澳大利亚文化研究

Australian Cultural Studies

（第 2 辑）

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主编寄语

《澳大利亚文化研究》创刊以来，得到了中外学者的高度重视，颇有受宠若惊的感觉。惊喜之余，又深感压力重大。这一方面反映出国内学者在澳大利亚文学、文化研究方面已逐渐形成一股不可小觑的力量，另一方面也反映出国外学者对中国澳大利亚文学、文化研究的关注，更重要的是体现出全球化语境下文学、文化研究同行相互学习、彼此沟通、深入对话的趋势。

在本辑的编排上，我们延续了上辑的“学者访谈”、“作家作品”、“文坛纵览”和“社会文化”四大板块，新增了“书讯书评”一栏。“学者访谈”是我们隆重推出的一个栏目，成语有云：“栉风沐雨，薪火相传；筚路蓝缕，玉汝于成。”前辈学者对澳大利亚文化的研究给我们打下了良好的基础，对他们的访谈就是要继承和保持这个活的历史，给后辈更多的引导。本辑的胡文仲教授访谈录相信会给读者很多启迪，而澳大利亚著名作家米勒在访谈中所涉及的很多中国轶事也一定会引起读者广泛的兴趣。“作家作品”中讨论的三部作品都是澳大利亚文学中的名家经典，这些研究体现了中国学者对澳大利亚文学的把握和了解。“文坛纵览”中陶乃侃的译诗体会和陈贝贝研究的澳大利亚华裔文学新进展都会给读者带来耳目一新的感觉。“社会文化”一栏展现了对澳大利亚社会文化各个方面的研究，以使读者对澳大利亚能有更加深入的了解。“书讯书评”是新增的栏目，通过这个栏目，我们希望及时向读者推荐介绍一些国内外澳大利亚文学、文化研究最新的优秀成果。

王光林

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社会文化

书讯书评

“九人帮”及其他
——胡文仲教授访谈录[1]

李建军

李建军（以下简称李）：在中国的澳大利亚研究发展历程中，“九人帮”可以说是一个传奇，在澳大利亚和中国都曾引起过轰动。请您对从事澳研的年轻人谈谈相关的情况。

胡文仲（以下简称胡）：说是传奇，有些过分。但这个团队确实有其不一般之处。1978 年上半年，国家通过考试选拔了一批中年教师派出国进修。我们 9 个人（按年龄排序：胡壮麟、杨潮光、胡文仲、黄源深、钱佼汝、王国富、侯维瑞、杜瑞清和龙日金）来自北京、上海、南京、苏州、西安和重庆的 9 所大学，在北京集训后被派往澳大利亚悉尼大学学习。刚开始，澳方为我们单独安排一些课程，主要目的是提高我们的英语水平。我们要求在悉尼大学正式读硕士学位，经过反复交涉，最后他们终于同意。6 个人进入了英语系，3 个人进入了语言学系。英语系主任是著名澳大利亚文学教授 Leonie Kramer，语言学系主任是著名语言学家 M.A.K. Halliday（韩礼德）教授。虽然我们分了系，但实际上，在英语系注册的也到语言学系听课，在语言学系注册的也到英语系读澳大利亚文学。我们那时的想法很单纯，就是多选课，多学些东西，回国后多开课。我们选的课比澳大利亚学生平均多二分之一甚至多一倍，学习负担非常重，但是，大家的学习热情很高，废寝忘食，都希望把“文革”中丢失的时间夺回来。

头半年，我们住在悉尼大学对面的留学生大楼（International House）。在那里我们是最有人缘的一批外国留学生。每到周末，许多澳大利亚朋友开车到我们的住处接我们去度周末，这包括侨青社、澳中友协和中国教育学会各友好团体的朋友们，其他国家的留学生十分羡慕。后来，我们陆续迁出了留学生大楼，住到普通老百姓家里，以便更多地了解澳大利亚人民和他们的文化。我们除了在大学里学习，还参加各种活动，包括出席各种会议、座谈、到各地参观等等，与澳大利亚各阶层有了广泛的接触。我们在澳大利亚的影响逐渐扩大，引起了媒体的注意。他们注意到我们经常集体活动，关系十分紧密，可以说是很“抱团”，当时又是中国“文化大革命”结束不久，所以，

1 胡壮麟教授阅读了访谈初稿，并提出修改建议；黄源深、钱佼汝、王国富和杜瑞清教授曾提供有关材料，在此一并致谢。

他们戏称我们这一批人为“the Gang of Nine”。

两年后，这批人回到国内自己的学校，都成了教学的骨干，绝大多数被任命为系主任，其中三位还成为大学的校长或副校长。在全国外语教育领域，这批人也都做了比较多的工作，得到同行的认可，成为一批中坚力量，因而外语教育界有人把我们叫做“澳帮”。在澳大利亚研究方面，这批人中的大多数都在自己的学校发起成立了澳研中心，相继开设澳大利亚研究方面的课程。1988 年在各地澳研中心活动的基础上，北外澳研中心发起成立了中国澳大利亚研究学会。

