

We do not fully savour the meaty individualism of Furphy's style because we are wondering whether perhaps his egotistic verbosity is not too Australianly crude; but we accept the egotistic verbosity of Borrow as part of his quality.

The Australian writer normally frames his communication for the Australian reader. He assumes certain mutual pre-knowledge, a responsiveness to certain symbols, even the ability to hear the cadence of a phrase in a certain way. Once the reader's mind begins to be nagged by the thought of how an Englishman might think about this, he loses the fine edge of his Australian responsiveness. It is absurd to feel apologetic about *Such is Life* or *Coonardoo* or *Melbourne Odes* because they would not seem quite right to an English reader; it is part of their distinctive virtue that no Englishman can fully understand them ...

A second effect of the Cringe has been the estrangement of the Australian intellectual. Australian life, let us agree, has an atmosphere of often dismaying crudity. I do not know if our cultural crust is proportionately thinner than that of any other Anglo-Saxon community — such evidence as the number of books we buy and the proportion of subscribers commanded by our more intelligent papers, would suggest that in fact our cultural attainments are rather above the average Anglo-Saxon level. To the intellectual, however, the crust *feels* thinner, because, in a small community, there is not enough of it to provide the individual with a protective insulation. Hence, more than most intellectuals, he feels a sense of exposure. This is made much worse by that deadly habit of English comparison. There is a certain type of Australian intellectual who is forever sidling up to the cultivated Englishman, insinuating 'I, of course, am not like these other crude Australians. I understand how you must feel about them; I should be more at home in Oxford or Bloomsbury' (the use of 'Bloomsbury' as a symbol of intellectuality is badly out of date; but, then, so as a rule is the Australian Cringer) ...

A similar tendency is revealed in the Australian intellectual's habit of hurling denigratory criticisms at the Australian community without any attempt to check their accuracy. Thus it was long his morose pleasure to repeat that 'the Australian' did not read, that his home was a bookless monument to Philistinism — until the figures which the Cringer ignored got into the press, and established the fact that the Australian *per capita* purchase of books was higher than in any other Anglo-Saxon community. It is still a favourite Cringer's parrot-cry that the Australian is jealous of

The dismaying circumstance is that ... in any nation, there should be an assumption that the domestic cultural product will be worse than the imported article.

The devil of it is that the assumption will often be correct. The numbers are against us, and an inevitable quantitative inferiority easily looks like a qualitative weakness under the most favourable circumstances — and our circumstances are not favourable. We cannot shelter from invidious comparisons behind the barrier of a separate language; we have no long-established or interestingly different cultural tradition to give security and distinction to its interpreters; and the centrifugal pull of the great cultural metropolises works against us. Above our writers — and other artists — looms the intimidating mass of Anglo-Saxon achievement. Such a situation almost inevitably produces the characteristic Australian Cultural Cringe — appearing either as the Cringe Direct, or as the Cringe Inverted, in the attitude of the Blatant Blatherskite, the God's-Own-country-and-I'm-a-better-man-than-you-are Australian Bore.

The Cringe mainly appears in a tendency to make needless comparisons. The Australian reader, more or less consciously, hedges and hesitates, asking himself, 'Yes, but what would a cultivated Englishman think of this?' No writer can communicate confidently to a reader with the 'Yes, but' habit; and this particular demand is curiously crippling to critical judgment. Confronted by Furphy, we grow uncertain. We fail to recognise the extraordinary original structure of his novel because we are wondering whether an Englishman would not find it too complex and self-conscious. No one worries about the structural deficiencies of *Moby Dick*.

\* From *The Australian Tradition: Studies in a Colonial Culture*. Melbourne: Cheshire, 1958.

outstanding ability, that he demands a dead-level of mediocrity. I have never found a shred of evidence to support this accusation — its chatters have certainly never supplied me with any ...

The Australian writer is affected by the Cringe, because it mists the responsiveness of his audience, and because its influence on the intellectual deprives him of a sympathetically critical audience. Nor can he entirely escape its direct impact. The core of the difficulty is the fact that, in the back of the Australian mind, there sits a minatory Englishman. He is not even the most suitable type of Englishman — not the rare pukka sahib with his deep still pool of imaginativeness, and his fine urbanity; not the common man with his blending of solidity and tenderness; but that Public School Englishman with his detection of a bad smell perceptibly engraved on his features, who has left a trail of exasperation through Europe and of smouldering hatred through the East, and whose indifference to the Commonwealth is not even studied.

Subconsciously the educated Australian feels a guilty need to placate this shadowy figure (Freud has a name for it). His ghost sits in on the tête-à-tête between Australian reader and writer, interrupting in the wrong accent.

It may be said — it often is — that this is a healthy influence, ensuring that we shall measure our cultural achievements by universal standards, protecting us from the dangers of parochialism. This is only a little of the truth. Finely responsive reading is primarily an act of surrender, only secondarily an act of judgment. That minatory ghost prevents the unqualified readiness to meet the writer on his own terms which should precede a critical appraisal. The Australian writer has almost conquered the problems of colonialism; they still sit as heavily on the Australian reader as the plum-pudding of an Australian Christmas.

What is the cure for our disease? There is no short-cut to circumvent the gradual processes of national growth — which are already having their effect. As I have already suggested, the most important development made in Australian writing over the last twenty years has been the progress in the art of being unself-consciously ourselves. In the same period there has also been a similar, though slower, development in the response of the Australian reader. That response will develop more rapidly in discrimination and maturity of judgment, as the present increasing interest in Australian studies within the universities takes its effect. Meanwhile the pace of those developments can be quickened if we articulately recognise

two facts: that the Cringe is a worse enemy to our cultural development than our isolation, and that the opposite of the Cringe is not the Strut, but a relaxed erectness of carriage.