

## **E. L. Grant Watson—THE MAJOR NOVELS & STORIES**

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### ***WHERE BONDS ARE LOOSED (1914)***

Based on Grant Watson’s observations of the stockman and medical staff living at the Lock Hospitals on Bernier and Dorre islands, the novel begins in a sweltering corrugated iron roofed hotel at ‘Port Kaimera’, or Carnarvon. John Sherwin, having shown his qualifications when provoked into a bar fight, is made an attractive offer—£3 a week, his own house and a young Solomon islander boy as a cook—to work as an overseer on Kanna [Bernier] Island. Sherwin’s subsequent voyage to Kanna with ‘Pomfrey’, in an old pearling lugger stinking from its earlier cargo of turbot shells and now carrying forty chained, seasick and frightened Aboriginal patients, resembles Bates’s later description of similar events, while a journey by the young research scientist Dr Hicksey—modelled on the real-life government pathologist Dr Steele—mirrors Grant Watson’s experiences with Henrietta and the ‘Shark’.

The incumbent medical supervisor, Dr Hubbard, prefers the milieu of Fenton [Dorre] Island, where the female patients and nurses are housed, and stays away for up to six weeks at a time. Sherwin, while it is not part of his job, feels pity for the neglected male patients and tries to alleviate their suffering. Those who can walk are expected, under Sherwin’s rough but unquestioned authority, to help with patient care and labour at building

useless roads. Sherwin, who comes to like his isolated life and has no thought of returning to 'civilisation', picks the maggots out of the fly-blown eyes of the bedridden, eventually losing a finger to blood poisoning for his efforts. Besides, the money he saves is financing his brother's gold seeking ventures, which, he thinks, will eventually see them both financially secure. Through Sherwin, Grant Watson conveys the island life in the early part of the century in all its beauty and crudity. The landscape is as indifferent to the fate of the Europeans as it is to the fate of a sheep that, having fallen over an ocean-side cliff, waits mutely for a monitoring eagle to pick out its eyes.

On Fenton Island, Dr Hicksey (who is in the habit of swimming with reef sharks) eventually replaces the easy-going and negligent Dr Hubbard. A self-controlled character, dedicated to research and efficiency, he initially resists the seductive power of the new matron, Alice Desmond, a woman encumbered by a 'past'. But stirred by elemental forces at the height of a violent hurricane (or 'cock-eyed Bob'), he succumbs. Later, tiring of his lover's neediness, and resenting the resultant neglect of his research, he prepares to leave for Kanna. Desmond, alienated now from the other staff, insists on accompanying him.

John Sherwin, confounded by the unexpected arrival of a woman on Kanna, makes an unwelcome advance to Desmond as she walks alone on the cliffs. Frightened and affronted, the nurse begs Hicksey to dismiss him from the island. Hicksey, irritated, refuses, but promises to remonstrate with Sherwin. Desmond is aware of Hicksey's growing indifference to her, but succeeds in retaining her sexual hold on him. They return to Fenton.

As the situation deteriorates, Hicksey tries to escape the ever more importunate Desmond by sailing again for Kanna, but Desmond, now hysterical, again insists on being taken. Sherwin observes the changed situation and makes his interest obvious. Precipitated by Desmond, a further confrontation occurs. In the heat and isolation, the two men stalk each other with rifles in the sand dunes, until Sherwin finally stabs Hicksey fatally during a hand-to-hand struggle. Sherwin, victorious and bloodied, arrives to

claim Desmond, who averts a possibly worse fate—as a witness to the murder—by offering herself to him, and then helps him to conceal the death. When Pomfrey arrives a few days later with the boat, they tell him Hicksey has been taken by sharks while swimming far out to sea.

When Keynes, a government inspector, visits the island two years later and asks if Sherwin feels no loneliness, Sherwin explains that he has learned to ‘see and feel things’:

...just little things; you wouldn't take much stock of them; the hot sun on the sand, the noise of the waves on the shore and sometimes the feel of the wind, and the red and yellow butterflies clinging to the thorn bushes.

Leaving again on the government cutter, Keynes sees that Sherwin standing on top of a sand-hill, a solitary figure, watching him out of sight. Desmond and Sherwin, who now have a son, are bonded by what has passed between them, and, having survived that ordeal, are free.

In a preface to the American edition, published by Knopf in 1918, Grant Watson wrote that ‘Out of the ruins, life naked and without shame... can rise to new expression’—or, according to Nietzsche: ‘In solitude Man becomes either a God or a beast.’ The novel is not entirely successful: Peter Cowan notes that the characters are so subordinated to the theme that the events hold little conviction—‘...the characters are manoeuvred into a kind of classic power struggle, or, having regard to Grant Watson's training as a biologist, a struggle of males for territory and the possession of the females....’. Noting a resemblance to the work of Louis Becke, Conrad or Somerset Maugham, as well as to stories in popular journals, ‘in this case Grant Watson came closer to the standards of the popular magazines than to some of the writers he admired’,<sup>1</sup> Cowan concludes.

Further, Sherwin's viewpoint shifts from a rough and ill-educated—or ‘primitive’—sensibility to the more subtle perceptions that can only be Grant Watson's own, as does that of the educated, but very impersonal, Hicksey. In one disturbing vignette, Desmond, alienated from her

workmates and touched by the hopeless resignation of the women patients, overcomes her earlier repugnance and is observed by the younger nurses spending time talking to ‘the black gins’:

In a hot instant of shame Alice Desmond got a picture of the half-lighted ward, with its rows of beds in which lay black diseased savages, and of herself sitting there in the twilight, sneered at and perhaps pitied by the other white women.’<sup>2</sup>

Beyond this, Grant Watson seems little able—or perhaps chooses not—to ‘see’ the Aborigines that are the *raison d’être* for their presence on the island, and few of the European characters display more than an aloof sympathy for their suffering. Undifferentiated, they are just ‘the natives’:

In the beds were sick natives, broken and hopeless pieces of humanity who lay still all day and looked out across the bleak expanse of sand dunes, under which they were destined to be buried, and thought regretfully of their beloved and far away bush.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, Grant Watson notes elsewhere how subtly perceptive the Aborigines are of the Europeans’ changing moods, and especially to their shifting relationships with each other. In his primal premise, where the strongest male kills his weaker rival, Grant Watson may be reflecting also on the triumph of the more ruthless Bedford over his younger and more inexperienced self, still too governed by social convention to successfully claim Ida from him. Dorothy Green comments:

Its central interest is the creation of a different kind of moral code out of the violent disruption of the old. These are large questions for a young man of twenty four and it is not surprising that Watson does not wholly succeed in transforming them into a work of art.<sup>4</sup>

In the film by Waldorf Photoplays, Inc. in 1919 (now lost), the ending, according to a plot summary, is changed to one more acceptable to conventional morality: after Hicksey and Sherwin stalk each other during ‘a night in the jungle’, Hicksey survives with only a wound, and after ‘a native’ treats him, he leaves the islands.

### ***THE MAINLAND (1917)***

A kind of sequel to *Where Bonds are Loosed*—Grant Watson’s other ‘paired’ novels are *The Desert Horizon* (1923) and *Daimon* (1925)—this tale, like the previous one, sets the complexities of civilisation against the purity of the Australian landscape. Living in almost complete isolation on Fenton Island, John, son of Sherwin and Alice Desmond, reaches the age of sixteen unable to read and write but skilled at hunting, fishing and swimming. Drawn to the unknown world beyond the island, he overcomes his father’s opposition and travels with Pomfrey to the mainland to trade a load of stingray skins. At the port of Kaimera [Carnarvon], he encounters Arthur Cray, an intellectual adventurer and amateur ethnologist who, with his half-French wife Caroline and a crewman, Tom Julep, is sailing ‘The Venture’, a well-appointed cutter, up the Western Australian coast.

Cray—tall, dark, thirtyish, a Cambridge graduate in classics, Moral Sciences and psychology, and with the immaculate ‘dress and habits of a French savant’—borrows more than a few of the attributes of A. R. Brown, including in his interaction with the ‘wild’ coastal Aborigines. Despite his patrician indifference to his wife and her needs, he is kindly towards young John Sherwin. Cray, intrigued to encounter a boy uncontaminated by education and culture, decides to take him along on the voyage.

After kidnapping an Aboriginal man, ‘Teacup’, from a mainland clan to serve as an interpreter, Cray sets up a pearling camp on a northern island, using local Aborigines as shallow-water divers. Mrs Cray, who shares with John an appreciation of nature, introduces him to the poems of Shelley and teaches him to read. Soon they are joined by a rogue American,

Peter Trigg, who arrives in a canoe with an entourage of native women. Trigg schemes to corrupt Julep and get his hands on the valuable pearls they have harvested, while John falls chastely in love with Mrs Cray, nine or ten years older than he—and, she reveals, unhappily married. A Corroboree and a demonstration of Aboriginal magic follows—and Teacup, the kidnapped Aboriginal, develops a deep devotion and loyalty to Cray.

By the time Cray is ready to return south, Julep, seduced by one of Trigg's accompanying women, has agreed to help Trigg steal the pearls, while Mrs Cray—with her abundant fair hair and blue eyes and 'air of distance'—has promised John she will leave her husband, while making him swear not to tell Cray before they run away together. In the chapter titled 'Mirage'—'What is indeed blessed and cannot be taken from us, even in the bitterness of the desert, is that the mirage was *real*'—both plots come to a head simultaneously and are foiled by Cray, who has suspected the former, but not the latter. Trigg is shot dead after attempting to kill Cray, and Mrs Cray, shamed by her husband, reneges on her promise. Cray puts both Julep and John Sherwin ashore not far north of Kaimera (where Sherwin spends ten days in a hotel room gazing out to sea while awaiting for the next steamer heading south), and then they go their separate ways. Mrs Cray, for John Sherwin, remains above reproach, but he feels that for his own self preservation he will in future be distrustful of women.

The novel now falls naturally into its second phase, shucking the previous rather melodramatic plotting and becoming a more episodic novel of ideas. Sherwin sails for 'Ruperttown' [Geraldton], on the railway junction to the goldfields, and hands over his wages to a barkeeper, drinking himself into oblivion at a rough hotel where he has a degrading sexual affair with a predatory barmaid, Mabel, which only confirms his self-contempt. One day in the bar he hears two educated Englishmen in white tropical suits discussing the human condition: to one, an art collector, humanity is merely the dung heap of baseness and greed from which the flower of art can grow. The man indicates to his companion the young John Sherwin—in his debauched state—to prove his point. Sherwin, enraged, tells him it is better

to have tried to live (and love) and failed, than to be effete like him, and after an ensuing fight is ejected into the hotel's backyard and left there. Having reached the depths of mental and physical degradation, he comes to realise that pain and loss are the natural order, and that his idyllic and innocent youthful experience has been the exception.