“九人帮”回国后，每个人在自己的领域都取得了比较突出的成绩：在语言学研究方面，北大资深教授胡壮麟先生成就最大，成为系统功能语言学在我国的创始人之一，任学会会长，现为名誉会长，曾任中国英语教学研究会副会长（1987—2001）。出版了多部语言学专著，发表了 140 多篇学术论文。1992 年他主编的《语言学教程》获国家教委优秀教材一等奖。他是北京大学澳大利亚研究中心的创始人，至今仍然担任名誉中心主任。王国富教授在苏州大学创立了澳大利亚研究中心，他主持编译和翻译了几部澳大利亚辞典，包括《英汉澳大利亚语词典》、《麦夸里英汉双解词典》等，1998 年获得澳中理事会翻译奖，2008 年获澳中理事会奖章。侯维瑞教授 1984 年出任上海外国语学院副院长。在英国文学研究方面成就斐然，他发表学术论文 50 余篇，出版多部专著、译著，共计 200 多万字，其中《现代英国小说史》深受学界好评。杜瑞清教授担任西安外国语学院副院长、院长长达 13 年，80 年代末在西外创办了澳研中心，在词典编纂和跨文化交际研究方面取得了卓越成就。钱佼汝教授在南京大学外文系任教，在本科和研究生层次开设了文学、文体学、文论等课程，1992 年入选国务院学位委员会第三届学科评议组成员，曾获第七届和第八届台湾梁实秋文学翻译奖，是江苏省第六、七、八届政协委员，南京市第九、十届人民代表，1993—2003 年被派到联合国教科文组织中文科，担任高级译审。杨潮光教授在对外经济贸易大学任教，出版了两部专著《语用学教程》和《语言学导论》，曾任校党委委员和北京市人大代表，退休后先后在北京科技大学、北京大学文理学院和国际关系学院授课。龙日金教授曾任西南师范大学外语系系主任、高等学校英语专业教材编审委员会委员、重庆市外文学会副会长、重庆市政协委员。主编教材 4 部，发表学术论文 10 余篇，并出版专著《现代汉语及物性研究》（与彭宣维合著）。黄源深教授在外语教育和澳大利亚文学研究和翻译方面做出了很大贡献，下面专门介绍，这里从略。

2009 年——也就是“九人帮”赴澳 30 周年——我们再次全体聚会在北京，与悉尼大学原校长 Leonie Kramer 和副校长会面，并回忆了我们走过的这一段不平凡的路程。我注意到会上有人发言把“the Gang of Nine”改成了“the Group of Nine”。其

实怎么称呼都无所谓，这 9 个人确实是一个团结奋进的集体。令人惋惜的是这时已经有两位成员（侯维瑞教授和龙日金教授）英年早逝，过早地离开了我们。

李：您能否谈谈“九人帮”的近况？近年来，您们还有联系吗？

胡：上面已经谈到赴澳 30 周年的聚会。实际上，这些年来我们这九个人（之后是七个人）一直保持着联系。大家不仅在全国的学术会议上见面，平时也经常有书信往来，在学术方面切磋，生活上互相关心。这次访谈就是不久前黄源深教授给我打电话，要我接受的。我对他说，一般情况下，我对于这类访谈都是谢绝的，但这个要求来之于你，我无法推却。有时我对于自己撰写的有关外语教育的论文中的一些提法没有把握，在发表前将论文发给胡壮麟教授，请他提意见，他从不拒绝，总是及时给我提出意见和建议。“九人帮”有过两次大的聚会，一次是 1999 年，杜瑞清教授邀请“九人帮”到西安聚会，并组织学术活动，纪念我们赴澳 20 周年。第二次就是我前面所说的 2009 年北京的聚会，纪念我们赴澳 30 周年。

李：我多次读到有关许多国内澳大利亚研究中心创办过程的艰辛，例如学校领导不支持等。请您谈谈北外澳研中心的创办情况。创办过程顺利吗？

胡：就北外来说，“学校领导不支持”这个说法不够准确。澳大利亚研究在当年还是一片 terra incognita，我们回国后提出在系里开设澳大利亚研究方面的课程，但系领导心中没有底，不知道是否学生会选修这些课程，开了课究竟有多少学生会选，所以态度不是很积极，但最终还是同意我们开课。当时在北外，只有吴祯福、余志远和我三个教师分别开设澳大利亚历史、政治、文学等课程。实际上，学生对澳大利亚研究兴趣很大，选课人数大大超过系领导和我们的预期，学生听课以后，对于课程的反应很好。澳大利亚研究课程在英语系的课程体系中从此得到确认。除了在本科设课外，在研究生层次也陆续开了课。澳大利亚也派来一些教师协助，澳大利亚研究从此成为一个专业方向。我们陆续培养了一批又一批澳大利亚研究方面的硕士，还培养了澳大利亚文学博士，这样就确立了澳大利亚研究在北外英语系的地位。之后，一批中年教师陆续参加澳研，使北外澳研中心不断壮大，所开课程也越来越丰富，招收的硕士生的规模也比当年大了许多。这几年有更年轻的教师参加了澳研教学，队伍更加壮大了。在华东师大开设澳大利亚文学课程初期也经历了一段艰辛的过程，黄源深教授在一篇文章中曾经谈及。作为一个新的学科，经过这样一个过程可能有好处，它能够锻炼教师，激励人们更加奋进。

