Australian literary fascists, 1905-1945: A comparative case study into the development of fascist ideology in Australia

Adrian Keri
The University of Notre Dame Australia

Follow this and additional works at: https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses
Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
Copyright Regulations 1969

WARNING
The material in this communication may be subject to copyright under the Act. Any further copying or communication of this material by you may be the subject of copyright protection under the Act.
Do not remove this notice.

Publication Details

This dissertation/thesis is brought to you by ResearchOnline@ND. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of ResearchOnline@ND. For more information, please contact researchonline@nd.edu.au.
AUSTRALIAN LITERARY FASCISTS, 1905-1945

A Comparative Case Study into the Development of Fascist Ideology in Australia

Adrian R. Keri

B. A. Hons

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Master of Arts

School of Arts and Sciences

Sydney Campus

June 2021
I say, if ever there were a time when poetry should be militant, relentlessly militant, it is now when, failing a remedy, Democracy may have to turn again to despotism for aid to rescue her from the soulless materialism and hysteric passions of the mob that afflict her!


My reason for indulging in this reverie […] is simply to kill time; for, to speak like a true man, I linger shivering on the brink of the disclosures to which I am pledged. I feel something like the doomed Nero, when he stood holding the dagger near his throat, trying meanwhile to screw his courage to the sticking-place by the recitation of heroic poetry.

—Joseph Furphy, *Such Is Life* (1903)
To Sarah-Jane
Declaration of Authorship

This thesis is the candidate’s own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other institution.

To the best of the candidate’s knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

______________________

Adrian R. Keri (20152503)
28 June 2021
Abstract

Historians of fascism and the far-right in Australia have generally focused on the role of material factors to the neglect of the role of ideas. Certainly, the history of ideas can never be divorced from the ‘concrete’ factors of politics and economics. But in the case of William Baylebridge (1883-1942), William Hardy Wilson (1881-1955), and Randolph William Hughes (1889-1955), ideas played a definite and decisive role in their embrace of fascism as the solution to society’s ills. They were artists and intellectuals in the so-called ‘vitalist’ tradition, drawing on the ideas of such thinkers as Hegel, Bergson, and Nietzsche, among others. Baylebridge was a writer and poet who embraced the prophetic idiom of Nietzsche and Gabriele D’Annunzio to promote his vision for Australia, which he termed the ‘New Nationalism’. Wilson was a noted writer, architect, and critic, and a somewhat seminal figure in the history of Australian art, whose embrace of certain fascist ideas has only been obliquely acknowledged by historians. Hughes was a poet and scholar of French literature who became deeply involved with the fascist movements of Germany and France after resigning from the University of London in 1935. In this thesis, their personal and intellectual developments will be explored not only to determine their own particular reasons for embracing fascist ideas and the fascist cause, but also to identify the various ideas and streams of thought that were present in Australia in that period that contributed to this development. To this end, this thesis will apply the theory and method of political theorist Roger Griffin, which seems to have had only a limited influence on Australian scholarship. Consequently, in applying his theory and method in a comparative case study of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge, this thesis has uncovered new insights into the development of fascist politics and ideology in Australia and has demonstrated that ideas played a greater role in this development than previously understood, thus expanding our understanding of the fascist phenomenon as a whole.
Contents

Abstract 5
List of Figures 7
Acknowledgements 8
Introduction 9
Chapter 1: Creativity and the Crisis of Modernity 34
  1.1: The crisis of modernity in Australia 35
  1.2: Their encounters with modernity abroad 44
Chapter 2: Health and Hierarchy 64
  2.1: Masculinity against the Judeo-Christian tradition 67
  2.2: Masculinity against the present modernity 75
  2.3: The spiritual aristocracy 85
Chapter 3: History and Expectancy 95
  3.1: The spirit of history 96
  3.2: The portal of the present 105
  3.3: In search of the millennium 114
Chapter 4: A Short History of Decay 123
  4.1: The collapse of their ideas 125
Conclusion 142
Bibliography 151
Appendix 161
List of Figures

Figure 1: Photograph of Randolph William Hughes (c. 1930s). 162
Figure 2: Photograph of William Hardy Wilson (1921). 162
Figure 3a: Photograph of William Baylebridge (c. 1908). 163
Figure 3b: Portrait of William Baylebridge in later life (1962). 163
Figure 4: Identification card issued to Hughes by the NSDAP (1936). 164
Figure 5: Photograph of Martin Place in Sydney (c. 1934). 165
Figure 6a: Photograph of St. James’ Anglican Church (c. 1930s). 166
Figure 6b: Photograph of the Hyde Park Barracks (c. 1880-1900). 167
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my incredible supervisors, Dr Christine de Matos, Dr Susanna Rizzo, and Dr Steven Lovell-Jones, for their invaluable support throughout these last two years. I know that this thesis would not have reached nearly the quality that it has without their help, and for that I will always be grateful. I would also like to thank both the National Library of Australia and the State Library of New South Wales for their generous assistance. When I needed access to rare books in the depths of COVID lockdown, they quickly provided me with full photocopies of everything that I needed and with the usual fee waived. In addition, I would also like to thank the Australian Commonwealth Government, who have supported this project financially as part of the Research Training Programme (RTP) scheme. I am also indebted, though in a non-monetary way, to my family and friends for their patience and support over the last two years, and who have all in their own way kept me rooted to the ground. In this regard, I am particularly thankful for my wife, Sarah-Jane, who has been my closest friend and companion these past two years—and who has tolerated my endless fascination with the other ‘Bae’. Last of all, I would like to thank God, who has made this project possible and supported me all the way—though I did not heed His warning, that “to know madness and folly” is folly indeed.
INTRODUCTION

Even if no mode of life could hope […] to revitalize the entire world […] the mode of life we propose to ourselves as a nation could hope, if conceived with vision, to revitalize a portion of it—the portion which is our world.
—William Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh (1939)

Amongst the various movements of the early twentieth century that sought to revitalize the world, one of the most significant was fascism, which promised (among other things) the restoration of meaning and purpose to life. The proposed means for achieving this goal varied from one movement to another. But the common denominator to these various expressions of fascist thought was, as the theorist Roger Griffin argues, a ‘myth’ of national rebirth that was combined with an essentially anti-Enlightenment politics often referred to as ‘ultra-nationalism’. In so doing, it presented a seemingly viable alternative to liberalism and Marxism that appealed to different people for different reasons. In the case of artists and intellectuals, often referred to as ‘literary fascists’, this appeal was based largely on fascism’s perceived significance within some broader frame of reference. In many cases, this significance was its status as a potential answer to the crisis of modernity. The relevance of this for the study of fascism more broadly is that in their embrace of the ideas of fascism, and in their elaboration of their own idiosyncratic forms of fascist ideology, such artists and intellectuals reveal the many personal, historical, and intellectual factors that contributed to their development and embrace of fascist ideas and by extension the fascist cause. But despite the presence of such thinkers in Australia throughout the early twentieth century, there has so far been little research into their development of fascist ideas.

It perhaps goes without saying that Australia is not a country typically associated with fascist ideology. But a growing body of research has confirmed that fascism was indeed present in Australia in that period. Such movements as the New

---

1 William Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh (Sydney: Tallabila Press, 1939), 155.
Guard, the Australia First Movement, and the local branches of the British Fascisti are among the more well-known examples of this presence. And literary fascism, too, was also present in Australia at that time, despite its reputation among artists and intellectuals as a ‘philistine’ country. P. R. Stephensen (1901-1965) is certainly the most famous individual in this category, but there were many others, including the Jindyworobak poet Ian Mudie (1911-1976), the pagan revivalist A. R. Mills (1885-1964), and the ex-communist Adela Pankhurst Walsh (1885-1961). But with the exception of some studies focused on Stephensen and Walsh, there has so far been little research into the presence of literary fascism in Australia. This is a significant oversight, not only due to the continuing relevance of the radical authoritarian nationalism that these individuals sought to articulate, but also for the deeper insight that it would provide into the various expressions of fascism that emerged in Australia in the interwar period. Therefore, in order to contribute to this growing body of research, and to identify the origins of fascist ideology (and ideation) in Australia, this thesis will conduct a comparative case study of three Australian literary fascists—who, by their writings and lives, reveal the many personal, historical, and intellectual factors that contributed to their embrace of fascist ideas.

These three literary fascists were the expatriate scholar and poet Randolph William Hughes (1889-1955), the poet and writer William Baylebridge (1883-1942), and the architect, writer, and critic William Hardy Wilson (1881-1955). The choice of these three men rather than other possible Australian literary fascists, such as the

---


7 Until around 1925, Baylebridge was known by his birth-name, Charles William Blocksdale, which appears on his earliest publications. But after 1925 he was known by the name ‘William Baylebridge’, which he adopted both personally and professionally. The reason for this change seems to have been primarily as an effort to control his own image and reputation, an effort that was considerably undermined by the large quantity of juvenilia he had published under his birth-name between 1908 and 1922. As he explained to A. G. Stephens in 1923: “Unfortunately for my earlier printings—if, indeed, it matters—I set out upon my literary adventures (as I have since continued) under a load of uncounselled imperfections; and, partly because of this, I have consigned to print a great deal that I could wish heartily I had fed into the fire. I had recorded only too many of my experiments; and, if I must confess it, the suggestion that anyone might deal seriously with these unhallowed striplings of mine puts me to a cold sweat. Don’t, for God’s sake, hold that axe over me! I believe there is some poetry in my earlier small books; but I should be well pleased to have it lie there, ‘too dark for vision and too deep for sound’, until I shall have leisure and enough inclination (if I ever shall have) to rescue what I think might be worth whole in it from the private mortuary in which it now seems to be safely interred—a mortuary doubly secure because of the debris about it.” Letter from William Baylebridge to A. G. Stephens, 7 July 1923, MLMSS 2786 Box 1, State Library of New South Wales (hereafter SLNSW), 1.
pagan Mills or the Francoist Catholic Herbert M. Moran (1885-1945), was based largely on the remarkable similarities that exist between their writings and philosophies in both form and content, which means that they provide a clear sample of one particular ‘pathway’ into an embrace of fascist ideas and ideology. This pathway may be loosely described as ‘the pathway via Old Hegelianism’, an interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy that was both overtly spiritual and politically conservative in its application of his ideas. In addition to being consistent with the development of fascist ideology in Europe, this affinity between their ideas is made all the more significant by the fact that they seem to have been completely unknown to each other, despite their mutual association with Stephensen. This indicates that there were several critical influences on fascist thought present in Australia in that period, and which all three men developed into their own elaborate (if impracticable) forms of fascist ideology.

In addition to this intellectual similarity, they also seem to have lived comparable lives and to have come from similar social and cultural backgrounds. They were each born into comfortable Protestant middle-class families on the east-coast of Australia in the prosperous 1880s, which meant that they were perfectly poised to come of age during the turbulent *fin de siècle*, which was followed immediately by the Federation of Australia in 1901. They appear to have been intellectually gifted as young boys, and with the opportunities that their class position provided they were able to enjoy the privileges of a quality education. During this time, they seem to have imbibed much of the intellectual atmosphere of the period. Hughes, for instance, claimed to have experienced “what is known in European literature as the *maladie du siècle*” as a child—and “not the comparatively harmless and more or less consciously cultivated form of it known to Chateaubriand; but the more deadly form of it known to Flaubert.” Through this influence, which only continued once they travelled to London as young men, they became conscious of the many ‘meta-crisis’ of the period. This included not only the crisis of modernity as a whole, but its various aspects, such

---

11 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Netterville Barron, February 1930, MLMSS 6717. SLNSW, 1.
as the challenge to traditional religion (and meaning) caused by the Enlightenment and the discoveries of Charles Darwin, which shattered much of the traditional Christian cosmology—not to mention the rise of the so-called ‘coloured races’, which inspired such influential texts as Charles Pearson’s *National Life and Character* (1893).\(^\text{12}\) In the midst of these questions and ambiguities, which were among the defining features of the age, they each came to regard themselves as men whose lives should be devoted to creative and intellectual pursuits, at which point they sailed to London to continue their journey of discovery. There they were exposed to more of the prominent philosophies of the day, and though Hughes decided to remain in London like so many other Australian expatriates, Wilson and Baylebridge eventually returned to Australia and settled permanently.

In the years that followed, they each developed from this common base of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century ideas their own elaborate social, political, and philosophical programmes that shared many of the essential features of fascist ideology, in which they sought to envision the return of meaning and transcendence to life through the complete transformation of society and civilisation. To achieve this goal, for it clearly required popular support, they each worked to persuade their respective audiences (in the event but a small circle of associates) of their ideas and visions for the future, which they explained in detail in their various publications.\(^\text{13}\) For Baylebridge, this culminated in the publication of *This Vital Flesh* (1939), in which he had collected his various political and philosophical writings and presented them as a final rallying-call to the people of Australia, and as a desperate bid for fame and repute.\(^\text{14}\) In Wilson’s case, this effort to persuade his audience also involved the publication of his various writings. But in order to ensure that his writings had the widest and most direct impact possible, he sent copies to various figures of importance. The most significant of these figures were Hitler and Mussolini; though unsurprisingly neither responded to his overtures.\(^\text{15}\) As for Hughes, this effort to convince his


\(^{13}\) As late as 1940, W. J. Miles, an associate of Stephensen, was urging Baylebridge to publicise his works *effectively*—that is, not *solipsistically*: “I take the liberty of suggesting to you that “T.V.F.” [i.e. *This Vital Flesh*] should now be treated by you as a book to be read by others than your intimates: there is no need to scorn the mob—it scorns itself in practice.” Letter from W. J. Miles to William Baylebridge, 19 January 1940, MLMSS 1284 Box 127, SLNSW, 1-2.

\(^{14}\) As Baylebridge stated in the preface to *This Vital Flesh*: “[I]f man is not to be annihilated, all who value that spirit [of man] must strike now the strongest blow for it that their powers permit. To do something thus is among the purposes of these books.” Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, ii.

\(^{15}\) William Hardy Wilson, *Eucalyptus* (Wandin: H. Wilson, 1941), 372-381.
audience and thus shape the course of events as directly as possible was conducted primarily through his relationships with various prominent far-right figures. By 1936, this network included such notable figures as Charles Maurras, Wyndham Lewis, Antonio Ludovici, and H. Rolf Hoffmann, who was a senior official of the Nazi Party’s Foreign Press Department. But as ostensibly practical as these various tactics may have been, they were sustained at every point by a vision of the future utterly distinct from the present—a future somehow immune to the vagaries of the present decadent modernity.

For this reason, since their engagement with fascism and fascist ideology was fundamentally creative and theoretical, they may rightly be placed within the category of ‘literary fascist’. This likeness, together with the similarities between Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge, suggests that many of the same intellectual ‘preconditions’ that shaped the literary fascists of Europe and elsewhere were also present in Australia in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Therefore, in examining the lives and writings of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge, this study will attempt to answer two main questions. Firstly: What were the personal, historical, and intellectual factors that contributed to the development and ultimate embrace of fascist ideas by Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge by the mid-1930s? And secondly: What might this personal, historical, and intellectual development reveal about the development of fascist ideology in Australia as a whole? But in order to fully understand the relevance of these questions to the study of fascism and far-right history in Australia, it is necessary to provide a brief summary of the existing literature.

**Literature Review**

In recent years, fascism has been increasingly recognised as a fundamentally modernist ideology, for which reason it cannot be truly understood without reference to modernist thought and discourse. This insight, though certainly not uncontroversial, has proved a remarkably fruitful development in the field of fascist studies. Among the works to emerge from this trend are such texts as Roger Griffin’s *Modernism and Fascism* (2007), which has been used extensively in this study, and Zygmunt Bauman’s *Modernity and the Holocaust* (2001). But since most of the scholarship on

---

16 Correspondence with each of these and other notable far-right figures can be found among Hughes’ papers in the State Library of New South Wales (see MLMSS 671).

the topic of fascism and far-right politics in Australia predates this trend, which gained significant headway only in the late 1990s, it has so far had little impact on the study of Australian history. In addition, as mentioned above, since the chief influence on Australian scholars has been the liberal and Marxist traditions of fascist interpretation, which have tended to overlook the role of artists and intellectuals in the development of fascist ideas and ideology, there has been relatively little research into the role of Australian artists and intellectuals in far-right politics. Probably the only exception to this has been considerable research into Stephensen and his admittedly indispensable role as publicist and organiser of the Australia First Movement in the early 1940s, which at that time was the *locus* of fascist activities. But as important as Stephensen may have been, he was not the only Australian artist or intellectual sympathetic to fascism in this period. And such individuals are well worth studying, for their lives demonstrate the appeal of such ideas, particularly in the context of interwar Australia.

There is much to be gained from such research, therefore, not only in the fields of fascist studies, but also in the history of ideas—which is another neglected area in the study of Australian history. But in order to demonstrate that this thesis is a valuable contribution to the study of history, it is necessary to provide an overview of the existing literature with reference to this latest development in fascist studies. One of the leading experts of the history of far-right politics in Australia is Andrew Moore, whose work has dealt primarily with the ‘secret armies’ of the interwar period. Methodologically, Moore is a Marxist historian of the ‘New Left’, a trend in Australian historiography launched by Humphrey McQueen in the early 1970s. The central claim of this ‘New Left’ school is that Australian history is best understood as an extension of the class-war in Britain—and not, as was often the tendency of the ‘Old Left’, as somehow separate from the perils of capitalism in Europe. As a result, Moore approaches the topic of fascism in Australia from a decidedly Marxist perspective, according to which fascism is an inevitable consequence of the capitalist system and its efforts to defend itself against revolution.

This interpretation serves as the foundation for Moore’s first major publication, *The Secret Army and the Premier* (1989), which offers a compelling case for the

capitalistic origins of the conservative paramilitaries of the interwar period—as an inevitable consequence, that is, of the power and entitlement of the Australian ruling class. Furthermore, he argues, in line with the Marxist perspective, that the study of lesser-known fascist movements, like those of Australia, can help demonstrate that fascism is not a uniquely European phenomenon but is an aspect of late capitalism everywhere. This position has since been elaborated upon in a number of articles and books, such as The Right Road (1995), in which the New Guard and other ‘fascistic’ organisations are situated within the broader context of Australian conservatism, and an article published in 2011, in which the New Guard’s demise is assessed in light of Griffin’s theory of fascism as ‘palingenetic ultra-nationalism’.

Similarly, Keith Amos and Humphrey McQueen have argued that the ‘secret armies’ stemmed at once from a long-standing authoritarian tendency in Australian conservatism and from a desire on the part of ex-servicemen to recapture the spirit and virility of life in the trenches. This authoritarian tendency is most readily associated with the efforts of W. C. Wentworth (1790-1872) to establish a landed aristocracy in Australia and can be discerned to varying degrees in the conservative and ‘fascistic’ organisations of the interwar period. Their origins, however, are explored only in a very cursory way, viewed as only the standard posture of the ruling class. Similarly, the yearning of ex-servicemen for a rekindling of the ‘spirit of the trenches’ (noted by Emilio Gentile, among others, as an essential factor in the development of fascist ideology) is not explored with reference to any specific framework of fascist studies, nor the intimate connection between modernism and the experience of the First World War.

Consequently, as with the ‘political’ historians in general, these factors are examined only with reference to their immediate political significance. There is little

---

23 In this latter article, Moore concluded that Griffin’s theory is unsuited to the Australian context, primarily because in Griffin’s typology, the New Guard would be considered ‘non-fascist radical right’ rather than fascist in the fullest sense, as Moore himself believes. In this regard, it is worth noting that there is an increasing debate around whether the New Guard should be considered fascist or rather as a radical conservative movement such as Griffin’s typology would indicate. Matthew Cunningham, “Australian Fascism? A Revisionist Analysis of the Ideology of the New Guard,” Politics, Religion & Ideology 13, no. 3 (September 2012): 383-392; Andrew Moore, The Right Road?: A History of Right-wing Politics in Australia (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995), 7-22; Andrew Moore, “Discredited Fascism: The New Guard after 1932,” Australian Journal of Politics and History 57, no. 2 (2011): 188-206.
24 Amos, The New Guard, 111-112; Humphrey McQueen, Gallipoli to Petrov: Arguing with Australian History (North Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 199-217.
analysis of the role of fascist ideas, nor the role of culture and psychology, in facilitating the development of fascist and far-right movements in Australia. This, of course, is entirely appropriate given the bounds of political history. But in focusing on developments of such clear political consequence, their analysis is prevented from assessing the more diffuse aspects of the fascist phenomenon in that period, such as the influence of modernist thought, particularly in the philosophies of Bergson, Nietzsche, and Hegel. Though such analysis is provided in a limited way by most political historians, it is the historians with a more socio-cultural approach that have provided the deepest analysis of these factors so far.

This can be seen in Michael Cathcart’s 1988 book, *Defending the National Tuckshop*, in which he provides a detailed socio-cultural analysis of the Victoria-based White Army. In this book, Cathcart also conceives of fascism as part of the efforts of the ruling class to defend their position of power. But unlike Amos or Moore, Cathcart’s analysis is focused primarily on the culture and ideology underlying the movement, thus emphasising the role of culture, psychology, and ideas over the role of material factors. Ultimately, having considered these factors, he argues that the ideology of the White Army was a kind of strained conservatism, still reeling from the traumas of the First World War, and exacerbated by the renewed crises of the 1930s. Notably, this was the only point in modern Australian history when the country was in a state of structural disarray comparable to that of Italy and Germany in the interwar period.26

However, in examining this ideological core, Cathcart’s book focuses on an ideology (namely conservatism) that is related to fascism only in a very tangential way. For this reason, his analysis largely ignores the specific beliefs that distinguish fascism from conservatism and considers them in terms of their historical rather than ideological proximity. In other words, it examines this ideological core largely in terms of its cultural and psychological determinants, rather than its formal ideological content. As a result, it provides only a limited insight into the relation between this strained conservatism and the content of fascist ideology properly understood. Without doubt, these cultural and psychological factors are important in accounting for the development of fascist movements in Australia. But ultimately, as Cathcart himself

---

suggests, this strained conservatism was ‘fascistic’ only in a very indirect way. For this reason, it would require a specific kind of analysis to uncover the connections between such local expressions of ‘fascistic’ inclination and fascist ideology as such. Analysis of this kind has been undertaken by other ‘socio-cultural’ historians, albeit in the context of specific case studies. This can be seen in the efforts of John Perkins, whose research has expanded our knowledge of Nazi activities in Australia. Across several articles on the topic, Perkins provides a detailed account of these activities, the most significant of which (in his view) were its Party’s attempts at generating support for the regime amongst the local German diaspora. In this, he uncovered their considerable but ultimately limited affinity for the Nazi programme. He argues that this affinity was limited by an innate conservatism and the strong loyalty that German-Australians felt for their adopted homeland, resulting in a considerable aversion to Germany’s alliance with Japan.

Perkins also offers some insight into the sympathy of Australians for the Nazi programme more generally. He argues that this sympathy usually stemmed either from some perceived affinity between their own conservative ideals and those of Nazism, or a shared anti-British sentiment, which was particularly common among Irish Catholics and German-Australians. This perceived affinity tended to revolve around Nazism’s opposition to communism and its apparent success in surmounting the ills of the Great Depression. This view is shared by David S. Bird and Gianfranco Cresciani, both of whom have highlighted the oblique nature of conservative sympathies for fascism—sympathies that were ignorant of its essential radicalism yet gleefully aware of its authoritarian character.

In each case, this affinity has been examined only to a limited extent. For example, in his regrettablly titled book, 

_Nazi Dreamtime: Australian Enthusiasts for Hitler’s Germany_ (2012), Bird focuses on specific individuals and examines their sympathies for Nazism between 1933 and 1945, though occasionally discussing earlier

---

27 Cathcart, Defending the National Tuckshop, 31-32.
figures like Baylebridge. Bird’s analysis is instructive in its assessment of the different ways that Australians became convinced of the fascist ideal. But since his book focuses specifically on Nazism rather than fascism as a whole, it provides only a limited insight into the appeal of fascist ideas more generally. Furthermore, since Bird argues that these ‘fellow-travellers’ were often highly idiosyncratic in their reasons for admiring Nazism, there is little attempt at situating their beliefs within the broader Australian context.

Perkins and Cresciani, on the other hand, have examined these affinities some distance into the past, focusing particularly on the 1920s. But their studies are also limited, at least with reference to the question at hand, in their focus on the influence of fascism among specific ethnic groups. This, of course, is not a limitation in itself; in fact, since Perkins and Cresciani are German and Italian speakers respectively, their work has unveiled sources that would have otherwise remained inaccessible to most Australian historians. Cresciani, in particular, has expanded our knowledge of the subject in his 1980 book, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism, and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945*. But given the evident prejudices of Australians towards Germans and particularly Italians in this period, it is unlikely that much influence can be ascribed to these groups before the 1930s. Consequently, in focusing on the activities of German and Italian fascists in Australia specifically, Perkins and Cresciani have provided only a partial insight into the origins of the development of fascism in Australia.

The most comprehensive view in this regard is provided by Roslyn Pesman Cooper, in her 1993 article on Australian perceptions of the fascist regime in Italy. Like Perkins and Cresciani, she argues that there was a widespread sympathy among Australian conservatives for the Italian regime, largely based on a falsely perceived affinity between their respective ideals.31 But significantly, she also argues that sympathy for Italian fascism was not limited to this kind of conservative naivete but was also common amongst Australia intellectuals influenced by the currents of modernist thought and discourse. Though this influence was also apparent amongst those intellectuals influenced by American progressivism, which itself stemmed from the same modernist roots as Italian fascism, the importance of this stream of modernist influence was most apparent in the case of Australian intellectuals familiar with the ideas of the European far-right, who were also a part of the general modernist discourse.

---

31 Roslyn Pesman Cooper, “‘We Want a Mussolini’: Views of Fascist Italy in Australia,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 39, no. 3 (1993): 349-351.
of that period. One notable example of this was A. R. Chisholm (1888-1981), a professor of French literature at the University of Melbourne and a close friend of Hughes—who, like Hughes, was a great admirer of the French reactionary theorist Charles Maurras.\textsuperscript{32} Therefore, despite the brevity of Cooper’s contribution to the field (she published only two articles on the subject), her approach is instructive in its consideration of the role of ideas in tandem with the concrete realities of that period, most notably the Great Depression.

But in addition to the literature on the Australian far-right, it is also important to discuss the literature on Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge specifically. Of the three, Baylebridge has certainly attracted the most scholarly attention, both in the fields of history and literary criticism. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, Baylebridge was a writer of not inconsiderable talent, and his poems have appeared in several anthologies of Australian poetry since his death in 1942. Secondly, through his efforts at cultivating a particular public persona, he successfully convinced both critics and the reading public that he was a greater ‘genius’ than he really was. For as Leon Gellert observed as late as 1963, “The parrot cry of “neglected genius” repeatedly crops up among people who have never read a line of Baylebridge.”\textsuperscript{33} As a result, much of the literary criticism on Baylebridge has been devoted to evaluating whether this reputation was truly deserved or not—which, in the case of an author as strange and complex as Baylebridge, was far from simple. For as T. Inglis Moore observed, “No Australian poet wants more careful reading and the exercise of the selective judgment than this strangely diverse Baylebridge.”\textsuperscript{34} Among the most insightful of these critical evaluations are those by H. A. Kellow, Firmin McKinnon, Judith Wright, Frederick T. Macartney, Robyn Claremont (née Benn), and T. Inglis Moore.\textsuperscript{35} Suffice to say, it is generally the critics who shared his literary and philosophical views that have held his works in high regard. This is reflected in the fact that John Kirtley and Enid Derham praised his sonnets for their traditional (and therefore ‘anti-modern’) style, while

\textsuperscript{32} Cooper, “Views of Fascist Italy in Australia,” 354-355. See also Bird, \textit{Nazi Dreamtime}, 184-192.
\textsuperscript{34} T. Inglis Moore, \textit{Six Australian Poets} (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1942), 116.
Kellow and Inglis Moore admired his works for their expression of Nietzschean and Bergsonian ideas.\(^{36}\)

In this way, the literary criticism on Baylebridge provides a unique insight into the reception of his writings and ideas in Australia throughout the twentieth century. But since these critics have examined his life and works from a literary rather than historical perspective, there has been little consideration of his significance as an early advocate of fascism. Furthermore, given their literary focus, there is only a limited engagement with his political ideas and their relation to the context of Australia and his creative project as a whole. In this regard, the most detailed examination so far is that of Noel Macainsh, who is emphatic on the connection between Baylebridge’s creative and political ideals. In fact, he argues that the poet is best understood as one of the many restless young minds caught up in the modernist (and Nietzschean) vogue that devoted their lives to the restoration of meaning and purpose through art.\(^{37}\)

However, since his analysis is concerned primarily with the role of ideas and literary trends, there is only a limited consideration of the role of historical context. The reason for this is that he was only concerned with determining the extent of Nietzsche’s influence on Australian literature through a close examination of Baylebridge’s writings, in which he ironically concluded that Baylebridge was mostly influenced by Hegel. This is certainly an important conclusion that serves as the basis for much of this thesis. But in order to wholly understand Baylebridge (and Wilson and Hughes), it is necessary to highlight the interaction of those influences with personal and historical factors; and in Baylebridge’s case, these personal and historical factors were vitally important, as can be seen in the influence of Anzac culture on his writings and ideas.

The importance of Anzac culture as a formative influence on Baylebridge has been recognised by Bruce Bennett and Bruce Clunies Ross, who both analysed his 1921 novel *An Anzac Muster* in the context of Australian literature. In both cases, their chief concern is whether some insight into Anzac culture might be gained from an analysis of the novel’s turgid style. In Bennett’s view, this pretentious style is best understood as an attempt to soften the brutality of the war (the novel is set in Gallipoli)


by placing it within a broader literary and mythological context, thus reducing the war to a series of meaningful archetypes.\(^{38}\) Ross, however, is not nearly so generous. In his view, Baylebridge’s novel is significant because it carried the common Anzac theme of blood sacrifices to its morbid logical conclusion, according to which soldiers and citizens were required to give their lives to an ‘Australia’ that more closely resembled Sparta than a liberal democracy. Furthermore, Ross argues that his novel is emblematic of the denial of the realities of war and the sanitising effects of Anzac culture.\(^ {39}\) But since their examinations of the novel were made in the limited context of a comparative study (that is, against other examples of Anzac literature), their engagement with his writings is considerably limited. This means that the connection between his writings and the Anzac culture of that period remains largely unexplored, and it is one of the tasks of this thesis to examine that connection in depth.

William Hardy Wilson has also attracted the attention of historians. This is largely due to his influence as an art critic in the 1920s and his seminal study of colonial architecture, *Old Colonial Architecture in New South Wales and Tasmania* (1924). The main scholars to have written on Wilson are Zeny Edwards, Deborah van der Plaat, Nicholas Heyward, and John Johnson. Wilson is also discussed in Bird’s book; but as with Baylebridge, the analysis is largely cursory. The most comprehensive analysis is provided by Edwards in her collaborative biography of Wilson, published in 2001. The chapter by Edwards in this book provides a detailed and sympathetic account of Wilson’s life, in that she was attuned to the deeply aesthetic and mystical manner in which Wilson lived his life. “Hardy Wilson,” she said, “was an *illusioned* man. He talked and wrote in soliloquy. He walked without touching the ground […] and every day sought something more in life than just living.”\(^ {40}\) But there is little engagement in Edwards’ account with his political and philosophical views. An analysis of this sort is provided in the final chapter of her book, which was written by her collaborator John Johnson. In this chapter, Johnson provides a detailed analysis of Wilson’s writings and the development of ideas, for which reason it is a valuable contribution to the field. But unlike much of the most recent scholarship in the field of fascist studies, such as the work of Roger Griffin, Johnson overlooks the futural element of Wilson’s modernism and argues that his views were fundamentally


reactionary. And though there is certainly much truth to this, there is a strong radical and futural element to Wilson’s views that is largely neglected in Johnson’s analysis.41

This futural element is recognised by Heyward and Plaat, and the origins of his ideas are also examined with considerable insight. Heyward, for instance, places Wilson’s views within the broader intellectual context of his period, in which Nietzschean and Bergsonian ideas were common currency. In particular, he likens Wilson’s views on ethics and aesthetics to those of Norman Lindsay (1879-1969), and his philosophy of history to the ideas of Spengler, Toynbee, and H. G. Wells.42 But in so doing, Heyward’s analysis largely overlooks the question of Wilson’s fascist sympathies and ideas, which were admittedly beyond the scope of his thesis.43 And though Plaat’s research has shed considerable light on the origins of Wilson’s theories on the role of climate and geography in facilitating creative development, her articles also avoided his fascist sympathies.44 There is still much research to be done, therefore, into this particular aspect of Wilson’s life and works.

Randolph Hughes, on the other hand, is the least studied of the three. In fact, the only historian to have written extensively on Hughes is Gregory Melleuish. The only notable exception to this is an article written by John Hawke and a book by Petra Rau called *English Modernism, National Identity and the Germans, 1890-1950* (2009), in which Hughes is briefly mentioned.45 But their engagement with Hughes is considerably limited, at least when compared to the work of Melleuish. Melleuish has written four articles on Hughes, each dealing with some aspect of his life and ideas. These articles are instructive in their analysis of the nature of his beliefs and their potential origins, particularly in relation to the intellectual history of Australia. But due primarily to issues of scope, these articles have not examined Hughes’ fascist sympathies with reference to biographical factors, nor with reference to the latest development in fascist studies. Though there is some recognition by Melleuish of the connection between fascism and modernism, these factors remain largely subordinate

to considerations of culture and aesthetics. Of particular importance in this regard is the fact that Hughes’ unpublished novel, *Lost Eurydice* (1942-1946), written after he had become disillusioned with fascism as a viable force, has yet to be examined by any scholar. This thesis will therefore be the first scholarly work to do so.

In sum, there has been little research into the role of ideas in the development of fascist ideology in Australia, particularly with regard to the latest methodological developments in fascist studies. In addition, there has been little research into the political ideas of Baylebridge, Hughes, and particularly Wilson, whose fascist sympathies are the least acknowledged. For this reason, this thesis aims to complement the existing literature by applying the theories and methods of political theorist Roger Griffin, who is one of the leading experts of fascist studies, to the task of determining the role of ideas in the development of fascist ideas in Australia, focusing specifically on the lives and writings of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge. To this end, the literature on the history of the Australian far-right in general in addition to the literature on these three men specifically will be considered and drawn upon throughout the analysis.

*Methodology and Method*

For its methodology, this thesis will embrace the approach developed by historian and theorist Roger Griffin, which he notably termed ‘methodological empathy’. According to this approach, the historian begins their investigation by closely studying the writings of fascist ideologues, so as to enter into “the affective, subjective world-view and value-system” of the historical figure in question. From that point, the historian will then seek to answer whatever question they may have through an analysis of their preliminary findings into this ‘subjective world’ in terms of the particular historical context from which it emerged, and the interaction between that ‘subjective’ world and its immediate context. The value of this approach, as Griffin explained his most recent book, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (2018), lies in its equal respect for both evidence and theory, and its unique sensitivity to the role of

---


affect and psychology in the rise of fascism and fascist ideology. Furthermore, in allowing for this fruitful balance between evidence and theory, it provides a definitional framework known as ‘palingenetic ultra-nationalism’—a theory based in large part on the pioneering efforts of such historians as George Mosse and Renzo De Felice. According to this theory, the ‘nature’ or essential core of fascist ideology is a myth of national rebirth that promises to deliver the nation from its current state of ‘decadence’. For the purposes of this thesis, the term ‘decadence’ refers to a state of moral or cultural decline characterised primarily by an excessive indulgence in pleasure and ease, a term which was frequently used by modernists themselves to describe the modern world. However, as distinct from other ‘myths’ of national rebirth (such as those of conservative populists), a fascist myth promises not only the restoration of the nation to its former, pre-decadent glory, but a surpassing of that glory into a renewed time and space—in short, “an alternative modernity”. Furthermore, this myth of national rebirth (or ‘palingenesis’) is combined with an essentially anti-Enlightenment politics, which is referred to as ‘ultra-nationalism’.

That is the essence of Griffin’s theory, as explored in his two theoretical works, *The Nature of Fascism* (1991) and *Modernism and Fascism* (2007). But since this study is concerned with ‘literary fascism’ specifically—that is to say, the permutation of fascism most closely associated with the general modernist discourse—it is important also to discuss the unique contribution of this latter work to the task at hand. This book, though certainly a sequel of sorts to Griffin’s first publication, *The Nature of Fascism*, is perhaps most significant in its expansion of the concept of ‘modernism’ to entail not merely aesthetic but also social, political, economic, and philosophical expressions of the search for ‘new meaning’. Furthermore, in advancing a ‘primordialist’ definition of modernism—that is, one that borrows extensively from social and anthropological theory—Griffin provides a detailed account of the process by which such ideological ‘myths’ are generated.

In *Modernism and Fascism*, Griffin defines the term ‘modernism’ as referring to “a vast array of heterogeneous individual and collective initiatives” undertaken in Western societies from the mid-nineteenth century onwards that sought to restore “a sense of transcendental value, meaning, or purpose” to the modern, ‘disenchant
world. The primary cause of this condition (and the subsequent need for a ‘modernist’ response) was ‘modernisation’—that is to say, the combined social, political, economic, and technological developments of at least the last five hundred years—which in turn contributed to the collapse of Christianity’s social and intellectual dominion in Europe and elsewhere, and that subsequently resulted in the impossibility of any new paradigm-grounding state of affairs to emerge to fill the void left by Christendom. This “perpetually open-ended condition which denies closure for society” that results from modernisation is ‘modernity’, which Griffin characterises as a protracted ‘liminal’ stage between paradigms that remains open and unresolved to this day. Consequently, since at least the end of the First World War, many people in Western societies have had an acute sense of the meaninglessness and absurdity of modern existence. Notably, this sense has manifested perhaps most clearly in the realisation that many of the beliefs that formerly held sway, such as those of tradition or revealed religion, had become seemingly untenable, or at the very least in need of extensive modern reform (and theological modernism, incidentally, was an attempt at this reform).53

As for the anthropological basis of this theory, Griffin argues that the human species, as a species that exists by mere chance to suffer in a universe with no overarching meaning or telos, has a deep-seated, indeed primordial aversion to consciousness of ‘the void’. Consequently, over the course of many millennia, humanity has developed a unique capacity for generating elaborate mythologies that chart the whole course of history and their essential place within it, thus situating their microscopic existence within some broader framework that gives it meaning and coherence. There are countless factors involved in this process of generating mythologies. On one level, the need for such an orientating frame is a matter of simple logic, for without some definite horizon giving shape to our existence, it becomes difficult to justify much of what we do with our lives. Many of the great monuments of civilisation, too, become largely incomprehensible. Yet on a much deeper level, these mythologies also serve to conceal the immense void at the heart of human existence, at least as it is understood from this anthropological perspective.

