcast scum of all the earth
> Lay the foundations of the Eternal City. (p. 68)

Despite their hopefulness, the lines are nevertheless simplistic in that they accept a view which Savery, for instance, could not: namely, that Australia's convicts were all 'outcast scum'. He considered that there were men of talent, as well as birth and honour, among the convicts; but like him, and Rowcroft too, Tucker does accept the fact, which so many later Australians have for one reason or another been unable to accept, that Australia was established by convicts, and, it should be added, by the soldiers who were their guards.

The simplistic comment of the motto is continued in the narrative:

> The town at that time contained but two classes, one comprising the high government officers and a very few large merchants, who formed at that period the aristocracy of Australia. The other was composed of men who, like Ralph, either were or had been convicts, or, to use the milder colonial phrase, 'prisoners of the Crown'. Many of the last, who were now free, had become very wealthy; but Heaven knows,

they formed no exception to the description given by Pope of those on whom riches are generally bestowed, they being, he says,

> Given to the fool, the vain, the mad, the evil,
> To Ward, to Waters, Chartres, and the Devil.

And surely, the men among the freed convicts of New South Wales who had acquired riches offered abundant evidence of the truth of the above couplet, the nucleus of their gains having been acquired either by the exercise of every art of fraud, or at least by chicanery, and in some cases by pandering to the grossest vices of their fellow-convicts, whose chief luxuries, and in fact the grand *prima mobile* or *summa bona* of whose existence were *rum* and *tobacco,* to wallow in beastly drunkenness being to them the very acme of earthly bliss! (p. 71)

This is a keen and total condemnation, the severity of which is perhaps to some extent accounted for by Tucker himself having wallowed and ultimately drowned in 'beastly drunkenness'. Yet a little while later we find a totally approving description of Robert Marshall and his wife, both of them freed convicts who have prospered as small farmers. Their ordered, hard-working lives are the touchstone for all others in the novel.

Tucker takes a similarly large view of the military, the other half of Australia's founding fathers:

when one of these ministers of torture did not appear to please this *humane* man of power in the vigour with which he dealt out the lash, the 'Captain' rushed upon him and belaboured the scourger himself with a cane, bidding him at the same time, 'Go on, sir! Go on!!' And every stroke the scourger applied to the back of the culprit was accompanied by one upon his own shoulders from the commandant's cane, with a loud shout from the latter, 'Harder yet, sir! Harder yet!!' until at last the weapon flew into fragments in the hands of this *splendid* specimen of a British officer! (p. 227)

Again the contempt is total, though again the author's scorn frames the description of the action; it does not intrude into it and diminish its immediacy. Yet, further down the same page, an important correction is added:

Lest this picture should appear overcharged respecting the partiality of this officer for flogging those under his sway, the reader is requested to remember that corporal punishment was of almost daily occurrence in the British Navy, as well as the Army, twenty-five years ago; and it is very probable the *gallant* captain in question had been selected for his present command to control upwards of two thousand lawless desperadoes from his known severity in his military capacity. And he might have considered that nothing short of absolutely breaking down the bodies as well as the minds of the ruffians — for such no doubt they

were for the most part — could either sufficiently punish them for their past crimes or prevent them from committing further atrocities in the exile to which they were doomed. (p. 227)

Historical perspective and an understanding of men as well as authority combine here to adjust the earlier scorn; and the balance maintained is keen. But having achieved this, Tucker does more. By way of a further reference to his experience of actuality, he affirms that such treatment, combined with hunger, was successful in achieving what he suggests it was intended to achieve. It even brutalised those who were not 'ruffians', thereby confirming the brutality of the gaoler. Only Marcus Clarke and 'Price Warung' have been as conscious of the implications of the brutality in which Australia was born.

Finally, lest there be any doubt about his objective appraisal of the behaviour of the military, Tucker shows that on the two occasions when Rashleigh experiences a kindness, he receives it at the instigation of army officers, one of whom is honest enough as a magistrate to believe his story and doubt his gaoler's, the other of whom is grateful enough to help him obtain his freedom.