李：第一届全国澳大利亚研究研讨会 1988 年在北外召开，这次会议应该是具有历史意义的会议，会上成立了中国澳大利亚研究学会。请您谈谈这次会议以及中国澳大利亚研究学会的创办情况。

胡：从 80 年代初期到 1988 年，国内陆续成立了一些澳大利亚研究中心，如北京外国语学院、华东师范大学、苏州大学、安徽大学、厦门大学、西安外国语学院等，

社科院本来就有大洋洲研究。有了这些澳研中心为基础，我们认为成立全国学会的时机已经成熟。大家经过交换意见，达成一致，决定 1988 年在北京外国语学院召开第一届澳大利亚研究国际研讨会。在筹办会议的过程中，我们得到时任澳大利亚文化参赞 Nick Jose 的大力支持，他帮助我们邀请了澳方的代表来参会。除了邀请国内澳研中心的代表外，我们还邀请了文化界的一些知名人物，包括吴祖光先生等。澳方的代表有诗人、作家、评论家、教授等，包括 Geoff Page, Shirley Walker, Brian Kiernan, Carrillo Gantner 等。教育部原副部长黄辛白出席了成立大会，北外的王福祥院长、王佐良教授也都出席并致词。会议大部分论文都是文学和文化方面的，涉及政治、经济、贸易、外交的比较少，但此后的澳研会议的内容越来越丰富，研讨的范围逐步深入到经贸、历史、政治、中澳关系等领域。在第一届澳研国际研讨会期间，我被选为全国澳大利亚研究学会会长，第二届会长是黄源深教授。我们从 1988 年起每两年召开一次全国的研讨会，推动国内的澳大利亚研究。我在澳研和中澳文化交流方面所做的工作得到澳大利亚方面的肯定。1990 年悉尼大学授予我名誉文学博士学位，1996 年获得澳中理事会翻译奖，1999 年获得澳中理事会杰出贡献奖，表彰我在推动中澳关系方面所做的贡献。

李：国内早年的澳大利亚研究主要以澳大利亚文学和文化为主，您的研究领域主要是文学。您能谈谈您的澳大利亚文学研究情况吗?

胡：澳大利亚文学研究在我国开始比较晚，与英美文学研究的历史完全不同。最早应该是安徽大学的大洋洲文学研究所的工作，领头人是马祖毅教授。他们翻译了一些澳大利亚和新西兰的文学作品，但数量不大。我们这批进修教师从澳大利亚回来以后，陆续在自己的学校开设澳大利亚文学课程，受到学生的欢迎，在学术期刊和报纸上发表文章，介绍澳洲文学，同时，翻译了一批作家的作品。澳大利亚文学的影响日益扩大。在这方面，黄源深教授作出了突出的贡献，他撰写了几部有关澳大利亚文学和文化的专著，包括《澳大利亚文学史》、《澳大利亚文学论》、《澳大利亚文化简论》、《当代澳大利亚社会》等，翻译了多部小说，培养了一批澳大利亚文学硕士和博士。他的代表作《澳大利亚文学史》不仅篇幅长，涵盖面广，而且紧紧跟踪澳大利亚近年的发展。时至今日，国内还没有一部类似的著作可以比拟。2002 年 11 月中澳建交三十周年，黄源深教授与其间中国驻澳大利亚的七位大使一起，获澳大利亚外交部长授予的澳大利亚政府勋章。此外，他曾任上海市翻译家协会副会长，在文学翻译方面成绩卓著，获得过澳中理事会翻译奖和其他多个奖项。我和李尧合作翻译了帕特里克·怀特的《人树》，与刘寿康合译了《探险家沃斯》，另外，我还翻译了怀特的中篇小说以及几部戏剧。其间，澳大利亚文化参赞甘德瑞邀请我将 Jack Hibberd 的 *The Stretch of the Imagination* 译为中文。在《想入非非》译成后，上海人民艺术剧院在上海和北京将此剧上演，受到观众的欢迎。在澳大利亚文学翻译方面，还应该提到李尧老师，他

三十年来一直从事澳大利亚文学翻译，他翻译的澳洲文学的数量在国内首屈一指，总字数可能有一二百万。他多次获得澳中理事会翻译奖。不久前，他被悉尼大学授予名誉文学博士学位，表彰他在澳大利亚文学翻译方面的成就。澳大利亚文学翻译这二十几年来有了长足的进步，许多学者和译者都做出了自己的贡献，这里限于篇幅不能详细列举，澳大利亚文学在中国的影响日益扩大。