In other words, for the purposes of this theory, the terms ‘meaning’, ‘purpose’, and ‘transcendence’ are to be understood in largely existential terms—that is to say,

53 Griffin, Modernism and Fascism, 43-159. See also Griffin, The Nature of Fascism, 182-205.
as constitutive of the individual’s search for solutions to the ‘problem of life’. The term ‘meaning’, therefore, which is perhaps the most foundational of the three, may be understood to refer to the intelligibility of existence, which the emergence of modernity had in many ways undermined. In other words, as the Christian existentialist Paul Tillich put it, the modern search for meaning is ultimately the search for “a meaning which gives meaning to all meanings”.54 Significantly, as a testament to the applicability of this theory to the writings and lives of these men, Baylebridge himself also defined ‘meaning’ in much the same way, which he referred to as ‘faith’, and placed it at the centre of his personal and philosophical programme. For as he said in This Vital Flesh (1939), “Faith gives significance to things. Beyond other agencies, it is the begetter of significance. And significance, to man, is more than bread.”55 His central concern as a writer, therefore, was the recovery of meaning in precisely the sense that both Griffin and Tillich intended.

The term ‘purpose’, then, can be understood to refer to the specific aims or telos that the individual is provided by this central, all-encompassing meaning, which Tillich also refers to as one’s “spiritual centre”.56 In this sense, purpose can also be understood as the implications of this accepted meaning for the individual, which requires them to act in some way or another. The term ‘transcendence’, then, refers to the sense of being a part of something greater than oneself—such as a political cause or some broader metaphysical process—which could serve to provide a restored sense of meaning and purpose. In other words, by identifying themselves with some ‘greater’ movement or cause—with something “transindividual”, as Tillich puts it—the individual is able to regain a sense of meaning and purpose by regarding that movement or cause as the source of meaning and purpose in their lives.57 In this way, the individual is spared “the anxiety of meaninglessness”, but in so doing surrenders their “freedom of asking and answering” for themselves.58 In so doing, a sense of meaning and purpose is retained, “but the self is sacrificed”, which has significant implications for the personal and intellectual development of the individual from that point on.59 In fact, Tillich considered the implications of this turn so dire that he identified it explicitly with the tyrannies of fascism and communism. And it will

---

55 Emphasis added. Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, 250.
56 Tillich, The Courage to Be, 45.
57 Tillich, The Courage to Be, 46.
58 Tillich, The Courage to Be, 46-47.
59 Tillich, The Courage to Be, 47.
become apparent in this study, through a close examination of their writings, that Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge believed tellingly that the self had value *only* to the extent that this served this ‘higher’ cause.

In light of this, it becomes clear that the efforts of modernists to ‘re-enchant’ the world were motivated by the same aversion to the void mentioned above.\(^60\) In other words, the sense of exposure and meaninglessness that is an unavoidable feature of modern existence is not simply the benign experience of *ennui*, but is the complete loss of a grounded conception of the world that might redeem an otherwise (seemingly) absurd and pointless existence.\(^61\) But since modernism has not responded to this experience in a single definitive way, Griffin distinguishes two different ‘ideal-typical’ expressions of modernism that encompass the range of modernist responses to the problem of ‘disenchantment’ of existence. These are ‘epiphanic’ modernism and ‘programmatic’ modernism. In epiphanic modernism, the artist, intellectual, or visionary (in this context they are virtually synonymous) considers it their task to restore a sense of meaning and transcendence through aesthetic or ‘epiphanic’ experience. Consequently, there is little reason in this particular kind of modernism to alter external circumstances.\(^62\) For such modernists, this ‘epiphanic’ experience was sufficient as a response to the vagaries of modernity, providing a kind of ‘negative’ consolation of the sort often associated with the writings of Kafka or Woolf, which deal extensively with the “aporic”—that is to say, *irresolvable*—nature of modern existence.\(^63\)

For the programmatic modernist, on the other hand, there is no such limit of irresolvability. Instead, there is only a fanatical urge to force their particular ideal into being without any regard for its actual feasibility—and, to their minds, was not mere invention (that is, creation *ex nihilo*) but was in some sense the restoration of the fixed order of reality that necessarily corresponded to humanity’s deepest desires, the loudest of which, in this particular case, was an acute thirst for meaning and transcendence. In different ways, as this thesis will explore, Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge had attempted such a retrieval of meaning in their lives through the mediums of poetry and prose, ultimately accepting a programmatic expression of modernism that led them to embrace some form of fascist ideology, however

\(^{60}\) Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 80.  
\(^{61}\) Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 70-129.  
idiosyncratic in its content and expression, as a final answer to their desperate need for meaning and transcendence in that period. And in this regard, it is worth noting that a programmatic expression of modernism need not entail an actual ‘programme’ as such, but only an effort to translate ‘epiphany’ into action—a fact that is demonstrated by the nature of the ‘programmes’ advanced by Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge.

And since this thesis will rely extensively on the use of literary sources as evidence, it is important to provide an explanation of the various sources that have been used in this study. For Baylebridge, this thesis has used a variety of published and unpublished writings. In the case of his published works, this thesis has referred primarily to the four volumes of his Collected Works (also known as the Memorial Editions), which were published in the early 1960s by his friend and executor P. R. Stephensen. These volumes, which Baylebridge himself had been compiling since at least the late 1920s, were *This Vital Flesh* (1939/1961), *An Anzac Muster* (1962), *The Growth of Love* (1963), and *Salvage* (1964). These volumes consist largely of revised versions of his earlier publications, most of which were written between 1908 and 1914. The only notable exceptions to this are the first edition of *An Anzac Muster*, which was published in 1921, and a collection of poems called *Sextains*, which was published in 1939 (and later included in *Salvage*). The materials that would have comprised the unrealised fifth and sixth volumes of this series can be found in manuscript form among Baylebridge’s papers. The first of these is a collection of essays called *A Harvest of Hours*, which were adapted from his private journals, while the second is a collection of letters and short fiction called *Fragments*. Significantly, Baylebridge had intended to publish his Collected Works under his own imprint, the Tallabila Press. But when he died in 1942, only the first volume, *This Vital Flesh*, had so far been published. It appeared in 1939, and it is this earlier edition that has been referred to in this study, for the simple reason that it is the edition that the author of this thesis happens to own. It is worth noting, in this regard, that Stephensen ensured that the pagination of both the 1939 and 1961 editions were identical, so the references in this thesis can be used for either edition.

---

64 Letter from William Baylebridge to Nettie Palmer, 22 April 1928, MS 1174 Series 1 Folder 123, National Library of Australia (hereafter NLA), 2.
65 For a detailed account of the contents of these volumes and their relation to his earlier publications, see footnotes in Bibliography.
66 Noel Macainsh also tried to complete the publication of *A Harvest of Hours*, but this edition also failed to eventuate. Macainsh, *Nietzsche in Australia*, 44.
In some instances, earlier editions of his writings have been referred to, generally when an earlier edition, or comparisons between editions (and their revised texts), reveals some unique insight that would have otherwise remained unknown. The most notable example of this is the three editions of *National Notes*, published in 1913, 1922, and 1936 respectively, which provide a remarkable insight into the development of Baylebridge’s ideas over time. In such instances, these earlier editions have been cited with his birth-name, ‘William Blocksidge’, which appeared on his publications until he adopted the name ‘Baylebridge’ around 1925. As for his unpublished materials, which can be found in the State Library of New South Wales, there is a wealth of letters and other unpublished writings (in addition to those mentioned) that provide a unique insight into his personal and intellectual development. In this regard, it is worth noting that this thesis will provide the first in-depth analysis of these unpublished materials by an historian.

For Wilson, the main sources used are the philosophical and autobiographical writings of his middle period—namely, *The Dawn of a New Civilization* (1929), *Yin-Yang* (1934), *Eucalyptus* (1941), *Instinct* (1945), and *Atomic Civilization* (1949). Some of his articles as an art critic have been referred to, in addition to his articles for the Burnie Advocate, a newspaper in Tasmania, which he wrote concurrently with *Yin-Yang* while living on the southern island between 1931 and 1935. His many short stories, which can be found in manuscript form among his papers in the National Library of Australia, were consulted but found to be largely irrelevant to the current study. There were, however, some unpublished essays and letters among his papers that are referred to in this study. But the most valuable information was found in his autobiographical writings, mentioned above. In this regard, it is worth noting that in *The Cow Pasture Road*, *The Dawn of a New Civilization*, and *Eucalyptus*, Wilson is recounting his own creative and intellectual development through the guise of a literary alter ego called ‘Richard le Measurer’. For this reason, this thesis will often refer to the latter two of these novels as though they were referring to Wilson himself, for the simple reason that Wilson’s own life is their chief inspiration. His biographer Zeny Edwards has also quoted his novels in this way.

For Hughes, the main source of evidence for this thesis is his enormous correspondence, which were donated by his son Philip to the State Library of New

---

68 See footnote 7.
South Wales. Other manuscript sources, particularly his unpublished novel *Lost Eurydice* (1942-1946), were also consulted. In addition, this thesis also referred to his published political writings, the most notable of which was his 1936 pamphlet *The New Germany*. Most of his scholarly writings, such as his articles on C. J. Brennan, were not consulted due to time constraints. One notable exception to this was his 1934 essay ‘Mallarmé: A Study in Esoteric Symbolism’, in which he provided some insight into his own Symbolist spirituality. With regard to his novel *Lost Eurydice*, there was one significant textual inconsistency that I have chosen to ‘correct’ to avoid confusing the reader. There is a character in the novel referred to variously as ‘Montclar’ and ‘de Montclair’ (evidently Hughes had considered both names for this character). For the sake of consistency, I have rendered this character’s name as ‘Montclar’ throughout this thesis.

Yet as with any methodology, there are certain limitations that are well worth mentioning. The most significant of these is the fact that Griffin’s theory and method, in prioritising the role of ideas methodologically, does tend to neglect the role of material and other historical factors. And though it is true that every methodology will have its own hermeneutical ‘blind spots’, it is nonetheless essential that the reader is aware that this study has consciously prioritised the role of ideas, which may result in some instances in an apparent exaggeration. This kind of exaggeration is certainly not the desired outcome. But when it occurs, it should be understood within the context of the broader methodological conflicts within the field of fascist studies, in which context Griffin’s approach is intended as a counterpoint to the liberal and Marxist interpretations.\(^{70}\) That said, I have endeavoured to avoid such exaggeration. Another significant limitation worth noting is that in applying this approach, this thesis has relied on the use of fiction and poetry as historical evidence. Obviously, since an author’s own views are *not* revealed unambiguously in their creative work, it is crucial that the analysis of fiction and poetry is conducted with honesty and integrity. For this reason, this thesis has endeavoured to apply a purely exegetical approach in analysing the writings of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge, as Griffin’s method clearly entails. The reason for this is that theory must always be subject to the corrective of empirical evidence.\(^{71}\) In both instances, I have followed the advice of Griffin himself, who

\(^{70}\) Griffin, *An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies*, 11-40.

\(^{71}\) Griffin, *An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies*, 61-62.
explains both limitations in his book, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies.*

Similarly, there are also several ethical implications involved in this research that must be noted. Obviously, most of the writings that I have consulted in this research were not intended for public viewing. There are some particularly ‘candid’ writings that I have chosen not to discuss, either in person or in print, for the simple reason that they are both irrelevant to this study and extremely private. In addition, as mentioned, there is the issue of reading the statements of fictional characters as reflecting the opinions of their author. The nature of the topic of fascism, too, demands honesty and integrity, most of all out of respect for its victims. But even beyond such blatant examples, there is an obvious care that must be taken not to infringe on the right to privacy of the deceased beyond what is necessary. And the point where this exposure does become necessary, I would argue, is when their writings and ideas have sought to infringe upon the rights of others. It is the responsibility of every researcher, therefore, to maintain a high standard of professionalism and respect in their work, whatever it may be—and it is precisely this standard that I have sought to maintain throughout the writing of this thesis.

To conclude this section, this thesis will embrace the ‘empathetic’ approach by Roger Griffin, thus providing a valuable contribution to the existing literature. Furthermore, this thesis will also apply Griffin’s theory of ‘palingenetic ultra-nationalism’ as the theoretical framework for analysis. This theory is not only one of the most well regarded in fascist studies today, but is uniquely suited to the understanding the role of ideas in the development of fascism in Australia, which this thesis will attempt to do through a comparative analysis of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge.\(^\text{72}\) It is not without significance, for instance, that one of Baylebridge’s earliest poems was entitled ‘Palingenesis’ (a concept which he interpreted in markedly Hegelian terms), and that his 1913 tract *National Notes* was dedicated to the so-called ‘New Nationalists’ of Australia, who were fighting bravely, he claimed, for “HER REGENERATION”.\(^\text{73}\) This same futural thrust was also evident in the writings of Wilson and Hughes. It is also worth noting that with the possible exception of an article by


Andrew Moore in 2011, there has been (to my knowledge) no significant study of the history of fascism and the far-right in Australia applying Griffin’s theory and method. For this reason, this thesis will be among the first, thus challenging Moore’s view that Griffin’s theory is unsuited to the Australian context in that period.74

To this end, this thesis will begin in the first chapter by placing Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge within the broader context of the period, which will be explored with reference to both Australia itself and the crisis of modernity at large. This will then be followed by two chapters that will explore the development of their social, political, and philosophical ideas throughout the interwar period in an overtly fascist direction and will attempt to explain this development. In the fourth chapter, which will serve as an epilogue of sorts to the analysis provided in the first three chapters, their final embrace of the fascist cause and the subsequent collapse of their ideas with the declaration of war in 1939 will be assessed for what it might reveal about the nature and structure of their beliefs, particularly in terms of their dependence on a particular historical state of affairs. This will then be followed by a concluding chapter that will discuss the implications of this research and areas of potential areas of future study.

Conclusion

It is clear, then, that this thesis has the potential to offer a considerable insight into the role of ideas in the development of fascist politics and ideology in Australia in the early twentieth century. In so doing, this thesis may also shed light on the cultural, political, and intellectual history of Australia as a whole, particularly regarding the influence of modernist thought. This thesis also has the potential to contribute in some small way to another recent trend in fascist studies, which Griffin has termed the ‘decentring’ of this field away from its historic Eurocentrism.75 In this way, this thesis might also provide some complement to Griffin’s suggestion in The Nature of Fascism that until the interwar period, the Australian intelligentsia “were still dominated by the collective sense of being new nations or part of the ‘New World’ which acted as a prophylactic against a mood of cultural pessimism […] and hence the palingenetic myths necessary to transform it into optimism.”76 The fact that Baylebridge called for

---

76 Griffin, The Nature of Fascism, 204.
the ‘regeneration’ of Australia in 1913, barely a decade after its Federation in 1901, suggests that there may be some notable exceptions to Griffin’s claim—particularly amongst those Australian artists and intellectuals that spent much of their formative years in Europe, as Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge had done. And it is these formative years, in both Australia and abroad, that will be explored in the following chapter.
CREATIVITY AND THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY

No one, I believe, can live by literature here; though many live well enough by something which, to the uninitiated, looks much like that elusive substance.

—William Baylebridge, in a letter to Nettie Palmer (1927)

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Australia was often regarded as both a philistine country and as a nation at the forefront of social and political progress—a view embraced with particular tenacity by many of Australia’s artists and intellectuals. And though there may have been some truth to these conceptions, which had their origins as much in the history of the colonies as in the modernist discourse of the period, the significant point is that these two starkly opposed conceptions of Australia were a decisive influence on William Hardy Wilson, Randolph Hughes, and William Baylebridge in their formative years. This was particularly true in the way that these conceptions framed their efforts to understand the various ‘crises’ of the period—the most significant of which was the crisis of modernity as a whole. Certainly, for many of the artists and intellectual of Australia, it seemed that their country was uniquely positioned, in both time and space, to explore the expansive possibilities of modernity and democratic society. But alongside this sense of optimism and awe at the opportunity for humanity to command its own destiny, there was a corresponding sense of terror at the sheer impossibility of the task and the burden of knowledge it entailed. Every human achievement, though previously attributed to the gods, was precisely that—a merely human achievement. This has always been the case. But never before had humanity known it was alone, nor understood the vagaries of change with such insight. In this overwhelming situation, therefore, the drift into a programmatic (and in some instances authoritarian) expression of modernism by some individuals was perhaps unavoidable. And in the case of these three men, who had brought their minds to bear on the great questions of the period, it was precisely this programmatic and authoritarian expression of modernism that they embraced by the end of their formative period as a solution to the ills of modernity.

In this chapter, this fateful combination of optimism and elitism that was present in the modernist discourse of that period will be discussed in relation to its significance as a formative influence on Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge. To this end, this chapter will be divided into two sections. The first section (§1.1) will examine the nature and influence of this discourse on them in light of the social and political context of Australia in the post-Federation era, which was the immediate context of their formative years. The second section (§1.2) will continue this examination through an analysis of their travels abroad, which were motivated in large part by the influence of the discourse in Australia. In so doing, this chapter will argue that the influence of this modernist discourse in both Australia and abroad was a crucial precondition to their development and embrace of fascist ideas in later years. Furthermore, it will argue that their experiences overseas, particularly in England, served only to expand and consolidate the influence of modernism as it was first encountered in Australia.

1.1: The crisis of modernity in Australia

Federated in 1901, Australia seemed to present a unique opportunity for reformers and revolutionaries to contribute to the creation of a new kind of society—that is to say, a society based on Enlightenment principles and the theories of Darwinian evolution. This was an attitude that stemmed from a variety of social and historical factors, the most significant of which, perhaps, was the concept of *terra nullius*, which deemed the land uninhabited prior to European arrival. On this basis, in contrast to the ‘strictures’ of Europe, they came to believe that Australia was a young and virile country, in which the forms and structures of the ‘old world’ had not yet firmly taken root.\(^2\) For this reason, these Australian reformers and revolutionaries believed that their country was uniquely poised to achieve this transformation, which they believed was the fulfilment of the ideals of the Enlightenment and the apparent ‘truths’ of Darwinian evolution. In this section, it will be argued that this context and the modernist thought that informed it were an essential influence on Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge throughout their formative years, which coincided almost exactly with the Federation of Australia in 1901.

This idealism found expression in much of the literature of the period, in such periodicals as the Sydney *Bulletin*, at a time when the writings of Edward Bellamy and

---

\(^2\) Incidentally, this same view of Australian history informed the ‘Old Left’ school mentioned in the previous chapter.
Henry George were among the most popular in the colonies. But the most remarkable expressions of this idealism were almost certainly the works of Joseph Furphy (1843-1912) and Bernard O'Dowd (1866-1953), whose writings clearly demonstrate the presence and nature of modernist thought in Australia in that period. In Furphy’s case, this was reflected in his eccentric 1903 novel *Such Is Life*, in which he expressed his own idealistic vision for the future of Australia, at least when compared to the ‘old world’ of Europe. Australia, he said,

is committed to no usages of petrified injustice; she is clogged by no fealty to shadowy idols, enshrined by Ignorance, and upheld by misplaced homage alone; she is cursed by no memories of fanaticism and persecution; she is innocent of hereditary national jealousy, and free from the envy of sister states. […] For […] one perennial truth holds good, namely, that every social hardship or injustice may be traced back to the linked sins of aggression and submission, remote or proximate in point of time. And I, for one, will never believe the trail of the serpent to be so indelible that barefaced incongruity must dog the footsteps of civilisation.

In other words, he believed that the people of Australia had been presented an unprecedented opportunity, due to their temporal and geographical circumstances, to break with the evils of the past (the ‘serpent’) and to achieve “the *palingenesis* of Humanity” by creating in Australia what he termed “[the] kingdom of God on earth”.

O'Dowd’s vision for Australia was not dissimilar. But unlike Furphy, who embraced a kind of secularised social gospel, O'Dowd followed Walt Whitman (with whom he corresponded) in holding that it was the task of artists, particularly poets, to create the consciousness that would unite the Australian people to build what he called “[the] Delos of a coming Sun-God’s race”—that is to say, the utopia of a new race.

In his case, the clearest statement of his idealism was his 1909 tract ‘Poetry Militant’, which was a passionate call-to-arms addressed to the artists of Australia. “Partly through the readjustments necessary everywhere,” he said, referring to the various upheavals of modernity,

in religion, politics, ethics, as well as in thought generally, on account of the advent of evolution doctrines; partly on account of the spread of education and of a little justice to the masses, as a result of the world-movement of which the French Revolution and the Turkish revolution [sic] were symptoms; and partly on account of the failure of old ideals and teachers to guide, owing to the operation of the factors just mentioned: the world of thought, of conduct and of action is in a state of chaos, out of which man can, I contend, only be permanently led by his naturally endowed teacher, jurist, philosopher and theologian, the poet.

---

In this, O’Dowd gave clear expression to one of the central principles of programmatic modernism—namely, that creative expression could contribute to the creation of a new society. But despite O’Dowd’s almost fanatic optimism regarding the prospects of Australia and modernity, his tract was also characterised by a terrible sense of dread. As he put it:

All, all is being thrown, has to be thrown, into the crucible of re-valuation, customs, morals, religions, laws, institutions, classes, castes, polities, philosophies: all, for at that apocalyptic word, “Evolution”, a new Jerusalem descended on the mental world, the old heavens and the old earth passed away, and it depends mostly, I contend, on the poet, the custodian of the innate prophetic wisdom of the world, the naturally sensitized plate for the reception of the intimations of the unseen Cosmos—it depends on him more than all whether a Millennium or a Pandemonium is to follow the pouring of the vial and the descent of the New City.8

The influence of this statement was considerable. The writer Katharine Susannah Prichard (1883-1969), for example, was left “too exalted and exhilarated to speak” by his articulation of the task at hand.9 It is also possible that O’Dowd was a direct influence on Baylebridge, given their stylistic and philosophical similarities. But the main reason for highlighting O’Dowd’s ideas, in addition to the fact that they attest to the presence of modernist thought in that period, is that they reveal the painful tension between optimism and fear that often characterises modernist writing and discourse.10

The importance of this tension is that it can limit or expand the range of social, political, and paradigmatic change that an individual is capable of accepting (or even conceiving). This is significant, not only for the insight that it provides into the development of modernist thought in Australia as a whole, but also for the insight it provides into the development of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge. The reason for this is that a pessimistic attitude will generally result in a reduction in the range of accepted possibilities, which in political terms results in the individual and the development of their ideas becoming narrower and more ‘reactionary’—which, in the context of this study, denotes an aversion to paradigmatic change. Notably, Michael Roe observed a similar ‘constriction’ in the liberal reformism of that period, which manifested at times in an increasingly authoritarian approach to politics.11 But the development of these three men in a markedly reactionary and authoritarian direction,

---

8 O’Dowd, Poems of Bernard O’Dowd, 9.
9 Quoted in Serle, From Deserts the Prophets Come, 71.
as will be explored throughout this thesis, far exceeded the usual consequences of this ‘realist’ turn in Australian politics. Both Heyward and Wright have also noted this anomaly in relation to their context and the base of modernist ideas from which their positions were ultimately derived—all the while stressing this point of derivation.\textsuperscript{12} And this ‘realist’ turn was reflected perhaps nowhere more clearly than in Baylebridge’s statement (quoted earlier) that:

\begin{quote}
[e]ven though no mode of life could hope, because of the multiple elements [involved] in this, to revitalize the entire world [...], the mode of life we propose to ourselves as a nation could hope, if conceived with vision, to revitalize a portion of it—the portion which is our world.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

It is not without significance, then, that the ‘revitalisation’ of civilisation as a whole remained an implicit ideal in his thought, despite his commitment to Australia. This same ‘universalist’ ideal was also present in the writings of Wilson and Hughes—who, like Baylebridge, were not wholly satisfied with the ‘nation’ as a vehicle of change. In each case, this disparity between their explicit beliefs and implicit ideals suggests a pessimistic development of their ideas from this ostensibly optimistic modernist base.

But despite their limited—or more, qualified—belief in the possibility of positive social, political, and paradigmatic change, they were still truly ‘modern’, in the sense that they recognised and embraced, in however constricted a fashion, that a definite break had occurred with the premodern world and that the recovery of this premodern existence in its fullness was neither possible nor even necessary. Instead, they concluded that the radical implications of modernity \textit{could} be embraced for the better, but stressed that in order for the most to be made of this new epoch—indeed, for the age to not end in ruin—modernity had to be returned to the forms and categories of the past (that is to say, the \textit{paradigmatic} elements of that past) without undermining the real advances of the modern world. This will be explored in greater detail elsewhere in this study. For now, it is only relevant to note that their modernism was a peculiar but not uncommon combination of radical and reactionary elements. Griffin noted this combination in numerous literary fascists, and the philosopher Eric Hoffer observed that it was particularly common amongst those engaged in “nationalist revival”.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{13} Emphasis added. William Baylebridge, \textit{This Vital Flesh} (Sydney: Tallabila Press, 1939), 155.
\end{flushright}
fact, as Hoffer went on to explain, the line between the radical and reactionary is often quite blurred. “The reactionary manifests his radicalism,” Hoffer said, “when he comes to recreate his ideal past. His image of the past is based less on what it actually was than on what he wants the future to be. He innovates more than he reconstructs.”15 The political theorist Mark Lilla noted this paradox in his own study of reactionary politics, highlighting that the reactionary is presented with a choice (and both are consistent) to either “lead the charge back to the past in all its glory” or “[to] strive for a future that will be an even more glorious version of [that past]”.16 The border line is far from clear, and in the case of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge, there is manifest the extremes of both.

Implicit in this was a stress on the importance of historical continuity, which likely stemmed from the fact that their engagement with the crisis of modernity was first and foremost in the realm of Australian art. From around the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the chief obstacle faced by Australian artists was the problem of adapting their inherited and largely European artistic traditions to the unique needs of their new-found context.17 This was far from simple, either on a technical or cultural level. For as Geoffrey Serle observed, “[o]nce the geographical break was made, in creative terms the tradition was broken or became very tenuous.”18 For this reason, without adapting the tradition in some way to the local context, it would be difficult for artists to produce anything that addressed the experience of Australians with depth or authenticity. And though there were some notable early attempts at this, as in the writings of Henry Kendall (1839-1882) and Charles Harpur (1813-1868), it was not until the movement towards a consciously nationalistic art in the late-nineteenth century that some Australian artists were able to eliminate the extraneous elements of their inheritance.19 For as Vance Palmer (1885-1959), one of the earliest advocates of this nationalist turn, said in 1905: “[U]ntil the Australian writer can attune his ear to catch the various undertones of our national life, our art must be false and unenduring. There must be no seeing through English spectacles.”20 This was the task of the nationalist Australian artist, and only then, once this uniquely Australian relation to

15 Hoffer, *The True Believer*, 78.
17 Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come*, 31-51.
18 Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come*, 52.
19 Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come*, 60-89.
20 Quoted in Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come*, 131.
the world was established, could the nation flourish as a whole—echoing in this the ideas of O’Dowd.

Though this idea was later embraced by P. R. Stephensen in his efforts to inspire national revival through the promotion of Australian literature, it had its origins in the federation period, when it seemed that the future of the nation depended on the forging of a national culture by artists. In this regard, it is also worth noting, as Mark Hearn argues, that the task of creating this new nation and national culture was often conceived in light of the “narrative mechanism” of the fin de siècle, according to which the entirety of civilisation had reached a point of rupture between the old and new. This meant that the task of adapting their inherited traditions, which was the immediate concern of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge, was a challenge that was easily subsumed into the much larger (and more radical) problem of adapting their ‘inheritance’ to the needs of the coming age. To quote O’Dowd:

Poetry should be militant nowadays because […] the poet is the father and mother of wise rebellion, and because he, being in touch with the Infinite, the Permanent, is the most potent and far-seeing stimulator of reconstruction. […] They can do more than any to plant civic unselfishness, to encourage the “forward view”, and to fan that zeal for nothing less that the best and most just […]. Indeed, to the silent influence of good poetry for permanent good there are absolutely no bounds. It is the true nation-maker; yea, mayhap, at the Last Day the nations shall be judged by the poets they have produced!22

In other words, he believed that the problem of adapting Australia’s inheritance to the needs of Australian art and civilisation’s inheritance to the needs of modernity were intimately connected, and that it was only through an adequate creative response to this “crucible of re-valuation” that Australia could secure a place for itself in the modern age.23

This view of the artist as ‘nation-maker’ was clearly shared by Wilson and Baylebridge. As Baylebridge said in his 1913 tract National Notes, “Art must help us to the nationality we plan”, for “[t]ill we have developed great art among us, we are nothing.”24 Wilson, too, provided a picture of the role of the artist in ensuring the spirit and vitality of Australia—though notably, unlike O’Dowd, his conception of culture is far more explicit in its elitism. This can be seen in an essay he wrote on the colonial architect Francis Greenway (1777-1837), published in Art in Australia in 1921. In this

24 William Blocksidge, National Notes, first ed. (London: W. Blocksidge, 1913), 73.
essay, he provided his own idealised portrait of Greenway, to whom he felt “a certain fellow-feeling”, through a series of imagined interactions between Greenway and John Thomas Bigge, who was appointed by the Crown to assess the administration of the colony under Governor Lachlan Macquarie. In one of these imagined interactions, Bigge accuses Greenway of wasting the colony’s funds on constructing beautiful buildings for ‘mere convicts’, to which the imagined Greenway responds:

I am an artist and concerned alone with the creation of beautiful works. For me Life has nothing to offer but food for dreams. In the towns arising around us—the Town, the mother of the arts and sciences and industries—I dream of well-ordered plans with generous spaces and shady groves, blue vistas and beneficent institutions; and of houses—the House, wherein men are born and suffer and pass away—gay and symmetrical, set like strung pearls along the roads of the town. Thus would I bring harmony to the lives of men, and to their imaginations make appeal that would lift them from the ugliness in which they pass their days.

The fact that this statement reflected Wilson’s own position is indicated in the text itself, where he admitted that in the absence of primary evidence on Greenway, “there is an opportunity, which affords me great pleasure, to make Greenway as I would like and believe him to have been.” Furthermore, John Johnson notes that in his essay on Greenway, Wilson described events from his own life as though they had happened to Greenway, and that his description of Greenway’s desk was actually a description of his own. The other significant parallel between himself and Greenway is that in Wilson’s three autobiographical novels, his literary alter ego, Richard le Measurer, had a mentor named ‘Lachlan Macquarie’—a character that Wilson later admitted was entirely fictional and based on the real Governor Macquarie, who was arguably a kind of mentor or patron to Greenway’s efforts. It was for this reason that Wilson found such comfort and inspiration in Greenway’s designs, the most notable of which were the Hyde Park Barracks and St. James’ Anglican Church in Sydney (see figures 6a-b in Appendix for a sense of Wilson’s taste).

But Hughes, though he certainly believed in this present ‘re-valuation’, rejected the idea that there was such a thing as a ‘national’ art. To him, there was only Art in the most general sense, the commonhold of all civilisation, though emanating, in his view, from the centre of civilisation in Europe—specifically in ancient Greece.
and Rome.\(^{31}\) This was certainly one of the reasons for his decision to remain in England after 1915. For without the possibility of a ‘national’ art, there was no hope for Hughes of a revitalisation of modernity except through the revitalisation of Western civilisation as a whole, which he effectively believed was the only civilisation. Anything that was achieved elsewhere he either dismissed or claimed as Western. For Hughes, it was only in Europe that the roots of true art and culture could be found. The adaptation of Australia’s cultural inheritance to its context was therefore neither possible nor even desirable. All that mattered to his mind was the adaptation of the inheritance of Western civilisation—that is, the paradigmatic remains of Christendom—to the needs of the coming age. In this regard, it is worth noting that his position was not simply an idiosyncratic antiquarianism, but a principled belief that the Graeco-Roman tradition was a living tradition, and one that still found expression in such radical works as the Symbolist poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé.\(^{32}\)

Yet alongside these considerations of the urgency of the moment, their experience as artists and intellectuals in a country that was seemingly indifferent to their efforts was another significant aggravating factor in their desire for both a sense of importance in the grand scheme of things and the birth of a new world. This was not particularly uncommon in Australia in this period. As Germaine Greer notes, in reference to Henry Handel Richardson (1870-1946), “in a country which is [considered] utterly philistine, people who are genuinely excited by the arts tend to distrust any art form which seems close to ordinary life, and to adopt paranoid, overblown concepts of the artistic personality.”\(^{33}\) As Baylebridge said in a letter to Nettie Palmer in 1927:

> Ambition in any form is the unpardonable sin in those who write for their day’s bread here [in Australia]; and persecution is hardly too strong a word for the rebuffs that seem fated to meet it. From some points of view (for man is but himself) this is perhaps naturally enough [the case] anywhere; and we can do nothing but harden our hearts to the uncomfortable fact. I myself (if the self-reference be allowable), who have dared to nurse some quantum of that frailty, that unmarketable ambition, cut but a poor figure among the merchants.\(^{34}\)

He expressed this same frustration in a poem called ‘Poetry in Australia, 1929: The Bard’s Cup Runs Over’, in which he rehearsed his characteristic disdain for publishers:

> No fellowship; no atmosphere to nurse it;

\(^{34}\) Letter from William Baylebridge to Nettie Palmer, 25 September 1927. MS 1174 Security Binder 28, NLA, 1.
No publishers of poetry—they asperse it;
No readers—hardly one that understands—
How could they, who think only with their hands?
The sole obsession here is to assist
A filthy coin more to the catching fist.
Oh Muse, desist then, or this desert flee!
Earth holds no soil more alien to thee.35

Hughes felt the same way, which was part of his reason for leaving Australia permanently in 1915. “While such a state of affairs prevails,” he said in 1936, lamenting that in the years since he left things had remained largely the same,

the exodus of gifted members of the community to Europe […] is bound to go on;
and those who remain in the country and attempt to serve culture will be condemned to oppressive discouragement and to a very large measure of frustration.36

Evidently, their experience as artists in Australia had left them with a potent sense of difference, frustration, and elitist superiority.

But despite the role of circumstance, there remains an extent to which this sense of alienation and neglect stemmed from their own attitudes and choices. Baylebridge, for instance, could have easily published with Angus & Robertson Ltd., who were interested in publishing their own editions of Love Redeemed and An Anzac Muster.37 But after lengthy discussion on the subject, Baylebridge decided to withdraw from the project, preferring to retain complete control of his writings.38 He also received numerous offers to publish in anthologies, most of which he rejected; and in one of the few instances where he agreed to publish in an anthology called The Sonnet in Australasia (1926), he later criticised the editor for altering his poems without permission. “You have twice altered ‘earth and heaven’ to ‘heaven and earth’,” he said, “[a]nd the omission of a comma in one place has altered, without I think bettering, the incidence of meaning there.”39 Wilson, too, seems to have had little difficulty in publishing his essays. From 1918 onwards, he wrote regularly for The Home and Art in Australia, and his first two books were received with widespread acclaim.40 For Hughes, his only difficulties in this early period stemmed from his inability to write efficiently—and later, from his poor choice of publisher. His first book, C. J. Brennan: An Essay in Values (1934), was published by one of Stephensen’s failed publishing

36 Hughes, Culture in Australia, 25.
38 Letter from William Baylebridge to Vance Palmer, 27 January 1925, MS 1174 Security Binder 25, NLA, 1-2; Letter from William Baylebridge to George Robertson, 7 December 1925, MLMSS 314/12/Item 2, SLNSW, 1.
39 Letter from William Baylebridge to Louis Lavater, 22 June 1926, MLMSS 2786 Box 1, SLNSW, 1-2.
ventures, which went bankrupt less than a year after its publication, and was probably the reason for its commercial failure.41

Admittedly, in Wilson’s case, there was the very real problem of the limited means available to architects. The budget restrictions, the lack of quality materials, the careless workmanship, and the general lack of interest in daring design were all symptomatic to him of the modern and Australian malaise. This was certainly an alienating factor for Wilson, as his memoirs readily attest.42 But as with Baylebridge and Hughes, this alienation stemmed as much from circumstance as their ambitions and expectations. They could find no perfect home in Australia or elsewhere, and in their striving to find this ‘home’, they directed their efforts and hopes towards the distant future, when the transformation of society would make Australia, or the world, at last inhabitable. But this futural orientation was not merely a consequence of their experience in Australia, but their travels to England and elsewhere in search of answers to their uniquely modern predicament, to which this thesis now turns, and which was a crucial part of their formative years.

1.2: Their encounters with modernity abroad
For most of Australia’s history as a European colony, it has been remarkably common for Australian artists and intellectuals to travel abroad, at least for a time, to expand their knowledge and to enjoy the companionship of their creative and intellectual peers. The list of notable expatriates is long and impressive. Among the most significant are such writers as Patrick White and Christina Stead and the Jewish philosopher Samuel Alexander. Their reasons for travelling abroad were varied. But the most common motivators were a desire to escape the drudgery of creative and intellectual work in Australia and to earn the approval of foreign literary society in such cities as Paris and Berlin.43 This was sought as much to assure themselves of the importance of their work as to convince their potential audience in Australia, who bore a curious prejudice against the artists of their own country.44 For as Alan Moorehead, another expatriate scholar, observed:

Success depended on your imprimatur from London, and it did not matter whether you were a surgeon, a writer, a banker, or a politician; to be really someone in

41 Craig Munro, Inky Stephensen: Wild Man of Letters (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992), 147-149.
43 Serle, From Deserts the Prophets Come, 127-130.
44 Serle, From Deserts the Prophets Come, 137-138.
Australian eyes you first had to make your mark or win your degree on the other side of the world.  