Now Sherwin searches for a way to live, exploring his need for solitude against his desire for human company, the effects of isolation and his deep feeling for the landscape. Deciding he has had enough of humanity, as manifested in the town, he jumps a train to Garloo [Yalgoo], Mount Gerard [Mount Magnet] and Redsand [Sandstone] and takes up sandal wood cutting with a solitary bush character called Loo Radcliffe. The area around Garloo is a tableland of red granite and sparse mulga scrub stretching northeast to the saltpans of Lake Harrison [Lake Austin]. Here in the desert he struggles to recover.

The silence of the bush, broken only by the sound of his own axe, seemed the natural medicine of his soul. Here, there was time and space to think and feel in the quiet. Around him, in the living things and in the growth of the trees, were reflections of his earlier life. Wild nature he had loved, living always close to the earth, and was now glad to feel his life enveloped and soothed by the untroubled beauty of its virginity. This feeling lasted for a while and then a new one slowly grew in its place. He began to realise the cold indifference of nature's smile. As the discords of his own mind became less insistent, and his pain less turbulent, he felt with an overpowering vividness the insignificance of human life. He came to know with convincing certainty that all human power was but an accident possessing but a trifle's weight compared to the sublime endurance of the desert... Even though man should cover the whole world with his importance, he would become thereby, more than ever accidental and irrelevant. The stars and the vast spaces of the sky would still smile down as coldly, chilling his imagination to humbleness, teaching him the knowledge of his insignificance.<sup>5</sup>

This feeling grows until it becomes almost a terror, brought on by the silence and sense of his own irrelevance, but then this fades and he achieves a contentment within his own solitude and sense of freedom. Rain, and resulting desert flowering, is associated in his mind with his brief love affair.

More than six months had passed in this way when the rains came. They lasted only a week, but they changed the whole face of the land. The red dust was at first covered with tiny shoots. These grew to a carpet of green which burst into pink and white blossoms. Each flower had dry, brittle petals which gave out a faint scent of honey. Innumerable insects soon swarmed everywhere. Large stick insects soon became active on the green sprouts of the acacia bushes. In places the desert was white as snow with tiny blossoms. The sudden and surprising beauty was overwhelming. John felt it keenly, and it brought new sadness...He saw in it the enthusiasm of love, knowing that such prodigality could never again be his.<sup>6</sup>

After a 'Cock-eyed Bob', or whirlwind, has passed, he notices bright flashes of metallic blue moving above the upper boughs of the mulga bushes and follows the irregular flight of a blue butterfly:

He was astonished at the enigma of its existence. This frail life, which existed with obvious joy upon the scorched, inhospitable desert, swept by fierce winds, was in itself a question set to stagger all philosophies. Was chance always to remain master of the ends of life? He wondered whether he himself and other men had any power over the direction of their lives. Certainly he had believed he had such power, or did he merely exist in some space of quiet air and at such a moment when no fierce wind rushed by, destroying his kind, whirling them along in dust and storm? Then, in the stillness, he was dismayed at the thought of a brain that could see and measure its own destruction. His dismay lasted but a moment, followed by an unexpected gladness. There was exhilaration in the belief in the hazards of chance; there was delight like a douche of cold water in that feeling of



freedom. As he gazed at the butterfly it clicked its wings over its back and danced into the air.<sup>7</sup>

After fifteen months, John leaves Radcliffe and takes the train back to Mount Gerard and then north to Tharamecka [Meekatharra], where he hitches a ride out to the ‘Magenta’ claim with a prosperous entrepreneur called Stephens: here Grant Watson’s descriptions closely derive from his sojourn at the Bullfinch mine further south—experiences he will revisit also in *The Desert Horizon* (1923), *Daimon* (1925), and *The Partners* (1933). Here he prospects for gold with an eccentric Irishman, Gilbert (an expanded portrait of the ‘Gilbert’ described in *But to What Purpose*), who lectures him about the perils of being in thrall to women, and explains he wants nothing more than to wander the unexplored wilderness, his love of finding gold uncontaminated by the urge for the trappings of a materialistic life.

Nevertheless, the two find a promising vein and grow rich. As John again begins to feel a desire to venture among his own kind, they sell the claim profitably. In Chapter 13, ‘The Beaten Track’, Sherwin finds a new mining partner, Robert Dixon, the son of a Busselton pioneer, and becomes even more successful. While milling their ore at Mt Gerard [Mount Magnet] he has an affair with Hilda Vance, a pretty, strong 24-year-old with advanced ideas about personal freedom; and later, in Leith [Perth], with Alice Carter, a fragile, discontented married woman. The unhappiness of women—whether free-thinking or bonded by marriage—and his time spent among prosperous acquaintances in Leith society further alienates him from the sterility of city life.

Sherwin retreats again to the landscape. Dixon takes him south to the Margaret River and Busselton area, where—in the short and idealised epilogue that unconvincingly finishes the book—he fortuitously meets, in Arcadian surroundings, a ‘perfect’ woman—Dixon’s sister Mary, who shares his love of the bush—and marries her. The novel leaves them on the brink of a life together, in which Mary has determined she must learn things for herself, rather than accept John’s ideas.

***DELIVERANCE (1920)***

Told largely from a female viewpoint, *Deliverance* begins with a group of children gathering mushrooms. Susan is a serious child, with blue eyes and hair 'yellow like pale honey'. Her sister Caroline, two years younger, is darker. Her mother, Ida, had met their amoral but artistic Polish father Paul Zalesky in Petrograd, and lived with him in Vienna, Rome and Paris, Poland and India. Zalesky leaves his wife when she becomes ill, deserting her with no word in a small hotel in southern India. After ten days spent awaiting his return, Ida is forced to move to a small dak bungalow outside the town, and dies there. Susan, eleven, and Caroline, nine, are taken to England by their aunt Dorothy, Ida's sister, who lives in a village on the South Downs. Zalesky returns when Susan is adolescent and takes over her education; she, having grown up fatherless, is soon in emotional thrall to him.

Susan, as she grows older, becomes a solitary creature who roams the woods, where she encounters Tom Northover, a childhood playmate, who in the intervening time has been living in the wilds of Canada. Tom, while knowledgeable about nature, is also reckless, callous and unsentimental. He believes one should follow one's instincts above all, and not be frightened of unhappiness. While Zalesky—weak, amoral, and unable to resist living off women—is slave to his own sensual nature, a major theme throughout is Susan's sexual ambivalence and fear, through facing which she learns first humility, then courage, and then spiritual freedom.

The novel deals largely with the relationship between Susan and her father Paul Zalesky, and with Northover. Grant Watson approaches the theme of incest and veers away: Zalesky twice kisses his daughter Susan on the lips in an inappropriate manner: later she tells him she 'can't bear being touched'.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Zalesky conducts an affair with her aunt Dorothy, who becomes embittered at the realisation that he is merely using her.

Living in Dorothy's house in the village, he also seduces Hilary, an uneducated fifteen-year-old village girl who works as Dorothy's maid (and against whom he rants for her alleged lack of innocence and desire for power over him). When the girl leaves her village home to escape him, Zalesky once again flees his family, after stealing Dorothy's jewellery.

Susan again encounters Tom, who has become a painter, but initially will not submit to the thrall of marriage and sexual relations. Eventually they marry, at Tom's insistence, but their relationship, although physically requited, is based on a deep friendship rather than passion. Living in rooms overlooking the Thames in Cheyne Walk in London, they become friends with two young Chelsea artists, Noel Sarret and Martin Hyde. The couples are attracted to each other's partners. When Tom seduces Noel, convinced that his physical desire for her is entirely separate from his unalterable love for Susan, he is confounded when Susan, who has discovered she is pregnant, 'deserts' him. The novel ends with Noel asking Susan to leave so that she may possess Tom completely, and Susan and her new baby depart with Zalesky for Paris, while the much younger Martin, who has always loved Susan, is left to spell out Grant Watson's continuing and conflicted story of unrequited love in the last few pages:

When the moment of departure came, Martin was still numb and bewildered. He was like some creature who, in the midst of a fierce convulsion of life's energy, had been given an anaesthetic. This is perhaps life's way of wounding most deeply the subjects of her vivisection. He knew that he was numb, and that later he would have to probe to the quick the depth of his injury.

### ***SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT: A ROMANCE OF THE TROPICS (1920)***

James Blunt, at forty five, has run a copra plantation for eight years at Matana on the island of Korobello in Fiji, a place of extreme beauty but evil reputation. All his European predecessors here have met violent ends after

seeing the Naki; terrifying, corpse-like supernatural beings that are heard screaming and swooping through the treetops at night. Identified with this landscape is the enigmatic, superstitious and violent nature of a pagan people. Blunt, however, is happy where he is: he likes the absence of civilisation and the company of the young native girls who live with him, and with them has evolved a way of life based on delicately-balanced mutual convenience.

Blunt is also trying to deflect the attention of Matherson, a missionary on Nathamaki, an island fifteen miles away, with whom he is friendly but would prefer did not encroach on his territory with his evangelical efforts. Matherson, however, feels it his mission to persuade Blunt to advertise for a European housekeeper—a woman who, Matherson is convinced, will feel a divine call to marry Blunt and save him from the sins of fornication and lack of Christian belief. Blunt, however, is semi-pagan himself by now, and regards the rituals he witnesses with an anthropological interest.

‘These people are in the process of creating their own Gods,’ he tells Matherson. ‘...in their own likeness, but possessing all the wonder of the unknown. They are involved in the natal labours of the first abstract ideas...that have dawned on their world. This is the very primogeniture of God.’ Matherson rebukes him for ‘pretending to a paganism alien to his nature and civilisation’.<sup>9</sup>

However, after falling ill with fever (which the local people attribute to bad magic), Blunt dreams that the Naki are telling him that his illness is in retribution for siring ‘half caste’ children, and realises he is caught in a limbo between both races. He submits to the missionary’s scheme with mixed feelings.

Eva Dixon, a distant family connection who indeed feels ‘called’ to offer her help, arrives and, like Blunt, quickly falls in thrall to the island’s wildness and beauty. But the local people resent her usurping the position of Blunt’s previous women and are openly mocking and hostile, and Blunt, restless and ambivalent, realises that the previous balance has been upset.

Eva is herself also less malleable and more self-contained than he imagined a European woman might be. Eva cannot envisage life without her Christian belief in salvation; Blunt cannot accept a religion that teaches a denial of all natural instincts. He must now negotiate his relationship with this Godly woman, who is not unwilling to marry him as part of her Christian mission, but now finds that she, also, must reassess her original motivations and feelings.