李：在国内，怀特研究一直受到重视。您和怀特本人有很好的私人关系，您能谈谈和他的交往情况吗？

胡：我在澳大利亚文学研究方面主要集中于怀特和澳大利亚戏剧。关于我与怀特的往来在我撰写的文章和论文中多有涉及，这里只简单谈谈。1980 年，我在悉尼大学读澳大利亚文学课程，对于怀特的作品很感兴趣，把他的小说几乎全部读完。有一天，悉尼大学东亚语系主任 Arthur Davies 教授问我是否有兴趣与怀特见面，我喜出望外，立即表示同意。后来，由 Davies 教授安排在怀特的家里见了面。我妻子吴祯福与我同行。从澳大利亚的报刊上看，怀特似乎是个性情古怪甚至刻薄的人，因此，我们去访问他时，心情十分紧张。实际上，一见面就发现怀特是个很和善友好的人。日后的交往更证实了这一点。我们多次会晤，在一起吃过几次饭，书信往来延续十多年，我们成了朋友。怀特是一位现代派作家，写作风格与传统的澳大利亚现实主义作家很不相同，他在作品中不断探索和创新，他一生中创作了 12 部长篇小说和 3 部短篇小说集、7 个剧本和一个电影剧本以及一部自传和一部演说集，为澳大利亚文学打开了一片新天地，在 1973 年终于获得诺贝尔文学奖。他的获奖提高了澳洲文学的地位，使得澳洲文学与世界文学进一步接轨。怀特是一位有高度社会责任感的作家，支持澳大利亚的年轻作家和画家，关心世界和平和人类命运这些重大问题。在他晚年，他反对在澳大利亚开采铀矿，参与成立核裁军党，甚至上街游行，表达澳大利亚人民的意愿。有人说，怀特是澳大利亚人的良心。怀特去世后，人们很怀念他，我也是一样。我把怀特写给我的十几封信件全部捐给了澳大利亚国家图书馆，因为我认为这笔文化遗产应该属于澳大利亚，而不是我个人。

李：2000 年后，您的研究兴趣主要在跨文化研究和英语教育方面，这对国内的澳研发展是一个很大的损失。您能谈谈当时的研究转移是出于什么考虑吗？

胡：回国以后，除了澳大利亚研究，我一直身处外语教育第一线，参与了全国外语专业教学大纲制定、教材编选、外语教育咨询等各种学术活动。2000 年起，我不再担任国家教委高校外语专业教学指导委员会主任。这时国家教委要我将中国英语教学研究会的工作恢复起来，因为原会长许国璋教授辞世后，研究会已经停止活动多年。所以，从那时起，我的主要精力集中到英语教学研究会上，被选为会长后，主持召开了几次大型的国际研讨会，加入了国际应用语言学学会（AILA），之后又开始申办在北京召开国际应用语言学大会。1995 年，我被选为中国跨文化交际研究

会会长，在跨文化交际研究方面也投入了相当的时间和精力。无论是外语教育或是跨文化交际，要真正做好都需要毕生的精力。跟踪澳大利亚文学的研究也同样需要很多时间，需要阅读大量作品，与澳大利亚作家保持密切联系。我这时年事已高，精力有限，只好忍痛割爱，把澳大利亚文学研究暂时搁置。参与澳研方面的活动逐渐减少，后来就基本上不再参加。之所以产生这些变化不是我个人有什么考虑，而是工作的需要，任务的调整。

李：您近年很少参加澳研的活动了，但国内的澳研界一直关心着您。请您谈谈您的近况。

胡：2014 年 3 月我正式退休。如果说以前是“淡出江湖”，这次是正式退出了，但是，学术上的事情还没有完全结束。今年我把过去发表的跨文化交际方面的论文和文章收集成册，交外研社出版，书名是《跨文化交际教学与研究》，年底前问世。其他零碎的学术活动我还参加一些，但总的来说已经不多。年龄和身体都是制约因素，许多活动我都婉言谢绝了。今年我进入耄耋之年，正在朝着“清静心”的境界努力。谢谢你的书面采访。从你的问题可以看出你为这次采访做了很好的准备。

李建军，北京外国语大学英语学院澳研中心主任、中国澳大利亚研究会秘书长。

► 1979 年“九人帮”进入悉尼大学学习时合影。
前排左起：龙日金、侯维瑞、黄源深
后排左起：钱佼汝、胡壮麟、杨潮光、胡文仲、王国富、杜瑞清

► 1981 年“九人帮”中七人获得文学硕士时留影。

► 1982 年在怀特家中，胡文仲（左）与怀特亲切交谈。

► 1986 年，澳大利亚总理 Bob Hawke 访华时在北京外国语学院发表演讲。

► 1988 年首届澳大利亚研究国际研讨会在北京外国语学院举行。

► 1990 年胡文仲（左四）被悉尼大学授予名誉文学博士学位，其左侧是澳中理事会主席惠特拉姆先生，右侧是悉尼大学副校长，其余为中国使馆文化处官员。

An Email Interview with Alex Miller for Australian Cultural Studies at SUIBE

Ouyang Yu

Ouyang: It's nearly 30 years since you first visited Shanghai in 1987 on your research tour for *The Ancestor Game*. Do you still remember those days?