But another significant motivating factor, particularly for those artists and intellectuals who found their life’s purpose almost entirely in art and philosophy, was the search for meaning and transcendence, which it was believed could be found in places where culture and philosophy were in abundance. This was certainly true of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge, who each attributed the absence of meaning and transcendence in their lives to the present decadent modernity. Therefore, having learned as much as they could in Australia of art, philosophy, and the crisis of modernity, they each travelled abroad as young men, not only to expand their creative and intellectual horizons but also to discover some solution to their private search for meaning and transcendence. But due in large part to the tensions implicit in modernism itself, which served as the background to their various experiences and encounters abroad, they each came to believe that their private crises of meaning could only be resolved through the restoration of meaning and transcendence to modernity as a whole. Their conception of the form that this restoration should take, and the means by which it should be achieved, were also informed by their travels and early influences. In this section, their travels in Europe and elsewhere will be explored roughly chronologically (by date of departure) in order to determine the significance of their travels and early influence in facilitating their eventual development and embrace of fascist ideas.

Wilson was the first of the three to travel abroad. After completing a six-year apprenticeship as a draughtsman in Sydney, he sailed to London in 1905 to continue his studies in architecture at the Royal Institute of British Architects. Shortly after arriving, however, and much to his disappointment, he found that few of his fellow architects in London shared his belief that their vocation was an art. For this reason, he spent much of his time at the Chelsea Arts Club, where he joined an impressive circle of Australian expatriates and discovered his own preference for the company of artists; it was here also that he first encountered the philosophy of Orientalism, through his friendships with Orientalists such as George Henry (1858-1943) and Francis Derwent Wood (1871-1926). As he complained in the Dawn of New Civilization: “The client was given more and more of his own ideas, which were usually wrong, and the art of architecture went steadily downwards, and with it went the standard of

---

45 Quoted in Serle, From Deserts the Prophets Come, 127.  
taste in the community.”

Even the Royal Institute seemed to him to have forgotten the essence of their vocation, and he had become so thoroughly disillusioned with the practice by the end of his course in 1908 that he completed his final examinations “in a mood full of revulsion”. Soon afterwards, perhaps hoping to rekindle his faith in architecture, he left for the Continent with his friend Stacey Neave (1883-1941), another young architect of similar taste and temperament, for a tour of all the great Renaissance buildings of Europe.

During his travels, he lost interest in the art nouveau style (which he had been taught) and slowly came to regard not originality, but tradition and continuity as the foundation of all great art. “At an exhibition of Secessionist [art nouveau] art,” he said, as the new style was called, the motives of the movement were expressed. It was well done, and yet one felt that the artists strove to be original without mastering the work that had gone before, and without a guide to their efforts.

By contrast, he saw in the architecture of Michelangelo that “every moulding and feature was based on the earlier period”, and realised that it was only “when the past is available” that artists could truly innovate, which the ‘secessionists’ had tried to do without tradition as a guide. Without this guidance, no new ideas could arise—which led to Wilson’s view that tradition was not static but a growth that developed over time, yet always in continuity with the developments of the past. This emphasis on continuity and his consequent rejection of the art nouveau can be understood in light of the tension mentioned above, in which the range of possibilities than an individual is able to accept becomes constricted. Yet there remained a radical element, and the combination of the two was reflected in Wilson’s hope that “the greatest masterpiece of the world, in architecture, [would] appear in this land, where the spirit of to-morrow beckoned to-day, which was still immersed in the past.” In all this, the ideas of the British reformers John Ruskin and William Morris were evident and acknowledged influences, whose writings he likely encountered while studying in London, if not earlier.

48 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 26.
49 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 26-27.
51 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 45.
52 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 39.
53 Emphasis added. Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 164.
After his tour of the Continent, Wilson also visited the United States, where he encountered not only the extremes of modernity in New York, but an inspiring revival of colonial architecture throughout the eastern states as well. He found New York repellent, with its “hideous buildings” and its noisy elevated railway, “which caused [in one] a longing for a desert isle.” But most of all he was unnerved by the aimless progress he saw epitomised in the towering skyscrapers of Manhattan. “There was something stupendous in their height,” he said, and something in the jumble of it all which was depressing. It looked as though man had developed the use of steel with which he built to greater heights than ever before, and had built blindly along old thoroughfares [...]. And down in the streets, which had become darkened by huge structures, man was a tiny antlike being, swarming at his tasks, and had forgotten the existence of the sun, and its meaning in his life, as he build blindly upwards, striving unconsciously, perhaps, to enter the sunlight, and overlooking those who were left in the lower storeys of his immense buildings.

Though this description is certainly to be taken literally in its evocation of the atmosphere in New York, in order to fully understand Wilson’s writings, it is important to also recognise the allegorical dimension to such passages, in which he sought to convey his own feelings regarding the apparent aimlessness of the present modernity. “Mankind had not succeeded,” he went on, in creating conditions [in America] where humanity would be dwelling in a world better than its old environments in Europe. Its growth and progress had advanced blindly without creativeness, like the rest of the modern world.

In this he reflected something of the nationalist discourse explored in the previous section. But significantly, it was not for Wilson simply a matter of returning to the ways of the past that would resolve the crisis of modernity but legitimate progress on the basis of that past. It was for this reason that he lamented the fact that “there was nothing [in New York] which did not echo the past in endless repetition”. In fact, when he described his frustration with the elevated railway in New York, he made the hopeful remark that “[s]ome day an overhead [railway] system would be designed to which passengers would ascend in lifts, and be borne in cars suspended from overhead wires without the rattle of the Elevated, and in the light of day.” In other words, his frustration was not with modernity as such but with modernity in its present aimless, decadent form. To this end, inspired in large part by the colonial revival he had seen

56 Wilson, *Dawn of a New Civilization*, 178.
57 Wilson, *Dawn of a New Civilization*, 51.
58 Wilson, *Dawn of a New Civilization*, 49.
59 Wilson, *Dawn of a New Civilization*, 165.
in Boston and elsewhere, he struck upon the idea that continuity with the creative traditions of the past could be established through the revival of Australian colonial architecture, which he believed retained some part of the essence of Renaissance architecture.60

Upon returning to Australia in 1910, he started work as a professional architect, but quickly became disillusioned with the realities of the practice in his country—problems that he believed were all symptomatic of the general modern and Australian malaise. But inspired by his tour of the United States, he believed that the situation could be remedied through a revival of the Australian colonial architecture. This idea was probably the source of Wilson’s fascination with Greenway’s architecture, which he considered the foundation of art in Australia—with which any future development must be continuous. He mulled over this idea for the next two year until in 1912, when the state of the practice had become intolerable, he set about the ambitious task of documenting the Australian colonial style, which he believed could serve as the basis for a creative revival, particularly in architecture.61 He travelled throughout Tasmania and New South Wales, usually on foot, in search of the last remaining colonial buildings, which were “rapidly disappearing before the march of modern buildings.”62 The book that resulted was his seminal study Old Colonial Architecture in Tasmania and New South Wales, which was published in 1924 and has since secured his place in Australian history as a prescient voice in the field of art criticism. But despite its critical success, it failed to inspire nearly as much interest as Wilson had hoped.63

While working on this project, he became increasingly aware of the climate in Australia (and elsewhere) and its possible influence on the development of aesthetics. He was living at that time in a lavish apartment in Sydney, where he found himself unable to work in the heat of summer. “Working late on summer nights,” he said,

[Richard] began to wonder about the climate of Sydney. It seemed too hot to preserve one’s energy. Often at night he worked clad in the lightest clothes, and was drenched with perspiration without making any physical exertion.64

By this stage in his life, he was consumed with the problem of creative development in Australia, and increasingly came to see this problem as not simply a lack of talent or inspiration but as symptomatic of a much larger, indeed almost cosmic problem—

60 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 54.
62 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 85.
63 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 88.
64 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 85.
namely, the crisis of modernity. He puzzled over this problem, largely isolated from any sympathetic listeners—except perhaps his friend George Hoskins—and arrived at the conclusion that the decadence of modernity was caused, at least in part, by climate and geography. In this Wilson was not particularly unique. As Deborah van der Plaat has shown, his ideas regarding the role of climate and geography were largely echoing the ideas of such theorists as Ellsworth Huntington and T. Griffith Taylor. There is no evidence to suggest that Wilson had been influenced directly by either theorist, but she claims that there is nonetheless a remarkable likeness between his own theories and those of Taylor, who was also an Australian. Both identified cold and temperate climates with energy and productivity, and warm climates with inspiration and enervation (which is the draining of energy). Without evidence to confirm a direct influence, the most likely explanation is that they had come to develop similar ideas through their shared interest in the problem of climate in Australia’s tropical northern regions, which Wilson discussed at length in the *Dawn of a New Civilization*.

But despite the prominence of such theories, he found that there was little interest in the idea when he broached the topic at a dinner in Soho, several years earlier, for it was in London that he had first suspected the role of climate. “Filled with the importance of this idea,” he said,

[Richard] attempted to arouse some discussion of the subject, which he saw must influence the development of art in Australia. But Tom Roberts produced some eucalyptus leaves and burned them as a reminder of the bush. A vague uneasiness came over Richard as he inhaled the perfume. Only those who were not born in Australia seemed to rejoice in the scent of the thin blue pungent smoke.

Though his retelling of the event seems somewhat exaggerated, there is little reason to doubt that the dinner had indeed occurred, and that the ominous burning of eucalyptus leaves was Wilson’s way of conveying the sense of hopelessness that pervaded his fellow expatriates in London. In other words, the burning of the leaves symbolised for him the unavoidable influence of climate and geography, not only on the arts but on all aspects of life. And when he returned to Australia in 1910, he found only ignorance on the question of climate—at least when compared to the perceptiveness (and

---

66 Heyward reports that Hoskins, evidently sharing his friend’s ideas regarding climate, helped Wilson determine the ideal location for his new home, which he named ‘Punalia’. Heyward, “William Hardy Wilson,” 40.
resignation) of his expatriate friends. “A Labour [sic] Government was in power,” he said, recounting a visit to the country’s sweltering north, “and everything but the obvious cause of the trouble was discussed. One part of men hurled criticism at another, and over them all the sun looked down in pitiless rays of uncaring heat.”

Needless to say, the fact that most Australians seemed oblivious to the ‘obvious cause’ would have only exacerbated his sense of isolation in this period—and his view of democracy also seems to have suffered at this time.

There would be no solution, therefore, until Australians accepted that there were parts of their country that were practically uninhabitable to Europeans, and that the best solution to this problem was for the north to be populated by people that could tolerate the heat—preferably the Chinese, whose influence he believed was essential to the renewal of culture in Australia. This view was inspired in part by the influence of the Orientalists he had met in London, but also by his sudden realisation that a fault in his design for Purulia, the home he had built for himself in 1912 to escape the heat of summer, was not present in any of the Chinese designs he had seen, which prompted him “to wonder about [the potential of] Chinese architecture.” Yet even there he found himself unable to work, and interpreting this failure again through the lens of his climatic theories, he left Australia in 1921 on a ship to China, where he hoped to find answers to his dilemma in the ‘wisdom of the East’.

As with his tours of Europe and the United States, he intended to closely study their architecture. He visited Beijing, where he sketched the Temple of Heaven, in which he found echoes of the Tempietto of San Pietro in Rome; yet the Temple of Heaven, he believed, “had a loveliness which was unknown in the West.” He also met with artists and intellectuals, such as Hu Shih (1891-1962), a noted reformer and professor of philosophy at the University of Peking. But when he tried to broach the subject of the coming change, he found them mostly unreceptive—just as he had with his artist friends in Soho:

[In after-dinner hours of conversation, he tried to arouse an interest in the world movement, but no sign of creative interest broke the pleasant converse. The movement is in its infancy, he thought, and it will not take definite shape until the Occident and the Orient, realizing that creative art is dead, begin to build with the same goal ahead.]

---

70 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 118-119.
71 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 90-91.
73 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 101-102.
74 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 98.
75 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 106.
It would still take some time, he thought, before even the Chinese, who he assumed to be preeminent, understood their importance in the revitalisation of the arts, which he believed could only occur through a fusion of Eastern and Western styles. But he saw signs of hope in China, and certain aspects of his subsequent philosophy were informed by his experience. For instance, his belief that creativity relied on an intimate connection between the artist and nature, from which all good art was ultimately derived, was confirmed by his visit to the gardens of Hangzhou, where he found an elaborately-painted paifang gate:

Perhaps the Chinese artists who painted these flowers [also] copied the work of his ancestors [as Europeans do], but they reveal a means to us of restoring that contact without which European art must remain lifeless, beyond the influence of that primal source from which it sprang.76

Much of this idealisation can be attributed to an Orientalism that romanticised the cultures of the East as being somehow uniquely suited to combating the ills of modernity and modernisation (a view, it must be noted, that was common amongst modernist intellectuals in this period).77 And whatever the truth of this may be, it does not seem that Wilson had a sufficiently deep understanding of the complexities of Chinese culture to warrant such confidence. He returned from China convinced that it was “on the eve of another creative period, rich in new and engaging forms, in which the beauty and serenity of its ancient art will be sustained in the onrush of modern industrialism.”78 Indeed, as both Edwards and Johnson have noted, his knowledge of Chinese art and philosophy was cursory at best, relying as he did on a narrow range of English-language sources.79 But the confirmation that he found for his ideas in these sources, at least as he understood them, had a significant impact on the development of his later thought and his reception of his experiences in China—which served for him as a template for the changes that should be made in Australia.

In 1908, Baylebridge sailed to London with his friend and later brother-in-law Robert Graham Brown (1887-1945) to pursue his dream of becoming an acclaimed writer and poet.80 His grandmother paid his fare across, and when he first arrived in London he was supported for a time by his aunt and muse, Celia Grace Leven (1865-

---

78 Wilson, *Dawn of a New Civilization*, 112.
80 “For Women,” *Daily Mail* (Brisbane, Qld), 3 October 1917, 2.
But despite the wealth of his family in England (his relations owned printing-works near Dudley Castle), it was not long before he was living in cheap rented rooms and enjoying the life of a wandering poet and scholar. He often visited the Wattle Club, a popular meeting place for Australian expatriates in London. Brown recalled the nights they spent together in those years, particularly on cold winter nights, when they gathered around the fire to discuss Baylebridge’s ideas about the ‘New Life’ that was to emerge in Australia in the future. He was treated to recitations of his friend’s trumpeting poetry and proof copies of his various writings. Among these earliest productions was the first edition of National Notes (1913), which was intended as a kind of guiding creed for the ‘New Australia’. In fact, he later admitted that most of the copies of this edition were sent to Members of the Australian Parliament, which may indicate an acceptance of the parliamentary system at this early stage in his development.

In this 1913 tract, he gave the first clear expression of his ideology, which he called the ‘New Nationalism’. Though he may have taken the name for this creed from Theodore Roosevelt’s 1912 political platform, it was essentially a form of proto-fascism in that it anticipated much of fascist ideology as it developed in later years, though adapted for the unique circumstances of Australian in that period. For this reason, there was a strong emphasis on the need for racial homogeneity and the creation of a distinctly Australian ‘race’. He was still a believer in Empire at this stage, though recognising its considerable decline. For as he said in a poem from this period called ‘Empire Day, 1909’, which was notably published in the London Daily Mail:

England, thy loins have lost their fabled power—
Or wherefore ease in these too-pregnant times?
A cancerous apathy o’ergrows and devours
Thy vital parts, and through thy marrow climbs.

[...]

O, Mother of my Mother, shake thy sides,
And cast ahead thy vision but one pace
In the eternal race!
Show now what patriot power abides
In stuff thou’rt made of! Let us only feel

82 “Australian Literature,” Daily Telegraph (Sydney, NSW), 3 November 1934, 5.
83 “Social and Personal,” Queensland Figaro (Brisbane, Qld), 3 September 1908, 15.
85 William Baylebridge, National Notes, third ed. (Sydney: Tallabila Press, 1936), 5.
86 Roe also considered this ‘New Nationalism’ to be a “thoroughly fascist programme”. Roe, Nine Australian Progressives, 17.
How good it is to call thee Mother still!\textsuperscript{87} This loyalty to Empire seems to have effectively disappeared by 1919, and was summarily dismissed in the first revised edition of \textit{National Notes}, published in 1922, where he said: “Might not the moral practice of its [Australia’s] mother-country be inexpedient for a new, growing, and ambitious community?”\textsuperscript{88} But across all three versions of \textit{National Notes} (a third appeared in 1936), there remained a consistent emphasis on the need to create, through the methods of eugenics, a distinctly Australian race, which would subsequently ‘overrun’ the world. “When we shall have bred this higher human variety,” he said, “it is not probable that it will allow itself to be chained up in any particular stall. … It will devour the earth.”\textsuperscript{89} Significantly, this creation of an Australian race was not simply a question of power and supremacy, but a matter of national survival. In the coming age, said Baylebridge, only those nations that developed this ‘higher type’ could hope to survive the conflicts of the coming age. “On their right understanding,” he said, referring to the ‘science’ of eugenics, “hangs the fate of nations.”\textsuperscript{90} In this he reflected much of the defensive paranoia in this period, which is indicated by his reference to the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) as a potent example of the need for preparedness against the rise of the ‘coloured races’.\textsuperscript{91} Furthermore, it is clear that his views regarding race and the need for racial homogeneity were informed by his experiences in Europe. As he explained to T. Inglis Moore in 1940:

\begin{quote}
In my ambulations through Europe, and far beyond it for that matter, I was reminded of another lion in the path [of progress]—the ethnical lion. Are all countries to be free for all peoples? Is our brother from Asia to have his will with our obsequious sister here? But the implications are endless. They would mean a world utterly changed, and, with the breaking down of every aristocratic barrier, a world on a lower plane. (The Greeks were Greeks because they knew no equality with Persians.) We all want the change—but one of this sort? Start the rot of internationalism, and you have started something indeed.\textsuperscript{92}
\end{quote}

Evidently, his political views were greatly influenced by the elitism and ‘race realism’ that proliferated amongst European intellectuals in that period.

\textsuperscript{87} William Blocksidge, \textit{Australia to England and Other Verses} (London: David Nutt, 1909), 9-10; Letter from Robert Graham Brown to Ida Leeson, 5 November 1943, MLMSS 951, SLNSW, 1.
\textsuperscript{88} William Blocksidge, \textit{National Notes}, second ed. (Sydney: W. Blocksidge, 1922), 17.
\textsuperscript{89} Blocksidge, \textit{National Notes}, first ed., 18.
\textsuperscript{90} Blocksidge, \textit{National Notes}, first ed., 65.
\textsuperscript{91} Significantly, this defensive turn was also reflected in Australian public policy, as can be seen, for instance, in the Deakinite ‘Australian Settlement’. Blocksidge, \textit{National Notes}, first ed., 37; Stuart Macintyre, \textit{A Concise History of Australia}, fourth ed. (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 139-159.
\textsuperscript{92} Letter from William Baylebridge to T. Inglis Moore, 21 January 1940, MLMSS 1284 Box 127, SLNSW, 6.
From a variety of sources, it has been possible to reconstruct his time in Europe with some detail, which suggests much the same influence. After less than a year in England, he spent several weeks in Germany, much of which was spent in Munich, where he first encountered the writings of Nietzsche, which he may have read in the original German. Shortly after returning from Germany, he joined his parents, who had just arrived from Brisbane, for their own tour across of Europe. He showed them the famous Lake District and then accompanied them through Scotland, Ireland, France, Switzerland, and Italy. In Rome, he visited the famous Protestant Cemetery, where he wrote a sonnet on the theme of immortality at the graves of Keats and Shelley, before returning to London via Naples. The following year, he joined his sister Celia May (1881-1942) for her own tour of Europe, charting a similar course to his previous journey. Throughout all this time, whether travelling or boarding in London, Baylebridge wrote incessantly, and it was during those years, between 1908 and 1914, that he wrote the bulk of his works. The influence of English and German poetry is clear, as some critics have noted, together with the evolutionary and idealist thought that was present in England and Germany at that time. In fact, Macainsh has argued convincingly that it was largely from the evolutionary vitalists of England, such as John Davidson (1857-1909) and George Bernard Shaw, that Baylebridge had derived most of his understanding of Nietzschean and German Idealist philosophy. This argument is confirmed, at least in part, by the fact that National Notes plagiarised sections of a tract on eugenics by Shaw called ‘The Revolutionist’s Handbook’, which was published as an appendix to Man and Superman (1903).

But in addition to the evolutionary vitalism of England, which was likely the source of Baylebridge’s fascination with eugenics, he was also influenced by several other important sources. He was conversant, for instance, with the writings of Walt

---

93 “Social and Personal,” Queensland Figaro (Brisbane, QL), 1 April 1909, 11; “Social and Personal,” Telegraph (Brisbane, Qld), 16 June 1909, 4; Letter from William Baylebridge to Nettie Palmer, 19 April 1933, MS 1174 Security Binder 37, NLA, 2.
94 “Social and Personal,” Telegraph (Brisbane, Qld), 10 July 1909, 10; “Social and Personal,” Telegraph (Brisbane, Qld), 20 October 1909, 5.
95 “Social,” Telegraph (Brisbane, Qld), 4 November 1909, 7; “Business Man’s Tour: Mr. Blocksidge Returned,” Telegraph (Brisbane, Qld), 6 November 1909, 5. See also William Blocksidge, A Northern Trail (London: W. Blocksidge, 1911), 21.
96 “Social and Personal,” Week (Brisbane, Qld), 26 August 1910, 5; “Social and Personal,” Week (Brisbane, Qld), 13 January 1911, 5.
99 Macainsh, Nietzsche in Australia, 111-113.
Whitman, Donald Hankey, George Moore, Antonio Fogazzaro, and Gabriele D’Annunzio, which together represent a broad range of modernist thought.100 Whitman, of course, was one of the greatest Transcendentalists, a school of philosophy influenced by both Hegel and biblical textual criticism.101 Similarly, Hankey and Fogazzaro advocated for modernist theologies in their respective Christian traditions.102 Moore, on the other hand, represented the libertine bohemianism that often accompanied the modernist revolt against decadence. Baylebridge’s use of the term ‘kakogenics’ also suggests the influence of the eugenicist Sir Francis Galton, who coined the term as an antonym of ‘eugenics’.103 Furthermore, it seems that the proto-fascist D’Annunzio, the archetypical ‘prophet-poet’, was another significant influence on Baylebridge, who is known to have admired D’Annunzio’s novels. Indeed, it takes little imagination to realise the sentiments that Baylebridge would have found in D’Annunzio’s most prophetic statements, which he quoted favourably in a collection of excerpts among his papers. “The truth the Revealer sets forth,” said D’Annunzio, in a quoted passage, “must be the outcome of the whole life lived by men up to the present hour.”104 “To obtain victory over man and circumstance,” he said, in another passage, “there is no way but that of constantly feeding one’s own exaltation and magnifying one’s own dream of beauty or of power.”105 It is likely that many of these influences were first encountered in Europe, or that their influence was consolidated while Baylebridge was abroad, during which time he was puzzling over the future of Australia.

When the war broke out in 1914, Baylebridge tried to enlist in the Australian army in London but was told that he could only enlist in Australia, or possibly in Egypt. The following year, apparently following this advice, he travelled to Cairo, where he was reprimanded by the British military authorities after he failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for his presence there.106 Though it is a somewhat contested question among scholars, it seems unlikely that Baylebridge enlisted and served in the

104 Baylebridge, ‘Excerpts’, MLMSS 2786 Box 2, SLNSW, 5.
105 Baylebridge, ‘Excerpts’, MLMSS 2786 Box 2, SLNSW, 6.
conflict. In fact, by 1916, he had returned to England, where he published a revealing collection of poems called *A Wreath*. In these poems, which were framed as a kind of dialogue between himself and a friend who had died in battle, there is a clear sense of guilt and male inadequacy at having ‘missed out’, which suggests that Baylebridge had indeed failed to serve in the conflict. As he said in ‘Sonnet VIII’ of this collection:

```plaintext
Who makes his choice, that choice in turn makes him;
And I, who chose here, cannot choose again:
No future friend or season may redeem
My bias [...].
```

Indeed, as can be seen elsewhere in his writings, he clearly felt like a man permanently tarred by his decision to remain at home—to focus, it seems, on his vocation as a writer. And though it may be true, as Baylebridge later claimed, that he had served in an intelligence role during the war, it does not seem he considered this the same as real combat. But whatever the case may be, the war evidently disrupted his writing, and by the end of the conflict he was living in India, where he had been staying since at least June 1918.

He returned to Australia in 1919, after almost eleven years abroad, and whatever his original intentions may have been, it seems that the experience led him to conclude that it was only in Australia that he would ever truly feel at home. Indeed, he had spent most of his time in Europe considering the future of his country, and it was during those years that most of *This Vital Flesh* was originally written. And it is certainly significant that some of his earliest publications, though printed and distributed in London, were labelled: “A PRIVATE IMPRINT MADE IN THE TENTH YEAR OF THE AUSTRALIAN COMMONWEALTH.” This dating style suggests that he had hoped, much like the Jacobins before him, that the ‘rebirth’ of his country would start time anew, or at the very least mark a new phase in the evolution of humanity towards its highest exemplar. Furthermore, his experience in the ‘old world’ had strengthened his conviction that it was only in a ‘young’ country like Australia that this ‘New Life’ could come to birth. And notably, this ‘New Life’ had yet to seize power in Italy and Germany at that time. “In those ancient places,” he said, “I felt oppressed: there time had its great hand upon my throat; there the invisible has the first property in things,

---

109 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, xix.
110 Blocksidge, *A Northern Trail*, front cover.
and the living take but the reversion.” But “[a]s I trod again the soil of this land [i.e. Australia] that mothered me,” he said upon his return,

I had a feeling at once intimate and reverent—a feeling akin to that of some devotee treading in a holy place to which his creed gives him title. I kept thinking: This is my land, my land! I jostled with the crowds in Perth, with the men, the women, the young girls. These, I thought joyfully, are Australians, are therefore my brothers and my sisters, and therefore, also, in some part, myself. Seldom have I sensed flesh like that. […] The intoxication of return coloured all.112

After almost eleven years abroad, he was relieved to return to Australia, which he now believed was his true home, not Europe. “I left home lightly,” he said,

for I knew not what I left. Having found a perspective in lands removed, I can now see what my own is, what it stands for to me. Not for much would I forego that knowledge.113

In other words, he had reached the conclusion that the crisis of modernity could only be resolved, however partially, through a national revival in Australia, and in subsequent years, as the following chapter will show, he believed that the ‘spirit of Anzac’ would inaugurate this ‘New Australia’.

Hughes’ experience, on the other hand, was quite different. After completing his undergraduate studies at the University of Sydney in 1913, it was not long before he prepared to continue his studies in Europe, which he believed was the centre of civilisation. This idea (and its implicit prejudice against Australian culture) probably stemmed from the education he had received at the university, which was known for upholding elitist conceptions of culture in that period.114 Between 1913 and 1915, he taught classics at a high school in Bathurst, a small city west of Sydney, feeling bored and isolated from his intellectual peers. And though he had arranged with the Fisher Library to have books sent to him directly, so that he could continue his studies in the interim, he became increasingly convinced, during these years, that Australia placed limitations on his intellectual development.115 For this reason, after less than a year in Bathurst, he applied for a travelling scholarship, which he was awarded in July 1914, a mere three days before war was declared in Europe. He had arranged to sail from Sydney in August to study at the University of Paris.116 But with the declaration of war

112 William Baylebridge, ‘Return to Australia’, unpublished manuscript, 1919, MLMSS 2786 Box 2, SLNSW, 1.
113 Baylebridge, ‘Return to Australia’, MLMSS 2786 Box 2, SLNSW, 5.
115 Letter from Randolph Hughes to John Le Gay Brereton, 12 October 1913, MLMSS 218/8, SLNSW, 1-2; Letter from Randolph Hughes to John Le Gay Brereton, 5 May 1914, MLMSS 218/8, SLNSW, 1-2.
116 “Students for Abroad,” Daily Telegraph (Sydney, NSW), 25 July 1914, 15.
between France and Germany in early August, these plans were postponed until the following year. In the meantime, he developed a deeper interest in the Symbolist esoterism he had learned from the poet C. J. Brennan (1870-1932), which remained an enduring influence on his philosophy and spirituality. This was reflected in his statement to John Le Gay Brereton (1871-1933), the poet and editor of the literary journal *Hermes*, in October 1913:

My time outside [teaching at the] school is divided between reading (& I do plenty of it), walks beyond the town, and—this at night—a kind of life which is esoteric & particular. Next year I hope to be able to lay before you my first-fruits.

It was also during this time that he married his first wife Muriel, with whom he conceived twin boys, Philip and Maurice, before sailing alone to London to continue his studies.

When he arrived in London in early 1915, he was struck by a profound sense of connection to the ‘spirit’ of the place unlike anything he had experienced in Australia or elsewhere. As he told his friend Charles B. Cockett (1888-1965) in December 1915, referring to a visit to the historic city of St. Albans:

I love Australia, & I have admired South Africa. But no other place has ever been to me what England is. The first sight of its fields was the occasion of an ecstasy & a peace that I have never known before. A part of me that had never before been appeased was set at rest; it was as though I had come upon something I had been waiting for long. The adaptation between myself & my surroundings was complete.

In this and other similar passage from this period, there is a clear influence of the mysticism of the Romantics and the German Idealists, in addition to the Symbolist esoterism of Brennan. “Once I loved only in my dreams,” he said, referring in this to the Symbolist aesthetic,

upon an imagination that was independent of Nature […]. But another element has entered with increasing insistence into my life during the past three or four years. I mean the beauty of Nature. That element has now established itself fully as a part of my being, & is the constant occasion of passion & worship.

---

117 As he said in an essay on Symbolist poetry: “[T]his aesthetic is nothing less than a religion; as spiritual and mystical as any other, yet making no hard and impossible demands upon reason; for nothing merely conjectural, nothing of the absurdity so dear to Tertullian and Pascal, enters into it; and it is nobler than any other, for it makes no appeal to the lesser, basely selfish side of man’s nature, which is desperately concerned to prolong its individuality, however little worth preserving it may be; its sole appeal is to the highest part of man, the part that seeks towards what else is highest in this world, and thence to what is highest in the transcendental world. And it reinstates man in his Eden; or, better still, conducts him to an Eden greater than any that he may have known and lost in any part of his odyssey in the past. It offers him sure salvation, and salvation of the only acceptable sort.” Randolph Hughes, *Mallarmé: A Study in Esoteric Symbolism* (London: Whitefriars Press, 1934), 10-11.

118 Incidentally, some of Hughes’ earliest poems were published in *Hermes*, which was a student literary journal published by the University of Sydney. See *Hermes* 18, no. 1 (1912): 7-8, 9.

119 Letter from Randolph Hughes to John Le Gay Brereton, 12 October 1913, MLMSS 218/8, SLNSW, 2-3.

120 “An Idle Woman’s Diary,” *National Advocate* (Bathurst, NSW), 4 June 1915, 1; “An Idle Woman’s Diary,” *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate* (Newcastle, NSW), 4 June 1915, 7.

121 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Charles B. Cockett, 20 December 1915, MLMSS 458/10, SLNSW, 11.

122 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Charles B. Cockett, 18 September 1912, MLMSS 458/10, SLNSW, 1-2.
In other words, the nature-mysticism of the Romantics and German Idealists had become a definite part of his spirituality. But despite his admiration for such figures as Novalis and Spinoza, this passion for nature was always qualified by his commitment to the Symbolist aesthetic—the purpose of which was the return to a ‘purer’ reality through the manipulation of language. This can be seen in a letter to the writer Jack Lindsay (1900-1990), in which he drew a sharp distinction between Art (with a capital) and the “phenomena of nature” that “a bad aesthetic philosophy elevates to the premier place.”

Another significant influence in this regard, which served to justify his mystical approach to life and poetry, was his embrace of the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis. According to this idea, which Plato articulates primarily in his dialogue Meno, all learning is ultimately only a process of recollection, that is to say, a process by which the student remembers the knowledge that they already know from when they were a disembodied soul in the ‘realm of forms’—where it was possible, claimed Plato, to look upon ‘truth’ itself. And though his embrace of this idea does not seem to have followed Plato’s conception exactly, it was a clear influence on the development of his ideas and his philosophy of life in this early period. For as he told Cockett in 1915, in the letter describing St. Albans: “The impression I had [upon arriving in England] was not so much of coming to something new as of recognition. So far as I have any earthly home this is it.”

The fact that the idea of anamnesis remained an influence throughout his life can be seen in his unpublished novel Lost Eurydice (1942-1946)—appropriately based on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice—in which the central concern is whether this kind of ‘recognition’ is real or imaginary. In this novel, the main character, a French soldier named Marquis Aymar de Saint-Geniès, encounters a mysterious woman in a crowd while deployed in Spain and becomes immediately infatuated with her, to the extent that he begins to see an eternal significance to their

---

123 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Charles B. Cockett, 18 September 1912, MLMSS 458/10, SLNSW, 1; Hughes, Mallarmé, 3-5.
124 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Jack Lindsay, 15 March 1935, MLMSS 671/17, SLNSW, 1.
125 The background notes for Lost Eurydice demonstrate his fascination with the doctrine, which is the one of main ideas explored in the novel. Among the figures cited are Plato, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Iamblichus, Plotinus, Eckhart, Novalis, and various thinkers of the Hindu Vedanta school. See Randolph Hughes, ‘Background notes’, unpublished manuscript, 1942-1946, MLMSS 671/49, SLNSW, passim.
127 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Charles B. Cockett, 20 December 1915, MLMSS 458/10, SLNSW, 11.
encounter.128 “[S]he’s more real than any woman I’ve met,” he said to his fellow soldiers, Montclar and Poinsot,

and I feel that she’s been in my life a long time, as long as it has existed, whether in this or other worlds; only I hadn’t kept a clear memory of her, but as soon as I saw her I knew her as someone known before—long ago perhaps,—I recognized her as the woman after whom I’ve been searching through all the years—the Companion who is another part of myself.129

Since this concept of anamnesis remained a central concern for Hughes as late as the 1940s, for it was the central theme of Lost Eurydice, it can be concluded that it was an important influence from this early period onwards.

The significance of this early influence of Symbolist and Platonic ideas, alongside the material advantages that he found in England, is that Hughes became increasingly disillusioned with Australia, the country of his birth. “London,” he told Cockett,

makes you feel that in one large sense all the years spent in Australia are wasted. […] You don’t know what you miss until you come here. As your new standards grow you realise how Australia is lacking in dimension & fullness; and one’s development in some ways suffers because of that.130

After several more months in England, during which time he enlisted to serve in the First World War, his rejection of Australia became even more pronounced. As he said to Cockett in May 1916:

I cannot go back to Australia as a home now; in fact, I never really did feel at home in it. England is the only home I can know,—or some other part of Europe where there is the fine product of many centuries; where a procession of many forces has culminated & rested upon the land;—not where there has been nothing but unredeemed barbarism & absence of greatness. When you come to Europe you feel the meaning of the word “classic”; & you understand too that Australia is barbaric.131

In other words, he needed to live in a place where his gifts could be nurtured, but also where he could be close to the centres of Graeco-Roman civilisation, which he believed were England, Germany, and France. This belief was only strengthened by his experience in the Middle East, where he took the opportunity to appreciate one of the apparent sources of Graeco-Roman civilisation, namely ancient Egypt, by visiting
such places as Thebes and Lycopolis. “One brought up as I have been,” he explained to Cockett in October 1916,

on the Roman & Greek & their derivative European traditions, is hardly prepared for the beauty & power of this Egyptian civilisation. […] I have little doubt that an experience of that kind—actual living contact with the things of three and four thousand years ago—is worth more in one’s development than the 2 years’ course of history […] at Oxford.

Evidently, in the short time since his arrival in London in early 1915, his view of things had changed considerably, particularly with regard to his birth-country of Australia—which by this stage effectively disappeared from view.

In addition to exploring the culture of the Middle East, Hughes experienced the ordeal of modern combat. He fought at the battles of Katia and Romani, which occurred in 1916 in April and August respectively, before being invalided in unknown circumstances sometime before October. The experience was formative, and despite his apparently unromanticised view of war, he found that life in the military suited his nature well, which longed for both action and regimentation. “It was with great disappointment,” he said in that same letter, “that I came back from military work. The hard tense life suited one side of my nature admirably; also [I enjoyed] the great opportunities for fellowship.” But perhaps more critically for his spiritual and philosophical development, he had come face to face with death and the limits of corporeal existence:

I had one or two narrow shaves from bombs & shells. A man faces the great fact once or twice or three times, & he does not care what happens to him after that. He is either hardened or he is Kismet. I myself don’t value my life a single straw now. The mind that has been ready once is always ready. I wouldn’t change that feeling for anything. Also, many of the small affairs of life that seemed large before, assume their natural insignificance.

This experience served only to confirm his preference for the ‘eternal’ over the merely ‘ephemeral’, for which the foundation had already been laid by the various influences mentioned above. Furthermore, his experience in the Middle East, though enriching his understanding of the diverse sources of Graeco-Roman civilisation, also convinced him of the superiority of the English ‘race’. “It is only necessary,” he said, “to visit a foreign country—especially a cosmopolitan place like Egypt—to realise that, taken all
in all, the English race is the best on the earth.” And though he had a great admiration for the cities of Thebes and Lycopolis, as his political ideas advanced over time, he became increasingly dismissive of anything that could not be placed directly under the head of Graeco-Roman civilisation, which included Egypt. Thus, in a letter to Sir Arnold Wilson (1884-1940) in 1936, he claimed that he had been “greatly disappointed with the East.” “Most of the famous glamour,” he said, “was superficial and flimsy, and I was heartily glad to get back to Europe.” Evidently, then, his rejection of the non-European world, most notably his birth-country of Australia, was informed by his experiences and intellectual encounters in Europe and elsewhere.

It is clear, then, that their travels abroad in these early years were a significant influence on the development of their ideas and personalities. Through his experiences in Europe, China, and the United States, Wilson came to value tradition and continuity above all as the criterion of legitimate creative development, which resulted in his rejection of much of modernist art and architecture. Baylebridge, though drawing primarily of European sources, became disillusioned with Europe and committed himself to the cause of Australia as a nation independent of Empire. For Hughes, the experience had the reverse effect. By 1916, he had disowned Australia—evidently regarding its ‘youth’ as a weakness—and embraced the view that Western civilisation would remain decadent until it returned to its Graeco-Roman roots. In each case, they reached unique though highly comparable solutions to the crisis of modernity in Australia and elsewhere, each of which stressed the need for kind of grounding foundation—some kind of essence or continuity—that would serve to restore the seemingly ‘natural’ condition of meaning and transcendence for which their hearts cried out, and which appeared to have prevailed in pre-modern times. In this, a curious combination of radical and reactionary elements is made manifest—a combination which, as the following chapters will explore, runs throughout their social, political, and philosophical ideas.

