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Acts of writing

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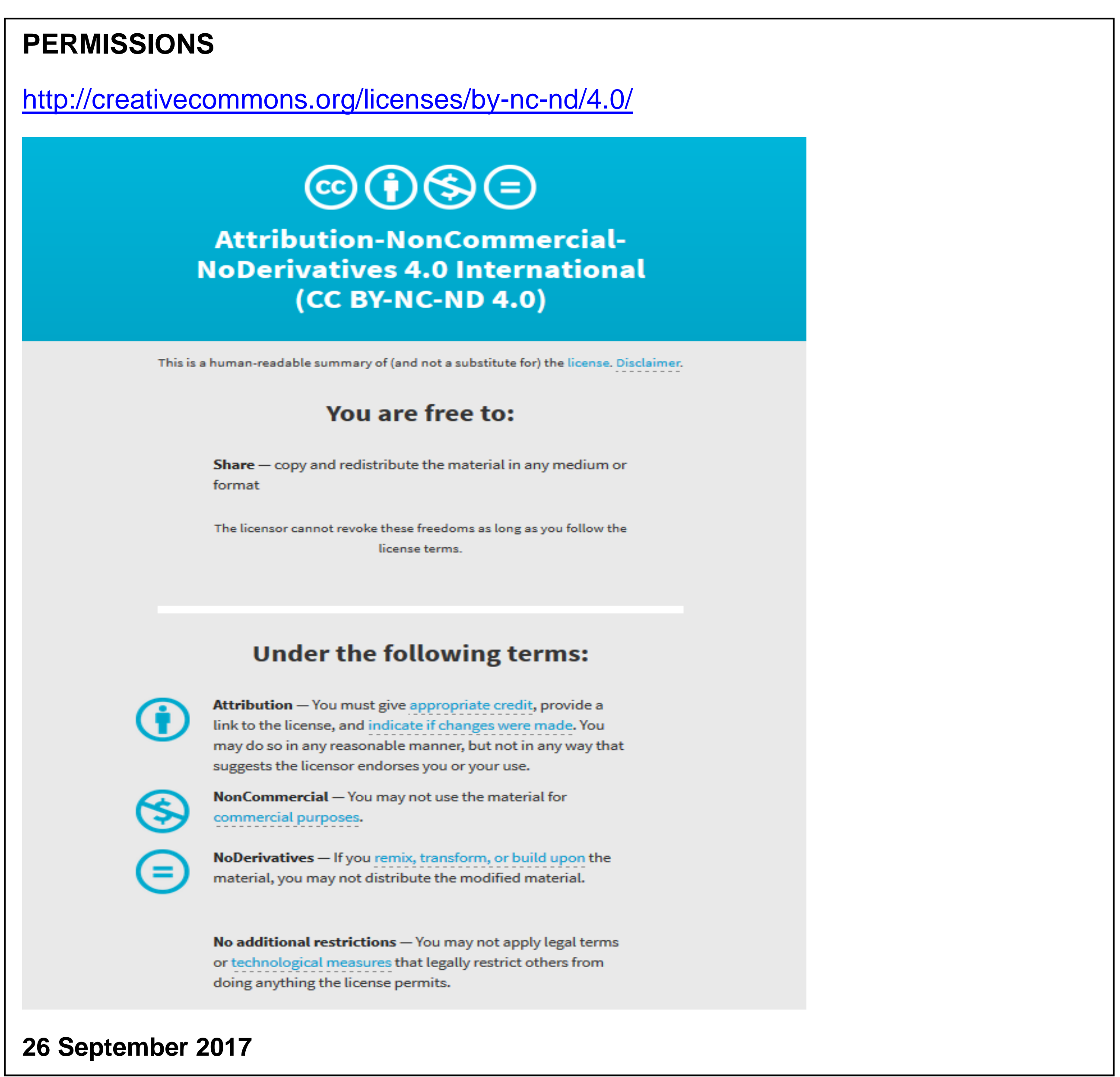

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1 Acts of Writing

Kerryn Goldsworthy

The city of Adelaide existed extensively in writing before one house had been built, before one street had been surveyed, before the place had been named or its site determined. It was built on acts of writing, and it had existed in writing, a city built of paper and parchment, for years before it became a physical fact. The city itself, with its geometric streets and quarried stone, seemed to be somehow absent from all the documents surrounding its establishment, as though it were the hole in the middle of a large discursive doughnut.