[**Alex:** I've attached my essay 'Impressions of China', which you might like to use instead of the answer I've given after this at the end of this interview.]

A: I began to write *The Ancestor Game* in the hope of coming to terms with the suicide of a friend, Lang Tzu, the fictional name of the man on whom the main character in the book is based. Lang was a fourth-generation Australian Chinese. He was an artist who had failed to achieve recognition for his work. In his mid-fifties he gave up the struggle and shot himself. Along with one or two of my fellow Australians I believed Lang Tzu was a highly talented artist and that one of the factors in his failure to achieve recognition had been the inability of Australians at that time to view the work of an ethnic Chinese as representative of Australian culture, this despite the fact that Chinese had lived in Australia in large numbers since the middle of the last century. I may be wrong — I hope not; it's always difficult to quantify these things — but my feeling is that this perception no longer holds true in Australia.

I began the book as a memorial to Lang Tzu's life and to our friendship. As I worked my way deeper into the material of the novel, this simple aim became complicated for me by questions about the nature of belonging and the meaning of the idea of home. Gradually I was drawn into an exploration of the ambiguities of colonialism and displacement, conditions which have limited and inspired the human race for centuries. The earliest poems in Old English, the works that mark the origins of English literature — *Beowulf*, *The Ruin*, *Widsith* and *The Seafarer* — all deal with journeying in distant lands, or with the presence of foreignness in one's own land. It hasn't always been as fashionable as it is today to write about life in the suburbs. I am an immigrant myself and my meditation on Lang Tzu's life soon became a kind of concealed autobiography. I was deeply intrigued by the experience of exile, by its positive aspects just as much as its negative ones. Exile as opportunity, rather than as cultural deprivation, was what interested me. And of course we don't have to leave the country of our birth to experience the condition of exile. Drusilla Modjeska's *Exiles At Home: Australian Women*

Writers 1925–1945 is a fine study in this condition.

After I'd been working on the book for a year I realised I would have to go to China to experience at first-hand the people and the place of Lang's origins, to breathe the air of West Lake in Hangzhou on a winter evening and to smell the smells of life in Shanghai. I knew by then that much of the book was to be set in Shanghai and Hangzhou. I travelled to China over the Christmas / New Year period of 1987–1988. It was my first visit. Through Ruth Blatt in Melbourne, and with the help of Nicholas Jose, I'd made contact with Chinese people in Shanghai and was able to travel as a Chinese for the brief period of my visit, which lasted ten days.

It was in Hangzhou, while walking among the evening crowds on the shores of West Lake, that I began to feel for the first time a confidence in my ability to write of Lang's life and his Chinese family background. I didn't take photographs or make notes. It was to be my impressions that would be important to me. I knew that.

When I returned to Australia I discarded the draft of the book I'd been working on before I went to China and began again. I felt an assurance about writing of the Chinese that I could not have felt if I hadn't visited China. My visit had dispelled for me the myth of difference and given me the assurance that in writing about Chinese Australians, providing I got the facts of their history right, I would be no more limited than I would be in writing about any other Australians.

I didn't go to China expecting to become an expert on Chinese life and culture. I went to experience a little of China and the Chinese for myself, so that I would have private memories and impressions to draw on for my book. Whenever we visit a foreign country for the first time we enjoy for a brief period a kind of honeymoon, during which the depth of our ignorance seems to insulate us from danger and to imbue our surroundings with a kind of glow of infinite goodwill. It is a bit like being in love. If we stay too long, we soon begin to be worn down by the frustrations and difficulties of daily life that the locals are nearly overwhelmed by. After a few weeks or months the struggle to get a place on the overcrowded bus has ceased to be a challenge to our determination to behave just like a local and has become a daily burden. The inability of the authorities to provide adequate public transport is no longer part of the exotic spectacle but has become a source of anger and resentment and a cause for frustration and criticism. The unvarying menu in the Mongolian restaurant in Hangzhou, after we have eaten there every day for a month, has ceased to intrigue us and has begun to disgust us.

With increasing familiarity we soon lose our tolerance of difference. I don't mean

fundamental difference, if there is such a thing, but petty differences. The sharpness of our curiosity has been blunted against the repeated minor frustrations of ordinary daily life. The longer we stay, the harder it is for us to experience anything outside our own immediate area of endeavour. We begin to manipulate the status quo so that arrangements will suit us better. We cease to be uncritical. We begin to limit ourselves. We define our little area of interest. We become a political being, a struggling member of the local community, a foreigner suffering all the frustrations of foreignness and determined to overcome them.