The convention of the bushranger provides a considerable portion of the novel's adventure. Tucker's description of Foxley, the suggestively named bushranger, is conventional: he 'shot forth a glance of sarcastic contempt, twisting his naturally coarse features into a truly Satanic as well as sardonic grin' (p. 168), and 'no tiger was ever more pitiless to his prey than the fiend in human shape' (p. 169). Apart from these slight gestures to the Satanic ancestry of the Byronic bushranger, there is little else in Foxley's character to emphasise the convention. Instead of being a well-born younger son, dark-haired, pale-skinned, with 'eyes that sparkling blazed', Foxley is a shaggy, red-headed Irishman 'talking to his nearest mate' McCoy, with O'Leary as one of the other 'companions of his fall'; and with the Shanavans, it is McGuffin, an Irish overseer, who finally kills him. In a curious way, Tucker's novel anticipates the story of Ned Kelly, the final manifestation in Australia of a literary convention; for Kelly, Joe Byrne and Steve Hart were hunted by Lonigan, Kennedy, Wheelan, O'Connor, Fitzpatrick and O'Day, all of them policemen and as Irish as the Kellys. This did not prevent Ned, in his Jerilderie Letter, explaining that his anger had been first aroused by what England had

done to Old Erin. Foxley, though demented, offers a similarly lucid explanation to William Allen, whose name he has just asked:

> 'You lie, blast you!' roared the querist; 'for you are long Hempenstall, that used to hang the rebels long ago in Ireland! . . . I have heard my father talk about you when I was little, how you used to go about with ropes, and when the soldiers would catch a couple of rebels, they would tie them together by the neck and throw them over your shoulder so that they was choked!' (p. 202)

Tucker's anticipation of the Kelly affair is established by means of a reference to historical circumstance, in the same way that Sir Walter Scott attempted to understand the present by an imaginative recreation of the past. And because the historical circumstances to which Tucker refers resemble those of the past Scott recreated (Scott's own acknowledged indebtedness to Maria Edgeworth underlines the resemblance), we are able to recognise a reason why Scott's work could remain, if not an influence, then at least a useful example to anyone wishing to turn Australia into fiction.

One of the difficulties in reading about bushrangers in Australian fiction is that though their exploits are many, without being varied, their motives are almost entirely unmentioned. Such difficulty is the result of using a literary convention's surface characteristics without indicating the historical origins of that convention — historical in social or literary terms. But in reading Tucker the difficulty is absent, not only because his bushranger is an Irishman whose racial history is still very much a part of him, but because Tucker also makes clear that Foxley is motivated by revenge, that characteristic of the Byronic hero, put clearly in *Mazeppa*:

> If we do but watch the hour
> There never yet was human power
> Which could evade, if unforgiven,
> The patient search and vigil long
> Of him who treasures up a wrong.

Though there is some doubt about the motives of Milton's Satan, there is none at all about Scott's Bertram in *Rokeby*; like Foxley, he is another shaggy outlaw of the hills. Nor is the hero's Satanic ancestry unemphasised:

> Here stood a wretch, prepared to change
> His soul's redemption for revenge![1]

Scott's footnote to these lines is instructive: 'It is agreed by all the writers upon magic and witchcraft, that revenge was the most common motive for the pretended compact between Satan and his vassals.' The bushranger's Satanism, such as it is in this novel, probably comes from Scott and the old tradition of witchcraft, rather than from Byron and the Christian tradition which Milton, as Mario Praz remarks, had made so influential. Mottoes to three of Tucker's five chapters concerning Foxley do in fact come from *Rokeby*.

The last perhaps also explains where Foxley acquired his not particularly Irish name:

> He took a hundred mortal wounds;
> As mute as fox mid mangling hounds.
> And when he died, his parting groan
> Had more of laughter than of moan![2]

More important than such influence, however, is the way in which Tucker's reference to actuality confers plausibility on Foxley's desire for revenge. The details of the gratuitous brutality of the convict system, as Tucker describes it, justify Foxley's explanations of revenge and the brutal form that revenge can take. The following passage, concerning the gangs indictment of overseer Huggins, illustrates this:

'Ah,' resumed McCoy, 'You know me too well! It is not twelve months ago since I was under you in your infernal gang, and one day when I wanted to go and see the doctor, you put me in the lock-up. You left me there thirty-six hours, handcuffed over a beam, both wrists twisted above my head, all my weight hanging on my hands, and my toes only resting on the ground. You delighted in nothing but tyranny, as long as you had the power. But now, *our turn* is come; and you may say your prayers, for you are standing on your own grave!'
'Oh,' remarked Foxley. 'That tricing men up to a beam is a very common trick of his. Why, not a month ago one of the deputy overseers was tried for killing a poor devil of a crawler who was very sick and wanted to go to hospital; but Mr. Huggins ordered him to be triced up, and the other obeyed him, and handcuffed the man over a pole for two days and a night. The first night the deputy was told the