That might be understandable, given that the focus was on establishing the laws and limits of the colony, rather than on the city itself. But throughout the history of South Australian writing there seems to be surprisingly little emphasis on, or representation of, the city of Adelaide itself. South Australia has writers associated with Mt Gambier, Auburn, Penola and Eudunda; it has writers who write about China and Russia; it even has writers who write space operas. But by comparison with Brisbane or Perth or Hobart, much less with Melbourne and Sydney, there is relatively little writing grounded in the city of Adelaide, at least not in a way that brings it to life after the fashion of

Patrick White's Sydney or Helen Garner's Melbourne or David Malouf's Brisbane.

In the many historical accounts, certain key documents are repeatedly mentioned as crucial points in the establishment of the colony of South Australia and the city of Adelaide. The earliest of these was published in 1829: Edward Gibbon Wakefield's *A Letter From Sydney*, in which he outlined his scheme for 'systematic colonisation', on whose principles the colony of South Australia was subsequently founded. The next is *Two Expeditions Into the Interior of Southern Australia*, published in 1833 by Captain Charles Sturt, whose description of the country around the lower reaches of the Murray and whose recommendation of it as a good place for settlement was influential both in the decision to establish a colony and in the choice of where the earliest arrivals would land. A third is the *South Australia Act of 1834* (or 'Foundation Act'), which wrote the future establishment of the colony into British law, and a fourth is the Letters Patent of February 1836, which brought the colony into being as a geopolitical reality. A fifth, and the one that has had the most lasting resonance for South Australians, was the Proclamation that was read to the assembled colonists under the Old Gum Tree—or possibly under some other gum tree; the point is still disputed and the truth may be permanently lost—at Holdfast Bay on 28 December 1836.

These are the five key documents on the basis of which the Province of South Australia and its capital or 'principal town' were established. But the word 'Adelaide' does not appear anywhere in any of them, and on the day that the Proclamation was read, the city's site was not yet decided on.

Writing about place is almost always an act of mimesis. The writing is a response to and a representation of something that already exists. But although these early documents are all about the colony of South Australia, and by extension the city of Adelaide, this process is reversed in them: the city of Adelaide did not yet exist except as an imaginary place, and did not begin to exist until a fortnight after the Proclamation was

read, when Colonel William Light began his survey near the corner of what became North and West Terraces. The city of Adelaide was brought into being by a succession of acts of writing: acts not of mimesis, but of projection.

On the voyage out, the three earliest boatloads of settlers likewise kept shipboard diaries of a voyage whose destination was as yet non-existent. It was an imaginary basket into which they had put every egg of their lives and futures. In describing their fellow emigrants and anticipating their lives in the new country as they wrote their shipboard letters and journals, they were writing the community into existence, as were the settlers who followed in their wake.

This chapter considers the genesis of Adelaide in acts of writing, tracing its beginnings as a planned city not only in terms of its physical layout, but also in terms of its social, political and economic workings. It looks at some of the literary aspects of the documents that brought the city into being, and at a tradition of literary references to Adelaide either as Paradise or as Utopia. And it gives some examples of the ways in which the idea of Adelaide as an abstraction, an ideal or an absence—and sometimes as more than one of those things at a time—has persisted as an influence and as a motif in writing about the city. It's a given that the establishment of the city of Adelaide was an act of Aboriginal dispossession; in spite of the surprisingly detailed and contemporary-sounding paragraphs concerning the rights and treatment of the Kaurna people of the Adelaide Plains in some of these early documents, Aboriginal culture here as elsewhere was literally overwritten by the process of white settlement. The condition of written-ness was one that automatically excluded, if not erased, the Aboriginal culture of the time and place.