Ebu, one of Blunt's resentful past female companions, creeps into the house and tries to attack Eva with a digging stick, but flees terrified when Eva holds out her silver cross and prays: Ebu believes the cross to be a magic charm, her prayer the incantation of a spell. Eva is now convinced that Divine intervention has saved her, and that her faith will hold all evil at bay. Meanwhile, their position among the local people grows ever more precarious.

The couple make a canoe trip together to Lula, an area said to be beset by magic, and, in the paradise-like surrounds of a volcanic lake—as a small red and black snake swims into the ferns—Eva at last responds passionately to Blunt's advances and admits her love for him. When a sudden storm sets in, they make the perilous return journey, with Blunt feeling they have celebrated a true union.

On their return, however, they find a witchcraft charm, an evil-looking hollowed-out bone,<sup>10</sup> on Eva's bed. Eva, having succumbed in lust, and outside the sacrament of marriage, sees it as a sign she has committed a mortal sin. If she had not gone against God and sullied herself, she believes, the curse would have no power.

Blunt, overcome by anger, confronts Pinjaroo, the medicine man responsible for the charm, and thrashes him, humiliating him in front of his people. Now they are both in mortal danger, and Blunt, torn between his old life and his love for Eva, sends for Matherson to come and take Eva away for her own safety.

Eva refuses to leave. Blunt, who had promised the local people that the white woman would go, reneges on this promise, and the people,

believing Eva has bewitched him, angrily begin to practise more magic against him. Soon the Naki begin to manifest themselves visibly, Blunt discovers his boat is gone, and Matherson's severed head is found on the centre pole of the copra house. The couple embrace and resign themselves to death, which, as the house is set on fire around them, comes by way of a spear for James and flames for Eva: she has been allowed her desired atonement for her sin, while James's death has in itself fulfilled the curse of the Naki. Now Matana and its people can revert to their natural primordial state, as it was before Blunt's arrival, while the voices of the Naki still scream in the trees.

Primarily the novel presents a conflict between Western Christianity and a more ancient animist belief system, in both of which, the author considers, the adherents are equally bound by superstition. One might note here a similarity with the anti-missionary thread of Melville's *Pierre* (1852), common also to the work of Louis Becke and R. J. Fletcher (or 'Asterisk'), who had published 'Gone Native' in London in 1914. Dedicated to Katharine Grant Watson, his new wife, the book's title and epigraph comes from Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem 'Brahma' (1857), dealing with the transcendental power of the mind to affect one's own reality: those that believe themselves bound by their relationship to the world—as an aggressor or victim, or by being too attached to feelings—will be trapped by this belief.

### ***THE DESERT HORIZON* (1923) <sup>11</sup>**

Based mainly around the Murchison region, the action in *The Desert Horizon* takes place in the same time frame as *The Mainland*, but is not a sequel to it, although both John Sherwin and Loo Radcliffe briefly reappear. One of Grant Watson's best-realised novels, here the desert itself becomes the central character, and again the author addresses the question of living in

isolation versus civilisation, along with the problem of reconciling the need for solitude with the demands of love.

From the age of eight, Martin has lived on his father's failing pastoral property, Nallagoo, on the edge of the western desert. His parents are first generation British migrants: to his father the landscape is to be fought against and subdued; for his mother, a stolid woman, it is something to be endured. But their battle is already lost. After a run of dry seasons, the father is forced to leave the property to work for others. Their two older children, remembering little of England, take to the bush as their natural environment, and against their parents' wishes make friends with the Aborigines, whom Grant Watson, in several sympathetic but occasionally clumsy passages, describes as a benign and gentle race (page 16)—Martin later tells his wife that the Aboriginal women will work with her if she is able to make them laugh.

When his mother dies, seemingly of a heart attack while washing clothes in the clay pan, and the children are unable to move her body, Martin loads his two younger brothers into a pram, along with tinned food and water bottles, and, accompanied by his dog and pup and with his sister Mary pulling on a rope, pushes them twenty miles across the desert, tracking his father's horse, to where he is shearing at a distant shed. During this journey, Martin loses his fear of death when they encounter a mirage.

Towards mid-day, the children pause, bewildered. To the left is the white, encrusted rim of a salt-marsh; beyond this line of white is a shimmering haze whose surface undulates into waves and ripples. As they watch the waves seem to rise higher, and glassy layers, which look like water, appear one beyond the other, rising up into the sky. The mirage flows out before them and behind, clipping them as in a horse-shoe, and on all sides the false-water rises and ebbs. The surface is twisted and torn by faint, hot gusts of wind into wisps of shining vapour, which are in shape like the bodies of fantastic creatures, which run over the vibrating sheen of water beneath. And now in recurring lines beyond the horizon there appear images of the desert, trees and low scrub, salt-bush, and here and there

cattle, large beyond all natural proportion. As the children watch, the forms alter their shape, they merge into and replace one another. The sea of shimmering vapor rises higher...

As Martin watches, his fear slowly leaves him...A flutter of happiness brushes, like a bird's wing, his innermost senses. He tastes an unexpected freedom; the world is changed into unsubstantial air and vapour.<sup>12</sup>

The children's three-day trek is described without false pathos. On their arrival, Alec Shaw, one of the young shearers who works with his father, befriends the boy. After his father has gone back to bury their mother's body, the younger children are sent south, but Martin, who does not want to leave, is employed by Shaw to work on his nearby cattle property. Over several years of unsentimental friendship with Alec, he grows into an adolescent while attending school in a small nearby settlement (resembling Lakeway). When Alec is killed in an accident, Martin is thrown together for a single night with Nance, Alec's grieving girlfriend, an independent spirit—but in coming to him for comfort, she reproaches herself for having awakened in him his first feelings of love, and the two part. She later sends him a letter asking his forgiveness. This attraction is balanced against his sensual feelings for Jane, the sullen common-law wife of a local storekeeper.

In Part Two of the novel, after some years spent on the southern farm where his younger siblings are living, Martin returns to the desert country when local grazier George Mackay, a Scot, offers him a job as a fencer on his station Quinn's Springs. Here Grant Watson contrasts three viewpoints: Clara, Mackay's tough and hard working wife, is unstable, depressed and bitter, and blames the life of isolation and loneliness. To her, the land is barren, empty and nightmarish. With her husband her enemy and the bush an object of hatred, it is inevitable that she will be destroyed. Mackay himself does not ultimately know why he stays on his property, apart from 'not wanting to throw it in'. He dreams of transforming the country by irrigation, of making wheat grow, believing that Nature will



crush man if man does not crush Nature. This is a desire that Martin himself finds incomprehensible and repellent. "I come here because I like the country just as it is. I should like to live here without changing anything, without changing it much, I mean," he tells Mackay.<sup>13</sup> The land itself is the source of his happiness, and somehow sustains him.

In a passage written 25 years before Patrick White's *Voss*, Mackay tells Martin:

'It's dangerous for men to live long in the desert...One has to go the bottom and fish up everything that's lying there. That's where the trouble is. The air's too clear. The words count too much as you let them fall...One gets too close; there's nothing between, that's the danger.'<sup>14</sup>

But while Mackay is speaking here of his relationship with his wife, it will emerge that he is as much in thrall to the land as Martin. Building fences for Mackay, enjoying the solitude, Martin regains his equilibrium after losing both Alec and Jane, his only real emotional connections.

After an incidental meeting with John Sherwin and Gilbert, Martin is inspired to learn more of his own kind, and takes a holiday in Perth. Here he meets Maggie Linton and her father, both jewellers, both newly arrived from England. The friendship between the two young people develops into an attraction, watched over by the elder Linton, who recognises Martin's goodness, but worries about their cultural differences: his quick, intelligent, talented city-bred daughter and this simple but decent boy who knows of nothing but the bush and work. Martin, after a period of rain, unexpectedly returns to the north, omitting to tell Maggie of his departure, but sends her a wooden box holding three small bunches white, pink and yellow paper daisies and a letter, asking her to write to him: 'I should like to get your letter while I am here. That would be the next best thing to seeing you.' Maggie understands that Martin will not choose between her and the desert; she must accept both if she is to take him at all.

Following Clara Mackay's painful self-inflicted death by drinking Lysol, Martin is offered the manager's job on Quinn's Springs station. He marries Maggie and takes her north with him, recognising, in his innocence, neither the doubt in her eyes as he describes the life they will have together, nor what is implied in asking her to take the place in the homestead of a woman who has committed suicide. After the train journey from Ruperttown [Geraldton] to Mount Gerard [Mount Magnet] and then north to Tharrameka [Meekatharra], they drive a buggy into the bush and together survey the jarrah wood homestead of Quinn's Springs, set in a green hollow in the desert landscape, and their immediate future. On this ambiguous note the novel ends, while Grant Watson signals in a postscript that he will return to the next stage of Martin's life in a future work.

***DAIMON (The Contracting Circle) (1925)***

The philosophers of antiquity believed that, as consciousness developed, men could become aware of a spirituality which interposed between themselves and the universe, and that through this medium they could interpret the mystery of life. This the Greeks called a *daimon*.<sup>15</sup>

—E. L. Grant Watson *The Leaves Return* (1947), page 7

Written five parts, the novel is a continuation of *The Desert Horizon*, here told largely from Maggie's point of view. Part one opens with Maggie and Martin O'Brien, now married two years, living together on Quinn's Springs station, north of Tharrameka. Maggie inhabits the homestead, and their infant son John sleeps in a pram on the netted verandah. Maggie is friendly with the Aboriginal women who work for her in return for food and clothing, including 'Gnilgie' (a younger version of the Gnilgie portrayed in *Innocent Desires*). Martin goes out every day to work or camp in the surrounding bush, but Maggie, confined to the house by her dependent baby, is no longer able to ride out with him even if she desired to. Maggie

finds her isolated life unsatisfying, although she still loves her virile young husband. She feels restless and apprehensive about the wild country that encloses her on all sides, while within the homestead fence is the small sphere that she is able to change and influence. The fierce sunlight that strengthens her husband only wilts her, and the landscape seems dusty, desolate and monotonous.