[1] *Rokeby,* Canto Third, lx.
[2] *Rokeby,* Canto Sixth, xxxiii.

man was dying; but he only answered, 'Let him die and be damned, there's too many of his sort in the country.' So the next night, when the doctor came at last to see him, the poor fellow was dead and stiff. That scoundrel, though he was committed, managed to pull through it. *He* made shift to escape from the *law*. But I'll take rattling good care *you* don't escape from *justice,* my fine fellow, for I'm judge in this here Court, and I never acquitted a tyrant like you in my life.' (pp. 169–70)

This is a description of the kind of suffering which we have already seen Ralph Rashleigh experiencing in the earlier part of the novel. Foxley's restatement confirms it, reinforcing the prevailing tone of the book: a connection is established between the convict, bushranger and aborigine sections in the novel. At the same time Foxley's explanation of his proposed revenge on Huggins goes some way towards explaining the brutality inflicted on the aborigines. Where the law is contemptuous and brutal, contempt and brutality become the law. A chain-reaction is set up in the novel; and because no one doubts Tucker's general historical accuracy — or to put it another way, his claim to be a realistic writer — it is possible to say that the chain is even today not exhausted in Australia. The White Australia Policy as well as Australia's readiness to fight in Vietnam, coinciding as the last does with Australia's military tradition of 'gallant captains', are merely its more recent links. In terms of literature, the 'crucifixion' of Mordecai Himmelfarb in Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot* by drunken ex-soldiers has its connection with the death of Huggins in *Ralph Rashleigh*. Because of historical circumstance, Australian society, as it is reflected in literature, permits, even encourages, a measure of brutality, disguised as playfulness, that is not found in, say, Canadian literature.

If play is thought of as a concentration on the means, not the ends, of an action, it is possible to see this connection more clearly. Crucifixion is a pedantically clumsy way of embarrassing a man, quite as clumsy as tieing a can to a dog's tail in order to get rid of it, as happens in Lawson's 'Loaded Dog',[1] or chasing Chinese with hounds in order to give them a fright, as happens in Boldrewood's *The Miner's Right*.[2] The means are similarly excessive when Foxley and his gang decide to kill Huggins. The

[1] *Prose Works of Henry Lawson,* Sydney and London, 1948.
[2] *The Miner's Right: A Tale of the Australian Goldfields,* 3 vols., 1890.

description, one of the best-known in the novel, shows the absurd exaggeration of the process. The details of the preparation invest the action with an element of playfulness, which here, because the ends are intended to be fatal, in turn heightens by contrast the effect of shock the description creates:

Huggins was now hurled again on the ant-bed, from whence he had so nearly escaped, and the top of which having been flattened down, a slight trench had been made in it to receive the luckless wretch. The insects, angered into madness at the injuries inflicted on their storehouse, were swarming in thousands around it; but the moment the fresh shock was felt from the fall of Huggins's body, they all rushed to the spot and he was completely covered with them directly afterwards. The bushrangers, being thus relieved from the attacks of the furious ants, now coolly set to work, and tied the wretched sufferer fast down with several cords passing over his thighs and body, two to each arm and leg, and two crossing his neck. The ends of the cords were secured to the pegs cut by Foxley, which were now driven tight into the ground in a sloping direction the better to retain them. The struggles of the wretched victim to escape from these bonds, which were at length so numerous as to form a complete network over him, were further rendered nugatory by logs that were piled upon the cords, between his body and the pins on every side, so that they were tightened until they cut into the flesh.

All these dire arrangements were completed before Huggins had recovered from the effects of that fatal blow which had caused his recapture. When he again became conscious, the convulsive throes of agony that heaved the mass of flesh, cord and logs were so appalling that a sensation of dizzy sickness came across the brain of Rashleigh, who fell to the earth and cut his head severely. (p. 172)

John Barnes has said of this description that 'incidents like this are not marked by any particular literary skill.'[1] The point which was raised earlier about such descriptions is therefore worth mentioning again: authorial comment is absent and the immediacy of the action enhanced. Moreover, Foxley's justification for such bestiality, namely his desire for revenge, has its echo in the response of the ants: they are 'angered into madness at the injuries inflicted', which is to say that they destroy Huggins out of revenge, their natural bestiality paralleling the unnaturalness of Foxley's. The parallel acquires added point when the contemptuous attitude of the System towards the convicts is recalled:

[1] *The Literature of Australia,* ed. Geoffrey Dutton, Ringwood, Australia, 1964, p. 145.

having escaped Rats' Castle, they die like flies because they are treated as less than human; while those that live show themselves, like Foxley, as less than human in their revenge. Even the absurd pedantry of their revenge follows the pattern of their own suffering as convicts:

Shortly afterwards, the names of all the men being read over, each shouldered his implement of labour, and the gangs began to move off; but for Rashleigh's part, the overseer Joe called him and ordered him to take up a rope that lay near, and bring it along. Ralph looked at the rope, which appeared heavy enough to load a horse, it being nearly as thick as a cable and of great length. He attempted to lift it, but finding it far beyond his strength, he was fain to desist. He then received a volley of oaths from the little Jew, and two men being called, they placed the rope on his back. It was as much as he could stagger under, and finding it impossible to walk steadily, he ran a few paces, when his foot caught something, and he fell beneath his load, cutting his shin upon a root, so that it bled profusely. But the inflexible Joe directed the rope to be replaced on his back, which was done, and although he repeatedly fell down, it was as repeatedly again hoisted on his back, until at length, trembling in every limb from the intensity of this over-exertion, Ralph reached the scene of their appointed labour. (p.76)

Rope, the symbol of servitude, and wounds, the signs of suffering, are common to both passages; though it is Rashleigh who is specifically treated like an animal, it is Foxley, who is an ex-convict and fellow-sufferer, who revenges himself like an animal. But more interesting are the parallels of excess: to net a man in rope over an ant-hill is not the quickest way of killing him, but to burden a man like a horse is not the quickest way of shifting rope. Indignity and pain are the intentions behind such actions. The manner in which they suffuse the whole novel suggests Tucker was a finer writer than anybody has so far given him credit for.

Foxley concludes his justification of revenge by saying of Huggins:

He made shift to escape from the *law*. But I'll take rattling good care *you* don't escape from *justice,* my fine fellow, for I'm judge in this here Court, and I never acquitted a tyrant like you in my life. (p. 170)

Later Foxley says he'll be 'revenged on all such bloody tyrants.' (p. 171) It is clear that revenge moves from the personal level to the social, where tyranny of any form becomes its object. Again this is prophetic of Kelly's threat in the Jerilderie Letter that 'It will pay Government to give those people who are suffering,

innocence, justice and liberty.'[1] The transformation of a bushranger hunted by the law into the opponent of injustice parallels the development in European literature of the Byronic hero into the apostle of Good, a process which, as Mario Praz adds, is 'a curious popular reflection of the end of Byron's career, as the champion of Greek independence.'[2] In 'Marino Faliero' Byron had already anticipated as much in a distinction which echoes Foxley's:

> there are things
> Which make revenge a virtue by reflection,
> And not an impulse of mere anger; though
> The law sleeps, justice wakes, and injur'd souls
> Oft do a public right with private wrong,
> And justify their deeds unto themselves.

There is a logic in Tucker's analysis that encourages the belief that he has exhausted the subject of revenge; but he concludes by returning to his premise and questioning it. 'Tyrant', he observes,

> is the term used by all the convicts of New South Wales to designate any person, whether magistrate, overseer or constable, who may perform his duty more strictly than is agreeable to the exalted notions these worthies entertain of the deference and consideration with which they ought to be treated. (p. 173)

This is not a pleasant point of view; taken in isolation, it lacks charity. Yet there is no reason why it should be taken in isolation. In the whole context of the novel, this view is made tenable by Tucker's understanding of the brutal and brutalising System, of which his novel remains the earliest intelligent record. Conversely, the novel's conclusion, where Rashleigh is eventually restored to freedom by the interest and gratitude of Colonel Woodville, the father of the woman Rashleigh has rescued, is not 'conventional' as John Barnes appears to suggest.[3] Rather, it is the final illustration of an authorial opinion that attempts throughout the novel to correct the easy but mistaken view that the convicts were all saints and their captors all sinners.

A similarly balanced view is evident in the fourth and final part of the book, which deals with the aborigines; but it is not as

[1] Max Brown, *Australian Son, The Story of Ned Kelly,* Melbourne, 1956, p. 276.