Some foreigners who stay on respond to the problem by insulating themselves from the foreignness of the place, drawing over themselves a protective carapace composed of the customs and beliefs they brought with them from the country of their origin. They live in a ghetto, whether of the mind or an actual physical community which, with the passing of time, comes less and less to reflect the cultural reality of their homeland. In some ways, of course, it's easier for migrants and long-term foreigners to live in ghettos and ethnic enclaves. In this way the problems are postponed and are bequeathed to the next generation. The ghetto people are a people lost to history, their lives are lived outside history, they are castaways on an island that has become disconnected from their own culture and from the dynamic of change and conflict within their host culture. I encountered a little ghetto of such European foreigners in Shanghai. The Chinese referred to them as Foreign Experts with just enough irony to make me immediately want to translate this as *Foreign Devils*. With the foreign experts I ate the worst Christmas dinner I've ever eaten anywhere. The ritual of Christmas with them was more funereal than celebratory, and I couldn't wait to make a polite excuse to escape from them back into the living world of China, on which they'd turned their backs. Another writer might have stayed and written a novel about them. There was certainly a fictional offer in the peculiar melancholy of their lives — a kind of communal *folie*, in which they had each agreed to keep silent about the death of reality. Would I notice that they were ghosts? This was their fear. They watched me closely. They knew they had ventured a long way into the labyrinth and had no hope of ever finding their way back. They could scarcely remember the brief days of the honeymoon. After a few glasses of wine their resentment at the way I was able to take my pleasure in the country they had grown to hate began to find its voice. The ghetto, wherever it is, breeds hatred. Despite legislation prohibiting their permanent residence in Australia, Lang Tzu and his forebears had never been ghetto Chinese. They had married with the Irish and the Scots

and the English and had lived in the general Australian community since 1848. And so had thousands of other Australian Chinese.

It wasn't the hazardous business of staying on and becoming a long-term resident of China that interested me. What interested me was the honeymoon experience, the precious period of being insulated by my ignorance and my lack of accountability, a period during which I might hope to be a detached observer of life, a kind of carefree visiting parasite, collecting my impressions and enjoying the uncritical blindness of a lover, not the hard-boiled attitude of a spouse. It was a peculiar privilege, this period of disengagement within a culture that I knew would never require from me an atonement if I failed. And art always fails. I already knew that. We never succeed in making the sublime incandescent object of our imaginations that beguiles us into undertaking the journey in the first place. For the novelist, the next novel may even be, in a very private way, an attempt to atone for this kind of spiritual failure of the previous novel.

Also, it wasn't history but impressions that remained my source. When he read the book, Professor Huang Yuanshen, who was born in Hangzhou (Oy comment: in a village in Zhejiang Province, of which Hangzhou is the capital) and who heads the Australian Studies Centre at East China Normal University in Shanghai, asked me, 'How did you manage to get the smell of duck droppings in Hangzhou in 1937 exactly right? I was in Hangzhou as a child,' he said, 'and I can tell you, the smell of duck droppings was then exactly as it is in your novel.'

Impressions that hadn't seemed important at the time, and which I thought I'd forgotten, surfaced again once I was back at my desk writing the book. I wasn't proposing an historical argument. A novel, I believe, deals in the currency of the universality of human nature. Isn't that why we can still read novels about nineteenth-century Russians and French or eighteenth-century Chinese and feel able to identify our own destinies today with the destinies of the characters in those novels?

When I began writing *The Ancestor Game* I didn't start out with the idea of celebrating a rich Chinese contribution to our immigrant culture in Australia. I couldn't possibly have started out with that idea because when I began work on the book, like almost every other Australian I'd ever met, I didn't know there had been a rich and complex Chinese contribution to our immigrant culture as we know it today. Such a contribution had not been noted. It hadn't been celebrated in the literature. When I began the book I was writing about friendship. And in the end for me, whatever else it might be for others, I think *The Ancestor Game* will always be a book about my old friend

Lang Tzu and my new friend Ouyang Yu. A book about friendship and home, and how those two things go together.

My first visit to China in 1987 remains vivid in my memory. It marked an important turning point in my life as a writer. Of course you and I met and became friends during that visit. My wife, Stephanie and our son Ross were with me and the whole journey has taken on in this family something of the importance of a legend.

I came to China at that time in search of the remains of the landscape and community in which my friend the Australian/Chinese artist, Allan O'Hoy, had his origins. Allan died in tragic circumstances some years earlier and I missed him greatly. Stephanie suggested I write a book about him in order to deal with my persisting grief. Allan was an extraordinary man and people in Melbourne's artistic community still talk about him and his exacting standards and richly sensitive knowledge of Australian art. I came to Shanghai and Hangzhou to learn first-hand something of the world from which Allan had come.