The widower Mackay, who returns occasionally to wander aimlessly in the bush, regrets having given up the property after his wife's suicide, but when Martin tells Maggie he will buy it himself one day, she finds the idea daunting. Ownership looms as irrevocability; it means they will never leave: 'and it came then in a flash that the men of the bush never really possessed the land. It was the land that possessed the men.'<sup>16</sup> Trying to regain their common ground, Martin asks Maggie to ride out with him after dinner. When, after an exhilarating moonlight gallop, the horses shy, Martin imbues the landscape with the numinous:

[Martin] checked his horse and gazed into the ghostly and pearl-coloured haze that hung in a thin veil over the land.... The horses lifted their heads and with their ears forward gazed intently. They drew their breaths deeply, snorted and quivered a little, and it seemed that they saw, moving in the desert-emptiness, things that the eyes of the humans could not see. Suddenly the mare neighed with a short high-pitched neigh. Both horses sprang sideways, shying. They shook their heads excitedly and pranced.<sup>17</sup>

Martin tells Maggie that the horses see things that they don't, invisible beings that have nothing to do with them, but do them no harm. He likes to feel that they are there, he tells her; the feeling the landscape inspires in him is 'like love'. But the ride ends with their differences unreconciled. He chooses to try to placate her, rather than remain true to his inflexible self: 'hard in the quality of that inner exultation which was the core of his life.'<sup>18</sup>

Mr Linton visits, bringing an outsider's European sensibility and wearing a sola topi, an item of headwear never worn by bushmen. When

Maggie shows her father the sheep dogs, rounding up each other and separating out the rooster from the hens, because they ‘can’t get out of the habit’, Linton tells her ‘they want to exercise their power and do the only thing they have been taught to do: an *idée fixe*, a continuous restlessness’, and observes that he has seen men like that.<sup>19</sup> Maggie tells her father that Martin loves the country more than he loves her: he could do without her, but not without the country. Prophetically, she is worried that he will be swallowed by it, ‘bewitched by its strange monotony’.<sup>20</sup>

They visit by sulky a neighbouring property, Bell Hill, where the two Cameron women—a talkative old woman and her severe daughter, both obviously in bitter warfare with each other—are strangely unwelcoming. On the way back they encounter Mackay, who seems half-crazed, wandering alone and talking to himself. Linton tells his daughter that she must learn to endure: ‘You must have courage, the enduring kind which women have....Live in what you have got.’<sup>21</sup>

Part Two opens some seven years later. Martin has now bought the property, but Maggie is caught in an ever-contracting circle of unhappiness, and Martin is torn between love, pity and contempt for her. Their son John departs with his grandfather to be schooled in Perth. There will be no more children: Maggie feels she has been made barren by the land, and there is a growing division between them, an emergence of the essential antagonism of woman to man.

On an overlanding trip, Maggie, in her distress, is drawn into a brief sexual encounter with Bob Carey, her husband’s young offsider, while Martin is riding around the cattle at night. Carey tries to persuade her to run away with him. The viewpoint here is that of a woman, who is using a lover to dull her pain, rather than loving him. She agrees to leave with him: ‘Yes, as her deeper self had always known and recognised, men were only a means to an end. She was shocked at the hard logic of her mind, which could recognise [Carey]...as a mere instrument towards deliverance.’<sup>22</sup>

Back at the homestead, the casual cruelty with which the Aboriginal women allow the station dogs to play with a dying possum repels Maggie

further. She rides out to meet Martin and Bob Carey, to tell them she will leave with Carey. But when, in an horrific incident, Martin is injured while saving her from a stallion that has jumped a fence to come after Maggie's young mare, Maggie knows she will stay with her husband.

Part Three begins twenty years after Maggie's arrival at Quinn's Springs. Her son John is grown up, a part of the bush himself, and resents his mother's unhappiness. Maggie's father is seriously ill. On the train south, surrounded by men who disregard her completely, Maggie realises that her youth has passed: 'She was old, she was used up, a dried husk, parching in the heat of an arid and foreign land.' In South Perth, near the sea, and with her father's death, Maggie comes to believe that the desert country is implicitly evil. 'Water was surely a symbol of life, and the sea was the utmost antithesis of the desert.'<sup>23</sup>

Maggie and Martin have reached a bitter stalemate: she feels the country is killing her, but cannot leave him, while he cannot articulate the reasons for his need to stay and to accumulate yet more land and money. Insidiously, they are destroying each other. Martin hardens himself against her, and leaves the homestead. Maggie decides she must escape. She saddles a horse and rides to Bell Hill, where Edith Cameron now appears to be keeping her mother a prisoner. Hearing finally of the crimes, psychological and actual, that the two isolated women have committed against each other, Maggie rides away into the bush, convinced all over again that it is the desert that is the cause of such madness, or evil—Martin, tracking her, also realises he must leave, if he is not to lose her.

In Part Four, fifteen years on, the couple are living at 'Sea Orchard' near Albany, a house overlooking the water in a fertile southern landscape that reminds Maggie of England. Martin, having given up the life of a grazier, is cultivating wheat. He is prosperous, but feels superfluous and 'done for'. He avoids going north in case it unsettles him. Maggie, now over sixty, is contented, but realises at last that desert is *beyond* good and evil, something 'aloof and opposed altogether to human love and sympathy'—all the humanistic values that are important to her. This love for the aloof and

virginal land, the uncomprehended part of husband's life, she realises, is what gives Martin his distinction. 'His spirit had touched and had been, though perhaps only for rare moments, on equal terms with that further part of God which was *not* human...but which, in its depths, went deeper, colder than human love could go, and in its heights, transcended to a thin and empty nothing.'<sup>24</sup>

But Maggie, with her instinct for a life circumscribed by human warmth and comfort, has finally prevailed, and tries to reassure herself that her husband is happy. But then, while Martin rides home one day between his vast wheat fields, the scent of the 'real bush' reaches him on the wind. Soon after, on impulse, he catches a train north to Tharameeka, where he sheds his southern clothes for the shirt and blue dungarees of earlier days and walks into the landscape: finding in the cracking of dry seed pods and the spidery orchids, motionless in the still desert air, 'strange and beautiful manifestations, symbols, in their isolation and purity, of God.'<sup>25</sup> He weeps. The horizon is no longer becoming smaller, he has escaped the contracting circle. Again, the butterflies appear flitting about the blackened twigs of a dead bush.

They and all live things were but fragments thrown off into time by some radiant and centrifugal force. Human lives were also fragments such as these, and might seem as aimless. But in man's thought the process might be reversed, and life, turning back on itself, might find God, centripetal and confluent, sustained in the bright calm of nothingness...<sup>26</sup>

Maggie, left alone, is hurt and betrayed by Martin's absence and silence, and feels she has both failed him and left herself in an ever-diminishing sphere of life. But after four months he returns, telling her that he could not leave her. In the next years Martin moves between north and south—like a compass needle, according to Peter Cowan, 'between the two poles'.<sup>27</sup> Ostensibly he is seeking gold—the 'rare essence' of the desert—but in fact trying to regain what he has lost. Martin knows that his life is now divided, and although the northern country makes him feel alive again, that alone is

now not sufficient to satisfy him. When he goes north again, to wander alone, Maggie eventually follows, and spends two years looking for him in the wild country, gradually coming to resemble an old tramp living rough. When she finds him, she also is entirely stripped of the trappings of civilisation, and seemingly pursuing an impulse towards death.

When Maggie finally sees him on a distant ridge where he has found a reef of gold—‘a dust-stained fragment of a man...hardly a man: a piece of earth, detached from it and imbued with movement; a minute creature, which the sun with its burning rays blazed down upon: a piece of dust impelled in circles and spirals in a tangle of interpenetrating figures, attracted to that one spot by some mystical affinity’<sup>28</sup>—he tells her that it is not the gold he wants, but something else that seemed promised in the landscape. Maggie tells him that now she understands:

“You’ve given up everything to come and find me,” he said.

At this she turned towards him with a smile that seemed both gentle and triumphant. “Now that I’ve found you, I have all that I came for.”

“And I too...It’s been a long journey.” Then, looking at her as if sure of the truth, he spoke: “Most men would say that this was a failure, and we’d got little enough out of it all.”

She shook her head and smiled.<sup>29</sup>

Having achieved harmony with each other, and with no further desires, by evening Maggie has died of exhaustion. Martin spends the night beside her body, then next morning he buries her, carefully leaving no mark over her grave. As the sun rises red over the horizon, he strips naked and then ‘with long strides, swinging his arms about him, he strode eastwards toward the heart of the desert, singing to himself’.

***THE PARTNERS (1933) (Lost Man)***

Beginning in September 1912, *The Partners* (published as *Lost Man* in the USA in 1934) opens with a detailed description of a train journey north from Perth to Geraldton. Sam Lawson, a poker-playing young entrepreneur, is travelling north in a first class carriage with his newly English bride Vera, n<sup>è</sup>e Chance, to investigate a mining venture on the Murchison goldfields. Vera, previously a shop assistant, has been told by a gypsy woman in Salisbury that her life will be ‘full of accidents’, some of which she will not recognise till after they have happened: she will be ‘like the fishes in the river, they go the way the water goes, and as often as not, when it is over the fall, they go with it, and find themselves swimming in another place.’<sup>30</sup>

Now, as if by just such an accident, Vera has found herself married to a rich but avaricious man, an habitual womaniser, from whose touch she shrinks. At Geraldton they meet Lawson’s prospecting partner Tim Kennedy—closely resembling the solitary prospector in *Journey under the Southern Stars*<sup>31</sup>—a shy, taciturn bushman with a feel for finding gold, somehow furtive and yet essentially indifferent, to whom Vera finds herself strangely attracted. For Lawson, gold is a means to money and power; for Kennedy it is something more pure. With Lawson’s backing, Kennedy, after living rough in the desert for several years, has found a likely site, and now Lawson has come to make good on his investment.

While Lawson is away for a night, Vera, walking alone on the Geraldton sand dunes, comes upon Kennedy and—aroused, because he waits for her to come to him—takes him as her lover. Before they consummate the union, as they rest under the scrubby trees and bite into a shared melon, a snake—a death adder—appears. Tim kills it. Two days later they take the train east to Mount Magnet, through ring-barked country violated and exploited by men. At Yalgoo, Vera witnesses a confronting scene where some sixty donkeys, liberated from their team harness for the night, ‘scream and fornicate’ in a violently milling mob. Against this she sees also the beauty of the white and pink everlastings, which to her



husband are valueless because of their profligate uselessness. At Mount Magnet, where Vera is to wait while Kennedy and Lawson head north to Meekatharra, Vera disappears from the story.

From Meekatharra the two men travel by horse and sulky to Peak Hill Road and onto a vast plain of stunted scrub. Each man now possesses the object of the other's desire: for Sam Lawson it is knowledge of the whereabouts of the lode of gold; for Tim Kennedy it is Vera. Both men are driven to a different form of introspection, and the balance of their relationship changes: Sam, dominant and influential in the city, is now dependent on Kennedy's bush skills, and even somewhat fearful. The thought occurs to Kennedy that if Lawson were to be lost in the bush *by chance*, it would enable him to claim Vera. Fifty miles from Meekatharra, in spinifex country, they locate and assess the reef of gold-bearing ore. Kennedy goes off alone, ostensibly to explore further, but in reality to think.

On his return Kennedy lures Lawson away from their camp on foot, on the pretext of showing him a further strike, but just when he is considering ambushing and killing his partner, Kennedy himself is bitten by a snake—a death adder, as before—and succumbs in agony before Lawson's eyes. In the paroxysms of death, Lawson denies him the last of the water, fearing he won't have enough left for himself. As Kennedy dies he ejaculates, a vision of Vera before him.

