

Interlude 1

In the essays that follow next I want to discuss two family sagas, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* by Henry Handel Richardson (its three parts published in 1917, 1925, and 1929, with the complete work in 1930), and *All That Swagger*, by Miles Franklin (1936). Here are two passages to indicate a connection between them, the first from HHR:

On damp or marshy ground wattles were aflame: great quivering masses of softest gold. Wherever these trees stood, the fragrance of their yellow puff-ball blossoms saturated the air; one knew, before one saw them, that they were coming, and long after they had been left behind one carried their honeyed sweetness with one; against them, no other scent could have made itself felt. And to Mahony these waves of perfume, into which they were continually running, came, in the course of the hours, to stand for a symbol of the golden future for which he and Polly were making; and whenever in after years he met with wattles in full bloom, he was carried back to the blue spring day of this wedding-journey, and jogged on once more, in the light cart, with his girl-wife at his side.

The opening chapter of *All That Swagger* details the obstacles which Irish society put in the way of a union between Danny Delacey and Johanna Cooley, Danny excited by the prospects he believes to be offering in Australia, and Johanna far less certain, but willing to go with the excitable youngster who wants her to share his vision. They elope. Six months later, their ship enters

Port Jackson. A century later, a descendant of their marriage returns to Ireland ...

... but not a trace of a Cooley nor a Delacey could he find. Nevertheless, in the indestructible archives of imagination, Mrs Delacey still sits upon the milestone with her head bowed upon her arms. By the further aid of a simple song, Danny and his Johanna remain for ever in the sunlight on the stile, he young and brave, and listening to the words she now for ever speaks, the lovelight in her eyes, the red upon her cheeks.

Two young couples, two engagements with fate. Two very different prose styles, as you will have noticed: a measured objectivity, in the writing of HHR, and a loving, excited admiration in Miles Franklin's recall. Other similarities and even greater differences will emerge, I'm sure, as we make the two journeys through much the same period of colonial Australia's story.

In the two essays that follow, quotations from *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* are from the Reprint Society edition of 1954, following the Heinemann edition of 1930, while quotations from *All That Swagger* are from *The Bulletin* (first Australian) edition of 1936. Also referred to are *Maurice Guest* (Heinemann, London, 1908), *The Getting of Wisdom* (Heinemann, London, 1970), and *Myself When Young* (Heinemann, London, 1948).