Conclusion

Throughout this early period, which dated from approximately 1905 until the mid-1920s, the personal, historical, and intellectual influences which they encountered,

---

137 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Charles B. Cockett, 28 October 1916, MLMSS 458/10, SLNSW, 14.
138 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Sir Arnold Wilson, 18 October 1936, MLMSS 671/21, SLNSW, 3.
139 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Sir Arnold Wilson, 18 October 1936, MLMSS 671/21, SLNSW, 3.
together with the tensions implicit within modernism itself, drove each toward a programmatic expression of modernism—that is to say, an expression of modernism that sought to consciously transform the world. And though the epiphanic element remained an enduring feature of their writings (since the line between the two is “porous”, as Griffin argues), they each ultimately reached the point where they were no longer content to remain aloof from the actual crisis of modernity, which they believed was the cause of the absence of meaning and purpose in their lives. This absence could no longer be merely ‘simulated away’ through the experience of their own poetry and prose, as their writings served—and continued to serve—to do. In short, they realised that their own crises of meaning could not be resolved without finding some resolution to the crisis of modernity as a whole. Consequently, their writings became increasingly didactic and polemical as they sought to command the situation through the mediums of poetry and prose, which, as shall be seen, they believed had a direct and constitutive influence on the nature of reality itself. This drift into a programmatic expression of modernism and its implications for their personal and intellectual development will be discussed in detail in the following two chapters. As this chapter has shown, the influence of their encounters in Australia and abroad on this development was considerable, and serves as the foundation to the subsequent evolution of their social, political, and philosophical views—and in so doing, became “poets militant”.

140 Griffin, Modernism and Fascism, 64-66.
141 O’Dowd, Poems of Bernard O’Dowd, 9.
HEALTH AND HIERARCHY

Ultimately, might is always right. The only proviso necessary is that the might shall be of a spiritual order; and, in the natural course of things, the spiritual in the case of nations has an external expression in physical force.

—Randolph Hughes, in a letter to Edwyn Bevan (1939)

The shift from a purely epiphanic expression of modernism to one that is programmatic will have a variety of causes in any given case. For these men, as the previous chapter has shown, the reasons were no less various. But the most significant of these, at least with regard to their social and political views, was their need to escape the present modernity and contribute to the creation of a modernity that was rooted and therefore consistent with their sense of meaning and transcendence—which, when translated into the social and political sphere, entailed certain forms and categories. These were traditional concepts of masculinity, order, history, politics, ethics, religion, and even love; and the proponents of such concepts understood that their beliefs were anathema to the present age. This modernity, with its incessant fluidity, undermined such forms by its very nature. These forms and categories seemed to depend, for these men, on the solidity that they believed to have characterised the pre-modern world, where these forms and categories had emerged through centuries of social and historical pressure. But unlike conservative traditionalists, such as Edmund Burke or Louis de Bonald, William Hardy Wilson, Randolph Hughes, and William Baylebridge each understood that a definite break had occurred with the premodern world, and that a mere return to this ‘golden age’ was neither possible nor even necessary. There was nothing that could be done to reverse the paradigmatic shift that had occurred with modernisation, since any attempt to consciously alter the course of human development, even in a retrograde direction, assumed ipso facto the very paradigm that it sought to undo. And

1 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Edwyn Bevan, 22 September 1939, MLMSS 671/7, SLNSW, 3.
it is the consequences of this attempted adaptation, particularly in the realm of social and political philosophy, that are the subject of this chapter.

The burden of their search for meaning and transcendence, then, was the recovery of a kind of premodern solidity without sacrificing the many positive aspects of modernity, such as the enhanced capacity for knowledge and innovation that modern technology allowed. This meant that they were not ‘reactionary’ in the usual sense, deferring, that is, to some former golden age, but sought a kind of integration of modern and premodern elements—that is, the integration of those traditional forms and categories that corresponded to reality and could therefore be integrated with modernity without undermining this correspondence, and also lending this correspondence to reality to modernity itself. This emphasis on solidity was the connecting tissue of their various theories and philosophies, which culminated in a kind of vitalism that combined solidity with change. Closely related to this emphasis on solidity, which might be described as the ‘truth of place’, was an emphasis on ‘truth’ itself—an emphasis, that is, on the forms and categories (or natural order) to which society and the individual must conform.

One of the factors behind this insistence on truth was their need to escape from the trap of a merely ‘private’ meaning into a meaning that was ‘public’ and therefore real. They intuitively accepted the principle of non-contradiction that truth cannot contradict truth, and applied this standard to their own lives, and that of society, with often troubling results. The burden of their creative efforts was to restore, first and foremost, a sense of meaning and transcendence to their own lives. But if truth cannot contradict truth, and their ‘private’ meanings were to be regarded as true, then the same meaning must apply to all—at least within the confines of a particular society or ‘place’. For as Baylebridge said in National Notes, “What one man holds in truth must be common to many.” Their social and political views, therefore, were in large part an extension of their fundamentally epiphanic use of the written word (and other creative mediums) as a source of meaning and transcendence beyond their private selves and into the public sphere.

Closely related to this was their iconoclasm towards the present, which stemmed from the same source as their need to escape the trap of a merely ‘private’ meaning. The condition of modernity, at least in its then current form, was a state of

---

seemingly endless movement that far exceeded the cognitive and psychological capacity of human beings. This was the experience that afflicted these men, and the prospect of a society that tolerated mutually conflicting ‘meanings’ was only a very specific instance of this general condition of flux. If meaning was to be restored, this condition of mutually conflicted meanings had to be purged, together with all the movement that hampered modern existence and betrayed the potential of modernity to serve as a purer and more virile expression of the ‘natural order of things’—that is, the order or reality to which traditional forms and categories were believed to conform. Their iconoclasm, then, was directed against this general condition of flux in an effort to uncover the brute reality that lay beneath, since a condition that tended towards fragmentation rather than unity, they believed, could not be the basic state of reality. There had to be some kind of solid ground beneath the chaos. Yet this foundation need not be unchanging in the absolute sense, as Hughes criticised Chisholm for believing, but only in the sense that it reliably remains what it is.\footnote{Randolph Hughes, \textit{A Further Decline of the West} (London: Bonner & Co., 1934), 18-21.} A dynamic movement yet constant in its activity, this metaphysical foundation was understood to entail a natural order that was essentially unchanging, however differently it might manifest in different circumstances. It was this order, grounded in a singular and therefore unambiguous process, that was the basis of their social and political views. Though a variety of terms could be applied to this core of change, because they believed that this ‘entity’ developed gradually over time \textit{through} the historical process, the term ‘Spirit’ (after Hegel) is the most consistently applicable.

This embrace of the principle of non-contradiction, applied first in the realm of private meaning, was a significant motivating factor in their shift from a purely epiphanic to a programmatic expression of modernism. The implications of this transition, as both a motivating and developmental factor, will be explored in relation to three distinct aspects of their social and political programmes. The first of these was their views regarding masculinity and its origins as a rejection of the Judeo-Christian tradition (§2.1). The second of these was their views regarding the central role of masculinity in the functioning of society and the workings of the Spirit, particularly through the violence of war (§2.2). Finally, the third was their views regarding the hierarchical nature of this natural order and their belief that societies (and individuals) should conform to this hierarchical order for the sake of meaning and health (§2.3).
will be argued that their transformation from a purely epiphanic to a programmatic expression, and the development of their ideas due to personal and historical factors, was a crucial precondition to their eventual embrace of fascist ideas.

2.1: Masculinity against the Judeo-Christian tradition

The conception of masculinity embraced by these men was essentially reactionary, though innovated upon in such a way that it served a revolutionary function in relation to society as a whole, particularly in relation to its Judeo-Christian culture. It was reactionary in that it sought to defend a traditional masculinity that necessitated the dominance and priority of men, resulting in a conception of femininity that relegated women almost entirely to the domestic and maternal spheres. This, of course, is the conception of gender that have defined Western societies for most of their history. But in the case of these three men, this conception was altered and intensified in such a way that it served a radical and *iconoclastic* role in relation to the ‘effeminate’ and ‘self-negating’ values that had come to dominate through the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition.\(^5\) For this reason, we find throughout their writings (and in the conduct of their lives) the pursuit of an unbridled and ecstatic *joie de vivre*, the purpose of which was the destruction of this stifling ‘negative’ morality and the restoration of a ‘true’ morality based solely on power—which, it must be noted, was precisely the object of the Judeo-Christian critique.\(^6\) They were completely aware of this; and it is against this morality, in both its secular and religious forms, that their conceptions of masculinity were directed as both a challenge and critique.

As for the nature of this radical, iconoclastic masculinity, we find its clearest expression in Baylebridge’s poetry, particularly in *The New Life*, where he said:

\[
\text{Life, for this thy truth is lent—}
\text{High daring, proud experiment;}
\text{Thy purpose, free, could servile be}
\text{To duty, feigned, nor destiny.}
\text{Laugh and trip;}
\text{With mirth equip}
\text{Thy gods, to flout a world!}
\text{Bend thine arm;}
\text{Strike alarm}
\text{Along the apostate world!}^{7}\n\]

\(^6\) See the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. See also the Old Testament prophets such as Amos and Micah.
This radical, almost Nietzschean masculinity was also present in the writings of Hughes. In his case, it was the eroticism of this masculinity that was its most important feature, the clearest expression of which can be found in his lurid novel, *Lost Eurydice*. There, in one of its most astounding sections, Hughes identified the form of Woman (that is, the ideal of female beauty) with Beauty itself, and claimed that in sexual intercourse there is a kind of mystical union between Beauty and the self, between Life and poetry, that is the most direct and intimate experience of the meaning and purpose of existence possible:

What was it he had once heard his uncle Julian say? ‘There is something of a beautiful woman in this sort of furniture.’ […] Yes, those artists had been voluptuously alive to the beauty of woman’s body, […] women’s breasts in their ideality […] It was flesh enhanced into soul, or soul realizing itself through what was most pagan in the flesh.⁸

To reiterate, it was the traditional masculinity of the premodern world, though innovated upon in such a way that it constituted a revolt against the prevailing ‘negative’ morality of the Judeo-Christian tradition—which, it must be noted, they considered a constitutive part of the prevailing decadent modernity.

This section will explore their embrace of this conception of masculinity in order to determine both its origins as a developmental factor and also its role as a precondition in their development and embrace of fascist ideas. As discussed, this conception was a response to both modernity and the Judeo-Christian tradition, and it is not difficult to understand the reason for this. Modernity fragmented and immobilised, and reduced one, at best, to a life of materialism and nominal Christianity that was utterly devoid of the grandeur of the Western canon, at least as it was superficially understood by Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge.⁹ This, of course, was an uncharitable estimate of contemporary society on their part. But it was nonetheless their belief, and their conception of masculinity was in large part an instrument to escape the strictures of society and the embarrassment of such a mediocre fate. For as Baylebridge once said, “To have talent, to have power, and to live on the same plane of existence as those who lack these things is folly indeed.”¹⁰

---

⁸ Randolph Hughes, ‘*Lost Eurydice*’, unpublished manuscript, 1942-1946, MLMSS 671/43 Item 1, SLNSW, 192.
⁹ Giuseppe Borgese has observed that the fascist fetishisation of war for its own sake was unprecedented and was not present anywhere in the heroic literature to which their ideology ostensibly referred. The *Iliad*, the *Chanson de Roland*, and the *Nibelungenlied*, though venerating heroism, considered war a definite evil, and peace as always preferable. Giuseppe Borgese, “The Intellectual Origins of Fascism,” *Social Research* 1, no. 4 (1934): 472.
The iconoclastic purpose of this radical masculinity, though evident in the case of all three men, was explicit only in the writings of Baylebridge. In the case of Hughes, it was present largely in terms of its relation to the impending ‘culture war’ that he believed would occur between the ‘negative’ morality of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the ‘positive’ morality of Europe’s Graeco-Roman inheritance. The difference between these moralities is that the former condemned the passions for the sake of a conjectural ‘kingdom of God’, while the latter affirmed and celebrated the passions, which belonged to the only world that is known to exist. Though this conflict was also present in the writings of Wilson and Baylebridge, it appeared most emphatically in the case of Hughes, who harboured a profound hatred of Judeo-Christian morality. His reasons for rejecting it with such ferocity were both personal and ideological. He believed, first of all, that it unjustly condemned the joys of life and the ‘virtues’ of pride, exuberance, and complete self-sufficiency. From this “pride of life” (as he called it) came all that made life worth living. To deny it, therefore, as both St. Paul and St. Augustine had done, was to deny life itself. Similarly, he believed that the Sermon on the Mount, which he particularly despised, led ultimately to an “abdication of virility” that was “often given outward and visible expression in self-inflicted castration”. For this reason, he considered monasticism “the sublimest and the most cogent reduction to the absurd afforded by the whole of history”, because it revealed, to his mind, the ‘life-denying essence’ of the Judeo-Christian tradition. For as he told Jacques Delebecque (1876-1957), a senior member of the far-right Action Française:

The one great condition of moral advance, and hence of salvation in the only sense worth talking about, is the full acceptance of the consequences of one’s actions. Who diminishes those consequences, robs me of one of my most painful, but certainly one of my most precious rights. If I cannot save myself, I cannot really be saved.

---

12 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Edwyn Bevan, 20 October 1937, MLMSS 671/7, SLNSW, 4.
13 For more on the nature of Christian humility in contrast to the morality of the Graeco-Roman world, see St. Paul’s letters, such as Philippians 1-2, and St. Augustine’s Confessions, particularly Book 2. Letter from Randolph Hughes to Edwyn Bevan, 20 October 1937, MLMSS 671/7, SLNSW, 4.
14 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Edwyn Bevan, 20 October 1937, MLMSS 671/7, SLNSW, 5.
15 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Edwyn Bevan, 20 October 1937, MLMSS 671/7, SLNSW, 5.
16 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Jacques Delebecque, 29 April 1936, MLMSS 671/19, SLNSW, 2.
In other words, following the writings of Nietzsche, he rejected the servile morality of Christianity and its implication of human helplessness in favour of the classical ideal, which affirmed the competence (or arete) of ‘great men’.\(^\text{17}\)

A further sense of the vehemence of this rejection and its importance as a motivating factor for Hughes can be found in a letter he wrote to his friend Carl Kaeppel (1887-1946) in 1937, written in response to Kaeppel’s conversion to Roman Catholicism. “You were to me about the stoutest anti-Christian,” he said, referring to their time together as students at the University of Sydney,

> the best pagan (in the generous and noble and brave sense of the word) in the whole wide circle of my acquaintance; and one of the best-equipped, the most formidable, the most likely to do damage to the chief enemy of the true Light.\(^\text{18}\)

For Hughes, his friend’s conversion was as incomprehensible as Brennan’s own return to the Catholic faith in the late 1920s.\(^\text{19}\) “I never had any doubt,” Hughes said, “that you would always be on our side, with our masters Lucretius, Bruno, Goethe, [and] Shelley […], always a redoubtable and uncompromising antagonist of all the values of Jewry and Christianity.”\(^\text{20}\) “And so,” he said,

> to find that you have gone over to them, to the arch-enemy, comes with the force of a shock and a blow. It is about the most distressing act of apostasy of which I have any knowledge. It is as though Voltaire or Nietzsche or Swinburne had passed over to the other camp.\(^\text{21}\)

Indeed, his hatred of the Judeo-Christian tradition was so fierce that he never wrote to Kaeppel again: “for it is as though the man you were had died, or worse than that, had been transformed into something the negation of what he was.”\(^\text{22}\)

Baylebridge expressed a similar view when he argued that the promise of heaven only distracted people from the pleasures and demands of earthly existence. But aside from this denial of ‘life’, his greatest frustration with the Christian teaching on this point was that he considered it completely nonsensical. The Christian afterlife, he said, at least as it was commonly understood, promised an eternity of paradigmatically earthly joys. These not only depended on the various limits of time and space, as well as the presence of their opposites, to make sense; they were also virtually identical to those joys and pleasures that Christianity presently denied its

\(^{17}\) On this classical ideal as it contrast to Christianity, see Christopher Cordner, “Aristotelian Virtue and Its Limitations,” *Philosophy* 69, no. 269 (1994): 291-295.

\(^{18}\) Letter from Randolph Hughes to Carl Kaeppel, 17 November 1937, MLMSS 671/9, SLNSW, 3-4.


\(^{20}\) Letter from Randolph Hughes to Carl Kaeppel, 17 November 1937, MLMSS 671/9, SLNSW, 4.

\(^{21}\) Letter from Randolph Hughes to Carl Kaeppel, 17 November 1937, MLMSS 671/9, SLNSW, 4.

\(^{22}\) Letter from Randolph Hughes to Carl Kaeppel, 17 November 1937, MLMSS 671/9, SLNSW, 9.
followers. For this reason, in a somewhat facetious passage addressed, he invited his prospective Christian readers to consider what the doctrine of heaven actually entailed:

Picture yourself do, in Eternity—in that astounding emptiness, without beginning or end, where Time never was nor could be, where today and yesterday and tomorrow are terms that mean nothing, where a thousand years mean nothing, where every human concept means nothing, yes, where nothing human means anything! What business would you, friend, have there? For all your sublime vanity, do you not stand aghast, rather than exult, at the prospect of being thrust—you, with all your littleness—into the centre of that soul-staggering space? Ah, but you thought not like that of Eternity. You thought of Eternity as just the life and the joy you knew in this world spun out for ever.23

For Baylebridge, it was an absurd belief that deprived people of the joys of their earthly existence by promising them a non-existent incoherence. Therefore, in opposition to the teachings of Christianity (he was raised a strict Methodist), Baylebridge proposed a different kind of ‘resurrection’, not unlike that of Wilson or Hughes, in which the soul (or nation) could transcend the world of mere matter by infusing this matter with spirit (or vitality), which was achieved by an act of the creative will.24 This idea owed much to the Romantic and German Idealist philosophers, and was later echoed by Henri Bergson and his famous \textit{élan vital}.25 In the present context, this act of transcendence can be identified directly with the practice of epiphanic modernism—and it was essentially the same approach advanced by Hughes in his mysticism of Beauty and Woman.26

For Baylebridge, life itself, the \textit{élan vital}, was ‘god’, and its activity (or ‘resurrection’) was the return of that Spirit to the world of mere matter by the cooperation of humanity with this ‘god’. For this reason, he proudly claimed that his philosophy “submits, and gladly, to the circumscription of things human.”27 And these ‘things human’ were precisely the joys, virtues, and demands that they each believed Christianity and Judaism denied—indeed the whole ‘life’ that these men were at such pains to defend. These joys, virtues, and demands, denied them by the nominally Christian societies in which they lived, were not only sufficient, they said, but a gift. Its denial, therefore, must be one of the chief causes of the appalling state of the world in their day, which was in large part a projection of their own unhappiness.

27 Baylebridge, ‘Resurrection’, MLMSS 2786 Box 2, SLNSW, 1.
Indeed, there are remarkable expressions of anger and resentment throughout their writings towards the present age, particularly towards society and its ‘decadent’ values, which they blamed, for their own frustration. It was a state of mind comparable to that of the Romantics in their own revolt against the strictures of rationalism and the societies in which they lived. This can be seen in a fascinating essay written by Baylebridge around 1919 (and later published under a false name), in which he appraised his own works in the third person. “Blocksidge is out of love with the world,” he said,

only because he is so much in love with it. If this were not so he would accept it, as others do, with a shrug. Instead of doing that he lays about him vigourously, smashing anything within reach of his bludgeon. This desire to make a clean sweep of shams is prompted by a wild love of truth; it is the energy of love seeking justice for that truth.

This not only reflects the iconoclasm mentioned above, but indicates that Baylebridge was (perhaps unsurprisingly) an intensely restless and dissatisfied person—precisely the sort, it might be said, to appoint themselves a member of the Nietzschean elite. The poet Leon Gellert (1892-1977) described him as “an imposing personality perpetually gnawed by bitterness”. Similarly, the novelist Frank Dalby Davison (1893-1970) recalled once suggesting to Baylebridge that they could exchange autographed copies of their books as a token of friendship, to which Baylebridge responded that his own writings were beyond Davison’s own popularly-oriented books and that it was an insult to compare them. This is consistent with my own impression of the man, and explains much of the hatred that permeates his poetry—as can be seen, for instance, in the following poem called ‘Modern Community’ (which, again, blamed society for his own unhappiness):

Idiocy at ease abides;
Lunatics and suicides
Inflate their number; the predestined sick
Enlarge themselves. Why, doting, do we stick
At purging, for the health of our pressed soul,
These battening tumours of the foul and dull?

---

28 Berlin, The Roots of Romanticism, 151-152.
29 This is based on the fact that there is a typed manuscript version of the article among Baylebridge’s papers that differs slightly from the published version, as though it were an earlier draft. The most likely explanation for this is that Baylebridge was the original author. See also John Lovell, “A New Philosophy,” Daily Mail (Brisbane, Qld), 23 August 1919, 12.
30 William Baylebridge, ‘The Infinite Atom’, unpublished manuscript, c. 1919, MLMSS 2786 Box 1 and 2, SLNSW, 2-3. The first page of this manuscript is in Box 1, the rest are in Box 2.
32 Noel Macainsh, Nietzsche in Australia: A Literary Inquiry into a Nationalistic Ideology (Munich: Verlag für Dokumentation und Werbung, 1975), 102 fn. 1.
33 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, 70.
His embrace of eugenics, too, as this poem might already suggest, was also likely related to his unhappiness and elitism.

Hughes was also a bitter and dissatisfied person. He hated Christianity, Judaism, democracy, feminism, Marxism, and basically anyone not included in the Nietzschean elite. For as he admitted to his friend W. E. J. Lindfield in later years, reflecting on this period:

I long ago realized that the only part of the population in this country that I esteem or find congenial is the exceedingly small fraction who make up the intellectual elite […]. All the rest […] I dislike and contemn, and I feel that if most of them were wiped out by hydrogen bombs the world would be the better rather than the poorer for it.34

Before becoming a Marxist, Jack Lindsay had embraced a similar worldview, inherited from his father, the artist Norman Lindsay. With the insight that this provided into the personal factors that shaped this mentality, he told Hughes frankly that the reason “you fear and hate the mob” is “because you cant [sic] truly objectify it.”35 In other words, the source of this fear and hatred was that his belief in his own election was challenged by the likeness between himself and ordinary people, who were just as vulnerable to the vagaries of existence as himself. Indeed, the whole burden of his highly esoteric mysticism was that it allowed him to dissociate himself from the common destiny of humanity (which, it is implied, was mediocrity and death), as well as his own crippled body.36 “If you could see it [this ‘commonness’] in yourself,” said Lindsay, “you’d no longer fear the mob.”37 A similar pattern is observable in Baylebridge, whose own mystical beliefs, though vaunting the flesh, ultimately disparaged the body and other human beings, particularly women. For as he said in the gnostic Life’s Testament (1914/1939), “[t]he Soul, though her foot be in the flesh, is ever busy, as a bird caught in a snare, to free it: the Soul would run always abroad, to wider being.”38 And in another poem, he advises a woman that it is vain to mourn the death of her infant child, for death is not the end but the fulfilment of the individual’s purpose as a vessel for the Spirit’s “transmutation”.39

Wilson, too, felt a certain animus towards the ‘mass age’, primarily because of its apparent disinterest in the cause of Beauty. After returning to Australia in 1930, he

---

34 Letter from Randolph Hughes to W. E. J. Lindfield, 18 April 1950, MLMSS 671/14, SLNSW, 2.
35 Letter from Jack Lindsay to Randolph Hughes, 11 March 1937, MLMSS 671/16, SLNSW, 1.
36 For more on Hughes’ health, see letter from Randolph Hughes to Netterville Barron, February 1930, 671/7, SLNSW, 1-8.
37 Letter from Jack Lindsay to Randolph Hughes, 11 March 1937, MLMSS 671/16, SLNSW, 1.
38 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, 50.
39 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, 18.
searched in both Sydney and Melbourne for people “with [the] energy and ability to prepare for the condition of existence which had to come.”  

This ‘condition’ was the alternative modernity mentioned above. He spoke to one friend, a journalist for the *Bulletin*; but as they spoke, “[he] noticed that his friend’s mind was like the trees—tired, and hanging limp.”  

In Melbourne the prospects were no better. He spoke to Labor officials, “who tried to look revolutionary”, but “a glance showed that they could not take an active part in a revolutionary movement.”  

Even the bourgeois White Guard failed to impress him, because it was only a defence of the liberal *status quo*.  

“In both cities,” he concluded, “not one word of realities was publicly uttered by any class. Sydney and Melbourne were asleep”.

Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge would perhaps have remained relatively harmless eccentrics had their beliefs not entailed a programmatic element. But as discussed, their embrace of the modernist paradigm and their personal (and perhaps epistemic) need to escape the trap of a merely ‘private’ meaning ensured that their various ‘epiphanies’—which were the substance of their writings—would be translated into a programmatic form. Among the obvious examples of this, one of the most interesting is the connection between their iconoclastic conception of masculinity and their understanding of the metaphysical processes underlying reality. Much like Hegel and Fichte, they believed that there was a mysterious union or coincidence between the creativity of the individual artist and the creativity of the Spirit of history. Accordingly, as Isaiah Berlin argues, whenever an individual or group performs a creative act, they become “finite centres” of this vast metaphysical process, which is the gradual imposition of form (or spirit) upon matter. Consequently, when an individual or group seeks to impose themselves upon whatever matter it is that obstructs their self-realisation, they are in fact imposing the form and harmony of the Spirit, which is the source of all order and creativity. This meant that to impose anything that was contrary to the Spirit could only lead to failure and frustration. The

40 William Hardy Wilson, *Eucalyptus* (Wandin: H. Wilson, 1941), 17.
41 Wilson, *Eucalyptus*, 16.
43 In this regard, it is worth noting that Wilson knew the famous New Guardsman Francis De Groot (1888-1969), who wrote the catalogue for an auction of Wilson’s art collection in 1922. Francis De Groot, “Catalogue of the Hardy Wilson Collection of Works of Art,” May 1922, MS Acc 07/082 Box 1, NLA, 3; Wilson, *Eucalyptus*, 17.
44 Wilson, *Eucalyptus*, 17.
only true creativity was that which advanced the only creativity, the creativity of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{45}

It is certainly an exhilarating approach to life, and one ripe for abuse by the ‘epiphanic’ mind. And though their metaphysical views will be discussed in much greater detail in the following chapter, for now it is only relevant to note that a significant consequence of this view was that anything that could be reliably brought to be could then be referred back onto the Spirit as its intended end. This influenced their ideas in two significant ways. Firstly, it served as an impressive defence of their belief that morality was based solely on power, a belief that was easily combined with their rejection of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Secondly, it provided them with a framework within which to interpret the chaos of that period (and all of history) as the manifestation of a single purposive process. This not only made things simpler and more bearable, but it also served to strengthen their belief that there was a natural order (or solidity) that was continuous throughout history, and of which the present age was tragically and perversely deprived. Though the final importance of this second point for their development will be discussed in the following chapter, which will deal specifically with their metaphysical views, this chapter will now explore the implications of this belief for the praxis of their conceptions.

2.2: Masculinity against the present modernity

The conception of masculinity embraced by Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge, with its emphasis on action and virility, could not have remained in the realm of theory. There was an urgent need, felt by all three men, to actually apply this masculinity, not only for the meaning and purpose that this action would provide, but for the revolutionary role that it would serve in relation to society as a whole. For it was only through the application of this masculinity as a praxis, said Baylebridge, that modernity could be cleansed of the decadence of the Judeo-Christian tradition. As he said in National Notes:

\begin{quote}
Might we not at times enter thus—refusing to obscure the law in us that ordained it—into the directness and simplicity of innocent and clean animal life, in this being conscious of no falling off, no degradation, but rather of another submission to the divine power, another identification with that deity which stands revealed at the stripping away of complexity, the dead conventions, that crowd our present existence?\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{46} Baylebridge, \textit{This Vital Flesh}, 154.
Though present in the writings of all three men, this essentially Nietzschean masculinity was most apparent in the case of Baylebridge. For this reason, this section will begin with a detailed analysis of Baylebridge’s articulation of this radical masculinity in action, before comparing his articulation to those of Wilson and Hughes.

This combination of power and iconoclasm in their conception of masculinity, and the metaphysical implications of this belief, can be seen in his almost apocalyptic interpretation of the First World War. The significance of this war for Baylebridge lay not only in the fact that it was a purgative, as the Futurists believed, but also in the fact that it provided humanity with an opportunity to restore itself to an awareness of Life in its purest sense, which was no longer buried under the reigning Judeo-Christian culture. This was one of his most persistent and disturbing themes, which appeared in its most explicit form in An Anzac Muster (1921). But it was also present in much of his earliest poetry, most of which was written during or around the conflict. An early exploration of this theme was a poem called ‘Life is God’, in which Life—the Spirit—is ‘reborn’ through the purgative violence of war. It opens with the poet recounting a mystical experience in which he sensed the power and presence of Life,

[which appeared] like some strong and radiant god,
In spirit half-glimpsed, [that]
Trod before me in that splendid shadow,
And with the voice of a lover, called,
So that I blindly followed […].47

This sense of Life’s presence as both a lover and a life-giving force is then juxtaposed with the present age and its rejection of Life in favour of decadence and materialism:

Among men, then, I lifted up my voice for him [i.e. Life];
But few, how few! had hailed him;
And those mostly had trod earth in old seasons,
When lusty lovers were his, with great hearts,
And hands sufficient for their ministry.
No, nevermore, I cried, will that radiant one pass in full sight among men.48

There was little hope, then, that humanity would ever know Life again. But suddenly, like a divine intervention, the war broke out—an event of such magnitude, he believed, that it might shatter the lies and conventions that obscured the reality of Life.

Therefore, having embraced this philosophy in its most appalling form, Baylebridge conceived of the war in almost providential terms, considering it a kind

48 Baylebridge, Salvage, 197-198.
of spiritual purgative that would restore humanity to a consciousness of Life and its violent demands:

Then, War, I went out and saw thee,  
With thy prosperous sickle  
Mowing in spacious fields of breathing flesh.  
O, there Death quickened my foot,  
There lifted the scales from my eyes,  
So that I came up with and looked upon Life—  
So strong, so beautiful,  
I knew him for God!⁴⁹

Life, he seems to be saying, shines brightest in the face of Death; and in the heat of battle, in this contest between the self and mere matter, the individual came to see themselves and humanity more clearly.⁵⁰ But this purgative process was by no means automatic, as though it were simply forced upon humanity by the Spirit. Rather, as an essentially Hegelian doctrine, it required the cooperation of humanity, and particularly the cooperation of men, to achieve its purposed ends. The reason for this, he claimed, was that men were by nature the active and creative sex. This, of course, ignored the very obvious exception of motherhood; but this exception, as always, was easily and summarily dismissed.⁵¹ And to the further exclusion of women, the image of the soldier was often used to symbolise this masculine ideal. The duties of men in general—that is, in relation to the Spirit—were therefore considered analogous to the stoical duties that Baylebridge ascribed to the soldier.

This can be seen nowhere more clearly than in An Anzac Muster, where the task of soldiers (and men in general) was to endure the assault of Fate, and thus witness to the nature and reality of Life. This was a view with some precedent in classical thought, which was later embraced by the Romantics and German Idealists.⁵² Baylebridge was conversant with both, having enjoyed the privilege of a classical education and possible philosophical study in Germany in 1909.⁵³ But whatever the source of his ideas, the important point is that masculinity, understood as an active and creative principle, was placed front and centre of the historical and metaphysical process—so that the universe, and by extension society, became dependent on the integrity of this traditional masculinity and its revolutionary activity in the world.

⁴⁹ Baylebridge, Salvage, 198.  
⁵⁰ Berlin, Political Ideas in the Romantic Age, 179-180.  
⁵¹ Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, 163-188.  
But Baylebridge’s writings on this point were not limited to the abstract, but dealt explicitly with the future of Australia as a young and virile nation. In another poem, entitled ‘Australia’s Dead’, Baylebridge explored this same theme of the role of masculinity with regard to the nation itself. According to the poem, the First World War had provided the men of Australia with the opportunity to revitalise their manhood, which would then serve as the pattern for a new kind of society. This, he believed, was the vital task of the moment. Addressing his countrymen, he said:

What then of thee, Australia?
Thy skies fed fire into thy sons;
Thy plains starved their fool,
Put manhood upon them.
Could such but act thy will through the world
With ardent and with able hands?54

In this he did not stray far from the common view of that period that Australia had proved itself worthy in battle. This belief was often expressed through the symbolism of blood sacrifices, which Baylebridge carried to its literal and logical conclusion.55 This more than anything was the dominant theme of his writings, and was largely derived, as stated, from German Idealist philosophy.56 For as he said in *Songs o’ the South*, his earliest collection of poems, published in England in 1908:

Nature [i.e. the Spirit] brings forth but to consume again:
Each thing has death compounded in its parts.
Why weep ye, then? The rule, ye broken hearts,
Must partly bind her masterpieces, [namely] men.57

And so, by the shedding of its own blood, as this witnessing necessarily entailed, Australia had ‘reaped’ its place in the annals of history as a mighty and virile nation:

The moon,
Growing on the African veldt,
Spills her patient light upon the long habitations of thy dead;
They are sand in Egypt;
The wind ruffles the meads in France
And the flowers dance above Australian earth that feeds them;
They lie mingled with the old dust that set up Asian empires,
With the dust that looked living upon the face of Moses, and Sennacherib,
And the great Persian.

Australia, thou’rt written now into the chronicles
Of these kingdoms for ever.58

---

54 Baylebridge, *Salvage*, 198.
58 Baylebridge, *Salvage*, 200.
It is clear, then, that Baylebridge had hoped that the war would reawaken society to an awareness of Life and its totalising demands, and that Australia would enshrine these demands with the creation of a new political order. In this new order, he said, “[a] new patriotism would be taught and vitalized” so that every citizen “would understand, fully and without equivocation, the conflict between purely private interest and national duty.”59 “Room would be left for the essential play of thought and emotion,” he went on, “for what springs from the spontaneity of nature, for the arts and graces of the new national life,” for this national life would constitute “not an anarchy of individual wills, but a combined energy that would vitalize, without shattering, the forms of our new law and discipline.”60 In this sense, Baylebridge’s ideal state, mirroring much of fascist (and anti-Enlightenment) political theory, can be seen as an attempt at the Rousseauian union of perfect freedom and perfect order in the state.61 For this reason, he went on,

[the State to us would mean something more than a piece of social mechanism: it would imply a spiritual bond. At present we are a confused mass of separate entities, held together partly by political and partly by economic compulsion, but lacking any very conscious identify—in a sense that matters—with the community to which we belong.62

Such a community, he claimed, would be both “an aristocracy of the efficient” and “a socialism among equals” and would permit no distinction between religion and the state; for “politics and religion,” he said, “would not be two conceptions, but one.”63

The development of Anzac culture in the years that followed, however, though certainly problematic, fell woefully short of his dream that it would constitute the sort of political religion implied in his beliefs. This can be seen most clearly in his frustrations with the Martin Place cenotaph, a war memorial in the centre of Sydney (see figure 5 in Appendix). In March 1926, Baylebridge wrote an open letter to the designer of the cenotaph, Sir Bertram Mackennal (1863-1931), in which he argued that the memorial failed to commemorate the soldiers and only mourned their deaths.64 This letter does not appear to have been published at the time, and it remained so until it was inserted into the revised edition of An Anzac Muster (which was completed in

---

60 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 198.
61 As he said in the pseudonymous essay quoted earlier, his writings were attempting “to combine the two dominant ideas of the world—the broad equality of men, the idea of democracy, and the necessity of energy, whence comes all the appeals of the aristocrat.” Baylebridge, ‘The Infinite Atom’, MLMSS 2786 Box 2, SLNSW, 5; Berlin, *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*, 115-140.
62 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 186.
63 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 193, 197.
64 Baylebridge also expressed his frustrations with Mackennal in two poems. See Baylebridge, *Salvage*, 218.
1933), where it was adapted into a speech given by one of the characters. In this speech, the character, who has also written a letter to Mackennal, explains what he wrote to his friends. Though there is little difference between the two versions, it is the later version that will be referred to here.

This letter appears as a kind of epilogue to ‘The Apocalypse of Pat McCullough’, a story told in An Anzac Muster. In this story, a soldier named Pat McCullough awakes after an injury on the battlefield to find himself transported years into the future to a time when Gallipoli has been made not into a site of religious pilgrimage but a shallow tourist attraction. According to Baylebridge, this same softening of the war’s import was also apparent in the many memorials being constructed in that period, among them the Martin Place cenotaph. On this point, the Squatter, the novel’s protagonist, observed,

the making of these memorials—for the politician and the officious artisan now drag their slime across everything—is apt to become the business of those who care more for their own glory […] than for the tribute due properly to the soldiers.

It was this turn in Anzac culture away from the ‘true’ character of the soldiers and Life that had prompted him—both Baylebridge and the Squatter—to write to Mackennal, who had stated openly that his memorial would “symbolise, not the horrors of war, but the sacrifices of the fallen”.