* * *

On 14 May 1827, Edward Gibbon Wakefield, then 31 years old, was sentenced to three years' imprisonment in Newgate for the abduction of a teenage heiress, something he had already done once before and so much more successfully that when the first one died in childbirth, her fortune had set him up financially for life, which did not stop him from trying it again. While in prison, he became interested in the fates and life stories of his fellow-prisoners, including men who had been or were about to be transported as convicts, and many of whom as victims of the Industrial Revolution had found themselves with no legal means of support.

During this period Wakefield became a strong and inspiring advocate of emigration as a cure for the overcrowding and underemployment of the times. The study that he made of colonisation resulted in the writing and publication, in 1829, of his highly influential book *A Letter From Sydney, The Principal Town of Australasia*. It was, in fact, a letter from Newgate—in the event, Wakefield never set foot in Australia, much less in South Australia—but it used the reported weaknesses and failures of other Australian colonies as a basis for the scheme that he called 'systematic colonisation', as summarised here in Graeme Pretty's entry for Wakefield in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*:

> Wakefield claimed that Australian colonies were suffering from chaotic granting of free land, shortage of labour and consequent dependence on convicts. He argued that if settlement were concentrated, waste lands of the crown could be readily sold and the proceeds applied to the emigration of labourers, preferably young married couples, thereby giving maximum population relief in Britain and ensuring a balanced, fruitful colonial society. But if the price for crown land were made high enough to discourage labourers from immediately acquiring land they could not use, such tribulations as those of the Swan River settlement would be avoided. Sufficiency of labour and a congenial society would attract capital, encourage emigration, assure prosperity, and justify the rights of a colony to elect representatives to its own legislature.

Ideally the plan was self-perpetuating, like an executive toy. And it was a version of this scheme, though tinkered with here and watered down there, that was eventually put in place to establish the province of South Australia. Although reality intervened fairly quickly, the essence both of the plan and of the ideals behind it were enshrined in British law and in the history of South Australia.

A Letter From Sydney is what we'd probably now call creative nonfiction. It's a factual document using fiction-writing techniques, most notably the invention of a first-person narrator purporting to be a colonist in Sydney who has observed what works and what doesn't in the Australian colonies, and is offering his scheme for colonisation from the point of view of imaginary personal experience. Wakefield makes his argument persuasive by the use of literary techniques: turning it into a dramatic monologue and a narrative, not to mention the exotic setting. It also, on its title page, contains in large letters the words 'Edited by Robert Gouger.'

In one of the neater ironies of the only convict-free colony in the country, South Australia's two earliest founders and enthusiasts, Gouger and Wakefield, had both seen the inside of a jail. In a further irony, Gouger's imprisonment was for a debt to a printer, incurred by the costs of printing and distributing Wakefield's first outline of his theories. It was during Gouger's brief imprisonment in 1829 that he first learned of the explorations of Flinders and Baudin, and late in 1830 he heard of Charles Sturt's epic journey down the Murray through southern Australia and turned his attention there, thinking it sounded like an ideal place for an experiment in systematic colonisation.

The eventual success of Gouger's tireless efforts over the next few years to establish one of Wakefield's ideal colonies in southern Australia was due largely to Captain Charles Sturt's account of the countryside on the Fleurieu Peninsula, in his book *Two Expeditions Into the Interior of Southern Australia*. After this influential account appeared in 1833, the

hitherto hostile Colonial Office in London appears to have changed its collective mind in the face of widespread public interest.