[2] Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony,* Fontana Books, 1962, p. 97. (Original English edition, London, 1933).

[3] *The Literature of Australia,* p. 145.

keenly balanced as the earlier sections. One reason is the change Rashleigh undergoes as the result of his Australian experiences. Another is that Tucker appears to be here affected by the opinion of his time that the aborigines were a lesser breed without the law, a view which all Australian novelists of the nineteenth century shared. When, for example, Ralph Rashleigh's protector has died and he is told he must fight to retain his wives,

> the manner of the claimant indicated a kind of contemptuous superiority which Ralph had no notion of, seeing that he well knew his own muscular strength was greater than that of any warrior in the tribe. In fact, he had in sport wrestled with two of them at once, whom he overcame without much difficulty, because though they look large in many instances, yet the aborigines of Australia are physically very weak. (p. 272)

An obvious retort to such an opinion is to say that any people that manages to live in Australia by hunting game across the continent cannot be so physically weak; but it is better to consider Tucker's remark as undeveloped and therefore meaningless, for the judgement he offers is based on a comparison of physical strength as impossible to make as that between an Olympic runner and a wrestler. Occasionally, of course, Tucker prevents such consideration by saying, as he does of a battle between white men and aborigines, 'The white man's superior stamina at length prevailed.' (p. 245) It is certain that in such battles the white man usually did prevail, but whether it was because of his superior stamina is impossible to say. Even without his rifles and poison, he was well armed with disease and temptation to overcome his enemy. Tucker, however, knows the answer no more exactly than we. He accords the victory to physical superiority, as his contemporaries did, and in a brief and muddled way he was probably right. At least he did not ascribe it to the white man's superior intelligence, a view which has inspired much social legislation in Australia. Tucker extends the notion of white supremacy when he records Rashleigh's response to the burial of his friend, protector and teacher, the carandjie. He 'viewed this whole ceremony with much the same degree of melancholy feelings that are apt to impress themselves on the minds of men when they are bereaved of some such humble friend as a dog or horse they value.' (p. 272)

This is the language of Charles Rowcroft, and the reasoning is also his: 'in spite of the service rendered to him by the old carandjie, who doubtless had saved his life, yet the form of this disgusting specimen of antiquity was so very revolting that our exile had much ado to consider him as being at all human.' (p. 272) On the other hand, the force that honesty exerts in trying to break through a response that convention has moulded is particularly noticeable in the sentence immediately following: 'And yet it was no very long time before Rashleigh found that in him he had sustained the loss of a most powerful friend, who had hitherto controlled the savage humours of the males belonging to the tribe, who of themselves would have been now ready enough to mark their hatred of one every way so much superior to any of them.' (p. 272) The excitement of Rashleigh's struggle with the aborigines is to some extent sustained by Tucker's struggle to understand them. Although he is as sceptical of their magic as Scott was of miracles, he is aware of what Australian experience had taught him and his novel inexorably shows: that to exist at all in Australia, the white man must first become a black man. As the history of Australian exploration vividly illustrates, without the aborigines' knowledge of the bush, more than one white hero has come to unheroic grief. Tucker's struggle to understand and to be just is still going on in the last chapter of the novel, where the inadequate response to an alien society, of which Tucker can rightly be suspected, is specifically condemned. On seeing Rashleigh, still disguised as an aborigine, Colonel Woodville's 'female servants, who were not long in the Colony . . . appeared to consider a native black of Australia as only a higher sort of brute; and they were consequently much astonished to observe that Ralph knew the usages of civilised life, until he told them he had been bred in a white family, when their exclamations of surprise at his having again taken to the bush almost deafened him.' (pp. 296–7) The conclusion to this passage has a further interest. Tucker is suggesting that a bush life is preferable to the society of foolish female servants. Rashleigh does indeed 'take to the bush again' and dies there, though as a white man. This is perhaps the earliest serious mention in a novel about Australia where bush life is acclaimed as superior to urban settlement, or at least that kind of urban settlement represented by foolish female servants.