Baylebridge’s fear was that by focusing exclusively on their deaths and neglecting to commemorate their virtues, this awareness of Life would be replaced by an ‘effeminate’ attitude that saw no value or purpose in war—which, in effect, would undo the ‘progress’ achieved in the conflict. The Squatter then explained the content of this letter, which is the same letter that Baylebridge himself had written several years earlier:

What, I dared to question him, were “the sacrifices of the fallen”? They were intangible things, and many. And was his monument really to symbolise these? Or should the word have been “sacrifice”—for we can lay our lives down but once—and was his memorial to stop at death? If so, I hinted, it must be an absurdly one-sided affair. The mere passing of the flesh, I reminded him, is memorialised in every

---

66 The original letter can be found among Baylebridge’s papers. See MLMSS 2786 Box 1, SLNSW.
68 This character’s name is an obvious reference to the ‘squattocracy’ of the colonial period and was likely intended by Baylebridge to represent the fact that this character, as a man who had ‘missed out’, had therefore not earned his right to the land on which he lived, but would remain a ‘squatter’ for ever. For this reason, the Squatter laments: “If that accurst bale […] hadn’t splintered my knee, and compelled me to accept a soft job at home, I might now have been better pleased with myself.” Baylebridge, An Anzac Muster, revised ed., 50-51.
69 Baylebridge, An Anzac Muster, revised ed., 236.
70 Baylebridge, An Anzac Muster, revised ed., 237. For the article to which Baylebridge was responding, see “War Memorial,” Daily Telegraph (Sydney, NSW), 5 March 1926, 8.
—there is too often little else to memorialise there. But how many, I added, are the conceptions that might be covered in a memorial to our soldiers—for a memorial, and the more so as it is lifted to higher planes, can be to living things as to dead.71

Eventually the Squatter brought his speech to a close and advised that “to confine the commemoration to those only who were unfortunate enough to perish, would be an injustice to those who had done the same work […] and who had yet managed to emerge from that travail alive.”72 Though arguably a valid point, it must be remembered that the purpose of Baylebridge’s argument is not simply to ensure that the soldiers were properly memorialised, but to ensure that an attitude contrary to Life (as he understood it) did not become the general conviction of the Australian people. And since it is the purpose of memorials to establish the interpretation of the event or person being memorialised, this was a real possibility. For him, the Anzacs were prophets, heralds of a new age; but in memorials that commemorated only death, that is, Life’s negation, their message was as good as rejected. And it is perhaps significant that in the original letter he included an excerpt from the novel’s epilogue (the original 1921 edition). It is worth quoting in full, since it makes the purpose of his novel abundantly clear:

The rewards that concerned us now were not of yesterday only. They were living acquests, and would live while our race lived. […] Out of that high grappling with the impossible we had plucked things richer than victories in the field: we had proved greatly our blood in it; we had set, thus, an immortal seal upon our race.73

In other words, its purpose was to establish the meaning of the conflict as he understood it, and to rally the people to the cause of a fascist Australia, which was the institutionalisation of this reverence for Life, which he believed the war had reawakened. The fundamental difference, then, between these two versions of Anzac, Baylebridge’s own and that embraced by Mackennal, is that for Baylebridge the version promoted by Mackennal was not based on the actual experience of soldiers but was instead a sentimentalising negation of that experience. If it had been based on the experience of soldiers, it would have been a tougher, more virile thing—and Baylebridge is arguably correct in this. But again, his frustration with the emerging ‘official’ version of Anzac did not stem from a desire for a more honest and disillusioned view of war, such as could be found in the poetry of Wilfred Owen.

73 Emphasis added. Letter from William Baylebridge to Sir Bertram Mackennal, 7 March 1926, MLMSS 2786 Box 1, SLNSW, 1.
Instead, his call was for something harder and more ‘illusioned’ with the war, for a view of things that saw value in violence and stress as a purgative—in short, for a view such as that expressed by Ernst Jünger, Filippo Marinetti, and countless other ‘literary fascists’.

Marinetti, for instance, described the war as “the most beautiful Futurist poem which has so far been seen” because it cleansed society and was “an extremely efficient means for propagating courage”. Jünger, too, regarded the war in this way, stating in 1922 that war is “[the] father of all things”, and that in the heat of battle, the “a man’s drives, too long pent up by society and its laws, become once more the ultimate form of reality, holiness, and reason.” In both cases, as in Baylebridge’s writings, the war is understood as unveiling a higher reality—a ‘soldierly’ template for society—that would then serve to purge and reconstruct society in a manner true to the violence and duress at the heart of creation. And as bleak as this view may be, for some it was paradoxically more comforting than the ambiguity of a war that served no purpose.

Evidently, then, their conceptions of masculinity were radical, violent, and patriarchal, assuming both the primacy of action and the primacy of men in the functioning of the state and the metaphysics of the world. In this, they were consistent with the ideas of such writers as Jünger and Marinetti. But a significant implication of such a conception that cannot be overlooked is that such a conception inevitably places women in a passive, domestic, and subordinate position in relation to men. This is well worth noting, for the same view of gender roles was also embraced by the fascist orthodoxies of Europe, as can be seen in such programmes as the Nazi Mutter und Kind. This view was reflected in the frustrations of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge with the so-called ‘new women’ that had emerged in that period, who were striving for the privilege of an independent existence, which clearly threatened their conception of masculinity. For instance, when visiting Germany in 1936 (which he had last visited during the Weimar years), Hughes was pleased to find that “one does not [any longer] see women smoking in the streets, or women who smear […] daub upon their lips, or women who discolour their nails and otherwise do harm to what charms they may possess.” In a poem written the following year, apparently after witnessing a socialist march in London, Hughes noted with disgust the “female students, with the brains of

---

75 Roger Griffin (ed.), Fascism, 109.
76 Griffin, Modernism and Fascism, 153-159.
tomsits, taking themselves seriously as economists and philosophers, […] but you could put your money on it that none of these pieces were virgins”.\textsuperscript{78} Passages such as these, together with the intensely sexualised depiction of women in \textit{Lost Eurydice}, indicate that women occupied a largely passive and subordinate position in Hughes’ worldview. In fact, even when women are given an active role in his writings, it is always in some way as the object of male fantasy—as in the case of Morgana, the witch-like Jacobin who seduces Saint-Geniès in the final section of his novel.\textsuperscript{79}

In the case of Wilson, the subordinate role of women was even more emphatic, appearing not simply as a kind of erotic fantasy (as in Hughes), but as the principled belief that creativity was a fundamentally masculine attribute. As he put it, “aesthetic creativeness on the part of man is a principle of sex, bound up with it in a way which is almost incomprehensible.”\textsuperscript{80} This conviction had a significant influence on his social and political views, according to which humanity would remain in a state of decadence until it was able to “again become creative in the wide and masculine sense of the word.”\textsuperscript{81} He also believed that women performing creative and leadership roles was a sign of this decadence, since, in his view, a ‘lower’ group would only take control when the ‘higher’ failed in its ‘appointed’ task. As he said in the preface to \textit{Grecian and Chinese Architecture}, published in 1936:

\begin{quote}
As the position develops and man sinks back, woman comes forward to assume control and instinctively preserve the race from ultimate extinction. But woman has never created save in the first and most vital principle, which is the creation of life itself. […] In the end, [if creativeness is not restored,] the human race would become, most likely, not unlike a swarm of bees in which the female workers control the destiny of the hive.\textsuperscript{82}
\end{quote}

This view that the role of women was exclusively maternal was also shared by Baylebridge, who believed that women were obligated to serve in the vocation of “race-motherhood”, and that only in this “consecration to the national good” would they find true happiness.\textsuperscript{83}

The extent to which women, and all those excluded from the spiritual aristocracy, were subordinate to the dictates of the State can be seen in Baylebridge’s eugenic poetry. These poems, of which there is about fifteen, can be found in \textit{This Vital Flesh} in a section called ‘Political Verse’. As part of his general eugenic scheme,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{78} Letter from Randolph Hughes to A. R. Chisholm, 22 June 1954, MLMSS 812/1, SLNSW, 14.
\item \textsuperscript{79} Hughes, ‘\textit{Lost Eurydice}’, MLMSS 671/43 Item 2, SLNSW, \textit{passim}.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Quoted in Wilson, \textit{Eucalyptus}, 272.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Wilson, \textit{Eucalyptus}, 52.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Quoted in Wilson, \textit{Eucalyptus}, 272.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Baylebridge, \textit{This Vital Flesh}, 185.
\end{itemize}
Baylebridge advocated for strict policies controlling which sections of the population would be permitted to procreate. Those with ‘desirable’ genes would be encouraged to have children, while those with ‘undesirable’ genes would be discouraged, if not forcefully sterilised. He even considered subjecting these ‘undesirables’ to “the charity of the lethal chamber”. In the case of women, this kind of social engineering led him to consider the value to be found in a ‘revaluation’ of the concept of virginity away from its traditional notions of innocence and purity to one in which women were shamed for remaining childless. This idea was explored throughout these poems, the most astounding of which was ‘Lamentation of the Virgin’, in which he gave a chilling depiction of the role of women in his ideal polity:

```
This is the cry of a woman unvowed, a virgin:
This is the sorrowful song of a wasted woman.

‘Heart, my heart that brimmest with yearning and bitterness,
Empty thy woes in a flood: here utter and ease them.

‘Sighing, I rise at dawn—myself but hears me;
All that day I go longing to meet my Belovèd;
Weeping, I sigh for his arm in the solitary night-time:
No one comes; and my shame and my sorrow devour me.

‘Comely am I if my mirror tells me no vanity;
Shapely of limb I am, and dressed to commend it—
Formed well, kept well, to move him, chaste in his honour.

‘With seed the furrow of every harlot runs over—
Oft rivers of life, and swallowed in fetid morasses;
While barren this ground in me remains, neglected.

‘How canst thou speed, my impetuous Land, as a nation
While pregnant seed is scattered in those waste places
And so much soil and rich with a ban is cancelled?’
```

The significance of all this, whatever else it might mean, is that a conception of femininity of this kind was considered an essential aspect of the masculinity embraced by Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge. Granting women anything more than that would undermine the status of masculinity as an axiom—upon which their sense of meaning, purpose, and confidence ultimately depended. This is indicated by the fact that Baylebridge considered women not merely subordinate but a threat to masculinity as well. For as he said in a poem called ‘Sentimentalism’:

```
Hast thus embraced a woman? thou
Hast ta’en in thy two arms a foe;
For she, vowed patron then of sterile peace,
```

85 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 203.
86 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 204-205.
Is ever keen to sap thy knees.
As oil strewn on the impetuous sea
Of man’s aspiring, then is she. 87

The implication here is that women, as the patrons of “sterile peace”, are therefore also the patrons of ‘anti-life’, in direct contrast to the life-affirming role of the creative male. 88

Creation, then, with the possible exception of creating new life, was considered an essentially masculine task, such that it was given an axiomatic role in their social, political, and metaphysical programmes. This was the point at which the radical and reactionary elements of their conception of masculinity combined—the purpose of which, alongside its radical opposition to liberal modernity and the Judeo-Christian tradition, was to maintain a traditional understanding of gender roles despite modernisation. The ‘new woman’, together with the seemingly ‘effeminate’ society that arose from this culture, were anathema to the natural order that the Spirit had chosen as its purposed end—an order, it must be noted, that bore a striking resemblance to the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini. It was therefore necessary for a new kind of masculinity, at once both modern and traditional, to inaugurate this new order by witnessing to the reality of Life, which appeared most brightly in the face of death—when men were most conscious of their elemental selves.

2.3: The spiritual aristocracy
In addition to the formative influence of their views on masculinity, their social and political views were also defined by an aristocratic and hierarchical conception of society and humanity. This was largely due to their various philosophical influences, such as Nietzsche’s concept of the ‘spiritual aristocracy’—which, as John Carey argues, was a fundamental influence on modernist thought, particularly in relation to its conception of ‘the masses’. 89 In addition, their conception of society and humanity was also informed by their personal tendencies towards pessimism and elitism, which stemmed, at least in part, from their bourgeois origins. Baylebridge’s family, particularly his father George Henry Blocksidge (1855-1944), were involved in business and politics; in addition to founding one of Queensland’s largest real estate

87 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, 211.
firms, his father had also served briefly in politics, first as the mayor of South Brisbane in 1903 and then as the Conservative member for the seat of Woolloongabba in 1907. With the opportunities this provided, Baylebridge enjoyed the privilege of a private education, first at the Brisbane Grammar School (to which he was awarded a scholarship), and then under a private tutor in classics. Wilson’s family were similarly well-to-do. After a failed farming venture in 1804, his family established a lucrative hardware business in Sydney in 1820, amassing a considerable fortune that they invested successfully in land speculation. He studied at Newington College (where he later designed the war memorial) and then travelled abroad as a student of architecture, presumably financed by the family’s wealth. Likewise, Hughes’ family owned a warehousing company in Enmore, which allowed him to complete his first two degrees at the University of Sydney. Significantly, the philosophical influences mentioned above likely served to justify these innate tendencies towards pessimism and elitism.

As in the case of their conception of masculinity, their conception of hierarchy was at once radical and reactionary, which was reflected in their belief in the spiritual aristocracy alongside their insistence on a ‘natural order’ to which individuals and society must conform. This natural order consisted, claimed Hughes, “of an élite reposing—in one sense—upon a substratum of slaves”, in which “might is always right”, and where “genius is all that matters.” Baylebridge described it as “an aristocracy of the efficient, the efficient in heart, in blood, in brain”—that is, an aristocracy of those with a naked or ‘efficient’ relation to the world, which could only be achieved by embracing the radical masculinity described in the previous section. In this, Baylebridge and Hughes were largely consistent with Nietzsche’s own characterisation of the spiritual elite as men with “an instinct for rank” and an inborn
sense of their status as “the determiner[s] of values”. This “noble type of man”, he went on, “does not need to be approved of […] [because] he knows himself to be that which in general first accords honour to things”. Similarly, Wilson believed that although “creative men, in all ages, never were more than a few […] their lead was followed because of an instinctive desire to follow creativeness.” In other words, it was this creative few that determined (or embodied) ‘creativeness’. But in the modern world, this instinctive desire for creativeness was conspicuously and perversely absent for all three men. To explain this aberration, Wilson claimed that the main source of this problem was that the ruling classes had failed to lead towards new sources of creativeness, which was their appointed task. In response to this, the Spirit (which he identified with Nature) inspired the working classes to rise up and seize control—though they, too, failed at the task. This elitist attitude ultimately manifested in his belief that democracy was a perversion of the natural order, according to which there was an appointed ruling class. As he said in the Dawn of a New Civilization:

[Whenever] the leaders of a race fail to lead, the cry of “equality” is bound to be heard. It was always the cry whenever a race reached the end of its creativeness, and underneath is the feeling that the leaders have failed, and that “equality” is right.

In other words, like most reactionary modernists, he assumed the existence of a particular ‘natural order’ to justify his hierarchical and anti-Enlightenment view of society, in which the idea of equality had no place.

His attitude towards democracy and his pretensions towards elitism were reflected, above all, in his interpretation of modern history, according to which all the revolutions and upheavals that had occurred since the French Revolution were caused, fundamentally, by an unconscious desire for strong leadership and meaningful creative expression. His belief that these revolutions were motivated in part by a desire for meaningful creative expression was not controversial. It was shared, for instance, by Karl Marx in his theory of alienation, particularly in his belief that the capitalist mode of production alienated workers from the act of creation. But his idea that they were also motivated by an unconscious desire for strong leadership would have been

98 Emphasis added. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, 195.
100 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 273.
repugnant to Marx, and was strongly suggestive of an aristocratic view, with its paternalism and its characteristic contempt for politics as such.\textsuperscript{102}

In addition to this aristocratic contempt for politics, Wilson’s position was also characterised by an anti-rationalism that served to justify his rejection of the present modernity and his idealisation of the merits of unquestionable authority. Ultimately, this idealisation stemmed from his own desire to escape from the hyper-reflexivity of modern consciousness to a time when the given ‘truths’ of a society could be accepted uncritically, which entailed the creation of a rooted modernity. In his 1934 novel Yin-Yang, he wrote nostalgically of the slower and more regular pace of the pre-modern world by recounting the mythology of the ‘calendar trees’, also known as fu-sang. According to Wilson, these trees dropped and sprouted their leaves at regular intervals, which allowed them to be used as the basis for a reliable calendar system. But these trees eventually disappeared, and it is clear that Wilson intended this story to serve as a metaphor for the emergence of modernity.\textsuperscript{103} This same idea was reflected in his fascination with the I Ching, which he believed was the only book to have survived the modern assault on religious and philosophical authority. The reason for this is that the I Ching, since it was capable of virtually endless textual permutation, allowed for constant re-interpretation. This meant, in effect, that it could always outrun the assault of reason, precisely because it lacked the kind of definite or rational content that reason could destroy:

The I Ching must be great because nobody knows anything about it, and for this reason will interest mankind for ever. [...] Not knowing what it means, they will ascribe to the book the deepest wisdom and greatest philosophical truths which they can imagine.\textsuperscript{104}

In this way, Wilson was also able to justify his belief in anti-democratic and authoritarian forms of government, in which elected politicians were replaced by an elite of artists and visionaries.

In other words, this suspicion of reason, together with his innate paternalism, meant that Wilson had little interest in politics as such. As he said to W. J. Miles (1871-1942) in 1936, the main financier of the Publicist: “I am not particularly interested in economic, and social, and political conditions anywhere. I am interested in creativeness, as applied to man’s work, because I know that it is the greatest force in


\textsuperscript{103} William Hardy Wilson, Yin-Yang (Flowerdale: H. Wilson, 1934), 8-9.

\textsuperscript{104} Wilson, Yin-Yang, 157-158.
mankind.” In other words, he considered politics and other material conditions to be secondary to the dictates of Nature. The consequences of this belief can be seen in his extremely confusing use of the terms ‘fascism’ and ‘communism’, which he seems to have considered virtually interchangeable. For this reason, he claimed that it was a matter of secondary importance whether it was fascism or communism that became the world’s leading ideology, because it was only Nature or Spirit that really mattered. This could certainly be taken to suggest that Wilson was at best indifferent to fascism and its prospects of success. But then, in almost the same breath, he said that the struggle for new creativeness, to which fascism and communism were apparently irrelevant, was inextricably linked to the present ‘struggle’ between the white race and its ‘coloured’ enemies. “The coming of Communism and Fascism,” he said, “is a political change and is [therefore] of small importance compared to the question of white or yellow.” Evidently, though he considered politics of secondary importance, he nonetheless embraced a position that bore an essential likeness to fascist ideology and its embrace of bio-politics. In addition to the philosophical factors mentioned, this likeness can be attributed in part to his reading of both Lothrop Stoddard’s *The Revolt Against Civilization* (1922) and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which he read in an edition published by the fascist New Zealander Arthur Nelson Field (1882-1963). As he explained elsewhere:

> The history of mankind shows clearly that all races which lose their energy are overrun by more energetic people—as happened in Egypt, and later in Greece, then Roman Italy, and in modern times, when the Dutch settled in Java, and the British, coming to Australia, took the land from aboriginals. Now, in turn, Australia must show that her people are virile or make way for a more energetic race.

For Wilson, therefore, the structures and material conditions of a society, whether fascist or communist, meant nothing without a virile and united people to support it. “Democracy, Fascism or Communism,” he said, “cannot save the people if they are not prepared.” To his mind, ‘fascism’ and ‘communism’ were only different names for varieties of socialism, and the vagueness with which he defined even ‘socialism’ is exemplified by his identification of Akhenaten and Wang An-Shih, and possibly

---

105 Quoted in Wilson, *Eucalyptus*, 144.
also the Gracchi reforms and Epicureanism, as early instances of ‘communism’. For him, communism was only a kind of negative power in the metaphysical process, against which the Spirit (or Nature) advanced its purposed end. It was a political system, he believed, that inevitably arose when a society became decadent, and fascism (understood in a purely structural sense) was a species of this. But the honour that he reserved for Hitler and Mussolini, as seen in his various writings, together with his belief that demagoguery was an art, suggests that when Wilson referred dismissively to ‘fascism’, he was referring only to the practical or material aspect of those regimes, and not to the energy or spirit that was their essence and activity. The fact that he showed no comparable admiration for leaders of the ‘left’, with the possible exception of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister, seems to confirm this— who in any case only became the leader of India after fascism’s defeat in 1945. Indeed, his embrace of an almost Darwinian conception of the contest for survival could hardly have allowed otherwise.

Thus, despite this ecumenical strain in his work, dreaming of a time when all nations would live in harmony, there was nevertheless an emphasis on the value of particularity and the nation as the basic unit of politics. Consider, for instance, the following passage from Yin-Yang, which is the clearest depiction of Wilson’s ideal, in which the nations of the world, though retaining their identity, have come together through the auspices of the Spirit for the greater good of all. “Following the advice of Monsieur Rousseau,” he said, “[Europe] has declared in favour of simple ways, and in Athens a new era is arising with Nature as the goal.” He went on:

Up the roadway to the Propylaea, at the entrance of the Acropolis, a procession moved on foot. All the nations of Europe were represented. They were clad in scarlet smocks, adorned with the swastika in gold, white trousers, glossy black Russian boots [...]. On the northern side, a scaffolding hid the Erechtheion, which was being restored, and from a magnificent flag-pole between it and the Parthenon floated a great silk flag of scarlet adorned with a golden swastika.

Clearly this is an ideal more redolent of fascism than internationalist communism, according to which national differences must be ameliorated. And though there was certainly an Orientalist element to Wilson’s use of the swastika (for it was originally...
an eastern symbol), the fact that it was placed on ‘scarlet’ fabric and paired with Russian boots suggests that he was alluding primarily to its usage as a fascist symbol. Furthermore, this reference to Russian boots suggests that Wilson considered the communist movement a potential expression of the Spirit as well. But despite its resonance as a world-historic movement, he ultimately rejected it, primarily because it affirmed an upending ethos derived, at least in part, from the Judeo-Christian tradition.115

This notion of the importance of the essence or ‘spirit’ of the nation over its merely material elements was also present in the writings of Hughes and Baylebridge. For all three men, this emphasis on the spirit stemmed in large part from the vitalism of their thought, according to which it was only in this union of matter with spirit—the creative Spirit or élan vital—that the nation or individual was really ‘alive’. The kind of spontaneous community that this philosophy implied, based on energy and charisma rather than inert structures, was embraced as an ideal by all three men. But it was qualified by an aristocratic attitude to society and an embrace of authority that prevented this ideal from reaching its anarchic extremes. This was reflected in Wilson’s radical belief that the survival of the ‘white race’ depended on the cultivation of a national spirit that was somehow above or beyond politics. But it was also reflected in his reactionary belief that this national spirit could not lead itself but required the guidance of an appointed ruling class, who in turn sustained this spirit by supporting the arts financially.116

This radical emphasis on the spirit was also apparent in Baylebridge’s writings, who argued that a fascism based on structure and pageantry would be unsuited to Australia, where he claimed that only charisma and personal respect could inspire this national spirit. “The soldiers of Australia,” he said,

having sprung up […] in the lap of Nature herself, have the same heart that she has, and little stomach for any kind of goose-step or the shifts of ceremony. They have lived too much with things real to be in love with formal tricks, doings with no ground in necessity. Because of this, the understanding between all ranks among our men is an inward matter, bottomed on a common sincerity, rather than an outward formalism based on a written code.117

This was not unlike the position of Wilfred Kent Hughes (1895-1970), another Australian fascist in this period, who described himself tellingly as “a Fascist without

115 For more on this idea, see §3.3.
116 Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 263.
When asked by a journalist what he thought of the pageantry of European fascism, he replied: “That’s all right for Germany and Italy. They’ve had an operatic training, but I can’t see Australians going round saluting each other […] They’d laugh their heads off.” In other words, for both Baylebridge and Kent Hughes, it was the spirit of the nation that mattered, not its outward appearance as a fascist nation. This spirit was literally constituted by the radical mode of living that their philosophy entailed—a mode of living reflected, above all, in their radical conception of masculinity. For as Baylebridge said in National Notes: “Energy is the measure of life: the more energy, the more life; no energy is death; idiots are feeble and listless.” Consequently, in order to be true to this spirit, the state needed to be organised in a way that allowed for this radical mode of living to be lived without consequence.

But despite its almost anarchic connotations, this spontaneous community remained essentially hierarchical—a hierarchy based on energy, which was analogous to life itself, rather than the inert structures of “the old mechanised system”. “A nation, to survive nowadays,” said Baylebridge, echoing the *führerprinzip*, “must have leaders […]. Leaders are highly energized.” As the protagonist of Wilson’s *Yin-Yang* lamented: “Nothing could have been more intolerable […] than a modern democracy.” But this elitism was most explicit in the case of Hughes. In his writings, it was stated explicitly that it was only individuals with creative genius who would benefit from this free and ecstatic movement. The rest, he openly admitted, would live only as a ’substratum of slaves’. For as he told Lindsay in 1936, the same year that he visited Germany on a state-sponsored tour:

I am […] a complete individualist. That is why I could never be a complete Fascist— I mean a totalitarian Fascist. For, ultimately, the State exists simply for the individual, and is to be measured by the worth of the individuals composing it, or rather by the worth of the élite of its individuals.

For Hughes, then, the state was “only useful in so far as it helps to throw up and sustain genius.” Baylebridge was willing to compromise on this aspect if it made for a

---

119 Penton, “Tiptoeing To Fascism,” 8.
120 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 155.
121 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 154.
125 Emphasis added. Letter from Randolph Hughes to Jack Lindsay, 8 March 1936, MLMSS 671/15, SLNSW, 7.
126 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Jack Lindsay, 8 March 1936, MLMSS 671/15, SLNSW, 7.
stronger state. But Hughes could not, for which reason his acceptance of fascist doctrine was often qualified. But the fact that this compromise was possible for Baylebridge suggests that this elitism was a latent aspect of his thought, and remained an abiding influence despite his insistence on the ‘catholicity’ of his philosophy.

To conclude, it is clear that in the elaboration of their sense of meaning and transcendence into a social and political programme, Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge each arrived at a theory of the nation and the state that was comparable in many essential respects to the fascist regimes of Italy and Germany, such as their mystical conception of the state, not to mention the palingenetic fantasies of countless other ‘literary’ fascists. This is hardly surprising, given their embrace of similar philosophical influences, such as Romanticism, German Idealism, and evolutionary vitalism, as well as their bourgeois origins. It is also significant that they arrived at these conclusions—or at least an intuition of these conclusions—in relative isolation from the centres of fascism in Europe (and each other). This suggests that the potential for the development of fascist ideas was present in Australia in that period. But whether this potential could have developed without some connection to the centres of fascism in Europe (for all three men had spent years abroad) cannot be determined from a case study of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge.

Conclusion
There was an intimate connection, therefore, between the conceptions of masculinity, hierarchy, and the manner in which life ought to be lived embraced by Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge, which formed a cohesive ethical vision. This vision was influenced by both Hegel and Nietzsche, which meant that it could have been developed in any number of directions. Hermann Hesse, for instance, was as much an authentic follower of Nietzsche as Gabriele D’Annunzio, if not more so. But the direction of their thought, and the different ways they had imbibed Nietzsche’s influence, was determined in part by their position relative to the tension implicit in Nietzsche’s thought—that is, the tension between epiphanic and programmatic modernism, which is in essence the tension described in §1.1. As Robert Gooding-Williams has argued, Nietzsche’s tone in Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1885) was markedly more sceptical and

---

127 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, 245-246.
129 Macainsh, Nietzsche in Australia, 116.
exploratory than the trumpeting optimism of his earlier work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), precisely because in this later work he was “exploring the proposition that social reality might be transformable through a transvaluation of values, [thus] harbouring considerable doubts about the feasibility of such an undertaking.” As Griffin explained:

Nietzsche was […] walking a tight-rope stretched between palingenesis as a social and metapolitical (but ultimately also political and revolutionary) project and palingenesis as ‘fiction’, as a literary trope, a utopian metaphor with which to investigate reality without any concrete strategy or even desire to intervene directly in the historical process in order to realize it.\(^{131}\)

This is the divide between epiphanic and programmatic modernism, with the same tension existing to some degree in all modernist thought.\(^{132}\) Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge fell decisively on the side of the programmatic (at least for a time) and thus developed social, political, and philosophical programmes that shared many essential features with fascist ideology, despite their isolation from the fascist milieu. In other words, it was the elaboration of their private meaning into a programme to encompass society and civilisation in their entirety. In the following chapter, their philosophical views will be further examined, particularly with reference to their philosophies of history and metaphysics, in order to more fully understand the factors that contributed to their development and embrace of fascist ideas.

---

\(^{130}\) Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 61-62.

\(^{131}\) Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 62.

\(^{132}\) Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 64-66.
HISTORY AND EXPECTANCY

No matter how barbarous we may become, no matter what atrocities may be committed, the only way in which mankind can progress is to establish once more his sovereign purpose and proceed towards the hidden future.

—William Hardy Wilson, *Eucalyptus* (1941)

As artists and intellectuals immersed in the currents of modernism in that period, William Hardy Wilson, Randolph Hughes, and William Baylebridge viewed history in largely Hegelian terms. This meant that they considered the present decadent modernity to be largely the result of individual choices—or more, individual indolence—that preferred the lighter course to the dictates of the Spirit, which constituted the only ‘right’ course for humanity. Their philosophies of history and metaphysics, therefore, are best understood as an attempt to explain and then overcome the present ‘decadent’ modernity by restoring humanity to this ‘right’ course of history. In so doing, their philosophies of history and metaphysics—which may be regarded as the elaboration of their private meanings into ‘time’ rather than ‘space’—served not only to provide a sense of meaning and transcendence in the present, but also to justify their belief that the restoration of the natural order that underpinned this meaning was actually possible, and could be achieved through programmatic means.

The significance of this is that their philosophies of history and metaphysics, together with their social and political theories, ultimately convinced them that fascism was the means through which the Spirit would achieve this restoration of the ‘right’ or natural order of history and reality.

In order to understand this aspect of their thought and its significance in their development and embrace of fascist ideas, this chapter will be divided into three sections, each of which will explore an aspect of this development. The first section will provide an account of the nature of their philosophies of history and metaphysics and its implications for both their social and political theories (§3.1). This will then be followed by an analysis of their interpretation of the present as a cultural and

---

1 William Hardy Wilson, *Eucalyptus* (Wandin: H. Wilson, 1941), 52.
ideological war between the Spirit (or Life) and its various antagonists, a view that was based directly on their philosophies of history and metaphysics (§3.2). Finally, this chapter will explore their reasons for choosing fascism rather than some other ‘world-historic’ movement, such as communism, as the movement of the Spirit of history (§3.3). To avoid an overly repetitive style, this chapter will use the term ‘philosophy of history’ to encompass both their philosophies of history and metaphysics. This is justified by the fact that the two are inextricably linked and that their philosophies of history are more clearly evidenced in their writings.

3.1: The spirit of history

One of the most recurrent themes in their writings was an emphasis on the importance of tradition and continuity, and that history was an ultimately purposive process. This belief, which assumed the existence of a ‘right’ or natural order to which ‘pre-modern’ societies had conformed, was the philosophical basis for their rejection of the present modernity as an aberration or discontinuity in this teleological process. This view appears to have stemmed from their belief that the present lacked the sense of meaning and wholeness that had characterised the premodern world—at least as they conceived it—when societies had their roots in traditional forms and structures. And though the role of tradition and continuity are important considerations in any attempted reconstruction of society (as Macainsh argued against Judith Wright), the embrace of tradition and continuity by Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge was also motivated by a simple preference for the achievements of the past.2 This meant that their philosophies of history were as much informed by their sense of reality as their own preferences and biases, if not more so. Consequently, the function and various implications of their philosophies of history cannot be determined solely from the fact of the influence of German Idealism, but must be uncovered through a close examination of their writings, which this section will attempt to do.

Through this examination of their various writings, it becomes clear that their philosophies of history, much like their social and political theories, stemmed from their own private search for meaning and transcendence. This was apparent in the case of all three men, but it can be seen with particular clarity in Baylebridge’s many unpublished essays. The significance of these essays is that they were not originally

---

intended for publication, but only as a form of private reflection. As a result, these essays are remarkably frank in their account of Baylebridge’s private thoughts and feelings. In one of these essays, called ‘Birth, and the Passage of Time’, Baylebridge offered some insight into his sense of the apparent meaninglessness of modern existence. “Musing here in the half-dark,” he said,

I take thought […] of what we call birth—of the thousand chances that conjoined, the thousand that stood aside, that I, who was not, might at last look upon the sun. Why was I born in the flesh that holds me? […] The finger of all things points to me; but the why of it I know not. At this stage, at least, there is little indication of a philosophy of history that could lead towards an embrace of authoritarian politics. But significantly, as the essay goes on, it becomes clear that he was considering this question of life’s meaning not simply in relation to his own personal existence but the totality of the human species across time—the medium, as it were, through which the Spirit achieved its goals. For this reason, together with its apparent longevity, this totality was one of the few points of metaphysical necessity that Baylebridge could accept, which he characterised in terms of the concept of fate. “Ah, this flight of time!” he said:

The eternal tragedy it is—the tragedy that frets men for ever. […] And yet (if there is comfort in a sop so poor), time runs not, though with swift foot he runs, against one only: all must keep step in the never-halting procession of the days and years; all, like soldiers in the same company—though the casualties and the scars of battle be thicker in some ranks—all must bear together the mark of the advance.

In this there is an evident attempt at finding solace in an almost stoical acceptance of this appalling condition (made so in part by the bleakness of his vision) as simply the nature of existence. But unlike the Stoics, Baylebridge believed that the universe was ultimately based on an active and creative rather than deterministic principle. This meant that reality was a process rather than an achieved totality, and that the individual could contribute to this process as a ‘finite centre’ of this creative process. This was reflective as much of the influence of Hegel as the Romantics, who embraced the philosophical view that the reality to which we conformed was in some sense created by ourselves. It was for this reason that Baylebridge could embrace an almost stoical attitude to reality alongside the belief that humanity’s greatness consisted in its ability

---

5 Baylebridge, ‘Birth, and the Passage of Time’, MLMSS 2786 Box 2, SLNSW, 2.
to consciously alter reality and so forge its own destiny. As he said in *National Notes*, “Man is what he is largely because he can interfere with [...] the evolution of the external world.”7 Perceptively, in contrast to the Stoic (and Judeo-Christian) view, which affirmed the *givenness* of reality, Baylebridge referred to this interference as ‘sin’, but claimed that because this interference was “the outstanding point of his [humanity’s] being”—that is, a condition of *life* itself—this ‘sinfulness’ was therefore *good*.8

The difference, then, was that his stoical views were intended only for the individual, essentially as a way to cope with being situated within a largely Hegelian framework, which for Baylebridge related more to the nation and humanity as a whole.

In this particular essay, it was this individual aspect that was most apparent:

> [As we take up the room resigned to us by the ranks in front, it is but just (as it is writ in the philosophies) that we step on, yes, even to the sheer edge, so that we give place to others, to those that thread upon our heels. [...] Such thoughts as these bring us sharply back to the self; and the self, we perceive, dies daily. Will nothing—for we have lost faith in the flatteries of the churchmen—will nothing shift this weight from our souls? Nothing, surely, but this—that we see ourselves as a link in a chain, the chain of that longer life that was in the beginning, that is now, that ever shall be. Thus (and how else?) shall we laugh at death. Thus shall we conquer time.]

Significantly, alongside this acceptance of fate, there is also in this passage a stress on the importance of continuity. It is for this reason that he described this totality as “that longer life that was in the beginning, that is now, that ever shall be”, which is an obvious and deliberate paraphrase of the Christian ‘Glory Be’. This emphasis on the importance of continuity was also reflected in another of Baylebridge’s unpublished essays, called ‘Past and Future’, in which he explained his reasons for rejecting the philosophy of the Italian Futurists. In this essay, apparently written during his time in London, he described one of his many trips to the British Museum, during which he considered the teachings of the Futurists.10 “I came here,” he said,

> fresh from a reading of the Futurists, those fanatics who would sweep the world clean of record. Here, in this room of old marbles, things they would [do] away with. I have turned their ideas over, and find them foolish only.11

For Baylebridge, it was the creative accomplishments of humanity that attested to the workings of the Spirit, and that the creation of such works was the purpose of existence. As he said in *The New Life*, “A creator is who, in the divine reckoning, adds

---

8 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 156.
9 Baylebridge, ‘Birth, and the Passage of Time’, MLMSS 2786 Box 2, SLNSW, 2.
10 Letter from Robert Graham Brown to Ida Leeson, 5 November 1943, MLMSS 951, SLNSW, 1.
something to Earth. To do this is Man’s reason for existence.”12 “In these stones,” he said, referring again to the works collected in the British Museum,

telling of the activities of men in old seasons, is written up many a precious page of the chronicles of mankind. They are links in the chain of man’s Greater Self, statements in the round, emotional, mental, and spiritual, of man in diverse time. They are the visualisations of the words in the book of man’s history. Who would slay this would [slay also] the humanity it makes note of.13

And this Greater Self, it must be noted, was only humanity itself as it worked in concert with this Spirit of history, which was the source of all creativity.

Conceived in this way, history appeared simpler and more predictable, now understood as the gradual unfolding of an ultimately purposive metaphysical process, of which the present was only a moment between the fulnesses of past and future. Evidently, this sense of continuity remained an important principle for Baylebridge, who said in This Vital Flesh that he rejected “that colossal presumption that man has followed a false light from the beginning, and is to be put right in a day”—referring in this to expressions of modernism, like Marxism and Futurism, that actively sought to break with the past.14 He was committed to a different kind of modernism, a modernism that combined radical and reactionary elements. As he said in that same preface:

[My] books […] would not turn to nothing the truth of all those souls who, from the beginning, have offered themselves on the altar of man’s spirit, who have contributed something to swell that immeasurable gift by which man must live if he would live at all—those souls with whom we are united in the soul which has dominion over all souls, which makes man one and indivisible […].15

In other words, despite the radicalism of some aspects of his thought, Baylebridge remained committed to the past as a kind of philosophical anchor, which stemmed from his embrace of an essentially Hegelian philosophy of history, together with the fact that his sense of meaning relied in large part on this connection with the past.

Yet the effectiveness of this solution is doubtful, in both its stoical and other philosophical expressions. In fact, there is a fascinating tension between deference and defiance throughout Baylebridge’s writings that clearly attest to the burden of this conception, which he embraced with such great personal urgency. This was apparent in some of his earliest poetry, such as ‘The Confirmed Heart’, in which he had not yet embraced the fatalism that would characterise his later works:

12 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, 104.
13 Baylebridge, ‘Past and Future’, MLMSS 2786 Box 2, SLNSW, 2.
14 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, iii.
15 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, iii-iv.
Since pity, Fate, you lack,
Know this—I dare
Your evils bear,
And hurl your curses back.

What! shall I tamely feel,
And so invite
To further spite,
Your coarse and heavy heel?

[...]

Let dupes your cringing do
Yea, turn the meek
Abusèd cheek,
That you may stripe it too.

Let them espouse your thrust,
And lie there still
When, as you will,
You'll smite them to the dust.

But while these hests of mine
Their motion hold,
I’ll be so bold
As yours, Fate, to decline.

