SAM MATTHEWS

# *Christina Stead's "Devil's Kitchen":* Seven Poor Men of Sydney *as Narrative of Disillusionment*

Christina Stead described her first novel *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934) as "bear[ing] all the marks of the writer's first work … [an] *oeuvre de jeunesse*."[1] Stead's lapse into French is hardly surprising for a writer who consistently claimed her formative influences were nineteenth-century French novelists, in particular Balzac, Zola, and Maupassant. This paper presents *Seven Poor Men* as a novel of disillusionment in which Balzac's *Lost Illusions* (1837-43), part of Stead's reading formation, appears as a key intertext.[2] Like Balzac's novel of disillusioned youth, *Seven Poor Men* explores the problem of artistic production under the conditions of modernity and the movement of a young provincial writer to the capital, a move which appears as an important theme in both texts and is also concomitant with their writing and publication. Stead's particular reading of the narrative of emerging artistic consciousness is inflected not only by the different configurations of literary production in the early twentieth-century which like Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) had moved out of Balzac's nationally-bound frame, but also various critiques of such a narrative, including a Marxist one, which are expressed through her hybridised

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[1] Christina Stead to Ron Geering (20 June 1964) in *A Web of Friendship: Selected Letters (1928-1973)*, ed. R. G. Geering (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1992), 216.

[2] The three parts of the novel were first published separately: *Illusions perdues*, later titled *Les Deux Poètes*, 1837; *Un Grand Homme de province à Paris*, 1838; and *Eve et David*, later *Les Souffrances d'un inventeur*, 1843. The parts were published together as *Illusions perdues* in vol. VIII of Charles Furne's 1843 edition of *La Comédie humaine*. Although Stead was later fluent in French she most likely read George Saintsbury's Temple edition of the *Human Comedy* (1895-1899, trans. Clara Bell, Ellen Marriage, James Waring and R. S. Scott), as it was by far the most widely available translation in Australia. My source is the 2004 Project Gutenberg reprint of the Temple edition of *Lost Illusions*. Page references are to the Adobe Digital Editions version. Honoré de Balzac, *Lost Illusions* trans. Ellen Marriage (Project Gutenberg E-text, August 2004) EBook#1315: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/13159

reworking of the realist group novel in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*. In effect, the desire for "self-aggrandisement" in a sensitive young artist's flight from province to centre is undercut by a harsh awareness of the difficulty of such task for a young woman from Australia.[3] Stead took significant risks in leaving Australia, but, in a move that inverts and complicates this movement to the centre, *Seven Poor Men* is also radical in the way in which it works with foreign and modern material to create a startlingly new vision of Sydney quite in opposition to the mainstream dun-coloured realism of Australian fiction in the thirties.[4]

In *Lost Illusions* an ambitious young "poet" from the provinces, Lucien Chardon, arrives in Paris with the manuscript of his historical novel *The Archer of Charles IX* in the "style of [Walter] Scott" (181). One of the first illusions Lucien entertains is that a publisher will see his shining artistic merit and publish him. As Lucien discovers, however, books are business: "A book means so much capital to risk, and the better the book, the less likely it is to sell" (244). Georg Lukács famously noted that *Lost Illusions* charted "the transformation of literature into a commodity."[5] This is most clearly represented in Lucien's entry into the world of journalism, a form of literary production clearly subject to both economic and political forces. His meteoric rise comes with an equally swift "Napoleonic" fall (390). Balzac contrasts Lucien's failure with the success of another young artist Daniel d'Arthez. D'Arthez's advice on reviewing Lucien's manuscript is: "You must go over your work again. *You must strike out a different style for yourself* if you do not mean to ape Sir Walter Scott, for you have taken him for your model" (189). The criticism is that Lucien's work is

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[3] "Self-aggrandisement" alludes to the title of part two of *Lost Illusions*: "*Un Grand Homme de province à Paris*."

[4] Miles Franklin's comments on *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* might be seen as representative of the cultural nationalist Australian literary field. In her diary, Franklin identified in Stead's novel the "tendency to dress up the thin banality of our cities with post-Freudiansim" while taking the "vomit from Bloomsbury & Washington Square" to "belch it upon Sydney." While also noting that while "these people may be Sydney types. I have been depressed by finding how far the city people are growing from any knowledge of Australia that waits beyond the Gib or the Blue Mts…" Miles Franklin "'Seven Poor Men of Sydney' by Christina Stead" in *The Diaries of Miles Franklin* ed. Paul Brunton (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2004), 26-28.