Elsewhere in the novel only the silence and the loneliness of the bush are mentioned, while there is implied the fear of bushrangers, aborigines and the unknown, to which the silence and loneliness give rise. In a novel which moves, like Australian civilisation itself, from urban England, to the 'suburban' settlement at Emu Plains, and from there to the bush, there is very little mention of that bush which is the setting for one half of the story. Even in a passage like the following, it is not the bush that especially interests Tucker, but the social implications of its tenure. He regrets its aspects not as a solitary, but as a social man:

> After he had passed the river and its clustering settlers, he journeyed through bypaths across the bush and was soon deeply immersed in the almost twilight gloom of an Australian forest, where the deepest silence ever prevails. No warbling choristers here greet the merry morn with jocund flights of song. No lowing of herds or bleating of flocks awakes the slumbering echoes. The feathered tribes are here entirely mute or only utter either discordant screams or brief harsh twittering. The solitary bell-bird chiefly, whose voice may be heard sometimes, disturbs the primeval solitude with its single sharp note, which resounds through the grove with so great a resemblance to a sheep bell that it requires a practised ear to detect the difference between the bird and the reality.
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> Animated nature here appears to slumber, for not a single living thing can be seen, except at rare intervals, when a gaudily-marbled goanna of great size may perhaps hurry on his spiral route up a tree to avoid the approaching foot of man, or perchance, a snake may glide hastily across his path, the glittering colours of its skin, in its convolutions, chiefly attracting the eye by their brilliant contrast with the faded dull brown herbage or the dead leaves among which it rustles in its sinuous way. No kangaroo, emu or other larger fowl or animal may be seen; 'tis too near the busy haunts of man, while on the other hand, the domesticated quadrupeds are not found, because this forms part of a large settler's grant. He has got no stock in this neighbourhood; yet he will not allow his poorer neighbour's single cow to subsist upon the grass, which annually springs, comes to maturity, is parched to dust by the winds of summer and blown away by the breath of autumn. (pp. 115–6)

Tucker here regrets the antagonism between the squatter and his poorer neighbour, a source of drama which Trollope recognised before Lawson and Steele Rudd saw it as a source of doubtful humour. But Tucker is also lamenting the difference that exists between Australia and England; but, curiously it is not the

England which Rashleigh has left. His farewell to 'Home' is cool and brief, his welcome to Australia correspondingly warm:

> The misery of his abode, he being thus overwrought and rather more than half-starved all day, and being devoured by myriads of vermin all night, made Ralph long for the arrival of the vessel which was to remove him to New South Wales. (pp. 51–2)
> Ralph had little to do with either leave-taking or bargaining. His slender store of money was soon expended in purchasing a little tea and sugar, with a few other trifling comforts, for his long voyage; and it was with no very poignant feelings of regret that he saw the anchor weighed and the sails loosed which were to waft him away from the land of his birth. (p. 61)

This is the England of Rashleigh's experience. In the long passage previously quoted, the equally real Australia of lizards and snakes is in part a reflection of the real meanness of outback society, as it was experienced by the wealthy squatter's poor neighbour. The England which is implied in the rhetorical figures of antithesis and periphrasis, and the heightened prose of 'No warbling choristers here greet the merry morn with jocund flights of song', is the England of lyrical poetry. It is possible to hear in Tucker's phrase, 'the busy haunts of men' a distant echo of Milton's 'the busy hum of men'. Tucker's whole description, indeed, is not far removed from Goldsmith's in *The Deserted Village* when he considers the nature of those 'distant climes' to which dispossessed peasants have emigrated:

> Those matted woods, where birds forget to sing,
> But silent bats in drowsy clusters cling;
> Those poisonous fields with rank luxuriance crowned,
> Where the dark scorpion gathers death around;
> Where at each step the stranger fears to wake
> The rattling of the vengeful snake.

Lyricism in fiction, however, encourages, even requires, a relaxation of intelligence.

Tucker must have known that it was a fifty-year old commonplace that Australia had no blackbirds and thrushes, just as he knows, and mentions that the country had no gardens where they could warble. He certainly assumes that jackasses need no introduction to the reader: he refers to them as 'laughing-jackasses — certain birds so called'. (p. 141) Either he imagines his reader

has heard of them before, or that they are unimportant. Nevertheless he persists in mentioning the absence of the jocund feathered tribe because it provides him with an occasion for lyricism. It can thus be seen that Tucker, while employing the picaresque form, was prepared to adapt it to make it conform with a convention that had nothing to do with the picaresque or his own very good reasons for choosing that form originally.