I shall not lick the hand
That plies the lash.
I’ll be so rash—
I’ll serve not; I’ll command. 16

But in the end, despite this defiant streak in his nature, he ultimately accepted deference, though not without retaining some trace of this earlier defiance. This can be clearly seen in An Anzac Muster, in which he presented fate as an almost hostile force to be fought and defied, yet ultimately obeyed.

In fact, in one of the novel’s most revealing chapters, a group of deserters are led at gun-point by their commanding officer to the body of a dead pack-mule and explained that if they wished to be counted as honourable men, they had to accept death as ‘nobly’ as the pack-mule had done. “Look, now, upon this lost mule,” the officer said:

This poor beast, who died fearless, and with that faith without which, whether man or brute, there can be no life—this poor beast, I say, beggars men with the thin veins of cowards. And when the Register of this Death is written up by the Divine Hand, would you that this mule were worthy of a place in it, and that you yourselves were not? [...] So long as you hold to this base fashion of doing, you are less than the leaves about us—for at least these served as nature meant them to [...] but to share with a willing heart the sweat and travail of comrades, to bottom all upon honour, to put faith in

---

providence that lets true intent come to nothing—these acts of the spirit, and such acts as these alone, give life to a man.\textsuperscript{17}

This idea that Life is, at least in part, the defiance of fate was discussed in the previous chapter, where it was argued that it was central to Baylebridge’s conception of masculinity. In that same chapter, it was also noted that this conception of masculinity was central to his understanding of history. Here, in their originating context, his conceptions of history and masculinity take on their full significance as an answer to his own desperate need for meaning and transcendence—a need so desperate that he was willing to accept such a crushing pessimism as ultimately liberating. The burden that this placed on himself is attested throughout his writings, but perhaps most notably in \textit{Life’s Testament}, which, in several places, drifts into an almost gnostic disdain for the body. And it is not without significance that the manuscript of ‘Birth, and the Passage of Time’ is dated 1922, which was the around the same time that \textit{An Anzac Muster} was first published. This suggests that they were written at roughly the same time, which would indicate that their conceptions of fate were essentially the same, differing only in aspect and intensity.\textsuperscript{18}

Wilson’s philosophy of history, in many ways comparable to Baylebridge’s own, also had its origins in a private search for meaning and transcendence. As Zeny Edwards said, “Things did not just present themselves to Hardy Wilson: they assaulted his senses with their vibrant colour, harangued him with their ugliness, or pierced his heart with their ‘uncreativeness’.”\textsuperscript{19} The reason for this is that his sense of meaning and purpose was so intimately tied to aesthetic experience that its apparent absence was an existential threat. Thus, like Baylebridge, he attributed most (if not all) of modernity’s ills to this absence of ‘creativity’. An example of this was his description of King’s Cross in London in the \textit{Dawn of a New Civilization}:

\begin{quote}
Dreary narrows streets ran in all directions—under railway bridges, between dismal-looking buildings blackened by fogs and smoke—thronged with vans and horses and crowds of people, who, despite their surroundings, were universally cheerful. No ray of sunshine seemed above to penetrate the gloom. Richard began to wonder how it was that mankind could build so vile a place. He had not yet learned how wide is the gulf between man and beauty.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} Baylebridge, ‘Birth, and the Passage of Time’, MLMSS 2786 Box 2, SLNSW, 1.
\textsuperscript{20} William Hardy Wilson, \textit{The Dawn of a New Civilization} (London: Cecil Palmer, 1929), 15.
Soon afterwards, in his search for a new way forward for humanity (and himself), he committed himself to the task of creating a truly original architectural style.\textsuperscript{21} His reason for appointing himself to the task was that he was convinced that humanity had reached a kind of ‘pause’ in the metaphysical process, which believed could be solved through creative effort.

This process was advanced, as in Baylebridge’s conception, by the cooperation of humanity with the Spirit. But he warned that if a new source of creative inspiration were not soon discovered, this ‘pause’ would become permanent—echoing Pearson’s own fears that socialists were striving to eliminate the struggles that nourished creativity.\textsuperscript{22} Baylebridge also feared this end for humanity. As he said in \textit{National Notes}:

\begin{quote}
The physical, intellectual, and artistic development of ancient Greece, and the intensity of her intertribal struggles, suggest a direct relation between those struggles and that development. Did not her development ease, physically, and above all spiritually, in the relaxing atmosphere of the\textit{pax Romana}? … Life needs energy.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

But alongside this vitalistic rejection of stasis, Wilson also embraced a highly aristocratic conception of society and politics (as discussed in the previous chapter) that informed his understanding of creative development. In his view, all creative development had to be based on the creative achievements of the past, which together formed a tradition that reached back into the earliest stages of prehistory, when art was first based on nature itself.\textsuperscript{24} As he said in the \textit{Dawn of a New Civilization}:

\begin{quote}
Under no circumstances will a new creative period be started which is not founded on that which has gone before. Every creative age in the past has followed the path which preceded it. The fault in many modern endeavours was to try to create anew with no better basis than desire, and always has resulted in the disarray of prevailing fashions without new blossoming.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

Originality, then, became not a matter of vision but \textit{foresight}, a matter of discerning the predetermined course of creative development as the Spirit (or Nature) worked through the medium of creative minds. This provided not only a philosophical basis for a purposive view of history, comparable Baylebridge’s own, but also served to justify the prevailing order of power. The reason for this is that Wilson believed that creative development was impossible without the guidance and patronage of the ‘appointed’ ruling class. “Money is the vehicle of progress,” he said, which meant that

\textsuperscript{21} Wilson, \textit{Dawn of a New Civilization}, 95-96.
\textsuperscript{22} Wilson, \textit{Dawn of a New Civilization}, 90-91.
\textsuperscript{23} Baylebridge, \textit{This Vital Flesh}, 200.
\textsuperscript{25} Wilson, \textit{Dawn of a New Civilization}, 281.
“[t]he idea of banishing the rich, who finance creative productions, is to do away with the opportunities for progress, because money is the means by which it can be assisted.”

And though he believed that the eventual demise of humanity into a state of permanent stagnation was ultimately inevitable, he was confident that it could be delayed through the creative effort of artists, who formed a spiritual elite. In this sense, Wilson’s philosophy of history was comparable to that of Baylebridge, in that both conceived of creative effort as a revolt against fate, for it was only creativity that could elevate humanity to a real spiritual existence.

Though differing in subtle ways, Hughes’ philosophy of history shared many essential characteristics with those of Wilson and Baylebridge. But as always, Hughes was the most cogent of the three, presenting a view that combined Nietzschean ethics with the idealist metaphysics of such thinkers as T. H. Green, F. H. Bradley, J. M. E. McTaggart, and Samuel Alexander. These, at least, are the influences that Hughes claimed for himself. It is known that he rejected much of Hegel’s system, particularly his dialectical understanding of history. As he told Jack Lindsay, “I am suspicious of all Dialectical systems, and in particular the most grandiose and plausible of all, [which is] Hegel’s”. Yet despite his rejection of Hegel’s dialectical conception, he does not seem to have rejected the idea that there was a creative Spirit guiding the historical process, which acted through creative minds. In fact, it becomes apparent, through an examination of his various writings, that this Spirit was an essential part of his own private spirituality, which meant that it was intimately connected to his search for meaning and transcendence. “I have always claimed to be religious,” he explained to Kaeppel, “in that I have lived by and for the forces of the Spirit as I find them working in the universe and especially in the achievements of the human mind”.

But like Wilson, Hughes was not confident that this Spirit would ultimately achieve its goals. As he told Lindsay in another letter:

The deity in the universe is striving to achieve this [its own] totality, with all that it involves; but it is still a long way from its goal, and it is not at all sure that it will ever reach it; it is even possible—tho’ not probable, I think—that it may fail to secure the mastery of things. Success depends largely on us; for we are part of the deity […]..

26 Wilson, *Dawn of a New Civilization*, 263.
27 William Hardy Wilson, “Communism and Existence,” *Advocate* (Burnie, Tas.), 17 August 1933, 2.
28 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Edwyn Bevan, 10 May 1935, MLMSS 671/7, SLNSW, 1-4; Letter from Randolph Hughes to Nesta Helen Webster, 12 September 1938, MLMSS 671/24, SLNSW, 1-2.
29 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Jack Lindsay, 24 February 1936, MLMSS 671/15, SLNSW, 2.
31 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Jack Lindsay, 15 March 1935, MLMSS 671/15, SLNSW, 1.
The most relevant point to take from this passage is that his ‘deity’ is not omnipotent but limited by the finite resources of human effort and creativity—which, incidentally, was his reason for rejecting the inevitability of progress. For Hughes, progress was not an automatic process but had to be positively willed into being. This meant that history only moved forward through the cooperation of humanity with the Spirit, which he believed had its highest expression in art. For the creation of beauty, he said, was “in the ultimate […] the highest and perhaps only manifestation and operation of deity in the universe”. The significance of this, alongside its allowance for the problem of evil, is that it provided humanity—or more, the elite of humanity—with a meaningful struggle in which to dedicate their lives, thus restoring them to a sense of meaning and purpose to life.

Notably, this idea that the creation of beauty is the highest expression of the Spirit was intimately connected for Hughes with his sense of meaning and transcendence. In fact, it is clear that the phenomenon he identified as ‘deity’ was actually the very sense of meaning and purpose that he derived from aesthetic (or epiphanic) experience. Indeed, his sense of meaning and transcendence was so deeply connected to this aesthetic understanding of ‘deity’ that life seemed impossible without it. As he confessed to Lindsay in a remarkably personal letter, “it is a matter of spiritual life or death for me.” The provocation of this admission was their discussions on the subject of Marxism, which Lindsay adopted in 1936, having formerly embraced the Nietzschean aestheticism of his father, Norman. In many ways, Marxism represented the exact opposite of Hughes’ own position, partly because it shared many fundamental characteristics with the Judeo-Christian position. But his main reason for rejecting Marxism was that it was incompatible with the elitism and aesthetic spirituality on which his sense of meaning and purpose relied. Marxism, therefore, and by extension the Judeo-Christian view, was simply unacceptable, “for it furnishes me with no good reason for wishing to live.” As he explained to Lindsay in another letter:

You, of course, who virtually harness art to politics, economics, etc., and thus equate or rather subordinate the master to the servants, the eternal to the ephemeral, will not be able to accept this view of mine. But you will never be able to alter or shake my conviction on this point; it is something central, radical, and all-controlling for me.

32 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Jack Lindsay, 26 March 1936, MLMSS 671/15, SLNSW, 7.
33 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Jack Lindsay, 26 March 1936, MLMSS 671/15, SLNSW, 8.
34 Letter from Jack Lindsay to Randolph Hughes, 12 February 1936, MLMSS 671/15, SLNSW, 3.
36 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Jack Lindsay, 1 March 1936, MLMSS 671/15, SLNSW, 7.
personally: if it went, life would cease to have any sufficient meaning for me, and the
world would collapse about me. All my instinct, all my purpose in being born, is
linked up with this.37

In other words, his sense of meaning and transcendence was absolutely dependent on
his belief that history was an ultimately purposive process, and that he could contribute
in some meaningful way to the progress of this creative process.

In sum, it is clear that their philosophies of history, which stemmed in large
part from their private search for meaning and transcendence, served them each in
several different ways. Firstly, their philosophies of history provided them each with
a conception of history as an ultimately purposive process, which served to mitigate
the ambiguities of modernity and to confirm that a different kind of present was
possible—a present not bereft of meaning and wholeness. Similarly, by characterising
the present as an aberration of sorts in the historical process, their philosophies of
history also served to justify their idealisation of the past and the future as somehow
immune to the ambiguities of the present. Thirdly, as discussed in the previous chapter,
their philosophies of history also served to confirm their belief that as male artists they
performed an indispensable function in advancing the progress of history and
civilisation—indeed, life itself.

3.2: The portal of the present
Their philosophies of history provided them each with a way to conceive of the present
and its relation to the past and future, not to mention the philosophical justification
needed for reducing the present to a mere “transition time” (to borrow Baylebridge’s
phrase) between the fulnesses of past and future.38 In this way, they conceived of the
present as a kind of portal—that is to say, a means—through which this new world
might emerge. This view, which was largely derived from the philosophies of
modernism and German Idealism, was embraced by all three men, and had significant
implications for their understanding of their own lives as well as their relation to the
great events of the period. In this regard, it is perhaps unsurprising that each of them,
whether consciously or not, cast themselves in a prophetic role in relation to the
present, a notion with some precedent in the movements of early nineteenth-century
Romanticism and late nineteenth-century Aestheticism, but which found its fullest

37 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Jack Lindsay, 26 March 1936, MLMSS 671/15, SLNSW, 7.
38 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, 70.
expression in the writings of such prophetic modernists as Nietzsche and the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch.\footnote{Roger Griffin, Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 90-96.} In short, their conception of the present as a ‘portal’ through which the Spirit achieved its work was the application of their philosophies of history to the present. In this section, the implication of this application for their embrace of fascist ideas will be explored in detail.

In Wilson’s case, his interpretation of the present was characterised primarily by the determinism of his philosophy, which, when compared to the philosophies of Baylebridge and Hughes, was unique in the diminished capacity it gave to human agency. In principle, Wilson’s philosophy should not have denied this agency. But what arises, due less to his philosophy than his acute awareness of the deteriorating condition of society and politics, was an increasingly pessimistic view of human agency and, consequently, the intrinsic value of human life. For Baylebridge, it was simply inconceivable that progress was “wholly an accidental matter […] entirely without reference to any conscious agency that preceded it.”\footnote{Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, xii.} Wilson, on the other hand, believed that progress was advanced by an unconscious desire for ‘new creativeness’—which was precisely the view that Baylebridge largely rejected.\footnote{Wilson, Dawn of a New Civilization, 261-263.}

Baylebridge certainly accepted the role of an unconscious will. But since the burden of his philosophy was to provide a sense of competence and mobility, yet also a closed and in some sense predictable universe, it sought to affirm the compatibility of free will with determinism.\footnote{Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, xii-xiv.} Though it is arguable whether he succeeded in achieving this synthesis, it is significant that the attempt is made. Wilson, however, made no such attempt. For him, these deterministic forces were his primary concern. And though his view of agency was not always so bleak (his earliest writings lack this pessimism), as the social and political situation became increasingly dire, his theories came to exclude entirely the possibility of agency and choice. He ultimately concluded that humanity had no choice but to obey the dictates of the Spirit (or Nature, as he called it). Later, in his 1945 book \textit{Instinct}, he adopted the term ‘Instinct’ to refer to this same force, which only intensified an already narrow scope of movement, so that humanity had to accept not only subservience but destruction at the hands of this metaphysical force.\footnote{William Hardy Wilson, Instinct (Wandin: H. Wilson, 1945), 7-11.}
Signs of this crushing fatalism can be seen as early as 1929, in the *Dawn of a New Civilization*, where he lamented that Goya would have been a greater artist “had he belonged to an earlier age.”\textsuperscript{44} The greatness of an artist, he claimed, was determined entirely by the age in which he lived, by the importance and vitality of that age relative to other creative periods. “It is a tragedy,” he said, to see the work of an artist who has been the victim of the period in which he dwelt. But there is no escape from it. All mankind moves onward together, and no matter if the artist leads in his generation, his position must become that of the age in which he lived.\textsuperscript{45}

He also claimed that his own failure as an artist was caused by this factor.\textsuperscript{46} And it is not without significance, for understanding these three men, that Wilson also expressed here an attitude comparable to that of Baylebridge, in that he conceived of the individual as wholly subject to humanity as a whole—that is, to ‘mankind together’. The only difference is that Wilson characterised this subjugation in a variety of different ways, largely due to his diverse range of influences. But despite their disparate sources, these different theories regarding the points of necessity to which the individual was subject were ultimately conflated in his writings as the aspects of the one power in different spheres.

His characterisation of this process became increasingly merciless over time, without the grace afforded by Baylebridge’s emphasis on the power of agency. Instead, in large part reflecting his own increasingly bleak view of the world, his characterisation of this process was slowly dehumanised. “Nature has always imposed her will on man,” he said in 1929, “eliminating the weak, and preserving and multiplying the strong.”\textsuperscript{47} But then, in *Eucalyptus* (1941), written in part during the terrible drought and bushfire season of the late 1930s, his pessimism became complete:

*Man is as helpless as the tiniest worm in the hands of nature. So powerful is the working of Nature that, whether we intend or not, our thoughts and actions lead to the same end. We are helpless. Nature causes races of people to disappear with the same indifference as she causes worms to vanish, when they fail to obey or follow her purpose.*\textsuperscript{48}

Elsewhere in the book he was even more explicit on this point. For instance, when he mentioned his first wife’s death in passing (she died in 1939), he said that the reason he had never mentioned her in his writings before was that his writings were “based

\textsuperscript{44} Wilson, *Dawn of a New Civilization*, 168.
\textsuperscript{45} Wilson, *Dawn of a New Civilization*, 168.
\textsuperscript{46} Wilson, *Dawn of a New Civilization*, 168.
\textsuperscript{47} Wilson, *Dawn of a New Civilization*, 263.
\textsuperscript{48} Wilson, *Eucalyptus*, 404.
on the vast struggle for new creativeness. And in that struggle human lives were of small account.”\(^{49}\) In another place, when describing the state of the world, he said that it was “all a sign of the times, when humanity no longer counts, except as a mass of people, without regard for beauty, which is dead.”\(^{50}\)

Indeed, his attitude had become so hopelessly bleak that he found it fitting to end *Eucalyptus* with his own fictionalised suicide. After witnessing the terrible bushfires in Victoria in 1939, he moved to the Kurrajong Ranges in neighbouring New South Wales, where he encountered the same natural catastrophe. “Death was on every hand,” he said, describing the sight of the drought-stricken land, “where starving stock drooped hopelessly, and a few figures moved slowly about their tasks.”\(^{51}\) Then, in a passage filled with philosophical significance, Wilson stated that in this destruction “Richard came face to face with Nature.”\(^{52}\) And so, echoing the famous nature passages of Lawrence’s *Kangaroo* (1923), a novel he adored, Wilson gave his own metaphorical rendering of the Australian landscape as an active hostile force:

Kurrajong Range […] is a symbol of man’s struggle with Nature. It stands as a barrier before the unconquerable West. On one side, the seaward side, man has planted himself and fights to preserve civilization. On the interior side, the eucalyptus bars the way. It is a fight between man and Nature, but Nature more terrible and menacing than anything else in the world. Legions of eucalypts bide their time before sweeping men, who dared trespass, into the sea.\(^{53}\)

Eucalyptus trees were present in the *Dawn of a New Civilization* as an unexamined symbol of Nature’s destructiveness.\(^{54}\) But in *Eucalyptus*, perhaps the truest reflection of Wilson’s mental world, their significance was made abundantly clear, where the trees, arrayed like soldiers, drive Richard to suicide:

Grey-blue smoke enveloped everything. Birds, with wide-open beaks, lodged in the trees, a moment, and then, flew into the forest below the cliff. The eucalyptus was burning. Richard rose from his seat and saw flames racing towards him. His retreat was cut-off by the fire. Only the cliff remained. Then he went over. The eucalyptus had won.\(^{55}\)

Wilson’s *alter ego* was dead, driven to suicide by Nature itself. But in so doing, he had followed the guidance of birds, which symbolised hope and renewal in his writings.\(^{56}\)

For by this late stage in his intellectual development, Wilson had come increasingly to

\(^{49}\) Wilson, *Eucalyptus*, 362.
\(^{50}\) Wilson, *Eucalyptus*, 192.
\(^{52}\) Wilson, *Eucalyptus*, 407.
\(^{54}\) Edwards, “Biography,” 47.
\(^{55}\) Wilson, *Eucalyptus*, 408.
\(^{56}\) Wilson, *Dawn of a New Civilization*, 213–216.
see destruction itself as an ultimately *creative* act, for it cleansed the world of decadence. The relevance of this to suicide is difficult to determine. But it is certain that Wilson intended this suicide to represent, at least in part, the possibility of rebirth—though also, I suspect, an exhaustion with life. For as he told Miles in 1936, “One cannot be destructive towards things which are dead.”

Though this idea was given its complete explication in *Instinct*, it was present implicitly in *Eucalyptus*, in which the protagonist’s suicide is followed by an almost hopeful appendix, written shortly before its completion in 1941:

> This book is written with pessimism and optimism. Between the two, the future may unfold. It is certain that Nature is the controlling force. To understand Nature is the task before creative workers. Always Nature is simple in working, but the simplicity baffles.

The contents of *Instinct* will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. For now, it is only relevant to note that it was intended as a guide of sorts for minimising the destructiveness of Nature, which Wilson believed to have been ‘angered’, as it were, by humanity’s unwillingness to obey. “As an old man with a mind failing in memory,” he said, “I write this book hoping to spread these thoughts for the benefit of humanity, […] treating all people […] as being subject to the same force, which is called instinct.”

Baylebridge also accepted the existence of this metaphysical force, which he referred to variously as ‘god’ or ‘spirit’. But unlike Wilson, whose ideas were dominated by this metaphysical force, Baylebridge conceived of the present primarily as an ideological battle between what he called “strength and loveliness and their antagonisms.” “Perhaps never till our own day,” he said in the preface to *This Vital Flesh*, “has the world seen so great a travail of the spirit of man; perhaps never before has that spirit been so threatened by forces pregnant for its destruction.” The source of this pending crisis, he said, was humanity’s “precarious liberation” from the ‘certain truths’ of premodern existence. This was the chaotic condition of the present modernity, and from this chaos, he claimed, “something sinister is now emerging:

---

57 Quoted in Wilson, *Eucalyptus*, 146.
58 Wilson, *Eucalyptus*, 409.
60 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, ii.
61 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, ii.
62 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, ii.
always more of the forces mentioned are taking definite shape.”

“They are forces,” he said,

that seem pledged to destroy much, and perhaps all, that man in his best manifestations had considered good—pledged to set up on earth a supremacy of the things he once rejected. More than one of those forces has proclaimed itself, established itself, and is now making its way through the world.

His account of these forces is never more detailed than this. But it becomes apparent, from a close study of Baylebridge’s writings, that these forces can be defined as those that sought to re-establish the “relaxing atmosphere of the pax Romana”, which would eliminate the pain and stress that nourished life in the fullest sense. And clearly, given the context in which Baylebridge was writing, there are several movements that immediately present themselves as complicit in this pernicious cabal. These include liberalism, socialism, communism, and the League of Nations, each of which was believed to have imbibed the ‘life-denying’ ethos of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

One of the clearest indications of this is the volume’s closing poem, ‘The Betrayal’, in which this amalgam of forces is presented as a kind of cosmic conspiracy against the species, which had its source in its own preference for comfort and ease.

What first—inviolate yet—our truth released
From the constraint and closure of the beast?
Restrictive law was it that would instate
But one type till the latest date?
Was it referred, unvisioned, to the past?
Or at some synod in the clouds upcast?
Was it an opiate, virtue queerly styled,
Fed to a vigorous-waking child?
Did it thrust out a swine’s long nose
To smell out every swine that goes?
Did it employ its knees for that revenge
Its arms could compass not—still doomed to cringe?
Or did it hold a brief for death, and give
The lie to life, unmoved, and think to live?
Servilely did it succour, yea, and more,
The dearth of the degenerate and poor?
Was its first premise that the proud and brave
Are human accidentals, and deprave?
That lust, intolerance, and sin—
But only as named by the effete and thin—
With all who touch them, must disparaged be,
As things accurst, to all eternity?
Did its perversion put the crown on fools?

63 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, ii.
64 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, ii.
65 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, 200.
66 Macainsh was also unable to determine what exactly Baylebridge was referring to here, though he speculates that communism was at least part of this amalgam, if not fascism too—though I would disagree with the suggestion that Baylebridge had ever problematised fascism in this way. His characterisation of this amalgam of forces as those intent on ‘softening life’ is clearly inconsistent with fascism. Macainsh, Nietzsche in Australia, 50-53.
67 In this excerpt, Baylebridge is describing the triumph of the Judeo-Christian tradition over the truths of life, which the classical tradition understood.
And cumber Earth with circumvention’s schools?
All this, and such as this, did it devise?
The answer falters not—and thus replies.

[...] Thus man, the appointed justification
Of Earth and breath, adopts negation.
Where stands his truth—now out of date,
Or cloaked, or scourged as reprobate?
O heed! mark how perversely small
This fatuous doing makes us all—
This paring away of vital rights,
This propagation of parasites,
This future, of this present bred, to be
A multiplication of misery.

This was largely reflective of Nietzsche’s own cultural critique—and it is clear from his various writings that Baylebridge considered this same critique to stand for liberalism and communism, which he believed were expressions of the same ‘self-negating’ ethos. Furthermore, liberalism and communism, as Enlightenment creeds, also affirmed the equality of human beings, and in their preference for the poor and oppressed (at least in principle), they each rejected the validity of worldly hierarchies. For Baylebridge, it mattered little whether these principles were practiced consistently or not. For him, the apparent hypocrisy of their practitioners only confirmed the falsity of their ideas.

Therefore, against the ‘negative’ doctrines of communism, liberalism, and the Judeo-Christian tradition, he proposed the New Nationalism. And though he had spent decades committing his ideas to paper (largely, as seen, for the sense of meaning and purpose this activity provided), its success ultimately depended, he claimed, not on humanity’s understanding but on their willingness to cooperate with the Spirit as it brought this new world into being—a world comprised, it seems, of fascist nation-states. “Though the rearguard of conservatism would passionately deny it,” he said, in an appendix to *This Vital Flesh*,

an assured spiritual reorientation seems now to be underway in the world; human institutions and human values, apart from the few that are immutable, are again in the melting pot; and, to those who have eyes to see, the emergence of a new order of things is already visible. 

---

68 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 227, 229-230.
71 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 253-254.
Much like Wilson, he came increasingly to regard the deteriorating condition of society and politics in that period as the very process by which this ‘new order’ would emerge. He also stressed that humanity had no real choice—despite his affirmation of agency—but to obey this cosmic process:

Man in any case could not exclude such processes if he would: they are a part of the law which makes breath itself possible. But there are points of time at which those processes are quickened and ruthlessly emphasized; and to such a point of time we appear to have again come.

This process would mean much destruction, and in a letter to Valentine Crowley (a member of Stephensen’s Australia First Movement) in 1940, he identified this process explicitly with the Second World War. But this chaos, thought Baylebridge, was not simply another instance of pointless destruction—for he regarded no war as pointless. Rather, it was an invitation to a deeper kind of life, just as the Great War had been, in which humanity could rediscover its true nature in the face of death, and so create for itself a new existence against this steadily encroaching amalgam of ‘evils’. For as he said in the third appendix to *This Vital Flesh*, written shortly before its publication in 1939:

The dispensation to which the present turmoil is but the prelude should be hailed with eagerness of spirit not beneath our convictions, embraced with a foresighted vigour, forwarded with all the strengths we possess. In truth, such a resurgence has long been overdue. When the debris of the reconstruction has been cleared away (the dirt, the doubt, and the suffering), men will understand that another round has been won, reluctantly or otherwise, in the battle that life compels them to wage for its redemption—a battle perpetually recurring, and always to be undertaken anew.

This perpetual battle was the philosophy of history and metaphysics through which he interpreted the present, and it was into this ‘myth’ that he was inviting his fellow Australians, but it seems there were few who listened—and even fewer who were prepared to follow him.

Similarly, Hughes also conceived of the present in terms of this ideological conflict. As he explained to several of his correspondents, this historic battle was

---

72 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 253-254.
73 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 254.
74 The Australia First Movement was a pro-fascist organisation founded by Stephensen in 1941. Letter from William Baylebridge to Valentine Crowley, 25 October 1940, MLMSS 2786 Box 1, SLNSW, 1.
75 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 254.
76 As T. Inglis Moore wrote to him in 1936, after receiving a copy of the third edition of *National Notes*: “Nearly all your ideas I welcome & agree with—you have concentrated much wisdom in curt phrasing … [But] I am antagonistic to nationalism. In theory as you put it, it sounds like a valuable regenerating tonic, but in effect nationalism as in Germany, Italy, etc. becomes Fascism, an enslaving tonic, suppressing the individual, exalting the head, mind & the mob-sentiments of fear, hate, aggression, sadism. It is the biggest danger in the world to-day. The universal? Yes. The individual? Yes. The national? No.” Letter from T. Inglis Moore to William Baylebridge, 12 August 1936, MLMSS 1284 Box 127, SLNSW, 2.
between the ‘self-negating’ values of the Judeo-Christian tradition (from which he considered liberalism and Marxism to have derived) and the ‘positive’ values of Europe’s Graeco-Roman culture, which he believed was its ‘true’ heritage. This was the great contest of values foreseen by Nietzsche, the great ‘transvaluation’ that would purge Europe and modernity of the values of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In fact, Hughes believed that this conflict was of such immense importance that he considered it the chief motivation behind the communist and fascist movements. “[I]t is significant,” he told Kaeppel, “that the two great forces in whose keeping will lie the master decisions of this century, that represented by Germany on the one hand and that by Russia on the other, are both hard set against Christianity.”

This concern for Europe’s fate was perhaps the most important motivation for his embrace of the fascist cause from 1935 to 1939. The reason for this is that it was precisely in terms of this impending conflict that Hughes conceived of fascism and the fascist movement. “[W]hat is truly fundamental in Germany,” he told Jacques Delebecque in 1938, “is the question of Judaic and Christian values, which the Nazis are bent on systemically expelling from the State.” The fact that he projected this ‘culture war’ onto the Nazi regime specifically can be seen in his 1936 pamphlet, The New Germany, which he wrote after returning from a state-sponsored tour of the country earlier that year. “[T]he new Germany,” he said, “is not fighting shy of this work of revaluation, from the Church downwards, and is not hesitating before the more or less drastic processes of readjustment that are dictated by the new values.”

Evidently, this impending conflict was not simply an idea for Hughes, but an immediate and threatening reality that would decide the fate of the world. And it was in his final letter to Kaeppel that he gave his clearest account of this conflict and its place in the grand scheme of things. “You see then,” he told Kaeppel,
aside from the question of Christianity, contain much to which I can give my adhesion; a thing that is not true of Bolshevist Russia.\footnote{Letter from Randolph Hughes to Carl Kaeppel, 17 November 1937, MLMSS 671/9, SLNSW, 8-9.}

With this approaching conflict, Hughes found comfort in the strength and willingness of the Nazi regime to achieve “this work of revaluation”, even if it meant possibly facing a former friend on the battlefield.

To conclude, it is evident that in applying their philosophies of history to the present, they each arrived at highly comparable interpretations of the present, according to which the world was in the midst of an immense purgative process, out of which would emerge a new world not marred by decadence. This is significant, for it allowed them to conceive of the present as a ‘portal’ through which this new world might appear. Furthermore, it allowed them to reduce the present to a mere means in the historical process, a channel through which the Spirit achieved its work, that could be dispensed with the moment the future had arrived. In the following section, these philosophies and their resulting conceptions of the present will be explored in relation to their social and political views as a final and decisive precondition to their embrace of fascist ideas and the fascist cause by the mid-1930s.

3.3: In search of the millennium

Throughout the preceding sections and chapters, this study has attempted to chart the personal and intellectual development of these three men. The purpose of this has been to explain this embrace despite their isolation during their formative years from the centres of fascism in Europe. In so doing, this study has identified a number of personal, historical, and intellectual factors that contributed to this embrace—which, it must be noted, remained ultimately a matter of personal choice. But despite this, the contributing factors are not without significance, for our capacity for choice is always limited by our apprehension of the world. For this reason, I have referred to these factors as ‘preconditions’. The last of these preconditions was their interpretation of the present, which was described in detail in the previous section. A significant point to note, however, is that even with these various preconditions informing their ideas, their choice of fascism was not inevitable. With some modification, these same preconditions could have led to a variety of different political or apolitical positions. The Nietzschean aestheticism of the Lindsay circle, for instance, was another possible avenue of radical and reactionary thought in Australia. But in their particular case,
Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge each chose to embrace fascism and fascist ideas instead, for a variety of important but not deterministic factors.

Therefore, because their embrace of fascism was not an inevitable consequence of their influences, it is necessary to explore in detail their particular (and in many ways preferential) reasons for identifying fascism as the movement through which the Spirit would achieve its purposed ends, and embracing it (in however qualified a form) for precisely that reason. In this section, it will be argued that their drift into a programmatic expression of modernism (which entailed the elaboration of their own private meaning into social and political programmes), together with their philosophies of history and metaphysics, led ultimately to the development and embrace of fascist ideas—though not without some recognition of the at least prima facie viability of communism as a manifestation of the Spirit in its own right. For this reason, when all three men sought to identify the current activities of the Spirit in the world, as described in the previous section, they each came to recognise both fascism and communism as potential harbingers of this new world. However, on the basis of their social, political, and philosophical views (not to mention some measure of personal preference), they each ultimately chose fascism as the movement that would restore meaning and transcendence to life.

The first of these preconditions was their embrace of programmatic modernism, which, in concert with the human propensity to generate ‘myth’ (a propensity known as ‘mythopoeia’), they became convinced that a solution to the crisis of modernity would appear as though apocalyptically in the present—a pattern which Griffin observed in countless other ‘literary’ fascists.83 Another significant precondition was their belief that morality was based ultimately on power—which, as an achieved effect in history, was indicative of the Spirit of history. In so doing, they considered themselves fit to interpret the present and determine the current activities of the Spirit through their own creative efforts, which they believed were in some sense constitutive of that Spirit. In this regard, Wilson applied his climatic theories to contemporary politics and found that the two existing fascist regimes, namely Italy and Germany, were in warm and cold climates respectively, which were the two climatic influences that he believed had to synergise to inspire ‘new creativeness’. This meant that when fascism and communism appeared on the world-stage as potential

83 Griffin, Modernism and Fascism, 100-117.
means to this long-awaited change, it was not long before all three men had recognised this potential viability. It was for this reason that Baylebridge said, in the preface to This Vital Flesh, that the works it contained had been written between 1909 and 1913, noting with emphasis that “it might interest some readers to compare these dates with those of the Russian, Italian, German, and other [national] experiments.” In the preface to the third edition of National Notes, which he published in 1936, he described Russia again as “the first of the modern national reconstruction” and as a country that reflected his own ideas. For this reason, he concluded that his ideology had been confirmed by the events of history as “the only point of view that would be acceptable to a progressive nation.”

Wilson was even more pronounced in his recognition of communism as a potential means to the creation of this new world. But in his case, this was hardly an expression of sympathy or support. As he said in one of his essays, “Communism appeared [...] whenever a civilisation approached its end, because Communism means the substitution of the failing power of leaders by the power of the masses in order to save the race from extinction.” In other words, communism only served as a final resort in particularly dire circumstances. Fascism, too, he understood in a similar way. But his characterisation of the national essence or ‘spirit’ that he believed needed to animate the structures of government was not unlike the fascist conception of the nation as a spiritual or organic body. In his own analysis of Wilson’s views, John Johnson argues that it was a testament to Wilson’s political naiveté that he could maintain close relations with both Stephensen and Henry Boote (1865-1949), the editor of the Australian Worker. But when it is understood that his affinity for fascism was based in part on an affinity for ideologies as such—that is to say, on his embrace of programmatic modernism—it is hardly surprising that he found the company of both Marxists and fascists encouraging. In fact, Boote himself at times expressed an apocalyptic longing comparable to Wilson’s own. “What you say about our own architects, painters and writers is absolutely true,” he wrote to Wilson in 1937.

84 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, xix.
85 William Baylebridge, National Notes, third ed. (Sydney: Tallabila Press, 1936), 5.
86 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, xv.
87 Wilson, “Communism and Existence,” 2.
“There is no creative surge in most of them, though here and there I sense vague intimations of genius waiting for some flame to be lighted to it.”

Similarly, Hughes also recognised the status of communism as a potential means to creating this alternative modernity, and though his preference was always for fascism, his hatred of the Judeo-Christian tradition was such that he was even willing to support communism if fascism failed—despite his many disagreements with their ideas—for the simple reason that it was also opposed to the Judeo-Christian religions. “Fortunately for me there is Germany,” he told Kaeppel, in the same letter quoted above,

[but] if Bolshevism were the only effective force arrayed against Christianity I should seriously consider throwing in my lot with it for at least so long as it was engaged in expunging Christianity; for to my mind there is nothing so pernicious under the sign of Marxism as the values that are inherent in Christianity.

His close friendship with Jack Lindsay also suggests that there was some affinity between himself and communism. In fact, Lindsay himself seems to have realised this, and admitted to Hughes that he had once also been conflicted between the choice of fascism or communism as the movement that would transform the world. “I must send you Rome for Sale,” he said, referring to a novel he wrote in 1934:

It was written at a time when I was still ideologically confused between Fascism & Communism—a state of mind which haunts the book, for Catilina was a man, I take it, drawn by powerful impulses of destructive energy which he couldn’t himself clarify.

The significance of this, in addition to what it might reveal about their friendship, is that Lindsay had been influenced by many of the same ‘preconditions’ as Hughes in embracing Marxist thought. This would suggest that there is perhaps an even deeper affinity between Lindsay and Hughes, and between the circuitous paths that lead to an embrace of fascism or communism, than either of them fully realised.

But despite these circuitous affinities, it is important not to overstate the extent to which Wilson, Baylebridge, and Hughes had actually considered communism. The truth is that fascism was the obvious choice for each of them, for the simple reason that their ideas and philosophies (and in many ways their personalities) were plainly more compatible with fascism than communism. Indeed, they were positively opposed to many of the cardinal points of Marxist thought. Their belief in the natural inequality of humanity, in terms of sex, spirituality, and race, as well as their mystical conception

---

89 Letter from Henry Boote to William Hardy Wilson, 6 November 1937, MS Acc 07/082 Box 1, NLA, 1.
91 Letter from Jack Lindsay to Randolph Hughes, March 1936, NLMSS 671/15, SLNSW, 4.
of the state, had no place in communist ideology. The fact that communism was also perceived by Wilson and Hughes as a ‘Jewish’ ideology likely also contributed to their embrace of fascism rather than communism. Nonetheless, their affinity for communism, however limited it may have been, is still worth mentioning as it highlights two significant aspects of their embrace of fascism. The first of these is that it was motivated in large part by its significance as an event in history, and the second was that it was embraced as a means rather than an end. As for their reasons for choosing fascism at all, instead of remaining simply aloof from politics, there are two main factors that emerge from the evidence (in addition to those just mentioned). The first of these was the clear compatibility of their existing social, political, and philosophical views with fascist ideology, particularly in its literary or mystical interpretation. The valorisation of masculinity, hierarchy, classicism, anti-rationalism, eugenics, violence, and charismatic leadership were all fundamental to fascist ideology; and each of them, in their own way, had embraced the greater part of these principles. Baylebridge in particular, as the most ‘orthodox’ of the three, embraced them all.