Sam Lawson, left to return alone to find their horse and buggy, discovers his social skills and superiorities are of no use to him in the desert. Having set off by moonlight, he becomes confused and, after spending a night beside a fire, wanders in different directions, battling thirst and panic, until—in a bravura passage—while reflecting on his past life and discarding items of clothing, he is gradually reduced to an elemental state approaching death. After a whirlwind passes, he sees the brilliant blue wings of butterflies above the desiccated branches of a dead bush: 'Dream images, or things of earth? ...Terror and beauty...God without man, for man was away back there in the dream of life. He had no place with God.'<sup>32</sup>

Sam Lawson dies at sunset with the ambiguous words ‘O Christ’, and again ‘Christ’, on his lips, either a blasphemy or a supplication.

While some critics have noted similarities with Lawrence’s and Skinner’s *The Boy in the Bush* (1924), Grant Watson’s preoccupations here predate Lawrence’s work. The descriptions in this and his earlier story ‘An Ordinary Corpse’ (1914) are derived from his experiences in the gold-mining country around Sandstone: ‘I would wander solitary in the bush, but never far from a wheel track for I had a keen apprehension of how easy it would be to get lost.’<sup>33</sup> In both stories the protagonist is stranded alone in the bush with a dead body, and suffers hallucinations. Again, the desert is ‘God without man’: amoral, non-human, and indifferent. However, *The Partners* is also concerned with the exploitation of women—in soul and body—by men. As Grant Watson explained to Dorothy Green some three months before his death in 1970:

You will probably have guessed that my books have an under-theme. In ‘The Partners’, which I consider my best novel, the protagonists are: the greedy businessman and his partner, who has turned his back on life, and worships a metal. The Gold is the ‘I AM’ which we are all after if only we knew it—the theme as stated is ‘Who knows that Life is not Death, and Death Life?’ Both men meet their fate. Tim Kennedy in the sensual vision of Woman, & Sam Lawson—after much anguish and hysterical running—gets a glimpse through his suffering, of Destiny. ‘Vera’ is of course the violated soul.<sup>34</sup>

### ***THE NUN AND THE BANDIT (1935)***

In this rather melodramatic story, the ‘nun’, a young novice, Lucy, and her adolescent charge, Joy, are kidnapped by Michael Shanley, an impoverished and ill-educated Australian bushman-turned-outlaw. Shanley—who previously has killed his father Adam and taken his abused young mistress, Sorrel, for his own—feels embittered by wrongs committed by his wealthy

uncle George Shanley, Joy's grandfather. Lucy (whom we meet first in the paradise of a walled and irrigated garden in the mining town of Balangoorlie [Kalgoorlie]), refuses to relinquish Joy and is offered a pact by her captor: he will release the child unharmed and without ransom, if she, Lucy, will willingly submit herself to him during a week in the wilderness. The alternative is rape by his two brothers, and possibly death, for both. In the virgin bush of Western Australia, a psychological conflict between good and evil, spirit and flesh, mind and body, is fought out between the 'nun' and the bandit. The character of Sorrel—bought by the brutal Adam Shanley from her own father at fifteen—provides a counterpoint to Lucy: entirely lacking in illusions, burned by her experiences with men, she has a wisdom of her own, and understands that the virginal Lucy offers an attraction to Michael that she cannot—despite this, the two women become friends.

Written some 25 years after Grant Watson left Australia, the novel is set largely around 'Jumina Rocks' [Jumna Hill, 120 km east of Kalgoorlie] and on the 'Ponton River' [Ponton Creek, or Ponton Well, 170 km east], while the denouement takes place at a lonely waterhole near 'Cardunia Rocks' in the desert further north [Cardinia Road, 200 km north of Kalgoorlie]—where, again, a small red and black snake appears just before Lucy discards her novice's habit for a cheap second hand frock given to her by Sorrel. In the second half of the book, after this somewhat lurid beginning, Grant Watson's writing gains firmer ground when the protagonists are isolated together in the landscape. As Lucy waits alone for her ordeal—or initiation—she overcomes her fear and becomes calm, in a kind of reverie:

Did nothing happen in this great empty land? Nothing but the sunshine and the still air...Like that in the beginning, and so eternally; the silence prevailed, it was on all sides and in the sky above, and as the moment passed, it insinuated itself into her own heart, lay behind her thought, and made blank her memory.<sup>35</sup>

And later:

...behind her there were the stores and the blankets and the glowing embers of the fire. These things were still a part of the accustomed world. These things that they had brought with them out of the past, and beside these, there were the natural features of the landscape, the pool and the bare rocks and their sharp dark shadows...they were in some ways enchanted and made unreal, or else more real, by the silence and the bright ocean of air, warm and impregnated through and through with sunlight. A buzz of insects, but so monotonous as to be but an emphasis to the silence which lay behind.<sup>36</sup>

The ‘cathedral’ of the bush (as Paul Cox puts it)<sup>37</sup> provides Lucy with the spiritual resources to endure and come through the events transformed, her hatred of Michael turned to compassion. With more self-awareness, she is no longer able to see the bushman as evil. In the last pages, Michael acquiesces to his own fate—capture—and the two wait quietly together by their campfire for the approach of the police. Lucy, we discover, is with child—out ‘in the world’ now, she will ‘bring to birth her own dangerous happiness.’

‘Only by becoming familiar with the shadow side of our natures will we be able to know how to deal with the evil of the world’,<sup>38</sup> Grant Watson writes, an idea he explicates further in ‘The Renegade Hero and the Anima’<sup>39</sup>—or, as he wrote to Dorothy Green, the novel is an exploration of the ‘all-important task of our time’: ‘a meeting and reconciliation ...in which the “anima” ultimately saves the renegade self.’<sup>40</sup> The theme—a variation on the ‘beauty and the beast’ motif, according to R. F. Dossetor<sup>41</sup>—was also partly derived from Dirk Coster’s *The living and the Lifeless* (1919) (translated from the Dutch by Beatrice Hinkle, which Peter read in 1929, and also Mikhail Lermontov’s novel *A Hero of our Time* (1841). Godwin Baynes would note certain parallels with the Gilgamesh

epic,<sup>42</sup> and the Taoist symbol of the Yin and Yang adorning the English edition's title page points to yet another influence.

In a major departure, here for the first time a woman character is granted the same capacity for spiritual communion with the landscape as his previous male protagonists—perhaps, however, one should not read too much into the fact that Grant Watson gave his Nun, or ‘anima’, his mother’s name, Lucy, and her age as hers at the time of her marriage to his father.

### ***PRIEST ISLAND (1940)***

A young man, Peter Costelloe, steals sheep so as to be able to afford to marry, and is punished by exile to a windswept, uninhabited island. While living there he has enduring visions of Jean, his true love, and on his solitary walks is visited also by the spirit of a priest who once retreated there to pray. When a local woman, Mary, follows him to the island he accepts her companionship but—able to relinquish neither his pain nor his solitude without regret—resents her intrusion on his communion with Jean.

Held at psychologically at bay, Mary feels that Jean is continually between them. Gradually, however, through the storms of winter, they achieve a loving comradeship. Nevertheless, Peter still yearns for the elemental life he had before, while Mary does not know whether her inability to possess him is due to her inadequacy, or whether it is due to something innate within him. Jean, meanwhile, has been found to be pregnant and is forced to marry an older man that she does not love. Only belatedly does Peter realise that with Mary he is in possession of a Paradise—a similar theme to that explored in *The Mainland*, except that here the rival presence is in another woman, embodied for Peter in the light and landscape of the island.

Based on Grant Watson’s experiences on Eilean a’Chleirich, or Priest Island, one of the larger Summer Isles in Lochbroom, where he first heard of an eighteenth century outlaw who avoided the death penalty for

sheep-stealing by accepting banishment there, it is also a reflection on Grant Watson's triangular relationship with Ida and Katharine, who took the initiative in claiming him as her husband.

## **THE SHORT STORIES**

### **'Out There' (1913)**

Jefferies, a young Englishman, manages Karramatta station, a remote northern outpost in the Kimberley with twelve thousand head of cattle and 'twenty or thirty natives' employed by his predecessor. Living alone in a two-room hut of corrugated iron, equipped with minimal furniture, he intends to stay a few years and save his salary to buy a property of his own in a less remote area.

In front of the house was a veranda. In the evenings Jefferies would pull out the cane chair on to the veranda and sit smoking his pipe and looking across the country. Overhead he would see the cloudless tropical sky, a few bats hawking for flies, and occasionally the larger wings of a flying fox. On every side in the dim light stretched the arid bush, flat and sun-baked. Scattered over its surface were gum-trees and mulga bushes, that repeated themselves far into the distance, and for distance beyond distance. For many evenings the white man would sit, listening to the stillness of that untroubled land. Kangaroos and wallabies would come out of the scrub and hop fearlessly within a few yards of him; he would hear the rhythmical rise and fall of the native songs, see the smoke of their camp fires, and hear the whirring, humming sound of the bull-roarers. At such times the natives, together with all his surroundings, beasts, and trees, seemed to be in league. They were part of the land and understood its mystery. He alone was foreign and out of place.<sup>43</sup>

To stave off loneliness, Jefferies gradually builds a companionable relationship with the Aboriginal women who cook for him in return for

small rewards, and he and they spend the evenings talking and smoking together on his veranda. He is less lonely when working among them, and while initially he finds them physically ‘ugly and repulsive’, after several months he becomes aware of the ‘slim, well-made bodies’ of the girls, and their quick, graceful movements, and takes pleasure in their proximity. ‘He then discovered in them a quick consciousness of the same fact. There was one girl of fourteen whom he had particularly noticed. She looked at him quickly out of the corners of her eyes as women will.’<sup>44</sup>

He soon convinces himself that possessing her will help him to penetrate the mystery of the land, and perhaps of his own soul—and besides, who will ever know? With pragmatic swiftness, over a shared pipe of tobacco, he barter with her father to buy her for a bottle of whisky.

At once the whole party broke into excited talk and laughter. Jefferies felt ashamed and annoyed, and wanted to get away as soon as possible. Manya called out to the girl, who came forward shy and frowning.

“You go along with boss,” he said.<sup>45</sup>

The bed in the hut is too small to sleep in, and so they pull the mattress apart and mix the stuffing with dry leaves, and he pulls down the partition between the rooms so they can sleep beside the fire. Mary is proud of her position, and envied by her companions. Over a period of several years Jefferies is drawn into their corroborees and allocated a totem name and place in the clan, and soon, in exchange for knives, tobacco and alcohol, he has seven young women living with him in the house, where the floor boards are now eaten away by white ants, and the interior filled with scraps of bone and rags and the ‘peculiar, strong odour of a native camp’.