Kingsley, in *The Adventures of Geoffrey Hamlyn,*[1] also seems to have the same attitude to lyricism and for the same reason. He, however, discovers that the morning warble of Australian magpies is a good substitute for the absent merle and mavis. The discovery is no more useful to the novel than is Tucker's lament to his; but it does show that whatever the novelist's opinion of Australian flora and fauna, lyricism is the means chosen to express it. The argument that went on, or was assumed, in nineteenth century Australian fiction was in fact determined by a literary convention: if lyricism was considered a necessary ingredient of a novel, then an author was bound to commit himself on the subject of blackbirds and gumtrees. After all, the actual appearance of the country — or that part of it which the argument was about, namely the bush, which could mean Tucker's forests or Furphy's Wimmera — was unimportant to the narrative, to the novel's instructive element, and to Australia's present and future settlers. As any reading of nineteenth century English fiction makes clear, most Englishmen would have been hard pressed to tell the difference between a mavis and either variety of the Australian magpie. For them, 'The crow doth sing as sweetly as the lark, when neither is attended.'[2] The convention, of course, which Australian writers are following is from Scott, a countryman, one of the few British novelists who were.

Tucker refers to a host of literary celebrities, many of them, like Mrs. Barbauld and Robert Bloomfield, now considerably less celebrated than they once were. In referring to Trapbois, however, and using his phrase, 'a fair con-sid-e-ra-tion', Tucker needs to mention neither the character's creator, Scott, nor the novel in which he appears, *The Fortunes of Nigel.* The character, the phrase,

[1] Henry Kingsley, *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn,* Cambridge, London, 1859. 3 vols.

[2] *The Merchant of Venice,* v, i.

even its typography, were evidently known exactly to Tucker and his readers. This, it can be suggested, provides a further indication of how completely Scott had permeated the English-speaking world, to say no more; it is also a useful corrective to today's dismissal not merely of Scott but also of his influence. When passages like the following are read in the novel — realistic though it often is — we recognise the extension of lyricism, namely the set-scene, set of course for the painter, not the narrative. Scott is the source of both. The following occurs when Ralph is still with the bushrangers:

Their provisions again began to grow short, when, on the fourth morning from the death of O'Leary, a few hours after they had quitted the spot of their past night's sojourn, they came to the summit of a lofty range, where a prospect equally unexpected as it was beautiful and varied burst upon the sight of the enraptured Rashleigh, whose tormenting feelings, induced by the fear of what fate might have in reserve for him as punishment of his involuntary association with the desperate and bloodstained ruffians who now formed at once his guard and his masters, all gave way before the majesty of nature, and he drank in large draughts of delight in contemplating the lovely scene now expanded before him.

Immediately in front of his present position was a precipice some hundred feet in height, whose rugged breast sank sheer down to the broad expanse of the low country; but immediately at its base the Nepean river, here narrowed to about the distance of a hundred yards between its banks, rushed with tumultuous force around the greater part of the hill on which they stood, from which immense masses of rock had apparently been detached by some long past convulsion of nature, and now lay in the bed of the torrent, causing the rapid waters to flash around them in sheets of snowy foam. Far to the right and left the winding convolutions of the stream might be seen at intervals appearing through the foliage, here in magnificent sheets of water, and anon, beyond a projecting promontary forming a low range of hills, the river seemed contracted into the semblance of a dazzling silvery riband that sparkled in the beams of the morning sun.

In the background rose the lofty heights of gloomy mountains, whose variously undulating sides were chiefly clad with the dark evergreen foliage of New Holland, though here and there might be seen upreared the giant form of some rude and fantastically shaped peak or rifted cliff whose grey bosoms were boldly exposed in naked sublimity. As far as the eye could reach in front was an expanse of nearly level woodland, broken here and there by cultivated patches of a greater or less extent, and thinly studded with solitary farm-houses, cots and one or two hamlets with their churches. (pp. 166–7)

Such a description, like lyricism, adds nothing to the narrative; and apart from 'the dark evergreen foliage of New Holland', does not tell the reader anything about Australia. Such passages in nineteenth century Australian novels — and there are many — could have come only from Scott. They bear no distinctive characteristics, which is why it is a mistake to say of such authors that they saw Australia through English eyes. There is nothing especially English, Scottish or Australian about such scenes. They were determined not by nationalism but by literary requirements. When embryonic writers decided what form their novel was to take, they referred to Scott for guidance, a practice which explains Tucker's otherwise inexplicable habit of referring to the 'potato bogle' as the Scotch equivalent of the English 'scarecrow' (p. 76); or the following remark:

The Scottish language has at this day a word expressive of the national belief in such a doctrine. It is *fey,* and is used to designate the conduct of a man who rushes, as it were, upon destruction . . . (p. 198)

Scott's influence is evident even in the final mention of 'solitary farmhouses, cots and one or two hamlets with their churches.' The vocabulary is English, though the scene could be Australian; yet such characteristics are unimportant when compared with the necessity Tucker seemingly felt to include such a final scene of settlement and domesticity in a description which emphasises sublime solitariness. Settlement, by which is meant a home, completes the picture, just as the restoration of Tully-Veolan, the Baron of Bradwardine's home completes *Waverley.* Unlike Scott's hero, Ralph Rashleigh has no share in such a settlement. He is an onlooker, among outlaws on a peak of rock. His final preference for a return to the bush is therefore plausible, but his admiration is no less than Kingsley's for the 'abundant proofs of the wonted energy of the Anglo-Saxon race, who speedily rescue the most untamed soils from the barbarism of nature and bid the busy sounds of industry and art awaken the silent echoes of every primeval forest in which they are placed.' (p. 68) Such a victory was represented most completely in *Waverley,* in which the Anglo-Saxon race under their German king was shown to triumph over the Scottish outlaws and their French Chevalier.

The argument, however, has one weakness: the admiration of the Anglo-Saxon race is in fact Tucker's, not Rashleigh's. To

what extent the two can be separated is sometimes difficult to say, and the problem is further complicated by the changes that Rashleigh's character undergoes in the novel. In the first, English section of the novel, he is a petty thief who, in his rise from rags to riches, acquires a shrewd resourcefulness but no courage. In the second section, when he is a convict, courage is not a quality that would have had much use, even if he had possessed it. He suffers; there is no possibility of a different response. At the same time he is critical of his gaolers and of the brutality they inflict on and encourage in their captives. In the third section, he secretly helps those he can among the victims of the bushrangers, but obviously lacks resourcefulness, cunning and bravery to escape from his companions; and they tell him so. Of the fourth section, however, in which it can be said that Tucker's view of the aborigines is the conventional one of the time, it can also be said that Rashleigh's physical superiority, his resourcefulness and his ability to bear deprivation are the results of his experiences in the earlier parts of the book. We are left in no doubt that he has learnt all the old carandjie's magic, which Tucker dismisses as tricks. Similarly, when Rashleigh builds a raft, he does it, Tucker says, in the way he had seen Foxley do it; and when he navigates it, he is relying on the example of Roberts, the convict with whom he finally escaped. It might be said sceptically, that any man who had withstood as many rigours as Rashleigh was virtually indestructible. Yet this is precisely what some of the convicts were. What is important here is that Rashleigh is the foundation of a legend as well as a fictional example of what in fact did happen. He is the forerunner of Judd, the convict in Patrick White's *Voss,* or of those latter-day Australians of whom A. D. Hope says:

> In them at last the ultimate men arrive
> Whose boast is not: 'we live' but 'we survive',
> A type who will inhabit the dying earth.[1]

Rashleigh is the product not only of his own experiences, but those of his nation. In order to survive, he assimilates the knowledge of thief, convict, bushranger and aborigine. Unlike the free settlers of fiction, as often in fact, he survives even to die in Australia, all thought of escape abandoned. On a factual level, his

[1] A. D. Hope, *Poems,* 1960, p. 100.

being dyed black and his removal of the dye are implausible; but on a symbolic level, they signify in the history of Australia as much as Crusoe's friendship with Friday does in the history of Europe: 'it was fully a week before his person had resumed its former appearance, when the newly-formed cuticle, though extremely tender at first, appeared to him much more delicate and pure than ever he could recollect it to have been before; and it produced such a youthful effect in his appearance as quite surprised him when he looked at his face in a mirror.' (p. 301) Pink purity which is the result of the removal of the black man; the continuing emphasis on youthfulness in a young society already nearly two hundred years old; and the mirror of engrossed self-approval — these are some recognisable Australian characteristics. To have expressed them so early and so completely in a novel of realism is Tucker's claim to our attention as Australia's first symbolist.

Fragment

My father lifted
a mouthorgan up
to the wind on a hill

and the wind of Bohemia
sighed a few
frail and blue notes

man and child
in the harebell light
frail ghosts . . . faint tune

GERDA MAYER