At this point, however, it is instructive to look at what Sturt actually said. Having reached the Murray mouth at the end of his epic journey to map the river, and having realised that not only had the promised support ship failed to arrive but that it was going to be impossible to sail safely out of Encounter Bay and back around the coast to Sydney, Sturt's already exhausted crew turned around and began the 1500-kilometre row upstream, back to their depot on the Murrumbidgee. Sturt never explored the land to their west, between the river and St Vincent's Gulf, at all; the closest he came was a quick glimpse across to the western side of the Mt Lofty Ranges as they set off back upstream:

> reduced as [we] were from previous exertion, beset as our homeward path was by difficulty and danger, and involved as our eventual safety was in obscurity and doubt, I could not but deplore the necessity that obliged me to re-cross the Lake Alexandrina … and to relinquish the examination of its western shores. We were borne over its ruffled and agitated surface with such rapidity, that I had scarcely time to view it as we passed; but, cursory as my glance was, I could not but think I was leaving behind me the fullest reward of our toil, in a country that would ultimately render our discoveries valuable, and benefit the colony for whose interests we were engaged. (Chapter 8)

Closer inspection was left to the doomed Captain Collet Barker, sent by Governor Darling the following year, on the basis of Sturt's report, to explore the area. Barker and his party had made and recorded a fairly detailed exploration of the Adelaide Hills and the land on either side of them by the time of his death; he was killed by a group of Ngarrindjeri men after having swum across the Murray mouth, with his compass tied to the top of his head to keep it dry, in order to take bearings from the other side. In writing up his own journals for publication in book form, Sturt included the report from a member of Barker's party, which

was a fairly detailed description of the coast, the Adelaide Hills and the Adelaide Plain—although, with the landscape's geographical features described but as yet unnamed, even readers familiar with the landscape might struggle today to recognise some of its features. At the beginning of *The Road to Botany Bay*, Paul Carter writes 'If we believe the name, the place is still recognisable. Or is it? Before the name: what was the place like before it was named?' (xiii)

Under the heading 'Adaption of this part of the country for colonisation', Sturt wrote

> From [Barker's] account it would appear that a spot has, at length, been found upon the south coast of New Holland, to which the colonist might venture with every prospect of success, and in whose valleys the exile might hope to build for himself and for his family a peaceful and prosperous home. All who have ever landed upon the eastern shore of St. Vincent's Gulf, agree as to the richness of its soil, and the abundance of its pasture. (Chapter 8)

Sturt's diction and cadences there are poetic and almost biblical, with exiles and valleys and pastures, and alliterative v's and p's. The rhetorical power of this passage no doubt played its part in engaging the British public and persuading the Colonial Office to change its mind, in spite of the fact that Sturt had never laid eyes on the place himself. His biographer J.H.L. Cumpston, writing in 1951, claims for Sturt's book that

> It had one immediate and most important result. ... The movement towards the foundation of a 'Wakefield' colony had languished, but the publication of Sturt's story of a large river, and his almost lyrical praise of the fertile river valley, brought the whole movement again into vigorous activity. He was invited by the Under-Secretary Hay at the Colonial Office to give his views as to the geographical prospects of a settlement in South Australia in the region of the Murray River. He gave these views in a long memorandum dated 17th February, 1834, in which, having the benefit of Barker's survey ... he recommended the vicinity of Port Adelaide River as the site for

> the first town, 'because [wrote Sturt] it appears to me that when the distant interior shall be occupied, and communication established with the lake and the valley of the Murray, the banks of this creek will be the proper and natural site for the capital'. (Chapter 5)

This is the first mention that I know of in any document of plans for a capital city. Only six months later, in August 1834, the South Australia Act was passed through the British Parliament. Written in impenetrable nineteenth century legalese, this document enshrines in law the basic premises of Wakefield's scheme to achieve a balance of labour, land and capital and to establish an Emigration Fund through the sale of South Australian land, as well as showing the kind of social engineering that Wakefield argued would 'ensure a balanced, fruitful colonial society' (Pretty) but that also looks, to the contemporary reader, ominously like a plan to breed a labouring class:

> [the] 'Emigration Fund' ... shall without any deduction whatsoever ... be employed in conveying poor emigrants from Great Britain or Ireland And to the said province provided also that the poor persons who shall by means of the said 'Emigration Fund' be conveyed to the said province shall, as far as possible, be adult persons of the two sexes in equal proportions, And not exceeding the age of thirty years.