The second factor, closely related to the first, was the role of affect and emotion. This was apparent in the case of all three men. Baylebridge, for one, had indulged in fascistic fantasies of violence and destruction as early as 1910, when he first published The New Life. A mere glance at the titles of these poems alone speaks volumes to the nature of their content: ‘Pain Requisitioned’, ‘Leaders and Led’, ‘Cleanliness Strong’, ‘Nobility’s Aggression’, ‘Motion Life’s Essentiality’. This same fascination with delirium was also apparent in National Notes, where he described it as “[that] eternal delight in becoming … that delight which involves in itself even the joy of annihilation.” Wilson, too, expressed something of this same delight in his novel Yin-Yang. “One has less chance of being entirely wrong,” he said,

if one believes things which seem impossible. There are few things of which we can be certain. And there are times when reality itself becomes wearisome, and when one would like to fly off into a world where everything is not regulated by the laws of Nature.

---

92 As Hughes said in a letter to Jack Lindsay, “Marx is the full and typical Jew; in other words, he has not the least creative originality, from first to last he is a parasite. (And, I may add parenthetically, it is this feeling, ill-defined no doubt for the most part, and stated in terms of an imperfect philosophy, about the interloping, acquisitive and unproductive parasitism of the Jew that is actuating the present movement against the Jews in Germany. I approve that movement fully, and I hope to live to see something such in this country.)” Letter from Randolph Hughes to Jack Lindsay, 1 Mach 1936, MLMSS 671/15, SLNSW, 14.
93 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, 73, 91-92, 107, 117.
94 Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, 150.
95 Wilson, Yin-Yang, 42.
In the same novel, he described with joy the destruction of the Art Gallery of New South Wales (and, in his view, its stagnant European art) as the beginnings of a new period of creativeness. From some unknown source, Sydney is consumed by a stream of lava, which flows into the Domain and destroys “the southern end of the Gallery […], destroying the European art contained on that side of the collection.”96 But then, after a night of chaos and destruction, a ship called the ‘New Era’ sails along Macquarie Street and rescues the protagonist of the story, who then travels to Kurrajong, which he finds is located in the perfect climate for creative work.97 Wilson had tried moving to Kurrajong for the same reason, and as late as 1954 he was still promoting his idea that Kurrajong, because of its climate, would be the perfect meeting place of Australian, Chinese, and Italian artists.98

Hughes, too, found some delight in violence and destruction. “I was never able to work up any feelings of hatred against the Turks in the last war,” he said in 1940, “but I would take a real delight in inflicting death on Italians.”99 (His admiration for fascism, it should be noted, did not extend to Italian fascism, which he rejected largely due to his racist view of Italians—as this quote clearly attests.) His poem ‘The Shuffle of Glory’, apparently written after seeing a communist march in London in 1937, is even more horrifying in its relish of violence:

Scum, scum, scum, All of them scum. […] They should be suppressed, annihilated, got well out of the way, out of the world altogether. It doesn’t matter how, sabre them down, shoot them to bits, blow them into such small fragments that nothing will be visible of their vileness. Or put them into a lethal chamber; but get rid of them somehow. They are human sewage, they are pieces of disease, lumps of loathsomeness […]. Nothing to fear; oh no; ten good men, ten real men, could have easily disposed of this mass of abortions, shuffling along in their hundreds.100

Alongside this delight in violence, which is also apparent throughout Lost Eurydice, he was evidently also seduced by the mysticism of fascism, which appeared nowhere more clearly than in his description of the 1936 Nuremberg Rally. As he told Sir Arnold Wilson, his account was “a serious attempt to convey the inner spirit, the poetry and the mystical side of the Nuremberg celebrations, and I put the best of myself into it.”101 Later, Wyndham Lewis praised his description of the rally as “worthy of the

97 Wilson, Yin-Yang, 210.
98 Edwards, “Biography,” 121-122. See also William Hardy Wilson, Kurrajong Sit-Look-See (Melbourne: H. Wilson, 1954), passim.
99 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Edwyn Bevan, 15 June 1940, MLMSS 671/7, SLNSW, 2.
100 Though originally written in 1937, the only extant version is a copy made for Chisholm in 1954. Letter from Randolph Hughes to A. R. Chisholm, 22 June 1954, MLMSS 812/1, SLNSW, 15.
101 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Sir Arnold Wilson, 18 October 1936, MLMSS 671/21, SLNSW, 1.
thing that evoked it”.102 “What you intuited,” he told Hughes, “with the German Chivalry assisting, with all the massed banners […] may be the last splendid flicker of White Civilisation before it is snuffed out”.103 But in addition to having impressed Lewis, Hughes’ description of the Nuremberg Rally is also significant because it provides the clearest insight into the affective and mystical appeal that fascism had for Hughes. For this reason, it is well worth quoting at length. In this passage, he is describing one of the rally’s evening ceremonies:

The next night, at eight o’clock, 180,000 men in brown uniforms stood in compact formations in the same field. These were the so-called Party officials or political functionaries, the controlling executive of the National-Socialist Movement, who form a network of organization all over Germany, extending from headquarters in Munich to the smallest and most distant hamlets. Some were seen in long avenues of pallid luminosity cast by searchlights, and they did not appear to be of the same world as their neighbours who remained in a nightshade made more profound by the contrast of the juxtaposed light. There was a continuous movement and stirring, and scarcely any of the noise that one might have expected to come from it; a shifting of humanity, a shifting of shafts of light, a shifting of patches and plaques of darkness. It was a play of phantasmagoria, a suggestion of a country of strange things, rather than a piece of clear-cut and every-day reality. At intervals on the great surrounding curve of a wall Nazi banners swung out red on the breeze or hung in limp folds about their poles. Suddenly, just as the Führer arrived, 150 powerful searchlights disposed all round the enclosure sent up pale blue streams of radiance that converged to a point in the sky higher than the topmost point of the highest cathedral multiplied many times. One—and with one that army of 180,000 men and the rest of the 70,000 spectators—found oneself in a vast cone of exquisitely delicate and tenuous effulgence, a bluishness as of some Apocalypse, that confined one within a new order of experience, and shut one off from the outside world as effectively as if it had been bastions of brass. Yet one has a sight of the outside world, beyond the mounting sheets of light, but what one chiefly saw were unmoving stars, shining golden against the ardent blue. And all the while other stars moved in and out among them: the lights of aeroplanes that circled through the night. The whole effect was faery, and seemed to be not of the things of this earth. The redness of the banners was vivid just outside the base of the cone; some of them fluttered like streamers of carnival at a seaside resort; others, hanging slack, a line of scarlet against the dark, looked like sinister guillotines in some picture of tragedy by Goya. Suddenly, in front of one, in the far distance, on the horizon of this new world, there was a stir and an agitation, an apparition of a wonder, a coming into view of a splendour that gradually assumed greater proportion, and began to pour over into the blue. It occupied all the background; it took the shape of an army of Crusaders, hundreds and thousands of them, massed close together, moving securely and grandly, and clad in habiliments of noble red. Against the red was a whiteness that might have been the sheen of shields or crosses embroidered on cloaks. And overtopping the onset of red splashed with white was a galaxy, a multitude of spears that glittered alternately silver and gold. And they advanced continually, their magnificence growing ever more spacious, and they mingled with the brown ranks, over whom they stood dominant in their crimson. It was as though a door had been opened in a wall of this Fairydom into the past centuries, and companies of the chivalry of old Germany were pressing through it to form one army with their fellows of to-day. One thought of the poem in which Frederick Barbarossa promises—or threatens—to return again one day with the splendour of the ancient glories. “He has never died. … He has carried away wither he has gone the grandeur of the realm, and he will come back with it in his own good time.” It seemed as though,

102 Letter from Wyndham Lewis to Randolph Hughes, 30 November 1936, MLMSS 671/22, SLNSW, 1.
103 Letter from Wyndham Lewis to Randolph Hughes, 30 November 1936, MLMSS 671/22, SLNSW, 1.
on this night, the prophecy had been fulfilled. Barbarossa, Germany, the Spirit of the Fatherland, was re-arisen.\textsuperscript{104}

The fascist regime in Germany, then, was the herald of this new age, which was at once a restoration of the old yet something distinctly new. Incidentally, Petra Rau noted the resonance between Hughes’ account and Griffin’s theory of fascism as palingenetic ultra-nationalism.\textsuperscript{105}

This ritual ‘rebirth’ was then followed in Hughes’ account with a speech by Hitler himself, whose voice he described as “sonorous and vibrant, with a touch, a rasp almost, of sorrow or suffering […]; energetic yet simple, passionate yet never distorted by mere hysteria”\textsuperscript{106} “It is the voice,” said Hughes, “of the greatest demagogic orator of our time […]. It seemed to expand into the volume of the whole cone of enveloping blue.”\textsuperscript{107} Then, like Thucydides, he recounted much of the speech from memory, which spoke of the unity of the German people and their destiny to future greatness. But the part of Hitler’s speech that most impressed Hughes was his admission, on the subject of the First World War, that “we were defeated because we did not deserve success.”\textsuperscript{108} In this, he said, Hitler ascended “to a plane of high and severe morality”\textsuperscript{109}

Furthermore, he noted with admiration that “[w]hen the leader of a people says such things, and carries that people with him, the other nations of the world should take notice, for something altogether unusual is happening.”\textsuperscript{110} In other words, he saw something uniquely potent in Hitler’s leadership and manner of speaking—a power and conviction unknown in the democratic world. But not only was it the potency of Hitler’s leadership that appealed to Hughes, but the German regime as well, which he believed was “well preparing itself […] for adaption to and control over the forces that are shaping the world of the future.”\textsuperscript{111} This meant the regime satisfied not only the affective criteria of his spirituality (and his longing, it seems, for ‘true’ leadership) but the intellectual criteria of his philosophy as well. This is something that neither liberal democracy nor communism could ever hope to do—despite certain intellectual affinities—for Hughes was committed to a philosophy that denied equality and affirmed the primacy of aesthetics and spirituality in politics.

\textsuperscript{104} Hughes, \textit{The New Germany}, 17-19.
\textsuperscript{106} Hughes, \textit{The New Germany}, 19.
\textsuperscript{107} Hughes, \textit{The New Germany}, 19-20.
\textsuperscript{108} Hughes, \textit{The New Germany}, 20.
\textsuperscript{109} Hughes, \textit{The New Germany}, 20.
\textsuperscript{110} Hughes, \textit{The New Germany}, 20.
\textsuperscript{111} Hughes, \textit{The New Germany}, 26.
Through a variety of personal, historical, and intellectual influences, they each came to embrace fascism and fascist ideas because they were convinced by their philosophies and the times in which they lived that the fascist movement was the movement through which the Spirit would restore meaning and transcendence through the creation of a new world. This modernity was characterised variously by all three men, though the essence remained the same: it was utterly unlike the present, which they believed was the source of their unhappiness, and despised for that reason. “If one thinks quietly upon it,” said Baylebridge, referring to the society in which they lived, “must he not hold this—that either Man, or his civilisation, has missed badly the right road?” Their writings and philosophies—indeed, their whole lives—were an effort to rediscover this ‘right road’, and in the end, they came to believe that this ‘road’ passed through Berlin and Rome.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is evident that all three men came to accept fascism as the movement of the Spirit of history through a variety of personal, historical, and intellectual factors. These philosophies not only convinced them that history was a purposive process that would eventually break into a new dawn and a new age, but that both creativity and force were indicative of the operation of the Spirit that would achieve this restoration of meaning and purpose through the historical process. The various influences that culminated in this view have been discussed at length through Chapters 1, 2, and 3. In light of this analysis, it is reasonable to suggest that the two most significant influences in their development and embrace of fascist ideas were modernism and German Idealism, both of which convinced them that reality itself was a legitimate object of creative manipulation, and that destruction was followed by rebirth. These influences also convinced them that they were fit to interpret the present and identify the current workings of the Spirit, in both history and their own creative efforts. As a result, they were each able to evaluate the fascist movement both rationally and mystically—that is to say, with reference to affect and emotion. In the following chapter, which will serve as a kind of epilogue to the argument so far, this study will examine the collapse of their ideas after 1939 in order to understand the nature and structure of their beliefs more fully.

In 1949, only a few years after his passionate embrace of the fascist Iron Guard, the Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran (1911-1995) published a book of philosophy called *A Short History of Decay*, in which he offered his reflections on the nature of politics and ideology in light of his experience as a literary fascist.\(^2\) “History,” he said, is nothing but a procession of false Absolutes, a series of temples raised to pretexts, a degradation of the mind before the Improbable. Even when he turns from religion, man remains subject to it; depleting himself to create fake gods, he then feverishly adopts them: his need for fiction, for mythology triumphs over evidence and absurdity alike.\(^3\)

In his view, the root of this tendency to create ‘false absolutes’, which he had evidently witnessed in himself only a few years earlier, was a refusal to accept the world as it is. For this reason, he claimed that “[o]nce a man loses his *faculty of indifference* he becomes a potential murderer; once he transforms *his* idea into a god the consequences are incalculable.”\(^4\) In fact, he was so disturbed by his own complicity and capacity for self-deception that by 1949 he had come to reject *all* conviction as such. “Scaffolds, dungeons, jails flourish only in the shadow of a faith,” he said, “[in the shadow] of that need to *believe* which had infested the mind forever.”\(^5\) William Hardy Wilson, Randolph Hughes, and William Baylebridge were clearly also shaped by this need for certainty and purpose. And though Cioran’s position is perhaps needlessly absolute, his reflections are nonetheless instructive, for there is an undeniable truth to his characterisation of ideology. Similarly, it is probably also true that there is a kind of mania, at least in the case of some ideologues, to universalise their particular

---

conception of the world. “We mistrust the swindler, the trickster, the con man,” said Cioran,

yet to them we can impute none of history’s great convulsions; believing in nothing, it is not they who rummage in your hearts, or your ulterior motives; they leave you to your apathy […]. Doctrineless, they have only whims and interests, accommodating vices a thousand times more endurable than the ravages provoked by principled despotism; for all of life’s evils come from a ‘conception of life’.6

This kind of ‘principled despotism’ was evident in the case of all three men, who believed that it was their task to (re)shape the course of history. Yet despite the fixity of their belief, they each eventually reached a point where their entire ‘worlds’ effectively collapsed through the pressures of external reality, which failed to conform to their theories and predictions.

In this, they each experienced something of the confrontation experienced by Cioran, when he realised the carelessness and self-indulgence of his own involvement with the fascist cause, which ended not only in a complete repudiation of his fascist beliefs, but in his own retreat into a near total scepticism. But unlike Cioran, their confrontation with their own beliefs and the nature of their own fanaticism was a personal rather than a moral crisis. This was completely in keeping with the manner in which they had come to embrace their ideas in the first place. But as the years wore on, their ideas buckled under the pressure of external reality, which undermined the sense of meaning and purpose they provided—that is, in both their epiphanic and programmatic expressions. Baylebridge eventually concluded that the complacency of his fellow countrymen had prevented the emergence of a fascist Australia, and that because of this complacency, he had wasted his life and his talent in pursuing this end. Similarly, once Hughes realised that his dream of a fascist Europe was impossible, he returned to the esoterism of his youth, where he felt confident and strong, humiliated that he had ever succumbed to the low lure of politics.

In Wilson’s case, there was a clear shift in 1936, shortly after the publication of Grecian and Chinese Architecture, when he moved away from the aesthetic and vitalistic theories that initially convinced him of fascism’s importance towards a position that bore only the faintest resemblance to the ideologies of Hitler and Mussolini. They became overtly conspiratorial, no longer concerned with the efforts of artists but with the anti-creative machinations of Catholics and Jews, and the all-encompassing role of Nature, which would ultimately obliterate the efforts of these

6 Cioran, A Short History of Decay, 5.
parties to obstruct the search for new creativeness. This eventually culminated, by mid-1945, in an ominous fascination with atomic bombs, which he now considered—and not fascism—the solution to this dearth of creativeness. His reasoning was that the invention of the atomic bomb and the prospect of ‘mutually assured destruction’ had presented humanity with a choice: either humanity could finally commit to the task of creating a new civilisation and so avert nuclear war, or else the entirety of humanity could be returned to a premodern state by the destruction of civilisation by nuclear weapons. In either case, though he certainly preferred the former, humanity would be returned to a way of life in which they were not alienated from their work. For this reason, he argued, it was only through this use or disuse of atomic weapons that the restoration of meaning and purpose could be achieved.7

By the late 1930s, therefore, all three men had come to realise that their theories and philosophies were untenable, which meant that some kind of adjustment had to be made to retain the sense of meaning and purpose that their beliefs provided for themselves, and claimed was possible for the entire world. In this chapter, which is intended as a sort of epilogue to the preceding chapters, an account will be given of this collapse of their theories and philosophies in the late 1930s and early 1940s in order to truly understand the structures and factors that contributed to their formation and endurance throughout the fascist period. To this end, this chapter will explore the development of each man after the collapse of their ‘worlds’ in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

4.1: The collapse of their ideas

Though their embrace of fascism and fascist ideas was certainly genuine, it was always ultimately a means rather than an end. This fact had a variety of implications for the nature and integrity of their beliefs, many of which have been discussed at length. But a significant implication of this ‘indirect’ embrace is that it was wholly dependent on the viability of the fascist movement as an effective means to the restoration of meaning and transcendence to life. This meant that once fascism could no longer be regarded as an effective means to this end, it was quickly if somewhat reluctantly abandoned. This fact that fascism was for each of them a means rather than end was most pronounced in Wilson’s case, whose conception of fascism was always qualified

7 William Hardy Wilson, Instinct (Wandin: H. Wilson, 1945), 113-126.
by a strange and highly idiosyncratic regard for communism. But it was apparent also in the writings of Baylebridge and Hughes. In this section, the collapse of their theories and ideas following the effective defeat of the fascist movement in Europe will be explored for what it might reveal about the essential structure of their beliefs, in which fascism held a central but ultimately conditional position, and in which the dream of an alternative modernity was the highest ideal, rather than fascism itself. This, however, does not in any way undermine the extent to which Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge can be properly regarded as ‘literary fascists’. Idiosyncratic theories of this kind, in which fascism is placed within a broader metaphysical framework, is not uncommon. The philosophers of such proto-fascistic thinkers as Ernst Jünger and Giovanni Gentile, at least for the duration of their dalliance with fascism, can be placed within this category. For this reason, however ‘unorthodox’ they may have been, the development and subsequent collapse of their ideas provides a considerable insight into the fascist phenomenon in Australia and the world more generally.

For Hughes, whose embrace of fascism was largely based on his own idiosyncratic classicism, the various movements and regimes of European fascism appeared as a viable means to the restoration of Europe’s Graeco-Roman heritage. With the Christianisation of Europe after the death of Julian the Apostate, most notably in modern Italy and Greece, it seemed to Hughes that this heritage was all but lost. With the Renaissance, Romanticism, and the Counter-Enlightenment, there was a brief return to pre-eminence of this Graeco-Roman influence. But it was only with the advent of fascism on the world-stage, particularly German fascism, that he came to believe that this restoration—which he had so far experienced only within the confines of epiphanic poetry—could be achieved as an actual change in external circumstances. In fact, it seems that Hughes had been largely indifferent to the fate of Europe before 1935, when he resigned from his position at King’s College, London. As a result, once this restoration of Europe’s Graeco-Roman heritage suddenly seemed possible, that fascism was the movement that would achieve this change, and that this restoration was the object of his mystic intimations, Hughes, who was then both unemployed and creatively frustrated, embraced the fascist cause and devoted the next four years of his life to its service. His efforts to this end consisted mostly in writing articles for English

---

readers on fascist politics to counteract the ‘false narrative’ of the English media and to promote his idea of forming a fascist alliance between Germany, England, and France, which he believed would establish a ‘fascist peace’ in Europe, despite the incitement of Jews and communists.\(^\text{10}\)

To achieve this, he published extensively and established an impressive network of connections within the European far-right. The most significant of these connections was probably his relationship with H. Rolf Hoffmann, a senior member of the Nazi Party’s Foreign Press Department—whose role, it seems, was to liaise with foreign sympathisers. To this end, in 1936 he invited Hughes to Germany for a state-sponsored tour of the country, the purpose of which, it seems, was to enlist Hughes as an intellectual propagandist for the regime. This view is supported by the fact that it was followed shortly afterwards by the publication of *The New Germany*, in which Hughes described his tour of the country. The fact that Hoffmann also believed that an alliance between England and Germany was desirable is also worth noting.\(^\text{11}\)

During this time, Hughes was also associated with Theodore Kessemeier, another Anglophile Nazi and director of the *Deutscher Fichte-Bund*, whom he asked that same year if he “could arrange for Herr Hitler, and other of the Party Leaders, to see my essay [i.e. *The New Germany*]”.\(^\text{12}\) When Kessemeier responded that he had shared the essay with his contacts in the Nazi Party (the *Fichte-Bund* was a pro-Nazi propaganda agency based in Hamburg), Hughes replied:

> I cannot tell you how grateful I am for your kindness in helping to bring my article to the notice of the authorities. I very much hope that ultimately it will find its way to Herr Hitler himself, for it would clearly show him that there are at least some Englishmen who appreciate his achievements at their true worth; and I venture to hope that this number will increase by my contribution, which is the only one that so far has told the full truth to this country.\(^\text{13}\)

But his efforts were not limited to promoting friendly relations between England and Germany, but also between Germany and France. To this end, he visited Charles Maurras at his home in Provence in 1938, where he tried in vain to convince him to align with Germany for the greater good of Europe. But as Hughes later explained, “it was useless to try to assure him that there is a great deal of goodwill [*sic*] in Germany

---

\(^\text{10}\) Letter from Randolph Hughes to Sir Arnold Wilson, 29 December 1938, MLMSS 671/21, SLNSW, 4-5.

\(^\text{11}\) Letter from Randolph Hughes to H. Rolf Hoffmann, 31 March 1948, MLMSS 671/23, SLNSW, 1-2.

\(^\text{12}\) Letter from Randolph Hughes to Theodore Kessemeier, 20 November 1936, MLMSS 671/24, SLNSW, 1.

\(^\text{13}\) Letter from Randolph Hughes to Theodore Kessemeier, 2 December 1936, MLMSS 671/24, SLNSW, 1.
towards France […]; he merely dismissed all this as so much “ruse” on the part of the Germans.”

Meanwhile, in his adopted country of England, Hughes also had connections with the pro-German English Review, the editor of which, Derek Walker-Smith, confided to him that he also sympathised with the Nazi regime. In addition, he was also associated with other noted English sympathisers, such as Wyndham Lewis and Sir Arnold Wilson. There is also evidence that he had some contact with the British Union of Fascists, which may have involved writing for the Fascist Quarterly under a pseudonym. In all this, his primary concern was to promote the idea of a fascist alliance between France, England, and Germany, which he believed would not only avoid the war he believed the Jews were inciting, but would also provide the stability needed for Europe to return to its Graeco-Roman roots, to which he had deemed fascism an effective means.

For Baylebridge, it was the welfare of his country that concerned him most of all. In fact, as early as 1913, he believed that the newly-federated Australia had succumbed to the modern malaise, from which it could be saved only through the purgative process of ‘national reconstruction’, a process he identified explicitly the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini. To this end, he proposed the New Nationalism, which was his own apparent adaptation of the same ideas later embraced by fascism to the context of Australia. And perhaps underscoring the extent to which he believed his country to have fallen from its former glory, and his hope that his efforts were part of a new burgeoning movement, he dedicated the first edition of National Notes: “To Those New Nationalists of Australia Who are Working for Her Regeneration”. This was only twelve years after its original ‘birth’ in 1901. And though there was certainly cause for a uniting creed for Australia at that time, Baylebridge’s New Nationalism was fascism in all but name—the term, of course, did not yet exist—and in later years, apparently in an effort to dissociate himself from the

14 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Edwyn Bevan, 4 September 1938, MLMSS 671/7, SLNSW, 9.
15 Letter from Derek Walker-Smith to Randolph Hughes, 8 September 1936, MLMSS 671/23, SLNSW, 1.
16 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Sir Arnold Wilson, 29 December 1938, MLMSS 671/21, SLNSW, 4-5; Letter from Randolph Hughes to Jacques Delebecque, 10 May 1939, MLMSS 671/19, SLNSW, 1.
17 Hughes described this fascist union in the following terms: “[A] federalistic or unitary system for Europe as a whole. But not such a system as that embodied in the League of Nations. The grave defects of the League: it was too oecumenical, it allowed to small nations a voice out of all proportion to their inherent worth and importance; etc. […] Europe must be governed by a Union of the Powers who are the creators of the values of civilization and have to meet the major responsibilities arising out of world events.” Randolph Hughes, ‘Typescript describing a projected book with Methuen Publishing on the viability of an alliance between France, England, and Germany,’ n.d., MLMSS 671/90, SLNSW, 2.
‘foreignness’ of Europe, he claimed absurdly to have been the earliest exponent of fascism in the world, and that it was originally an Australian innovation. In this, he seems to imply that he was the originator of fascist ideology, though he stops short of stating this explicitly. But whatever the reason for this claim may have been, it served to justify his belief that the introduction of this ideology on a national scale would unite the Australian people to form a single cohesive nation, now united by a common destiny to “take a new lead and teach the world.” An ideal of this sort was certainly in keeping with the ideologies of Hitler and Mussolini. But through an examination of Baylebridge’s various writings, it becomes clear that his embrace of fascism, though certainly sincere, was not only motivated by the meaning and purpose it provided, but also by its effectiveness as a means towards achieving his other great ambition, which was to be remembered forever as a literary genius.

Baylebridge wrote in a variety of canonical forms and styles—ranging from the Shakespearean sonnet to the Chaucerian epic—in an effort to establish himself in the company of the “great immortals”. His efforts to present himself as an eccentric recluse were also part of this, as was his obscure and often archaic style. But the most astounding tactic he devised for achieving this goal was a stipulation in his will that a portion of his £18,000 estate be used to fund the construction of a memorial to his own memory. “Memorials are instituted for all sorts of persons,” he protested from the grave, evidently anticipating the challenge his request would face. “Is the Australian poet so utterly worthless a being that it is ‘bad’ to perpetuate his memory?” To this the courts were unmoved, and the request was declared invalid on the grounds that it had “no commercial, utilitarian or extraneous basis”. And though he could certainly have achieved this reputation without promoting the fascist cause, his conception of ‘influence’ and creativity meant that he saw no meaningful distinction between poetry and politics. Both impressed his ‘influence’—his mark—on the course of history, which was equated with the ‘mark’ of the Spirit itself as it impressed itself upon matter.

For Wilson, whose embrace of fascism was based on a variety of disparate influences—the most significant of which, perhaps, was his belief in the influence of

---

19 Willian Baylebridge, National Notes, third ed. (Sydney: Tallabila Press, 1936), 5.
20 Blocksidge, National Notes, first ed., 11.
21 As Kirtley recalled, “[Baylebridge] once told me that a man lived as long as his name remained current, and that you had to manufacture your own immortality. He told me he intended to join, in absentia, the stream of future lives, that he would remain with each generation of good Australians until the end of civilization.” John Kirtley, “My Friend Baylebridge,” Southerly 16, no. 3 (1955): 135, 137.
22 “Challenge On Poet’s Will,” Sun (Sydney, NSW), 6 May 1947, 3.
climate on the development of aesthetics—the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini appeared as an effective means to advancing this creative historical process. In this way, ‘new creativeness’ would re-emerge through the intermingling of different ‘races’ and their respective climatic influences. He explained this theory in a number of unanswered letters to both Hitler and Mussolini. In a letter dated 1938, he told Hitler of “the necessity of Northern Europeans […] to flow to Mediterranean shores and there to breed and instil vigour into races which have become decadent. It seems that there is no other way in which Europe can again become creative.” In this, he was not suggesting that the German race possessed an innate superiority, but only that it possessed the attributes that emerge in colder climates—which, when combined with the attributes that emerge in warmer climates, would inspire ‘new creativeness’. To this end, he also suggested that the German people could be awakened to “the necessity of new creativeness” with the construction of “a Chinese building in Munich”, which he claimed would establish Germany’s reputation as a creative leader in the world.

In his letter to Mussolini, which was sent the following year, Wilson made the equally astounding suggestion that he assist in the migration of “one thousand, or five thousand people of Germanic blood into Greece to breed with Grecian people”, which he believed “would command respect, even from the British, who, being insular, have [the] least idea of the necessity of new creativeness.” He also sent similar letters to other world leaders, including two Australian Prime Ministers. But it was only in his letters to Hitler and Mussolini, whom he addressed as “fellow creative artist[s]”, that he explained the full depth of his theories.

Yet underlying all this was their private search for meaning, purpose, and transcendence—which, due to the tensions implicit in modernist thought, was expressed for a time programmatically. This was the window in time when fascism appeared as a viable means to their various ends, out of which the search for meaning, purpose, and transcendence was by far the most significant. During that time, which differed considerably in length for each of them, it was not only the promise but the striving after this new, alternative modernity that provided them with a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Notably, this striving was done largely through the

---

24 Quoted in William Hardy Wilson, *Eucalyptus* (Wandin: H. Wilson, 1941), 372.
27 Letter from William Hardy Wilson to Joseph Lyons, 18 August 1938, MS Acc 07/082 Box 1, NLA, 1-2; Letter from William Hardy Wilson to Ben Chifley, 2 June 1946, MS Acc 07/082 Box 2, NLA, 1.
28 Quoted in Wilson, *Eucalyptus*, 372.
mediums of mind and pen, which can be just as arduous as physical experience. The most notable exception to this were Hughes’ efforts to convince certain fascist figures that an alliance between Germany, England, and France was essential to the achievement of fascism’s goals. But once it was clear that fascism was no longer the viable movement they had believed it to have been—or perhaps never was, since their position was based in part on an identification of fascism with an eternal referent—they each experienced what was essentially a crisis of faith, which demanded some kind of fundamental adjustment if their sense of meaning and purpose was to be preserved.

To this end, Hughes returned with renewed vigour to the esoterism of his youth and cursed himself for having ever become involved in the profane business of politics. The collapse of his confidence in fascism as an effective means can be attributed in large part to the declaration of war between France, England, and Germany in September 1939. “My eyes filled with tears,” he wrote to Edwyn Bevan (1870-1943) in June 1940,

> when I read that the Germans had crossed the Seine and the Marne […] and that people had begun to trudge out of the capital into the most terrible unknown which it is possible for human beings to experience. […] All things considered, I don’t think there has ever been such a desolate moment in history.29

This reality not only made his hope of an alliance between these countries impossible, but also undermined the credibility of his political ideas, which rested in large part on their identification of fascism with the Spirit of history. But as committed as he was, only a few months had passed before it seemed that Hughes had accepted the implications of this collapse, at which point he confessed to his friend Cockett that the only thing in life that really mattered was “to do the work which is the expression and also the meaning of one’s truest personality.”30 In other words, he had returned to an epiphanic understanding of the connection between meaning and creativity. “Other things,” he said,

> no matter how momentous or dear or desirable they may appear to be can only be more or less peripheral to that centre where we have our fullest reality. And, as you know, that centre, whatever be the strength of the alliances we contract, whatever be the help we receive from others, is in some strange (and often sad) sort of solitude. Even when it ascends to spiritual summits, and has a view of transcendentals—then most of all perhaps—it never gets away from this condition of loneliness.31

29 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Edwyn Bevan, 15 June 1940, MLMSS 671/7, SLNSW, 1.
For Hughes, this meant rejecting the ephemerality of politics and society and devoting his attention exclusively to the only true eternal, which was Art—at which point he plunged himself into the task of writing *Lost Eurydice* amidst falling German bombs. As mentioned earlier in this study, one of the main themes of this novel, written between 1942 and 1946, was the question of whether the experience of mystical ‘recognition’ was real or simply imaginary. In this, Hughes was likely reflecting on his own embrace of the fascist cause, which had been motivated in part by such mystic intimation. This interpretation that the novel was in part a reflective exercise for Hughes is corroborated by the fact that it was also concerned with the nature of ideological adherence, particularly in the case of intellectuals. Indeed, the parallels between the recent pasts of both Hughes and the novel’s protagonist, Saint-Geniès, are so extensive that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the novel was inspired at least in part by Hughes’ own experience as a literary fascist. In one particular scene, Saint-Geniès’ companions were left alone to discuss their friend and his increasingly disturbed state of mind. “He’s certainly in a very bad way,” said Poinsot. “He goes off on fantastic lines of thought at times, and then something irrational seems to come into his speech; at least, it’s hard to find any ordinary meaning in it.” Other things too,” said Montclar, have doubtless had an unsettling effect on him. [...] Hard practical things, like the royalist movement, to which he gave four or five years of his life; on the whole, it was a sorry fiasco—a good deal of high-minded idealism in the likes of him, in the service of what was a futility and in some ways a tawdry pretence.

The parallel here between the French Royalists and the fascist movement as anti-Enlightenment forces is undeniable, as is the fact that “four or five years” is the same

32 To gain some sense of the context in which this novel was written, consider the following from a letter Hughes sent to his friend Sully-André Peyre, a French poet, in February 1945: “London has suffered much more than any of your large cities—more than any other in the world if the duration of our épreuves [ordeal] is taken into account. There is ruin—or ruins—in almost every street. [...] Night and day for months. Often all night. No sleep then, of course. And if one looked out one as often as not saw a huge red of conflagration in the sky that lit everything up with a strange light. It was a sort of faëry of diablerie [...]. It’s difficult not to slip in Goyaësque prose when one starts to describe those times; there were so many effects of the hallucination and nightmare in their hard reality [...]. Last year we had the pilotless planes, and they were somehow more sinister than those under the control of men. In the worst period twenty or thirty of them would come over the neighbourhood every twenty-four hours; when they were near, and seemed to be heading straight for one’s house, their crude roar was like that of some vast rusty engine. I shall never forget the first one, coming lower and lower towards us, about an hour after midnight; we had heard nothing of the kind before [...]. They visit us rarely now, but their successor is the most infernal of all machines. A sort of torpedo, longer than a telegraph-pole, hurtling at your unannounced at any odd moment from a height of sixty miles with a speed that outruns that of sound [...]. We shall probably be bothered by this latest invention until the end of the war; (one has just burst as I write this sentence!); for it doesn’t look as if the Allies are going to advance into the part of Holland from which the monsters are despatched.” Letter from Randolph Hughes to Sully-André Peyre, 2 February 1945, MLMSS 671/20, SLNSW, 1-2.


amount of time that Hughes himself had given to the fascist cause. And in his letters after 1939, he spoke of fascism with a similar regret, lamenting the “vast amount of idealism” that had been “shattered out of existence” with the defeat of fascism in 1945. In other words, even after he had abandoned it, he still considered its defeat a tragedy.

In addition to their similarities in terms of circumstance, there were also considerable parallels between the personalities of both Hughes and Saint-Geniès. For instance, in the same passage quoted above, Montclar described the kind of philosophy his friend had been reading:

I should say he’s read a devil of a lot; especially of philosophy of the German brand. [...] In a lot of the German thought that’s been floating about of late years there’s an extraordinary amount of wild fantasticality; predominance of dream-stuff, and hallucination, and extravagantly audacious hope and madly inventive fancy over all the authority of sense; avenues of transcendentalism into experiences beyond this life; fairy stories, pleasant enough in their way, but which you would think no sane man could take seriously; and yet numbers of educated men fall for them, and I fear Saint-Geniès is one of these.

Like Cioran, it seems, Hughes had realised his own foolishness in embracing the fascist cause and devoting his intelligence to defending their actions. By the end of the novel, Saint-Geniès too had abandoned the ephemerality of politics, and in his second encounter with his mysterious lover Morgana, he learns of her time as a Jacobin propagandist, which she too had abandoned. “I’ve no time for these unthinking and automatic loyalties,” she said,

so much goodwill and high spirit and splendid courage simply gone to waste. Devoted to an empty formula. [...] Yes, a vast pity. And so many movements, so many loyalties are like that, I suspect; history is full of them. While there are bigger things in the world waiting to be done, immensely bigger things, things of transcendental importance [...] .

Saint-Geniès himself had made the same realisation shortly before leaving the Royalist movement. “[H]ere was an ambition to which he might devote himself if he survived these wars,” the narrator said:

[T]o bring into French poetry something of these further [transcendental] things. That would be greater than all this turmoil of politics and war which shook the world [...] and reduced himself and all individuals of less than protagonist rank to mere pawns in a process regarded as immeasurably more important than any concern of theirs. Immeasurably more important than the making of beauty or the attempt of thought to lay hold of the inner meaning of things [...]. No, he told himself, that was a valuation he couldn’t accept now; he had begun to have faint doubts a good while back, even when he was a resolute subaltern in Condé’s army [...]; now they beset him as certitudes; and this time they were not for the most part mere negations that left a void.
when their work was done; behind them were the strong counter-claims of something that was superlatively positive, the challenge of other values that could be shaken by no questioning [...] 38

These ‘values’ were the ideals of beauty and the eternal that for Hughes were the sole purpose of existence. Likewise, his devotion to fascism had been motivated by its usefulness to achieving this end, which he believed would resolve not only the crisis of modernity but his own private crisis of meaning and purpose. Consequently, once the usefulness of fascism (or more, the integrity of his conception) was compromised by the events of history, it was abandoned, together with many of the ideas he had developed to justify his embrace of the fascist cause—such as his convenient but not baseless claim that the political ideas of Plato and Aristotle were “Hitlerian to a remarkable extent”. 39

In Baylebridge’s case, mostly due to his death in 1942, there is little evidence to suggest that the outbreak of war in 1939 was a significant factor in the collapse of his ideas in the late 1930s. Instead, the most important factor that emerges from the evidence is that his theories and predictions had come under a growing strain as the course of history came to increasingly defy those theories and predictions. 40 Of course, as he said in the preface to This Vital Flesh, the success of his ideas, however ‘true’ they may be, depended ultimately on the willingness of Australians to embrace them. 41

But despite his belief in agency, there remained a kind of latent determinism that exposed his ideas to being falsified by events. Consequently, given his prophetic guise and this deterministic aspect of his thought, the fact that the transformation of Australia into a fascist nation-state had failed to eventuate undermined his ideas and revealed that they were at best speculation.