[5] Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), 51.

imitative, derivative. D'Arthez, surrounded by his cenacle of like-minded artists, represents prestige in what Pierre Bourdieu described in *The Rules of Art* as the literary field.[6] Bourdieu's argument is that in mid-nineteenth-century France literature began to be imagined as occupying a space autonomous from politics and commerce. Artworks that obeyed only the "rules of art" and not the call of the market came to be valued more highly than clearly commercially or politically driven projects. D'Arthez thus functions as an idealised portrait of the young Balzac and represents the figure of the writer standing for the autonomy of art through a rejection of politics and commerce, and an embrace of originality.[7] This formulation directly anticipates the figure of the avant garde modernist in the literary field.[8] D'Arthez's criticism of Lucien's imitative work also reveals his powerful position at the centre of the literary field from which provincial works are judged as imitative, derivate and old-fashioned. We also see this power of the capital to define taste, and confer authenticity, as being played out in the response Lucien gets to his poem sequence *Les Marguerites* ('*The Daisies*'). The delicate provincial beauty of the daisies is, like Lucien, just waiting to be trampled in the metropolis. Thus d'Arthez's criticism of Lucien's literary production is analogous to that of the Parisian socialites in the circle of the Marquise d'Espard who mock Lucien's manners and dress as parochial and old-fashioned.

Almost a century later, Christina Stead found herself in a similar position to Lucien Chardon. Having left Australia in 1928 with the manuscript of *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* in her luggage (then titled "Death in the Antipodes"), she was a young, ambitious, provincial writer seeking a publisher in Paris. She was under no illusions about the difficulty of this task. Stead's manuscript is lost but

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[6] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure in the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

[7] Balzac's analysis of the Restoration literary field in *Lost Illusions* was informed by his own diverse experience in the publishing industry (he had worked as a printer, a journalist and a writer of pot-boilers).

[8] Lucien's visit to the "*Galeries de bois*", a book market in the political centre of Paris in proximity of the bourse and the red light district, draws a close connection between hack literary work and prostitution (to political and economic power). David Spurr applies Bourdieu's concept of the literary field to *Lost Illusions* in "Joyce and Balzac: Portraits of the Artist in the age of mechanical production," *European Joyce Studies* vol. 19 (2011): 42-59.

we can see clear traces of Stead's reading of *Lost Illusions* in her novel. In its incorporation of Balzac's characters and narrative structure, one might even say that *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* is "in the style" of Balzac.[9] At the heart of *Lost Illusions* is the story of "Two Poets", Lucien Chardon and David Séchard, two ambitious young men from Angoulême who seek to escape from the province where "ideas […] grow rancid" (128). While Lucien goes to Paris, David runs a print shop in provincial Angoulême while working on a revolutionary means of paper production. Of the multiple characters that appear in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* two members of the Baguenault family are clearly modelled on Balzac's "poets." Michael Baguenault, is a sensitive young "idealist" (229) and "poet of life" (252).[10] Michael's adopted father is, like Lucien's (and Stead's), a natural scientist. And Michael's story of spiritual struggle and failed amorous adventure leading to disillusionment and suicide (a kind of "aborted *bildungsroman*") closely echoes Lucien's narrative.[11] The other main narrative arc of Stead's novel follows the slow failure of the print shop where Michael's cousin Joseph Baguenault works. Joseph, like Balzac's David Séchard, falls victim to the machinations of shrewd capitalists that result in the closing (Joseph) or loss (David) of their respective print shops. Stead's and Balzac's novels close with Joseph/David retiring to the domestic realm to which they take a greater awareness of their place in societies defined by modern capitalism. If Michael recalls Lucien, David's name: "Séchard" which carries a sense of withered dryness (*séché*: dried, curt), is echoed in Stead's description of Joseph as "dried up and gnarled […] a woody pear" (70). The Baguenault family are also, if

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[9] There's more to be said about Stead's fondness for Balzac and more generally, Stead's reading of French fiction. Stead's longtime friend Florence James wrote from London in 1948: "Now when I look at a whole row of french paper back classics and some of your lovely hand bound books, I wonder if you would like me to have them packaged and sent over to you. How stable is your abode these days?" While a critical consensus exists that Balzac had a profound influence on Stead's work, this is the first essay to offer a close reading of Balzac and Stead and to try and identify some of the titles which were in this library (which was presumably not shipped to the wandering Stead). Correspondence with Florence James, Mitchell Library, NSW, Box 14.

[10] Christina Stead, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, imprint of Melbourne University Press, 2015). All subsequent references are to this edition.