This document contains no mention anywhere of a capital or 'principal town'. Nor do the Letters Patent of February 1836 in which King William IV, who had been empowered by the Act of 1834 to establish the Province of South Australia, duly and officially did so. Again, there is no mention of a capital or principal town in this short document, and nor is there in the Proclamation that was read to a crowd of over 200 colonists in the shade of a gum tree outside Robert Gouger's tent—Gouger having by this time been appointed Colonial Secretary—at Holdfast Bay, a little way inland in what is now North Glenelg. Clearly showing the hand of Gouger, whose concern for the Kaurna people is expressed again and again in his own diary, the Proclamation consists of three short paragraphs, two of

which consist entirely of calls upon the colonists to cooperate in securing Aboriginal rights, freedoms and safety.

Since the Province of South Australia had come into being as a geopolitical reality in February 1836 with the issuing of the Letters Patent, it's not clear exactly what was being proclaimed on Proclamation Day. The opening sentence begins 'In announcing to the Colonists ... the establishment of government', which suggests to me that the proclamation was simply Governor Hindmarsh's announcement of his own arrival. Robert Gouger had woken up on that hot morning, had gone out of his tent to feed his precious cashmere goats, and had seen the Governor's ship, the *Buffalo*, in the distance, sailing up the gulf; the proclamation ceremony was held that afternoon, in 39°C heat. Geoffrey Dutton and David Elder, in their unashamedly partisan biography of Colonel William Light, refer to the proclamation ceremony as 'Hindmarsh's little circus' (Dutton and Elder 134).

But although there's no mention in the Proclamation of a capital or a city, there is an exhortation in the first paragraph to behave as an orderly society, and perhaps this is the moment at which the colonists' sense of themselves as a community began to cohere. The Proclamation calls upon the colonists 'to conduct themselves on all occasions with order and quietness, duly to respect the laws, and by a course of industry and sobriety, by the practice of sound morality, and a strict observance of the Ordinances of Religion, to prove themselves worthy to be the founders of a great and free Colony'. Order, quietness, industry, sobriety, morality, religion: perhaps this document was the genesis of Adelaide's largely undeserved reputation as a city of wowsers, goody-goodies and 'churchianity'.

In another kind of early document, the shipboard letters and journals written by the colonists on the voyage out, their destination is likewise strangely absent from their writing. Although the place to which they're going is the end and aim of their journey and the whole point of being at sea, their letters and journals concentrate almost exclusively on

shipboard conditions, companions and tribulations; on the seasickness, the boredom, the food and the weather. In 2011 History SA established a website called *Bound for South Australia: Journey of a Lifetime*, structured like a blog with weekly entries, in which the voyages of the first nine ships out to South Australia were recreated through weekly updates over 45 weeks. The entries included written summaries of events that week, as well as numerous extracts from the shipboard diaries of the colonists, including Governor Hindmarsh's waspish private secretary George Stevenson and the practical, cheerful and energetic Robert Gouger.

But like the recently discovered shipboard diary of the young Scottish Presbyterian emigrant James Bell, these documents concentrate almost exclusively on shipboard happenings from week to week; their destination is barely mentioned. The capital city has been well established by the time James Bell takes ship late in 1838, but almost the only time he mentions the place where he has been bound all along, and which must have been a great deal in his thoughts, is in the final entry: 'Tomorrow I hope to step ashore at Adelaide' (174).