The book I eventually wrote about him, *The Ancestor Game*, was set in 1976, the year when the Cultural Revolution came to an end and China began to open itself to the West. In 1976 Allan had said to me, 'Now I can go back.' His brother soon went back to China for a visit but Allan never did return. When Allan told me he wanted to return to China I was astonished. He had never before indicated any desire to see China. When he said this it struck me that I only knew really his Australian side, or at last that I did not know his Chinese side very well. Going to China was partly in the hope that I would come to understand something about what was 'Allan' about him and what was 'Chinese' about him. Were some of those qualities which I found particularly attractive and interesting really Chinese cultural aspects that belong to all Chinese or were they just him, the man himself? I asked myself, 'What does it mean to be Chinese as distinct from Australian?' And I had no answer.

In China, in fact in Hangzhou when we were standing on the shores of West Lake watching the sun go down, with hundreds of Chinese people also doing exactly the same thing, I realised that there were of course no real differences between being Chinese and being Australian but that were all just people and I at once felt a new confidence to write about Allan. Of course I had to get the details of our histories and cultural styles right in my book. These differences, a Chinese woman said to me, are the kind of differences nations go to war over. But that really there are no essential differences. Of course she was right. So I read widely in Chinese history and culture and took care to note down in

my memory those aspects of Chinese social custom at that time which impressed me as not familiar to an Australian.

From my visit to China, and through my lasting friendship with you, I found the confidence to write *The Ancestor Game*. How can anyone who has once visited China not wish to return? That visit left with me a deep and abiding empathy with and interest in China as a country, and fondness for the Chinese friends and acquaintances I made then and on subsequent visits. I never found China to be strange and exotic, as I had anticipated, but from the first day felt myself to be in a country that was deeply poignant and strangely familiar. I felt at home there, as we do whenever we are welcomed in a foreign country by its people. The struggles and trials and joys of the people around me where those same struggles and joys we all experience.

China has since then honoured me with several invitations and a notable literary award. My wife, Stephanie, has visited China to teach there several times. From that first visit our attachment to China has developed and grown stronger over the years. The translations of my novels by Professor Li Yao have given me a sense that my writing is at home in China. A classical scroll painting by the artist Yeh Ching hangs on the wall of the hall outside my study and reminds me every day as I walk past it that I have an abiding connection with China that was made when you and I first met that day in Shanghai and made our plans to travel to Hangzhou together.

O: When did you publish your first novel and how was it received?

A: In my case this is not such a straight-forward question as it might seem at first glance. The first novel I wrote, *The Tivington Nott* (Robert Hale, UK 1989), wasn't published until after I'd written and published my second novel, *Watching the Climbers on the Mountain* (Pan Macmillan, Aust 1988). The reason for this was that at that time I was unable to find a publisher in Australia for a book set in England. *The Tivington Nott* was in fact finished in 1985 and was considered for over a year by the Australian publishers McPhee Gribble before being declined by them and returned to me. In her letter (19th June 1986) declining the book, the principle editor of McPhee Gribble, Hilary McPhee, said, '*The Tivington Nott* in the revised version is brilliantly sustained and engrossing.' She also included a glowing reader's report on the book, in which the reader described it as 'powerful, involving, and intensely interesting ... in short, absolutely first-class.' Despite these glowing accolades for the book it was turned down. I felt a kind of helplessness at this. What was I to do if publishers decided not to publish books that they themselves described in these terms? In a state of anger and frustration I wrote *Watching*

the Climbers on the Mountain in six months in one draft and sent it to Pan Macmillan. They accepted the book with enthusiasm within days of receiving it and published it the following year. The first review, in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, written by a fussy old lady, described it as 'the trough of Australian literature' in a review titled, 'Peaks and Troughs of Australian Literature'. I was more amused than dismayed. I'd given the publishers what they wanted and had proved my point. The following year I found a publisher in the UK for *The Tivington Nott* and it was released by them to glowing reviews, the principle reviewer for *The Herald* newspaper, Peter Pierce, described it as 'one of the most original pieces of writing of the year,' and editor of the highbrow *Supplement*, *Age Literary*, Professor Paul Carter, described it as 'mythical and darkly violent.' *The Somerset County Gazette* reviewer said it was 'altogether brilliant', *The Melbourne Times*, 'an extraordinarily gripping novel' and the Melbourne *Age*'s principal reviewer, John Larkin, said, 'It is a rich study of place, both elegant and urgent.'

I realised after this experience that the publishing industry in Australia at that time was lacking in confidence without the endorsement of England. Thankfully today that situation no longer exists. At the time I wrote *The Tivington Nott*, Australian publishing was struggling to establish a home-grown industry. Nowadays my own publisher of many years, Allen and Unwin, is the first Australian publisher in the history of this country to have acquired an established London publisher, Atlantic. This has never happened before and is an indication of the enormous growth and strength of Australian publishing in the last thirty years.

The Tivington Nott wasn't published in Australia until 1993 (Penguin, Aust 1993). Nearly ten years after it was written.