By 1939, it seems that Baylebridge had partly (but not wholly) accepted this implication. That year, alongside the publication of This Vital Flesh, he published a

---

39 Notably, when discussing the matter of British interests in Egypt, he told Delebecque in 1954: “We really have no legal or moral right to be there. The only plea we can advance is that occupation is a vital necessity to ensure the safety of the Commonwealth. But that is the plea of that cynically immoral thing Real-Politik (to which France resorts in the case of Tunisia, and other Powers in the case of other “spheres of influence”); it is the brutal argument of the Melian Oration (Thucydides): I can’t accept that.” Letter from Randolph Hughes to A. R. Chisholm, 6 March 1940, MLMSS 812/1, SLNSW 2; Letter from Randolph Hughes to Edwyn Bevan, 15 June 1940, MLMSS 671/7, SLNSW, 1; Letter from Randolph Hughes to Jacques Delebecque, 2 March 1954, MLMSS 671/19, SLNSW, 1.
40 This strain can be seen in the fact that with each revised edition of National Notes, Baylebridge gradually removed most of the explicit references to Australia and replaced them with vague terms such as ‘us’ or ‘here’ or ‘this nation’. The purpose of this, it seems, was to establish a kind of theoretical distance between his ideas and the concrete realities of Australia, a pattern which Macainsh also recognised. For several such alterations, see Blockside, National Notes, first ed., 70, 58, 62, 72; Baylebridge, National Notes, third ed., 52, 51, 59, 64.
41 William Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh (Sydney: Tallabila Press, 1939), xvii-xviii.
revealing collection of poems called *Sextains*, in which he expressed with remarkable clarity his regret at having ever become involved in politics, and having wasted his life in the process:

Too much upon the world’s my courses wait;  
Too long have I forgone self-loyalty:  
And, desperate now, one good I ask of fate—  
Since, by the grace that is, this hard decree  
Transcends at least the next, that late it be,  
And not too late.  

This poem, which is the closing piece of *Sextains*, is a beautiful evocation of weariness and regret, and, in addition to being one of Baylebridge’s best, it is also one of the rare instances where he expressed himself without artifice or conceit. Indeed, when compared to the trumpeting rhetoric of *This Vital Flesh*, the poetry of *Sextains* is like a rare glimpse at the real person of Baylebridge, who appears not strong but vulnerable. This collection is also unique in its clear rejection of ideological thought in favour of a kind of vitalistic Transcendentalism, rejecting in particular the sort that could lead an individual to ‘forgo self-loyalty’—that is, to sacrifice themselves to some higher cause.  

Yet in that same year, he also published the rambling preface of *This Vital Flesh*, in which he claimed that “if man is not to be annihilated, all who value that spirit must strike now the strongest blow for it that their powers permit.” Similarly, he stated that it was the task of every citizen “to fling gifts, fling gifts with both hands, into the abyss of the future.” Baylebridge meant by this that it was the duty of every citizen to devote their entire lives to the creation of this alternative modernity (“the abyss of the future”) and not to live simply in the present. But in his mournful *Sextains*, which were published simultaneously, he said precisely the opposite:

This moment, huge with all that certain is,  
O clasp, my Soul!—the next’s a shadowy thing.  
All-powerful know it; nor its marvel miss.  
This fateful Now to something let us bring,  
Lest, for our slackness, all we have we fling  
To the abyss.  

---

43 On the unique place of *Sextains* in Baylebridge’s corpus, Judith Wright observed: “The brief poems are, as it were, asides, written not by the prophet and visionary he liked to appear as, but by the almost strangled yet still living poet within. The book, once again, should be read as a whole, when the autobiographical thread that connects the verses becomes apparent; and then, I think, the really important thing about Baylebridge emerges—his final, almost savage disappointment with the human race, which had neglected his work and, as he thought, shown personal spite against him, and his acknowledgement, almost against his own will, of his own personal failure; a personal failure, a failure of himself.” Judith Wright, “Australian Poetry,” *Australian Folklore* 30 (2015): 131.
44 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, ii.
45 Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, 149.
It would certainly be too much to say that *Sextains* was a complete repudiation of the ideas presented in *This Vital Flesh*. In fact, even after the publication of *Sextains*, he continued to embrace the political and philosophical ideas of *This Vital Flesh*. But the fact that these contradicting works appeared simultaneously suggests that Baylebridge himself had felt limited, both personally and creatively, by the fatalistic beliefs he had embraced—and in writing *Sextains* had sought to explore that part of himself that was at odds with his own chosen creed. Furthermore, it suggests that at this late stage it mattered much less to him whether his ideas were strictly ‘true’ or not (which would entail a consistency across his works), but only that their expression provided him with a sense of meaning and transcendence in the present.\(^{47}\) Indeed, once it was clear that his dream of a fascist Australia would never come true, there was no longer the same meaning or purpose to be found in the apparent cogency of his ideas, but only in their epiphanic expression. His efforts to achieve fame and repute also seem to have been intended to provide a sense of meaning and purpose, and above all transcendence, since he hoped, in achieving this fame, to be “united [with all humanity] in the soul which has dominion over all souls, which makes man one and indivisible, and whose force enables us to interchange our names, our places, and even our seasons, with the approved.”\(^{48}\) In other words, like Hughes, he had returned to a largely epiphanic modernism—which, though expressed through such ostensibly ‘programmatic’ works as *This Vital Flesh*, now served only to provide a sense of meaning and transcendence to their author, as perhaps they had always done.

In Wilson’s case, his writings were always filled with a sense of futility and dread, and a belief that there was little hope that his writings would have any significant impact. Reflecting once on Gauguin’s failed efforts to create a ‘new style’ and his subsequent retreat to the island of Tahiti, Wilson thought that he too might eventually retire to Tahiti, or one of the other Pacific islands, once his own efforts had failed, as he believed they almost certainly would.\(^{49}\) For most of his career, this pessimistic tendency was counteracted by his often manic idealism. But in late 1936, following the failure of his application to the directorship of the National Gallery of Victoria, this futility and dread at last overwhelmed him, which had a catastrophic

\(^{47}\) Incidentally, he acknowledged in *This Vital Flesh* that the ‘nation’ could not be justified metaphysically but only in terms of expedience—which was effectively an admission that his system had failed, since it claimed to be based entirely on metaphysical principles. Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, xiv-xv.

\(^{48}\) Baylebridge, *This Vital Flesh*, iv.

impact on his personal and intellectual development from that point on. He had moved to Melbourne from Tasmania (where he had been living since 1931) specifically for the appointment. After submitting an impressive application to the trustees of the gallery, Wilson was recommended for the position to the Victorian state government in August that year.\textsuperscript{50} He was naturally ecstatic at the news, believing that this position would give him the perfect opportunity to shape public opinion on matters of art and politics—and already he was planning an exhibition of Chinese and Italian art (with Mussolini supplying the latter).\textsuperscript{51} But then, without warning, the recommendation of the trustees was rejected by the state government of Victoria and the critic J. S. MacDonald (1878-1952) was appointed instead.\textsuperscript{52} It was a humiliating blow, and one of the trustees had even resigned in disgust at the unprecedented intervention.\textsuperscript{53} But this gave the devastated Wilson little comfort. He sold his newly-bought home in Melbourne as quickly as he could, and then, after living transiently for about a year, he settled in the small town of Wandin, east of Melbourne.\textsuperscript{54} At this point, shortly after the publication of \textit{Grecian and Chinese Architecture} in late 1936—copies of which were sent to both Hitler and Mussolini—there was a clear shift in his writings away from the aesthetic theories that had initially convinced him of fascism’s importance to something more sinister and conspiratorial.\textsuperscript{55} Without any conceivable evidence, he became convinced that there was a Jewish conspiracy against him and the new creativeness, a conspiracy “likely” supported by the Roman Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{56} From that point on, therefore, his task of pursuing the new creativeness became entangled (quite incoherently) with the “mystery attached to the world-position of the Jews.”\textsuperscript{57}

That was the start of his descent. In the years that followed, his conception of politics moved increasingly away from a view that regarded the ‘nation’ as the basic unit of politics to a view that considered humanity as a whole the means through which the Spirit (or Nature) achieved its ends. Given his prior commitment to the ‘nation’ as a basic unit of politics, and a philosophy of history that identified power with necessity, this development was almost certainly inspired by the defeat of the Axis powers

\textsuperscript{50} “New Art Director,” \textit{Herald} (Melbourne, Vic.), 22 August 1936, 1.
\textsuperscript{51} Wilson, \textit{Eucalyptus}, 165.
\textsuperscript{52} “Gallery Director Choice Made,” \textit{Argus} (Melbourne, Vic.), 23 September 1936, 7.
\textsuperscript{53} “Art Gallery Appointment: Trustees’ Protest,” \textit{Argus} (Melbourne, Vic.), 24 September 1936, 11.
\textsuperscript{55} Wilson, \textit{Eucalyptus}, 372, 376.
\textsuperscript{56} Wilson, \textit{Eucalyptus}, 163-165.
\textsuperscript{57} Wilson, \textit{Eucalyptus}, 184-185.
between 1942 and 1945. Consequently, once it was clear that the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini could no longer be regarded as ‘finite centres’ of this creative metaphysical process, Wilson responded to this collapse by simply updating his philosophy for the postwar era. This meant identifying the new centres of power, which in that new age were India, China, Japan, the United States, and the Soviet Union—and for obvious reasons, he also included Australia.58 This new interpretation of the present moment, and how Nature worked through these powers, was the subject of his 1945 book *Instinct*. In this book, he argued that the war was Nature’s way of establishing ‘new creativeness’ by reducing the world’s population (which was also achieved through famines and birth control) to a point where modernisation was effectively undone and people were no longer alienated from their work.59 “This destruction,” he said, in the *non sequitur* prose of his late period,

is centred in gatherings of people in cities and towns, and is more complete in large gatherings. Therefore, instinct is directing man to dwell in smaller gatherings. […] In reality it is a movement to establish man in communities which may produce creatively without blind repetition. All the largest cities have proved that creativeness cannot be expressed by the masses of people in them. They have to be reduced.60

This view stemmed primarily from the fact that the chaos of that period could not be interpreted coherently as the workings of a single purposive process without invoking some form of ‘creative destruction’, which was already present in his earlier work *Eucalyptus*.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the rapidly shifting context of that period, he reinterpreted the present moment a second time in the last chapter of *Instinct* in order to understand the latest ‘revelation’ of Nature, which was destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. In this final chapter, having abandoned the plurality of nations in favour of a view (akin to Baylebridge’s own) that emphasised the totality of humanity above all, he came also to believe that the ‘rebirth’ of civilisation might only be possible through the complete destruction of the present ‘decadent’ civilisation. But the atomic bomb was also a sign of hope, for it presented humanity with an opportunity to build a new future. With prophetic confidence, he explained that the invention of the atomic bomb presented humanity with an epoch-making choice: either humanity could finally cooperate and create a new civilisation in which creativity was actually possible, or be returned to the premodern world—in which creativity was also

58 Wilson, *Instinct*, passim.
possible—by the destruction of the present civilisation through atomic war. He claimed that the prospect of nuclear war would be so frightening to humanity that they would at last commit themselves to the task of creating a new civilisation. If not, the present ‘decadent’ civilisation would be destroyed, either through the continuation of lesser wars, or through the rejection of this atomic evangel by humanity, which would result in its complete destruction by nuclear weapons. In either case, the roots that were conspicuously lacking in the decadent present would be restored, since he attributed this problem to the alienation of workers from their work. “The atomic bomb,” he said,

came into existence because instinct caused it. Instinct, which is part of atomic power, is the greatest force in the living world, greater than Jewish power, greater than conscious power of any people. It must be obeyed. Instinct of the world is conscious of the decay of civilization. [...] All peoples look with fear for a new civilization. Instinct causes them to work for a new civilization by war and political government. The atomic bomb is an expression of the coming of a new civilization. [...] It is for the people of the world to use this discovery to open a way to new creativeness.

The Nature, in other words, had made itself manifest through the invention of atomic bombs. And it is also worth mentioning that as early as 1934, in *Yin-Yang*, Wilson had identified the atom as the essential substance of reality, which was then confirmed by the creation of atomic bombs the following decade.

In the years that followed, Wilson continued to revise his interpretation of the present, culminating in his idealisation of Mao Zedong as a creative leader in his 1949 book *Atomic Civilization*, in which he claimed that the Chinese revolutionary was conscious of the importance of beauty because he is known to have written poetry. In this, Wilson had directed his attention to the new power. “[I]t is certain,” he said, “that modern Chinese Communism will produce new thought in the arts which will guide all people.” This stunning shift was probably justified by his claim elsewhere in the book that the efforts of materialists and those awakened to the importance of beauty were bound to achieve the same end. “The more one reads of any thought concerned with a new civilization for workers,” he said,

the more one realises that all thought, whether conscious or not, of fundamental change in civilization is directed towards the same end. Marx may be all materialism;

---

61 With regard to this latter option, he said: “[I]nstinct is directing man to dwell in smaller gatherings. In reality it is a movement to establish man in communities which may produce creatively without blind repetition. All the largest cities have proved that creativeness cannot be expressed by the masses in them.” Wilson, *Instinct*, 8.


others may be all for the opposite in esthetic creativeness; but the result of their writing is towards the same goal, which rests in the construction of a new era [...].

It was neither fascism nor communism that Wilson was presenting here, but a highly idiosyncratic utopianism. “The world is ready,” he said,

with all arts opening to create a greater world than humanity has known. Dismiss obsolete thoughts of Jewish Marxian Communism, and all the imagined terrors of the mechanical world, which must make way for a Communistic civilization of universal creative arts and peace in an esthetic world.

But even at this late stage, as with Hughes, his affinity and respect for fascism remained. This was reflected in his claim that the fascist movement, though defeated, had contributed enormously to the fight for new creativeness. For this reason, he said, “the world owes Herr Hitler a great debt for this awakening, for which he paid with his life.”

But despite the admiration that may have remained for fascism, and his burgeoning interest in communist China, Wilson had evidently come to the end of his tether. After so many years of failed attempts at charting the course of history, he began the doubt even the power of words. As he said in the final passage of *Atomic Civilization*:

> Ever since 1916, when enlightenment to world esthetics dawned on the blindness of my vision, books and essays were written, always on the arts and their meaning in the life of men. Always thoughts were received with silence. Now the time has come when nature demands silence. So I lay aside the pen, still hoping that these years are not thrown away as useless.

This book would be followed by another, *Kurrajong Sit-Look-See* (1954), which was written in an even more abstracted, Chinese-imitative prose. But in 1949, he seems to have realised, at least for a moment, that the very means he had chosen to engage with the world may have been partly at fault, and that the time had come for silence. This silence may have been brief, but what it signified, like Baylebridge’s *Sextains* and Hughes’ *Lost Eurydice*, was a sense of failure, defeat, and wasted life.

---

Conclusion

To conclude, it is clear, through an analysis of the collapse and subsequent development of the philosophies of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge in the late 1930s and early 1940s, that their embrace of both fascist ideas and the fascist cause were justified by several closely related factors. The movements and regimes of fascism had to appear as a viable means to the creation of a new civilisation that was also an alternative modernity. Their theories, too, had to present as legitimate by some marked correspondence to reality as it appeared to them. And in seeking to justify this embrace through their elaborate philosophies of history, which drew primarily on the tradition of German Idealism, their embrace of fascism became dependent on a particular outcome of history—an outcome that was ultimately denied by the actual course of events. This both confirms and expands the findings of the preceding three chapters, in which it was argued that their embrace of fascism was motivated first by their embrace of programmatic modernism, then by their elaboration to their ‘private’ meanings into social and political programmes, and last of all by their philosophies of history and metaphysics to justify their embrace of fascism as an effective means to the ends of history.
CONCLUSION

Nevertheless, let not the reader flatter himself that he will come, in these pages, upon much for his black thumb, nay, little will he find here but he shall have first beheld it—as his candour will perhaps confess for my absolution—in himself.

—William Baylebridge, A Harvest of Hours (1927-1942)

The primary aim of this study has been to identify some of the personal, historical, and intellectual factors that contributed to the development and subsequent embrace of both fascist ideas and the fascist cause by three Australian intellectuals—namely, William Hardy Wilson, Randolph Hughes, and William Baylebridge—by the mid-1930s. The secondary aim of this study has been to determine what the development of these three men might reveal about the development of fascist ideology and the fascist phenomenon in Australia as a whole. To this end, this study has conducted a comparative case study analysis of all three men. In so doing, this study has applied the theory and method of the British political theorist Roger Griffin, whose theory of fascism as palingenetic ultra-nationalism has served as the hermeneutic for this study. In this way, the study has successfully identified many of the personal, historical, and intellectual factors that contributed to their development and embrace of highly comparable forms of fascist ideology. This not only highlights that the relevant influences were present in Australia in that period, but also the fact that these influences, however benign in their basic form, can be developed in a markedly ‘fascistic’ direction, given the right context. In their cases, this context was that of the frustrated creative intellectual caught in a world that refused to accord with their desires and ideas. In addition, this study has also revealed the way that fascist ideas can be adapted to the Australian context, despite the country’s prevailing egalitarian and anti-authoritarian tendencies. But the most significant finding of this study, in addition to those mentioned above, has been the identification of modernism, particularly an almost apocalyptic modernism that sought rebirth through the complete

destruction of the present, as the critical influence in their development and embrace of both fascist ideas and the fascist cause.

For as this study has shown, they each embraced a philosophy of history and metaphysics that understood the world as being in the midst of a violent purgative process, in which the Spirit was struggling towards “richer birth”, as Baylebridge put it—that is, to a decisive break with established modernity. This grandiose vision, which inspired countless minds in that period, convinced them that it was their mission as artists to contribute to the ‘birth’ of this new world through creative expression, which they believed was ultimately the expression of the Spirit. This identification of the creative expression of the individual with the one creativity of the Spirit, as mentioned, had its origins in the philosophies of both Romanticism and German Idealism—each of which had a definite, if at times indirect, influence on all three men. And however much they may have differed in their reception of this influence, it is evident that they were inspired and indeed possessed by its vision of the rebirth of the world through creative expression, which was at times achieved through creative destruction.

To contribute to this rebirth of society and civilisation, therefore, was the urgent task of the moment, and in their search for signs of this much-needed renewal, they each became convinced of the central status of fascism as the agent of this process of cleansing and rebirth. As this study has shown, their philosophies demanded a renewal of the world from within itself, manifest as a concrete and powerful event, that achieved its goals by strength, manhood, and sheer force of will. In addition, this renewal also had to accord with their various personal proclivities—that is, their shared tendencies towards elitism, mysticism, aestheticism, and Dionysian conceptions of life’s purpose. The power, grandeur, and early success of the fascist movement in Europe, its mode of operation, and its emphasis on aesthetics suited them well, and seemed to confirm its importance as a ‘world-historic’ event—that is to say, as an event achieved through the auspices of the Spirit. Furthermore, in meeting their various proclivities, the allure of fascism prevented them from succumbing to that other great ‘event’ of the period—namely, the global revolution of the proletariat.

---

But no man is an atom, and no thinker thinks in a vacuum. Their life and works, though much informed by abstract speculation and the creative and philosophical currents of their day, were also informed by the concrete realities of which they were ostensibly a critique. In each case, their critique was aimed at the prevailing values and institutions of the ‘decadent’ modernity in which they lived, and which they believed had brought about the fragmentation and emasculation of society and the seemingly permanent loss of meaning and purpose to life. The various catastrophes of the modern age, from the erosion of traditional forms and structures by modernisation to the horrors of the First World War, led ultimately to a profound crisis of faith regarding the future of civilisation, particularly the civilisation of the West. At the same time, the rapidly elevating fear that white civilisation would be dwarfed by the ‘coloured’ races, particularly in countries like Australia, was another significant contextual factor. In addition, the emergence of certain distinctly ‘modern’ values in the postwar years, particularly concerning the role of women, was also critical in the development of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge. In short, it was a society and a civilisation in the midst of an extensive re-evaluation of many of its most enduring values and ideals, all of which were interpreted through the ‘narrative mechanism’ of modernity and the fin de siècle.

Influenced, then, by the many tensions and ambiguities of the age, and of those implicit within modernism itself, they each came to embrace a programmatic expression of modernism, and sought, however unconsciously, to elaborate their ‘private’ meanings into their own extensive social, political, and philosophical programmes. In so doing, they intuited many of the essential features of fascist ideology. And though this development was far from inevitable, it is nonetheless significant that despite their isolation from the fascist milieu in Europe (not to mention each other), they developed this seemingly neutral base of influences into highly comparable forms of fascist ideology. Zeev Sternhell once observed that there are, in effect, two kinds of fascism: the technocratic, managerial fascism of such figures as Albert Speer, and the mystical and irrational fascism of such figures as Giovanni Gentile and Julius Evola. And it was certainly into this latter category that Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge are to be placed. Like Evola and Gentile (and countless other literary fascists), they embraced forms of fascist ideology that emphasised the

---

mysticism of politics over the pragmatism of managerial fascism. They considered nations and races to be both spiritual and biological realities and rejected any limitation, as Baylebridge put it, “that springs not from the inner principle of its [the nation’s] own being.”

It was a feverish and frenetic view of the world, which found much, if not all, of its substance not in actual experience but in the conjuration of poetry and prose—which, as E. Morris Miller observed of Baylebridge, was “the means & experience of his own philosophy of life.” And in seeking to come as close to ‘reality’ as they could, as close as possible to the hidden patterns beyond appearances, they embraced ethical and metaphysical principles that justified the use of power and force to achieve their ends. For the Melian oration, as Hughes once said, was “Hitlerism raised to the 9th power.”

But ultimately, as the reader will know, this was all ultimately only a kind of intellectual ‘play’—a simulation, as it were, of meaning and experience achieved through the mediums of poetry and prose. As this study has certainly demonstrated, the consequences of this mode of living for their personal lives was tragic. For as the poet James McAuley once said, the “poetic revolution” is as much a disaster in its own sphere as “political revolution” is in its own. At best, it can offer only a kind of “delusive liberation” that is ultimately “contrary to our whole nature and real needs.”

The truth of this observation can be seen in the extent to which each of them had become alienated from their own bodily existence. This resulted, among other things, in the ‘ecstasies’ of Life’s Testament and Lost Eurydice, not to mention Wilson’s ‘suicide’ in Eucalyptus, and his dream in Yin-Yang of “a world where not everything is regulated by the laws of Nature.” Their neglect of their relationships was also part of this. And though McAuley, as an intellectual anarchist, had once been guilty of this same error himself—that is, in which the artist or intellectual sought to resolve their own personal crises through theories and ideas—he eventually concluded that the

---

5 As Hughes put it in The New Germany, “The talk about race [in Nazi Germany] is not the nonsense that many pseudo (and a few real) intellectuals would have us believe, Sir Arthur Keith, examining the dicta of these pundits, said a very wise thing lately, that should close the matter once for all: “It is what a people feels itself to be that matters, not what anatomists say about it. In brief, race is not a matter of anatomy at all, but of feeling, or … of spirit.” Randolph Hughes, The New Germany (London: Athenaeum Press, 1936), 24; Baylebridge, This Vital Flesh, 153.

6 Emphasis added. Letter from E. Morris Miller to P. R. Stephensen, 8 February 1935, MLMSS 1284 Box 127, SLNSW, 1.

7 Letter from Randolph Hughes to Edwyn Bevan, 15 June 1940, MLMSS 671/7, SLNSW, 1.


9 McAuley, “Culture and Counter-culture,” 16.

10 McAuley, “Culture and Counter-culture,” 16.

11 William Hardy Wilson, Yin-Yang (Flowerdale: H. Wilson, 1934), 42.
ambiguities of modern existence and the modern age were fundamentally irresolvable. As he said in a lecture given shortly before his death in 1976, after what was in many ways a spiritually difficult life:

I cannot pretend that the tension between the modern and the traditional has ceased within myself. I know I have to live in ambiguities and dilemmas, not letting go one end in order to cling with both hands to the other in false simplification. One has to "carry it all within" as honestly and loyally as possible, whether it be the problem of the arts or other problems that pull us different ways. That is not an easy task; indeed it is a torment. Yet the thought keeps occurring to me that I am not running the world and cannot expect to have all the answers.¹²

This same realisation does not seem to have occurred to Wilson, Hughes, or Baylebridge—however much they may have realised the futility of their efforts in the end. But as oblivious as they have been on this point, McAuley’s dilemma was their own, and suggests that their error lay precisely in their attempt to know ‘all the answers’, to have the entire world in their hand, and to resolve the tension between concept and reality by enforcing their vision on the world. But as Griffin observed, this kind of action can only end in tragedy, as this study has clearly shown.¹³

In this regard, it is worth quoting Mark Lilla’s brilliant essay, ‘The Lure of Syracuse’, which provides a clear articulation of precisely the kind of ‘tyrannical’ intellectuals that these men had been—and it is not without significance that that this essay was originally published barely a week after the September 11 attacks in 2001:

Some tyrannical souls become rulers of cities and nations, and when they do entire peoples are subjugated by the rulers’ erotic madness. But such tyrants are rare and their grip on power is weak. There is another, more common class of tyrannical soul that Socrates considers, those who enter public life not as rulers, but as teachers, orators, and poets—what today we would call intellectuals. […] Like Dionysius [of Syracuse], this kind of intellectual is passionate about the life of the mind, but unlike the philosopher he cannot master that passion; he dives headlong into political discussion, writing books, giving speeches, offering advice in a frenzy of activity that barely masks his incompetence and irresponsibility. Such men consider themselves to be independent minds, when the truth is that they are a herd driven by their inner demons and thirsty for the approval of a fickle public. Those who listen to such men, usually the young, may feel the stir of passion within; this feeling does them credit, for properly channeled it might bring honor to them and justice to their cities. But they are in need of an education in intellectual self-control if they are to turn that passion exclusively to good use.¹⁴

Though this may not exhaust the mystery of these men, it does explain much, and should serve as a warning to us all. For as Lilla went on:

Tyranny is not dead, not in politics and certainly not in our souls. The age of the master ideologies may be over, but so long as men and women think about politics—so long as there are thinking men and women at all—the temptation will be there to

¹² McAuley, “Culture and Counter-culture,” 19.
succumb to the allure of an idea, to allow passion to blind us to its tyrannical potential, and to abdicate our first responsibility, which is to master the tyrant within.\textsuperscript{15}

Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge plainly failed to achieve this. But thankfully, at least for the time being, their impact on Australian society and politics has been minimal. Many of the intellectual and historical factors that contributed to their embrace of fascist ideas remain present. But perhaps this study can, in some small way, help the young and restless of our day from succumbing to the same temptation, to sit comfortably in ambiguity, and ‘to carry it all within’.

There are, however, certain limitations to this research that must be noted. The first of these stems from the methodology itself. Griffin’s empathetic approach, together with his theory of fascism as palingenetic ultra-nationalism, have revealed with remarkable clarity the patterns and ideas that are apparent in the writings of all three men. This includes such things as their problematisation of time, their belief that it was the task of the artist to revitalise civilisation, and their embrace of the possibility of creative destruction. In this way, Griffin’s theory and method have made this study possible, highlighting commonalities of which I would have been otherwise faintly aware. But in so doing, this methodology has probably emphasised these commonalities to the neglect of their considerable differences. Wilson and Hughes, for instance, embraced a civilisational view of history and culture to which Baylebridge assented only reluctantly, once it was clear that the creation of this new society in Australia had become impossible.

Another significant limitation to this study stems from the choice of Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge as its subject matter. As this study has shown, each of them had travelled extensively in Europe and elsewhere, where they encountered many of the originating influences of fascist ideology. Consequently, the extent to which this study can demonstrate the presence of these influences in Australia, such that a domestic form of fascism could develop without the ideologue having travelled abroad, is somewhat reduced. Considering the extent to which Australian culture was influenced directly by British culture in that period, this is perhaps a minor issue. But it is nonetheless important to note that the development and embrace of fascist ideas by Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge may have been impossible, or made considerably more improbable, if they had never travelled abroad. Certainly, in the case of Hughes, had he stayed in Australia, it is unlikely that he would have established the same

\textsuperscript{15} Lilla, \textit{The Reckless Mind}, 216.
connections with the European far-right, which living in London had enabled him to do.

It is also possible that the choice of Hughes, who never set foot in Australia after 1915, as a subject has also undermined the capacity of this study to shed light on the development of fascism in Australia specifically. But I would contend that any expatriate who spent their formative years in Australia remains an Australian, at least in some historically relevant sense. Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge were each about 24 years old when they left for Europe in 1905, 1908, and 1915 respectively; and though Hughes spent the rest of his life in England (he is buried in the town of Tunbridge Wells), he maintained an interest in Australian affairs, which culminated in his scathing review of Stephensen’s *Foundations of Culture* in 1936. In fact, his friend A. R. Chisholm was certain that Hughes “was not without a secret nostalgia, I am sure; and he was always keenly interested in what was going on out here [in Australia].” The fact that Hughes’ greatest inspiration in life was the poet C. J. Brennan (who also influenced both Wilson and Herbert M. Moran) and that he seems to have been profoundly influenced by the culture at the University of Sydney, only further indicates that he remained an Australian after 1915—certainly, at least, in the sense that the integrity of this project requires.

But the significance of this study as it stands, in addition to highlighting the manner in which a particular ideologue comes to embrace their fascist beliefs, is that it reveals a number of intellectual factors that contributed to this development and embrace that were present in Australia at that time. Perhaps the most significant of these were the influence of modernist thought and German Idealism, the latter of which they may have encountered primarily through its equivalent in England. Furthermore, this study has also shown how these various influences were adapted and embraced in accordance with their highly particular personal and historical circumstances. In so doing, this study has also highlighted the extent to which the extremes of fascist ideology were potential extrapolations of this seemingly neutral base of influences. This potential of modernist thought to justify both scientised racism and the pursuit of freedom and equality is a fact that cannot stressed enough.

This is significant, for it is not outside the realm of possibility that Baylebridge’s writings could be embraced by an Australian fascist or far-right movement. In fact, speaking in 1947, Manning Clark feared exactly this outcome and noted its potential as a warning. “We are likely to hear more,” he said, of a need for ‘leadership’, and the need for enduring physical hardship in order to achieve something better. Herein [in Baylebridge’s work] lies the ideology for an authoritarian movement in Australia. Children of a future day may be required to pay homage to one William Baylebridge.19

The unfortunate fact is that Clark’s warning, made only a few short years after Baylebridge’s death, has since been proven correct—at least with regard to his concerns regarding the potency of Baylebridge’s writings for use by an authoritarian movement. Since 2003, a selection of excerpts from National Notes has been hosted on Dr Jim Saleam’s website, where he urges his compatriots to study Baylebridge’s writings. “This forgotten thinker,” said Saleam (1955-), who is the current chairman of the far-right Australia First Party,

deserves a place in the new pantheon of articulators of an Australian ethic for a new century. We expect our readers to search out the poetry and other work by Baylebridge as part of the necessary program of cultural-ideological warfare in which we are engaged.20

Though Saleam may be a marginal figure, he has spent decades constructing a canon of Australian ‘radical nationalist’ writings, in which he includes such figures as Norman Lindsay and the Labor minister Frank Anstey (1865-1940), which could be used to justify an Australian authoritarian movement, or at the very least the kind of random acts of violence that the far-right at present tends to commit.21 It is unlikely that such an appropriation would occur with the writings of either Wilson or Hughes. Hughes’ writings, with their emphasis on the possibility of an Anglo-German-Franco alliance, were too specific to their context to be appropriated to the present context, and Wilson’s were too incoherent and idiosyncratic to be worth studying for anything other than historical curiosity. But Baylebridge, despite his archaic style, remains a significant voice of the Australian far-right, who could easily be marshalled to the purposes of a contemporary authoritarian movement. Indeed, his adaptation of the Anzac legend to a fascist end was perceptive to the social and cultural context of

Australia in that period—and it is not without significance that the poet Ian Mudie (1911-1976), an admirer of Baylebridge and another member of Saleam’s ‘radnat’ canon, once wrote to Baylebridge to thank him for “the strong effect […] that “National Notes” has had on my whole outlook. We that are beginning the race salute you.”

With this potential presence in Australia even to this day, and with the baleful rise of the internet, the many intellectual influences on which these men had drawn, in addition to those that have emerged since, demands vigilance and integrity from anyone who would resist the emergence of such a movement in Australia. However obscure these threads of influence may be, they are present in Australia and abroad, not only in the various writings collected by Saleam, but through the efforts of such groups as the Sydney Traditionalist Forum, a Sydney-based ‘neo-reactionary’ forum that has hosted numerous far-right advocates and intellectuals from around the world, including Alain de Benoist (1943-) and Tomislav Sunić (1953-), both of whom have been quoted favourably by Saleam.

It is far from certain what might come of this. But whatever the case may be, it is important that the influence of such movements and figures is not underestimated—particularly in the age of GRECE and QAnon and, as I write these words, barely a month after the storming of the US Capitol and reports of white supremacists chanting ‘Heil Hitler!’ in the Grampians on Australia Day.

Though the fascism of the 1930s is unlikely to return, as Griffin himself has said, the fascist ‘essence’ is already present, though expressed in strange and unfamiliar forms, for which reason the kind of analysis that this study has provided, which has assessed the personal and intellectual factors that contribute to the development of such thought, may provide some assistance in resisting its rise on an intellectual level. At the very least, it may spare some poor souls from devoting their lives to such causes, which can only end, as it did for Wilson, Hughes, and Baylebridge, in tragedy.

---


BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources (Periodicals)

Advocate (Burnie, Tas.).
Age (Melbourne, Vic.).
Argus (Melbourne, Vic.).
Brisbane Courier (Brisbane, Qld).
Bulletin (Sydney, NSW).
Daily Mail (Brisbane, Qld).
Daily Telegraph (Sydney, NSW).
Herald (Melbourne, Vic.).
National Advocate (Bathurst, NSW).
Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate (Newcastle, NSW).
Publicist (Sydney, NSW).
Sun (Sydney, NSW).
Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, NSW).
Telegraph (Brisbane, Qld).
Week (Brisbane, Qld).
Queensland Figaro (Brisbane, Qld).

Primary Sources (Publications)


Baylebridge, William (Blocksidge, William). Love Redeemed, revised ed. Sydney: Tallabila Press, 1934.\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a} Love Redeemed was not published in its entirety until the revised edition was published by Baylebridge’s own imprint, the Tallabila Press, in 1934. Selections from the original unpublished version were included in Selected Poems (1919).

——. This Vital Flesh. Sydney: Tallabila Press, 1939.b

——. This Vital Flesh, edited by P. R. Stephensen. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1961.b


b This Vital Flesh (1939/1961) combines the final revised editions of Life’s Testament (second/revised ed.), The New Life (second/revised ed.), and National Notes (third ed.). These same editions of Life’s Testament and National Notes were published as standalone volumes in 1936. The revised edition of The New Life was only published as part of This Vital Flesh. The 1939 and 1961 editions of This Vital Flesh are identical, with the sole exception of an additional preface by Stephensen in the later edition.

c The revised edition of An Anzac Muster, though completed in 1933, was not published in Baylebridge’s lifetime. It was finally published as part of the Collected Works in 1962.

d The Growth of Love (1963) combines the final revised editions of Love Redeemed (second/revised ed.), Moreton Miles (second/revised ed.), and various other poems not previously published, but revised from their earliest versions. This same edition of Love Redeemed was published as a standalone volume in 1934, and this same edition of Moreton Miles was printed but not published in 1941.

e Salvage (1964) combines the final revised editions of A Wreath (second/revised ed.), Seven Tales (second/revised ed.), A July Interlude (second/revised ed.), and Sextains, which is unchanged from the original 1939 edition. A July Interlude was not published in its entirety until the revised edition was included in Salvage in 1964. As with Love Redeemed, selections from the original version of A July Interlude were included in Selected Poems (1919).


———. *Eucalyptus*. Wandin: H. Wilson, 1941.


*Primary Sources (Archival Materials)*

Papers of Angus & Robertson Ltd., State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 314 and MLMSS 3269.

Papers of William Baylebridge, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 2786.

Manuscript of *Australia to England and Other Verses*, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 951.

Papers of John Le Gay Brereton, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 218.

Papers of Charles Bernard Cockett, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 458.

Papers of Randolph Hughes, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 671 and MLMSS 812.

Papers of Philip Hughes, State Library of New South Wales, MLDOC 3342.

Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, National Library of Australia, MS 1174.

Papers of P. R. Stephensen, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 1284.

Papers of William Hardy Wilson, National Library of Australia, MS Acc 07/082.
Secondary Sources (Scholarly Publications)


Davies, Ross. *‘A Student in Arms’: Donald Hankey and Edwardian Society at War.* Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.


*Other sources*


APPENDIX
Fig. 1 (top left):

RANDOLPH WILLIAM HUGHES (1889-1955), photographed in his apartment in London (c. 1930s). From the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 458/10.

Out of copyright.

Fig. 2 (bottom right):

WILLIAM HARDY WILSON (1881-1955), photographed in his home by Harold Cazneaux (1921). From the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, ON 39.

Out of copyright.
Fig. 3a (top left):

WILLIAM BAYLEBRIDGE (1883-1942), born CHARLES WILLIAM BLOCKSIDE, photographed as a young man in Brisbane (c.1908). From the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 2786/1.

Out of copyright.

Fig. 3b (bottom right):


Copyright holder unknown. Reproduced without permission.
Identification card issued to Randolph Hughes during his tour of Germany by the NSDAP Foreign Press Department (1936). From the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 671/23 Item 175. Out of copyright.
Fig. 5:

The Martin Place Cenotaph in Martin Place, Sydney (c. 1934). From the City of Sydney Archives, A-00013826. Out of copyright.
Fig. 6a:

St. James’ Anglican Church on King Street, Sydney (c. 1930s). From the National Library of Australia, PIC/15611/15899. Out of copyright.
Fig. 6b:

Hyde Park Barracks on Macquarie Street, Sydney (c. 1880-1900). From the City of Sydney Archives, A-00012880. Out of copyright.