* * *

The representation of Adelaide as some form of absence is not confined to these early documents. Our most thorough, evocative, detailed and beautiful representation of the city in literature is Barbara Hanrahan's first book *The Scent of Eucalyptus*. But Hanrahan wrote this book in London; as with one of her literary heroes, Katherine Mansfield, she wrote one of literature's most memorable accounts of an antipodean childhood home from a self-imposed exile in the northern hemisphere. Both of them needed to be absent from the place, or for the place to be absent from them, in order to see and write about it in so powerful and evocative a way. In her own account of writing *The Scent of Eucalyptus*, Hanrahan is very clear about the psychological mechanics of it: she needs to be separate from her remembered childhood before she can write about it,

and that involves both her own absence from Adelaide and the death of her grandmother, the most powerful figure of her childhood. After her grandmother's death, Hanrahan recalled,

> I started keeping a diary again ... The old world was gone from me physically, yet it was inside my body, hurting so much it had to get out ... for the next six months I sat down every day and wrote about my childhood in Adelaide ... Dead, my grandmother had set me free to write. ('Beginnings', 84)

Even one of the most recently published books about Adelaide figures the city as something distantly seen from unfamiliar angles, and sometimes as a looming absence. Michael Ladd's beautiful book about the River Torrens is called *Karrawirra Parri: Walking the Torrens From Source to Sea*. It combines poetry, prose and photographs in its account of our river. It is at once a book about Adelaide and not about Adelaide at all: in its emphasis on Aboriginal sites and stories, on indigenous vegetation and on native wildlife, there's a sense in which it's almost an anti-Adelaide, an evocation of what the landscape and life of the river was like before the city was built on its banks.

* * *

When it comes to theorising about the relationship between writing and place, the three names that come first to mind are those of the philosopher Gaston Bachelard, the Marxist theorist and filmmaker Guy Debord and the great American regionalist fiction writer Eudora Welty. But the ideas of all three are predicated on the assumption that the place pre-exists the writing: that there already exists, to be written about, a place with the dense material reality of an established location with a name and a history. In her luminous essay 'Place in Fiction', Welty is writing for other writers, talking about the importance of writing about place as a creative act of mimesis, a response to and representation of the locations of stories. Bachelard's ideas in *The Poetics of Space* and Debord's theory of

psychogeography both presuppose the material density and complexity of a build environment: psychogeography is to do with the effect of urban space, which is often crowded and chaotic, on the human subject, while Bachelard's ideas depend on the contents, structures and functions of intimate space: the house, the attic, the wardrobe, the chest of drawers.

Given the psychological importance that both Bachelard and Debord ascribe to a built environment, in fact, it's interesting to consider the degree to which the colonists might have felt that as a lack. The culture of Victorian England was one that privileged *stuff*, in all its forms: bags, boxes, objects, gadgets, cupboards, drawers and general paraphernalia. The colonists had only such of their stuff as they had managed to bring with them, and were living in makeshift tents and huts while they waited for a city to be created. And many of these people were from cities: an understanding of daily interaction with urban space was a central part of their ontology.

A more useful set of ideas with which to approach the earliest, which is to say pre-Adelaide, white history of South Australia is that to be found in Paul Carter's groundbreaking book from 1987, *The Road to Botany Bay*, which seems to look more valuable and original the older it gets. Some of the uses to which it might be put in a study of this time and place in South Australia's history are suggested by his observation that

> The 'facts' of ... spatial history are not houses and clearings, but phenomena as they appear to the traveller, as his intentional gaze conjures them up. They are the directions and distances in which houses and clearings *may* be found or founded. (xxiv, emphasis in original)

Consider, for example, the case of Colonel William Light: asthmatic, tubercular, already 51 years old, unsupplied with any form of transport apart from boats and his own feet and sent out to the colony much later than he should have been, Light spent the second half of 1836 trudging across the terrain of the Adelaide Plain, Encounter Bay and the Eyre and

Fleurieu Peninsulas during the early months before the arrival of the Governor, struggling to make sense of earlier accounts of the regions and to work out what might be the best place to situate the city and begin his survey.