After ten years spent in perfect contentment, as a reward for good returns, his employers send an agent, Linton, from Wyndham to offer Jefferies six months holiday in Perth. When Linton reaches the house he finds three black women sitting on the floor, and the smell disgusts him. After some prevarication, Jefferies, shamed to see himself through Linton’s eyes, accepts the offer—just for ‘a month or two’—if only to convince

himself that his present way of living is right for him. As Linton leaves, a young black girl, Jenny, tells Jefferies that he will 'live with white women'.

In Perth Jefferies inevitably encounters a white woman. Muriel Thornton, thirty, is a nurse at the Perth Hospital, and moves among 'a set of other young women with ideals and aspirations similar to her own. Her religion was to have a good time and be thought respectable. She justified her existence by nursing the sick...and keeping her eye open for the possible man who might do.' Jefferies, of course, with his healthy bushman's body and sound financial prospects, 'might do' very well. He in turn is at first 'frightened of her; then attracted, then disgusted at her pruderies, and then enchanted by her contradictions, and finally in love.'<sup>46</sup> Physically remote from his past life, he tells her nothing of it.

At the end of six months Jefferies takes his new wife back north, leaving her in Wyndham while he goes on ahead to prepare: the hut is rebuilt and he sends the Aboriginal women back to the camp. They are indignant, then sullen, but—he thinks—submissive. On arrival Muriel, despite her previous claim that she is prepared for hardship, is 'horrified at the extreme loneliness and querulous as to the future'. Nevertheless, they plan to stay two years, until the company provides a better job outside Geraldton.

A day later Jefferies, hearing screams, comes into the kitchen to find one of the Aboriginal girls pulling his wife about by the hair and abusing her. He strikes the girl, drawing blood, and sends her away, threatening to 'do for her' if she ever comes back. Muriel, frightened and shocked, realises that her husband has previously lived with the Aboriginal women and is at pains to make him feel that he has behaved badly by her. He agrees to give up his position immediately so that they can start again elsewhere, and in the meantime Muriel, still on the verge of hysteria, lives in a state of terror. Jefferies walks over to the camp and orders that no one should come near the house: 'His old friends looked and listened silently and without comment.'



A little over a week later he returns from his work in the evening to see ‘an odd shaped bundle of clothes on the veranda.’ His wife lies dead in a pool of congealed blood, her head beaten ‘almost out of recognition’ and her breastbone ‘broken in by the blow of a heavy digging stick such as the native women use.’

Sick with rage and horror, he crams cartridges into the magazine of his rifle and sets off at a run towards the camp, planning to shoot everyone he sees, but the people are gone, leaving only a smouldering fire and a mangy puppy. He returns to the house and sits through the night next to his wife’s body, hearing the hum of distant bullroarers. Next morning:

He got up stiffly, looked at the corpse in front of him and shuddered.

Things happen quickly in a hot climate and it was not a pleasant sight. It seemed incredible that he could have ever loved, or thought he loved, that mass of decomposing flesh and tawdry clothing. Once more he stepped over it, and went and fetched a spade and began digging a hole.<sup>47</sup>

Repulsed now by the house—the ‘symbol of civilisation’—he spends the next nights sleeping in the bush, wracked by conflicting emotions. ‘He felt like a murderer; he had brought her up to be killed and mutilated, and was alone with that thought.’ When, ten days later, a lone prospector rides up, Jefferies tells him that his wife has died of fever. Convinced by the newcomer to ride to Turkey Creek to get a clergyman to read a service over the grave, Jefferies makes it five miles, but then turns back, cursing the vulgarity of his relationship with Muriel and the life she represented, and wishing he had been left in peace. One morning soon after he emerges from the house and sees the Aboriginal girl Jenny standing fifty yards away. His heart beats violently as he walks towards her, but she is unafraid of him.

He looked wonderingly at this mysterious creature that had stepped out of wild, unreckoned time and space to claim him. She was his slave....She looked up at him fearlessly, their eyes met, and she wriggled herself

nearer. Then suddenly he clasped her to him, forced her head back roughly and pressed his mouth to hers.<sup>48</sup>

‘Out There’, Grant Watson’s first published short story, was based on his observations of the station manager outside Sandstone and several young Aboriginal girls and women who lived with him, as described in *Journey Under The Southern Stars* (1968, page 41). Apart from the then transgressive nature of the subject matter, the 1905 Aborigines Act had made it illegal for a white man to have relations with Aboriginal women, and probably it is for this reason Grant Watson sites the story a thousand miles further north, near Turkey Creek in the Kimberly, where he never records having travelled himself.

Written in the time of Becke, Favenc and Lawson, the ending (incongruously conveyed in the phrasing of true-romance) illustrates Grant Watson’s difficulty in dealing with a topic never described before in Australian literature: a sexual union between black and white where the power is ambiguously distributed. The story incorporates a similar plot device to Louis Becke’s South Sea tale, ‘His Native Wife’, of 1895, and anticipates Katharine Susannah Prichard’s *Coonardoo* (1929)<sup>49</sup>—although both these stories reach vastly different conclusions.

As Roslyn Haynes notes, ‘Watson had come to Australia to study the anthropology of the Aborigines, specifically their marriage customs, but ironically, as a result of his particular experiences, he ended up [examining] the anthropology of Europeans exposed to the desert and the consequent effect on their marriages.’<sup>50</sup>

**‘A Farewell’ (1914):** features the young Englishman Peter met in Sandstone, caught in a dead end he would never escape.

**‘The Narrow Way’ (1914):** a young Aboriginal girl is fatally speared after breaking tribal sexual taboos, demonstrating that Aboriginal society is as much governed by social and religious conventions as European.

**‘An Ordinary Corpse’ (1914):** Mrs Harris, an emigrant farmer’s wife, has lived for years in a stifling homestead twenty five miles outside the goldmining town of Cue. Olsen, the farmer’s Norwegian offsider, a newcomer, is left alone with her and some Aboriginal workers after she falls ill and her husband rides off to fetch a doctor. Mrs Harris makes Olsen promise that if she dies, he will take her body to town to be buried among other Europeans: ‘The black people are the only people who should live in this country. It’s their land, and they ought to be left alone in it; it’s fit for them....They say, you know, that their spirits exist after they are dead, and are ....always watching, angry that they have been killed and their descendants driven out by the white settlers. That’s why I’m afraid to be left here.’ When he finds Mrs Harris dead, Olsen remembers his promise and sets out cross-country with the body in a cart, following the tracks of Harris’s horse. Soon he is lost, alone in the bush with only a corpse for company, and we trace his inevitable disintegration into panic and madness. As he drives on, with the woman seemingly now sitting beside him, the figures of spear-bearing Aborigines seem to glide through the bushes and the sheeted figure becomes indistinguishable from his Norwegian fiancée, as he sings to keep the spectres as bay. By nightfall next day he chances on the town, but by now, having kept his promise, he is deranged beyond redemption. The title refers to the fact that the body is ‘an ordinary corpse’ and not the ghost that his imagination brings to life to accompany him.

**‘Man & Brute’ (1915)** set in a rural bush hut outside ‘Armadale’, a dying bushman’s loyal dog tries to fight off the doctor who is attempting to save his master’s life. Published in the early years of World War I, the story of such an elemental but misguided battle would have had a particular resonance for its readers.

**‘A Raison d’Etre’ (1917):** Two Woodhouse brothers, in their twenties, arrive in northwestern Australia: Horace prospects for gold, Louis manages

a cattle station on the Ashburton River in the Kimberley. A young Aboriginal woman, Illigara, approaches Louis, explaining she wants to have a child—a boy—with him. After living with him for some time she goes bush and has a girl child, which she nurses for nine months before giving her to another woman to care for. Louis, meanwhile, is killed in a riding accident. When Illigara hears this she sets off to find Horace, and makes the same proposition to him—“Isn’t there something about a deceased brother’s wife?” Horace asks his (amused) companions. When after a year Illigara is still not pregnant she transfers her attention to an elderly cousin of Horace’s, with whom she has two boys, and happily stays. Although likely based on a true incident, the story has various anomalies and seems overly simplistic: Dorothy Green comments (probably on information from Isobel White) that a young girl would be unlikely to travel so far out of her territory to find her deceased partner’s brother.<sup>51</sup> The story (and title) probably reveals more about Grant Watson’s ideas about women’s biological destiny than Aboriginal marriage custom.

**‘Cobwebs and Starshine’ (1918):** a young shepherd living in isolation on an Australian sheep station, Jedburgh, forty miles from Meekatharra, is visited unexpectedly one evening by an older woman riding through en route to another homestead. Finding her sympathetic, he muses at length on his dreams for his eventual marriage, and on his own inarticulacy in front of younger women. The older woman suggests the practical qualities needed in a wife, rather than the sensual and aesthetic ones he desires: ‘men do have to be looked after, by a mother or a wife.’ ‘It’s I who will look after my wife,’ he tells her. As she canters away, the older woman thinks to herself: ‘Yes, he’s a dear boy...But what a baby!—but that’s all cobwebs and starshine!’ The publication date suggests that Peter was reflecting here his mother, who died later the same year.

**‘In the Jungle’ (1918):** Set on the island of ‘Wainang’—probably in Fiji—Waring, a young ship’s doctor, is approached by a dark and overwrought

man, Garmore, to perform an operation on his wife. In his bungalow he finds a woman, dressed in white, tied down in a chair. Her husband pulls out a pistol and, seemingly raving mad, demands that Waring cut out her heart. To save both their lives, Waring pretends he will comply, but then draws his own pistol and wounds Garmore. At the woman's insistence they tend his wounds, saving his life, and leave him to recover. Waring offers her freedom, and life, if she comes away with him, but despite their immediate affinity she insists that she will stay to nurse her husband. 'Don't you see that nothing can be better than the moment? Desire and hope always lead back in a circle.' Helpless before her strength of purpose, he feels 'the shadow of the years of suffering' that will follow, but the force of her conviction makes him acquiesce. Filled with pity for her sacrifice, he drives back through the jungle to the town in something like tranquillity. Published in October 1918, although possibly written earlier, the story is transparently a vehicle to satisfy the author's fantasy of having the power of life and death over his rival, although its overwrought dialogue and crude symbolism must have seemed inexplicable to the uninformed reader.

**'Friends and Neighbours' (1924):** a sketch of Grant Watson's neighbour, Jack, near Storrington in the War years, and his arduous life after running away from a brutal family at age four, first as a child labourer, then a poacher, and finally a farm worker.