O: After we met, you sent me some short stories and plays. Can you talk about your days as a playwright?

A: I'd never considered writing plays until a hippy friend of mine came to stay with me. He had just received a grant to write a play. He was a painter, not a writer, and I don't know how it was that he'd received a writing grant. Anyway, he asked me to write a play for him so that he could show he hadn't wasted the grant. He was a pretty mad sort of guy and so I sat down and wrote the kind of play I thought would appeal to him. The play I wrote was *Kitty Howard*. It was a satire about how men in authority never listen to women, especially their wives. Kitty's husband was the chief of police and was responsible for the security of the State Premier and the King and Queen of Moomba. After he goes out, leaving his gun behind on the sideboard in his anxiety to be at work,

Kitty puts down the tray she's carrying and picks his gun. Her son is watching the television and rolling a smoke of dope. She brandishes the gun at him behind his back and says, 'So who will I shoot?' The son, believing her to be joking, replies, 'Start at the top, Mum. Shoot the king.' In fact Kitty then sets about undermining her husband's security in order to assassinate the King of Moomba. She makes no secret of her plans but no one ever takes her seriously or even really listens to what she has to say. She is successful and in fact kills the King.

By the time I'd finished writing the play — which took me a couple of weeks — the hippy friend had left and gone to Iceland. I didn't know what to do with the play so I sent it to the Union Theatre Company, which was our State Theatre at the time. The Director of the theatre was Ray Lawler, who is famous for his play *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, the most successful play ever at that time. He rang me on the Monday and told me they thought my play was wonderful and they would produce it at their city theatre in Russell Street. My play was produced and it ran to full houses and was reviewed kindly and Ray Lawler said, 'Now for your next one.'

Compared to my experiences with novels and publishers this was just too easy and I mistakenly imagined I must really be a playwright. A bad mistake, as it turned out! I decided not to give any more of my plays to Ray Lawler's company but to establish my own theatre so that I could write and direct the plays myself. This was a disastrous decision that resulted in me wasting about five years of my life writing nonsense and dealing with incompetent and unproductive people who were always too busy to spend any time thinking and so everything they did was of a very low grade. They were pretty typical of the performance industry in that they mistook being busy for being successful and never understood it was their very busyness that undermined the quality of what they produced. The theatre also didn't suit me because I like to get my best work done in the morning and I go to bed quite early. They didn't begin their day till the afternoon and didn't go to bed till the early hours of the morning.

I don't remember sending you short stories. I've never written many short stories and can't imagine which ones they were.

O: Did you write poetry as well in the early days because you've got a longish poem recently published in *The Australian*?

A: All writers write poetry, of course, but not all writers publish it. Poets who do publish often ask me, 'Do you also write poetry?' Which seems a bit silly of them. I've even heard a senior Australian poet claim that poetry is a higher calling, thereby placing

himself by implication at the pinnacle of callings. Whereas of course there is no such thing as a higher calling, but only higher achievements. Unless, that is, one is a fascist with hierarchical ideas of culture and people and does not believe in cultural pluralism. I've always written poetry but have almost never wanted to publish it. It has been a private thing with me as it is with many writers. The reason I published the longish poem you refer to, *The Good Visa*, was that it came to me in a vivid dream that I couldn't get out of my head and it seemed to relate to something important that was going on around us at the time. Now I look back on it as a poem about the same thing that all poems are about, meaning. I also liked very much the statement by Bertolt Brecht, that the simplest words should be enough. It summed up neatly my own endeavour with my writings, which has been to achieve simplicity and clarity of expression. They seem to me the most difficult things to achieve. I greatly admire writing and thinking that has elaborated its subject, no matter how complex, in a simple coherent and clear way. This has seemed to me to be the point of communication. It is my opinion that if the beauty of prose and its poetics are to be served then metaphor must illuminate a dimension of the subject that would otherwise remain obscure. I often encounter metaphor that obscures and distracts and is there simply because the writer mistakenly feels he or she has a duty to invest his or her writing with similes and metaphors and that they will enrich his or her work. The opposite is the usual effect. To shine with clarity, metaphor must be used sparingly, or it is just another soggy potato chip among a bag of cold potato chips.

O: I know you wrote three novels that were not published. What is it that drove you on to write more?

A: What was it that drove me on to write THREE? Why does anyone wish to be a writer? These three were written in the mistaken belief that novels are about society's ills and are not about the intimate lives of 'us' . When this mistake was pointed out to me, I went on and wrote another eleven novels about the intimate lives of real people. That these people, my characters, were also embedded in the cultural and social movements and events of their own times, and that each of them carried about with them, as we all do, a sense of their own and their inherited histories, was inevitably part of the story in each case, but it wasn't THE story, as it was in those three unpublishable novels of ideas in which characters performed the function of puppets — my puppets — and possessed no autonomy. I wrote those books according to my own plans, as if I knew what I was doing, and was impervious to the prompts of my imagination. I stuck to my plans instead