Another useful theorist in this context is Benedict Anderson, with his notion of 'imagined communities'; while he is specifically talking about nationalism, the idea could apply equally well to a group of colonists trying to bring a new group identity into being in a new place. As well as being a real, if as yet embryonic, community, the colony of South Australia also constituted an imagined community in the Anderson sense: something in which the members of a national community don't all know, and never can all know, each other, yet perceive themselves as related through common nationhood. Many of the colonists regarded the Province of South Australia as a kind of mini-nation, and what Anderson calls 'the Utopian element' in nationalism was certainly present in the establishment of South Australia.

There's a long history of referring to South Australia as Utopia or as Paradise, something that would make many of the early colonists, many generations of bored teenagers, and many contemporary eastern-staters snort with disbelief. But the fact that it's such a very planned city, both in its physical layout and in the ideal structure of its earliest white society, probably has something to do with these recurrent tropes of perfection. Certainly Wakefield's ideas and ideals were Utopian.

References both implicit and explicit to Utopia and Paradise begin to appear early on in writing about South Australia. Catherine Helen Spence wrote an overtly Utopian novel called *Handfasted*, which remained unpublished until 1984, but her better-known novel *Clara Morison* uses mid-Victorian Adelaide as the setting of another feminist Utopia of sorts, disguised as standard nineteenth century realism and frankly imitative in many respects of *Jane Eyre*, which had been published a few years earlier. *Clara Morison* describes in detail and with relish the conditions of life in Adelaide during the gold rushes in Victoria and NSW, when so

many Adelaide men rushed off across the border burning up with gold fever and left the women at home to hew wood, draw water, learn to fend for themselves, and keep the city going in a sensible, practical and non-febrile way based on mutual cooperation and sturdy female common sense of the kind Spence personified for all of her long life.

Anthony Trollope, in his 1873 book *Australia and New Zealand*, called Adelaide 'a happy Utopia' in spite of his well-founded disgust at the state of the river at the time: 'Anything in the guise of a river more ugly than the Torrens would be impossible to either see or describe' (181). Mark Twain, writing 25 years later, recalled his attendance at a Proclamation Day ceremony in Glenelg and his bemusement at what he calls Adelaide's 'most un-English mania for holidays. Mainly they are workingmen's holidays,' he wrote,

> for in South Australia the working-man is sovereign ... The working-man is a great power everywhere in Australia, but South Australia is his paradise. He has had a hard time in this world, and has earned a paradise. I am glad he has found it. (94)

Douglas Pike titled his magisterial and still definitive early history of the colony *Paradise of Dissent*, a clever, multi-layered, and only slightly ironic title that makes reference, among other things, to the principle of religious freedom that was part of South Australia's attraction for many immigrants. And Peter Goldsworthy's novel *Three Dog Night* begins with a hymn of praise:

> There might be higher mountains on the planet than the Adelaide Hills, but they are no closer to heaven. Each valley is a little deeper and greener than the last, and each ridge, a little higher and bluer, seems another step in some sort of ascension. Even the names of the steps have a heavenly sound. (3)

Even J.M. Coetzee is uncharacteristically hyperbolic in his account of his first visit to Adelaide: 'It was March, it was hot, but there were shaded walks to be had along the Torrens River where black swans glided

serenely. "What kind of place is this?" I asked myself. "Is this paradise on earth?"' ('Coetzee shares his wisdom').

The representation of Adelaide as a paradise is the reverse of the more usual nineteenth and twentieth century representations in both English and Australian literature of Australia as a dumping ground for convicts: merely to be sent to this country was a punishment, and the country was therefore, implicitly, Hell. Even Adelaide was only briefly convict-free; many of the transported made their way here from other colonies. The difference was that they had wanted to come here because it was by comparison a desirable place, rather than having been sent here as a form of punishment. Adelaide was the one Australian colony not officially constituted by the British legal system as a hell on earth.

Paradise and Utopia are two different things. 'Paradise' is a word from the discourse of the sacred, with its connotations of innocence and of reward. 'Utopia' is a profoundly secular idea, and suggests a place where the ideal social organisation is the result of some hard thinking and regulated conduct by human beings, not created by any god or gods. What the two things do have in common is their status as ideals and the fact that neither of them actually exists except as an abstraction.