**'The Sacred Dance: Corroboree of Natives of North-West Australia' (1924):** a 'member of a scientific expedition' describes a corroboree, with the events transposed to a fictional island off N.W. Australia. 'Cray' is the expedition's leader, 'Louis' the cook on their vessel, 'Teacup' (also called Mindooloo) their interpreter. Concentrating on the emotional impact of the event on the observer, the description in some aspects foreshadows a corroboree described in *The Mainland* (1917), and is an earlier version of that given *But To What Purpose* (1946).

**‘The Diamond’ (1924):** a young married woman sailing out of St Michaels on the Malaspina Glacier in Alaska encounters on board ship a mining engineer, Hales, who relates a story of spending several seasons ‘frozen in’ on floating pack ice in the Behring Strait before finding his way out. The survivors were reduced to their most elemental, and now, having lost all other desires and impulses, Hales is obsessed by the idea of possessing a diamond, as a symbol of unchangeable and flawless perfection.

**‘Black Wedgwood’ (1924):** An English doctor relates a tale about his early days in the port of ‘Geraldton’. After visiting a young woman in labour in a squalid hut in the hinterland, he is paid with one of her remaining treasures, a black Wedgwood teapot. She will not divulge her name, but reveals that she has run away from her wealthy English family with her father’s groom, Jarvis, and come to Australia with him to take up a selection. Jarvis had hoped to get money from her father, but instead he disowned her. The doctor tells Jarvis that his wife should have no more children. Over six more years, and children, the doctor is paid with further pieces from the Wedgwood tea set. After a furlough he returns, and is again called out to Jarvis’s wife, only to discover that she is now a different woman. The other—still nameless—is buried somewhere in the sand dunes. When the doctor reports the death to the local magistrate, he is told that the case is too old to take up, and besides, such disappearances are not uncommon. The young woman has ‘vanished like a drop of water in the sand.’ The story echoes accounts of pioneer settlers of the Busselton region, who found themselves on the beaches of Western Australia with useless artefacts such as pianos, coaches and chests of porcelain, linen and lace. That the china (with the marque of the Wedgwood family, with whom Grant Watson was acquainted) is black—the colour of Perth’s black swans and the country’s earlier inhabitants—in an Antipodean world where everything is reversed, has a certain resonance.

**‘White and Yellow’ (1924):** A young European woman with ‘sleepy eyes’, who works as a waitress in a Chinese teahouse in an undisclosed location, is attracted by the Oriental sensuality of a young Chinese merchant. She agrees to go with him, but then her erstwhile husband, an alcoholic broom seller, arrives to reclaim her: contemptuously, she defies him, and he wounds the young man with a knife. After the broomseller has been removed by police, the young woman accompanies the merchant’s Chinese friend, her sensual nature overriding any other considerations.

**‘Gnilgie’ (1924):** A sketch of a Bibbulmun woman of the Tondarup division, called Ngilgi (or Ngilgee, Ngilian or Ngilgian) by Daisy Bates and ‘Gnilgie’ by Grant Watson, who is portrayed vividly against the background of the Guildford reserve—where, he writes, as customary Aboriginal life disintegrates, the people have been offered ‘Christian fables’ instead. The inhabitants are represented as remnants of dying race: ‘After the their smiles and laughter, they would tell sorrowfully that twenty, or even ten, years ago there were hundreds of black fellows, but now they were all dead but a few, and that in a few years there would be none left.’ Nevertheless, in sunlight on the dazzling sand ‘the little black babies crawled and scampered. There were a good many babies at the camp, for natives passing from one part of the country to another would leave their younger children to be looked after by the permanent residents.’ Despite their disadvantages, ‘Gnilgie’, a dominant figure, is relatively prosperous from her work as a washerwoman, with house of her own of tarred canvas and corrugated iron, and seems constitutionally happy. In a reversal of the usual role, her temporary ‘husbands’ are happy to serve her in return for being provided for. Central to both Bates’s and Grant Watson’s accounts are Ngilgi’s last liaison, at about sixty, with a much younger part-Aboriginal man [called ‘Jackie’ by Watson, ‘Jimmy’ by Bates], who stayed either until her other suitors drove him out or his ‘proper’ wife won him back. Bates dates this incident to sometime between 1906, at Maamba, when Ngilgi’s last husband died, and early 1908, when Bates’ earliest version of the story was published.<sup>52</sup> Grant

Watson's vantage point (in 1910) is from some eighteen months after the young man's departure, with Ngilgi still convinced that her lost love will return. (A younger 'Gnilgie' also appears in *Daimon*, in the guise of a station servant with a liking for colourful clothing.) It is thought that Ngilgi died in 1921 and was buried in Mogumber cemetery.

**'Boy and Girl' (1914):** A group of Cambridge students gather for an end-of-term picnic on the combes of Box Hill. 'Peter', about 22, goes to collect sticks in a wilder part of the woods. He is in love with 'that one marvellous woman whose being and significance he had but so lately discovered, and who, in return, had discovered for him the whole world'. Finding a patch of honeysuckle, he wants to show it to *her*. Tomorrow he will see her, while today is well spent because he can dream of her. A fellow student comments on how happy he looks and tells him he must be in love. Herself recently engaged, she asks if he may tell her who the woman is: he sadly tells her no, although 'he would have liked to have spoken the name'. He explains there are difficulties; neither of them can foresee what will happen, but they will come through all right, they love each other enough for that. The two kiss each other shyly, and the young man's eyes fill with tears.

**'Mediator' (1924):** A young man, back from five years in the Maldives, has recently wed. At a party he encounters an old lover, Mrs Humbold, a married woman of forty five. She tells him that their affair had saved her marriage, changing her from an embittered woman to an attractive and receptive one to her husband. The young man tells her that she will 'never grow up', expecting her to be flattered. She in turn tells him never to let his young wife know 'how wise you are', and to let her 'be young'. She asks, 'You won't ever tell her, will you?' 'No, why should I?', he answers.

**'The Case of Sir Reginald James Farquason' (1924):** A middle aged civil servant retires after thirty years as Chief Justice, then Governor, of a distant group of islands and returns to England with his tedious wife (whom he



married to further his career) so that his seven daughters can marry well at Home. Once he had dreamed of an ideal woman—blue eyes, fair hair, an expression combining sadness and humour. On his first night in his Liverpool hotel he encounters a chambermaid of that description, crying because her lover has left her to go to Australia with another. Farquason convinces the maid to run away with him, and abandons family, wealth and position to become a copra trader in the Pacific. Two years later his ‘wife’ stands at the tiller of his ten-ton cutter as a sailor passes him an old copy of the ‘Times’, which reports that his family have given him up for dead. One might recall here ‘The Scheme’, a pact invented at Portishead in 1911 by Rupert Brooke’s coterie—including Godwin Baynes, Ka Cox, Noel and Bryn Olivier and Jacques Raverat—to meet at Basle railway station on 1 May 1933 (when they would be in their mid forties) and vanish from their previous lives to go ‘fishing for tunnies off Sicily or exploring Constantinople or roaring with laughter in some Spanish Inn’.<sup>53</sup>

**‘The Cave of Corycus’ (1924)** A precursor to *Moonlight in Ur*, which begins with a similar motif: a fifteen-year-old girl in the ancient Mediterranean port of Corycus in Western Cilicia (now Seleucia in southern Turkey), is expected to sacrifice her lustrous long hair to the goddess Astarte (Aphrodite to the Greeks), in place of an older and more barbaric custom of giving up her virginity through an encounter with a stranger at the temple. When she falls asleep on the seashore and encounters a stranger, she is led by a priestess to enact the older sacrifice.

**‘The Last Straw’ (1924):** Mr Inchfield, an aging writer of biographical potboilers, wins the lottery and makes the Nietzschean discovery that there is nothing—women, philanthropy, material goods, travel—that he can spend it on that will make his life worth living. He kills himself.

**‘The Man out of the Sea’ (1931):** In the version published in the *London Mercury* in 1931, Dr David Cree, forty, whose wife has left him, is

becoming increasingly reclusive. Staying off-season in a deserted hotel in Cornwall he spends his days walking on the cliffs above the Atlantic. One morning, following news of a shipwreck, he discovers a man's body in the water but decides not to report it so as not to draw attention to himself. However, on searching him for personal possessions—which include a bundle of letters in a pocket case—to find out his identity, Cree notices that the man looks distinctly like himself. From a visiting card he establishes that he is David Vince, of 25 West 57<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, and then pushes the body back into the water. Back at the hotel he reads the soggy letters in the order they have been kept. All unsigned and undated, brief, and written (at long intervals) in 'a woman's hand', they read:

1. Do not think that you will be able to find me. I went away not only for my good but for yours. There is only one way you can serve me—never seek me.
2. I am glad that you should write through the channel that you have mentioned.
3. America! How wonderful! May your eager hungers be satisfied! You have always my best hopes.
4. This may be difficult for you to understand, but, David, dear, I must say no, or, at any rate, not yet.
5. Your last letter gave me great pleasure. You are good to write at such length and so wisely. There is a saying by Lao Tzu: "He who does not fail to find himself shall endure. He who dies but does not perish shall endure for ever."
6. Thank you.
7. Come.

The eight and last letter makes an appointment to meet by the North Gate of the Zoological Gardens at three o'clock on Thursday, 14 April: she will wear a small fern leaf in her coat. Cree decides to keep the appointment, if only to tell the woman of her correspondent's death and hand over his effects. In the intervening time he rereads the letters, awaiting the meeting with shame, dread and anticipation. One night he dreams that the man, Vince, returning after fourteen years, is himself. He leaves for the rendezvous with no idea what he will say.

When she arrives, Susan Elstree—beautiful, aged about 35—is accompanied by a gawky boy, whom she sends off to amuse himself. On Cree's approach she mistakes him for her lover, telling him she hardly recognises him, he is so changed. She is obviously discomposed: 'Come, let us walk. Don't notice me, I am a little shaken and uncontrolled today.' Cree tries to tell her he is 'not the man you think I am', but she tells him in tears that she had seen his name in the list of ship's missing and could not have borne it if it were true.

Her reason for refusing to see him, she tells him, was her inability to accept life as it came to her, which now—especially when faced with the likelihood of his death—she has realised was a terrible mistake. Unable to reveal the truth, Cree finds himself taking on the dead man's identity. He feels as if some 'purposeful influence' had led him to find drowned man and take his place. He will disappear from his previous life, he decides—and will tell Susan the truth one day, when it becomes necessary. Here (at the end of Chapter 3) the published 'work-in-progress' finishes.

Grant Watson's story 'The Man out of the Sea' appeared at roughly the same time as *Moonlight in Ur* (1932), while he was still struggling to find ways to tell the story of Ida. The title is a reflection of Ibsen's 'The Lady from the Sea' (1888), in which a woman, married to an older country doctor, is brought to a crisis when a past suitor, the Stranger, comes from the sea to claim her: she refuses to leave with him, choosing her unsuccessful marriage over new life in an unknown world. There is the

additional conceit of a ‘sea change’, while the theme also harks back to Melville’s sailor in *White-Jacket* (1850), falling from the yardarm into the sea and becoming a different personality. There are real-life resonances also with Ida returning Peter’s letters with ‘dead’ written on them, and Katharine’s thoughts of Noel: ‘I am alive, you are dead’.