For Wakefield's perfect society did not perpetuate itself in practice, any more than Colonel Light's beautiful design for the city guaranteed, at least in the early days of settlement, that a citizen might be comfortable and happy in it. The lived experience of making one's way through the perfectly planned city was very different from the way it looked on paper, and Governor Gray's account of Adelaide society in 1845 stands in vivid contrast to the Noah's Ark prescriptions of the South Australia Act. One early colonist, James Hawker, later recalled his arrival in the Colony in 1838:

> Owing to the buildings in Adelaide being very much scattered, the streets were scarcely defined. Hindley to Morphett Street—Rundle to Stephens Place and Currie Street to Light Square were the only

> ones that could be designated as such, as some tenements were erected on each side. Few and far between, however, they were. The greater part of King William Street was scrub, and so was the southern part of the town (M. Carter 195-6).

Another colonist, William Mann, wrote of his experiences earlier the same year:

> … I lost my way one day going from one house to another, and perceiving a fowler at some distance, I walked up to him to enquire the way to Adelaide, particularly to Hindley Street. He said 'Why Sir, you are now in the very centre of the city! The place you are in is Victoria Square', and pointing to a wooden hut about half a mile distant, he told me to follow the path through the forest that led to it, and the inmates could show me the way to Hindley Street. (M. Carter 196)

The population, by 1845, was very far from being the orderly society of strong young British and Irish couples that Wakefield had envisaged. Governor Grey, who like so many British gentlemen of his era had a remarkable gift for words, described it in a letter to his uncle in London in January 1845:

> The European population are collected from almost all parts of the world. They were wholly unacquainted with one another previously to their arrival here. You meet Scotchmen in kilts and plaids, Irish women without bonnets and their cloaks thrown over their heads, Germans in their national costumes and very picturesque they are (we have about 1,000 Germans here who have abandoned their country upon account of religious persecution), Chinese with their wide trousers, Indians in different costumes, natives with kangaroo skin cloaks, Frenchmen, runaway convicts who have come overland, with large beards & bush appearance, Catholic priests, English country bumpkins with smock frocks, Irishmen with frieze coats, London dandies, all mixed in our streets—all accustomed to different laws and usages, all ignorant of one another, of the country into which they have come, of its seasons, of its soils and their

> different degrees of productiveness, of the crops which are most remunerative (indeed until lately of those that would grow here), never accustomed to act in unison, having no common interest, ignorant of the nature of the Government under which they were to live, of the personal character and capacity of their Governor who had arrived from the other extremity of the earth to govern them, they did not know how—such was the nature of the Society into which I was thrown. (M. Carter 247)

Perhaps the city's origins in idealism are one reason for Adelaide's comparative lack of representation in literature. Adelaide is a difficult place to write about: the extremes of heaven and hell in its history make the city hard to see clearly. We have a handful of novelists and poets who did and do engage directly with the streets, mean or otherwise, of the city. But we have no robust body of such work: no equivalent of Sydney according to Ruth Park, Christina Stead, Kenneth Slessor or Patrick White; of Melbourne according to Henry Handel Richardson, Frank Hardy, Ray Lawler or Helen Garner; of Brisbane according to David Malouf, Andrew McGahan, Venero Armanno or the young Gwen Harwood.

Why in the twenty-first century is there still so little writing about the lanes and gutters and cafes and factories of Adelaide, about the body of the city? About its heart, its gut, its muscles and its little capillaries; about its circulation, its digestion, its breath; about its beauties and its bruises? I think South Australia is still haunted, even now, by the oppressions of perfection, even if only, ever, in theory: by the myths of a planned city and an ideal society. If the map is already perfect, then it doesn't leave you anywhere new to go. And if the society is already perfect, then it doesn't leave you anything new to say.

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