The three chapters published in 1931 were the genesis of a novel, completed in October 1940, of which eight chapters survive in manuscript (120 pages in all), and the rest was apparently lost or destroyed. In the remaining section, a few months later Cree is residing in Hampstead near Susan Elstree: her son David believes that his mother is dead; that Mrs Tarrant, a middle-aged family retainer, is his adoptive mother, and—now—that Cree is his father, returned from America. Susan gives back to Cree (or, as she thinks, Vince, who was a novelist) a manuscript he had sent her, telling him she has not read it, ‘because he would not have written the truth about himself, but a savage picture of how he thought himself to be.’ This contains Vince’s diary of his life in New York (closely paralleling Grant Watson’s American experiences), interspersed with the contemporary story:

Through the years of our separation you have sent me perhaps a hundred words (knowing well how to fetter my heart), scant messages of heavy import. I have listened and waited, obeying what I have conceived, and indeed what I made to be, your sovereign command. ...and I have named you to my fancy: She-who-must-be-obeyed. You have also been always the Susan who walked with me in the woods near Ilchester...who yielded, pressing among the spring-time bed of withered bracken: the same Susan who lay beside me, and who because of the fullness of your heart turned away your face, hiding it among the springtime vegetation while you wept. She who laughed through her tears, praising the scent of the sweet earth...David (as you once mockingly called me) the Giant Killer.

In the novel-within-a-novel it is at this point, in the woods, that Susan’s son David was conceived. Living later among a caste of thinly-disguised characters in New York, he raises the Karmic idea that a murdered

man may solicit his own death: a theme fictionally explored in a subplot. ‘She who must be obeyed’ is a reference to Rider Haggard’s *She*, a popular work that Jung once used to illustrate his concept of the four distinct levels the anima, designated *Eve*, *Helen*, *Mary*, and *Sophia*.

The story, a more fully-realised version of ‘The Case of Sir Reginald James Farquason’, where a man in his later years successfully swaps his unsatisfying existence for a new life with a chance-met woman, here hangs on the unlikely premise of the woman unknowingly accepting the impostor who substitutes himself for her lover. Nevertheless, despite its obvious weaknesses, this is one of Grant Watson’s more intriguing attempts, as it comes closest to approaching those intimate parts of his life still missing from his autobiographical works. With the last chapters missing, we do not learn if the protagonist is finally able to leave behind his old self (or half of his split personality), and successfully reclaim ‘Susan’: something that the author was not able to achieve in real life.

**‘Hope House’ (1931):** After a peripatetic life, a middle-aged man purchases the house in which he once lived in childhood. Having moved into his mother’s old bedroom he is horribly disturbed by the persistent screech of a Brazilian parrot and the ear-piercing crying of a baby coming from next door. He discovers that the baby’s cries are in fact part of the parrot’s repertoire. His protests to its owners, two elderly spinsters, are in vain. At last, driven to distraction, he calls on the sisters, only to learn that the elderly parrot was a resident of the house during his own infancy, and the crying to which he has such an aversion is his own.

**‘Farewell Psyche’ (1932):** a rich, fashionable and apparently well-intentioned young woman, Psyche, patronises an organ grinder with kindness, until she steals the affection of the organ grinder’s Brown Capuchin monkey and the musician feels forced to flee, and is thus rendered homeless once again.

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## NOTES—THE NOVELS & SHORT STORIES

<sup>1</sup> Cowan, Peter 'E. L. Grant Watson and Western Australia: A Concern for Landscape' *Westerly* Vol. 25 no. 1 March 1980 pages 39-58 [page 43]

<sup>2</sup> *Where Bonds are Loosed* (1918) Knopf, Borzoi pocket book edition New York 1927, page 218-19

<sup>3</sup> *Where Bonds are Loosed* (1918) Knopf, Borzoi pocket book edition New York 1927, page 34-5

<sup>4</sup> Green, Dorothy *Meanjin Quarterly* 1971, page 280

<sup>5</sup> *The Mainland* Duckworth, London 1917, page 214

<sup>6</sup> *The Mainland* Duckworth, London 1917, page 223

<sup>7</sup> *The Mainland* Duckworth, London 1917, page 225

<sup>8</sup> *Deliverance* Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1920, page 55, 130

<sup>9</sup> *Shadow and Sunlight* Jonathan Cape, London 1921, page 60

<sup>10</sup> a practice, transferred from Australia, described in *Journey under the Southern Stars* page 31-32

<sup>11</sup> various editorial differences exist between the American and English editions, causing differences in pagination.

<sup>12</sup> *The Desert Horizon* Jonathan Cape, London 1923, page 53-54

<sup>13</sup> *The Desert Horizon* Jonathan Cape, London 1923, page 172

<sup>14</sup> *The Desert Horizon* Jonathan Cape, London 1923, page 206

<sup>15</sup> Or, as David Malouf expressed it in *An Imaginary Life*: 'But the spirits have to be recognized to become real. They are not outside us, nor even entirely within, but now back and forth between us, and the objects we have made, the landscape we have shaped and moved in. We have dreamed all these things in our deepest lives and they are ourselves. It is our self we are making out there, and when the landscape is complete we shall become the gods who are intended to fill it.' Malouf, David *An Imaginary Life* Chatto & Windus New York 1978, page 28

<sup>16</sup> *Daimon* Jonathan Cape, London 1925, page 19

<sup>17</sup> *Daimon* Jonathan Cape, London 1925, page 27: cf 'There is something mysterious about the Australian bush. It is so absolutely still. And yet, in the near distance, it seems alive. It seems alive, and as if it hovered round you to maze you and circumvent you. There is a strange feeling, as if invisible, hostile things were hovering round you and heading you off.' Lawrence, D. H. and Skinner, M. L. *The Boy in the Bush* (1924) Eggert, Paul, ed. (Penguin UK 1996 edition), page 285-286

<sup>18</sup> *Daimon* Jonathan Cape, London 1925, page 31

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- <sup>19</sup> *Daimon* Jonathan Cape, London 1925, page 37
- <sup>20</sup> *Daimon* Jonathan Cape, London 1925, page 43
- <sup>21</sup> *Daimon* Jonathan Cape, London 1925, page 76
- <sup>22</sup> *Daimon* Jonathan Cape, London 1925, page 143
- <sup>23</sup> *Daimon* Jonathan Cape, London 1925, page 166
- <sup>24</sup> *Daimon* Jonathan Cape, London 1925, page 257
- <sup>25</sup> *Daimon* Jonathan Cape, London 1925, page 272
- <sup>26</sup> *Daimon* Jonathan Cape, London 1925, page 273-4
- <sup>27</sup> Cowan, Peter 'E. L. Grant Watson and Western Australia: A Concern for Landscape' *Westerly* Vol. 25 no. 1 March 1980 pages 39-58 [page 52]
- <sup>28</sup> *Daimon* Jonathan Cape, London 1925, page 315
- <sup>29</sup> *Daimon* Jonathan Cape, London 1925, page 327
- <sup>30</sup> *The Partners* V. Gollancz, Ltd., London, 1933, page 13
- <sup>31</sup> *Journey under the Southern Stars* Abelard Schuman, London, New York, Toronto 1968, page 11-12
- <sup>32</sup> *The Partners* V. Gollancz, Ltd., London, 1933, page 278-80
- <sup>33</sup> *But to What Purpose* Cresset Press, London 1946, page 100
- <sup>34</sup> Grant Watson to Dorothy Green, 27 February 1970, from the Papers of Paul Eggert, Academy Library, UNSW@ADFA, Australian Defence Force Academy, MS 230 (unhoused papers)
- <sup>35</sup> *The Nun and the Bandit* Smith & Durrell, New York 1941, page 300; Primavera Press edition, Sydney 1993, page 258
- <sup>36</sup> *The Nun and the Bandit* Smith & Durrell, New York 1941, page 303-4; Primavera Press edition, Sydney 1993, page 261-2
- <sup>37</sup> in 'Book to Film' *The Nun and the Bandit* Primavera Press edition, Sydney 1993, page 308
- <sup>38</sup> BTWP page 202-3, 211
- <sup>39</sup> ELGW Series 4950 Box 3, Folder 7
- <sup>40</sup> Letter, ELGW to Dorothy Green, dictated to Katharine, 27 February 1970, Papers of Paul Eggert, Academy Library, UNSW@ADFA, Australian Defence Force Academy, MS 230 (unhoused papers)
- <sup>41</sup> Dossetor, Roberts Francis, 'Reminiscences of Kenneth Seaforth Mackenzie and E. L. Grant Watson' *Australian Literary Studies* vol. 13 no. 1 May 1987, pages 99-104 (page 104)

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<sup>42</sup> ELGW Series 4950 Box 3, Folder 7: Godwin Baynes to Katharine Grant Watson, undated

<sup>43</sup> *Innocent Desires* Boni & Liveright, New York 1924, page 12-13

<sup>44</sup> *Innocent Desires* Boni & Liveright, New York 1924, page 15

<sup>45</sup> *Innocent Desires* Boni & Liveright, New York 1924, page 16-17

<sup>46</sup> *Innocent Desires* Boni & Liveright, New York 1924, page 27

<sup>47</sup> *Innocent Desires* Boni & Liveright, New York 1924, page 35

<sup>48</sup> *Innocent Desires* Boni & Liveright, New York 1924, page 40

<sup>49</sup> a fact first noted in 1965 by Henrietta Drake Brockman in *Katharine Susannah Prichard* Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1967

<sup>50</sup> Haynes, Roslyn 'Dying of Landscape: E. L. Grant Watson and the Australian Desert' *Australian Literary Studies* Vol. 19 Issue 1, University of Queensland Press 1 May 1999, page 32

<sup>51</sup> Papers of Paul Eggert, UNSW@ADFA, MS 230 (unhoused papers): Green, Dorothy, unsorted index card notes

<sup>52</sup> Bates's accounts include 'An Aboriginal's Adventures: Ngilgee' in *The Western Mail* 8 February 1908; 'Ngilgee and her Lover' in *The Western Mail* 25 April 1908; 'The Adventures of Ngilgian' in *Australia* November 1923 and 'A Rich Widow' in *The Western Mail* 23 March 1935, along with mentions in *The Passing of the Aborigines* (pages 71, 74) and *My Natives and I* (pages 66-67, 111) and *Aboriginal Perth* (pages 109-116).

<sup>53</sup> Jones, Nigel, *Rupert Brooke* (1999) page 107