[11] Peter Kirkpatrick, "Walking through *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*," in *Australian Writing and the City,* ed. Frances De Groen and Ken A. Stewart (Sydney: Association for the Study of Australian Literature, 2000), 63.

somewhat dubiously, French. [12] As Joseph recounts: "my cousin Michael Baguenault told me some long tale, that my father and his had French ancestors. In France they were Huguenots and were persecuted there" (101). Other indications of Stead's literary borrowing include a clear parallel between the organisation of these two main plots in both novels. *Seven Poor Men*, on the whole, moves from the suburban fringe of Sydney to the inner-city and back again, while Balzac neatly divided *Lost Illusions* into Part I ("The Two Poets") and Part III ("Eve and David"), both of which focus on provincial Angoulême, and Part II ("A Distinguished Provincial at Paris") which focuses on Lucien's life in Paris. [13] In Balzac, province and centre remain relatively separated and discrete entities. Communication between these poles is afforded by letters sent between characters (which Balzac reproduces in their entirety, particularly in section two). Balzac identified this separation and contrast as vital to his artistic project: "Paris and the Provinces - *a great social antithesis which held for me immense resources*." [14] It has been noted that *Seven Poor Men* reverses the "centre-periphery" relationship, so that Paris appears "within and beneath"

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[12] Margaret Harris has commented on the significance of Michael's name: derived from the French verb [*se*] *baguenauder* (to wander aimlessly), it is very apt considering Michael's (and Catherine's) movement through the city. Harris also cites Michel's origin story as evidence of a connection to the figure of the *flâneur*. Margaret Harris, "Names in Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*" in *Reconnoitres: Essays in Australian Literature in Honour of G. A. Wilkes,* ed. Margaret Harris and Elizabeth Webby (South Melbourne: Sydney University Press in association with Oxford University Press, 1992), 143, note 5.

[13] The history of English editions of *Lost Illusions* is important because of my claim of direct influence. Saintsbury's Temple edition excises part two of *Lost Illusions*, placing it in another volume. It's unlikely that Saintsbury's choice would have disrupted Stead's understanding of the sequence. Balzac's *avant-propos* to the *Human Comedy* (reprinted by Saintsbury) explicitly signals the sequence, as do short passages at the beginnings and endings of each part: the legacy of the serial publication of *Lost Illusions*. Saintsbury's deviation seems motivated by the perceived "decadence" ("Introduction") of Lucien's Parisian narrative for the polite Anglophone reader. Arguably the excision increases the contrast between the (immoral) centre and the (wholesome) provinces. Following Kathleen Raine's 1951 edition, English translations have published the three parts together. The 2004 reprint I've cited usefully places the older Temple edition translation in Balzac's intended order.

[14] Honoré de Balzac, "Introduction," *Human Comedy: Introductions and Appendix* (Project Gutenberg E-text, March, 2010) Ebook #1968: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1968/1968-h/1968-h.htm (my emphasis).

Sydney.[15] Stead's twisting of the structure that defines *Lost Illusions* is precisely the mechanism by which this is achieved. The early chapters of Stead's novel describe Michael's formative years. She gives Fisherman's Bay (her fictionalised portrait of Watson's Bay) a kind of exaggerated provincial authority in these chapters in descriptions of the "old stone houses, decayed weatherboard cottages, ruinous fences, boathouses and fishermen's shanties" (2). But at the end of chapter two, when Michael leaves for the Great War, the narrative does not. There is something of a move towards the inner city as opposed to the suburbs in the central chapters of Stead's novel, but the overall effect is one of constant juxtaposition. It is the travelling text in both cases that affords a connection between province and centre, but while Balzac's "social antithesis" is played out within the frame of the nation, Stead's narrative has somewhat different coordinates.[16] There are no provincial Australian capitals in Stead's novel to provide contrast to the city, and if the rest of the country appears at all, it is mostly as a vast interior, which is as much a psychic space for the characters as it is physical space. In other words, the province/centre nexus is played out in two fields: a transnational one in which Sydney is put in relation with a host of other world cities, notably Paris; and a local one in which the city is imagined in relation to its developing suburbs.

Within the local space of the city in which Stead's narrative is tightly bound, the proximity between the suburban home and the city plays havoc with the structure of the *bildungsroman*.[17] In his reading of *Lost Illusions*, which builds directly on Bourdieu's reading of *Sentimental Education*, Franco Moretti notes

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[15] Robert Dixon and Brigid Rooney, "Introduction: Australian Literature, Globalisation and the Literary Province," in *Scenes of Reading: Is Australian Literature a World Literature?* ed. Robert Dixon and Brigid Rooney (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2013), xviii.

[16] This is widely noted. In addition, Balzac's *avant-propos* to the Human Comedy makes his conception of the work as a national project abundantly clear.

[17] In Balzac, as I've noted above, province and centre remain relatively distinct categories. While Balzac signals this clearly in his *avant propos* there are also some clear examples from *Lost Illusions*. The opening section focuses on the role of local elites such as Madame de Bargeton who exert a power which is to some extent remote from the capital, at least while the characters remain in Angoulême. Moreover, the significant distance between province and centre is highlighted in the last section of *Lost Illusions* in which a broken and poor Lucien is forced to return to Angoulême on foot.

that The Latin Quarter, where Lucien finds himself in Paris, is a "world of youth" full of young men who have left their families behind, "converging from all over France […] set on making their fortune."[18] Lucien's movement out of the provinces is prompted by desire: literary fame, fortune, and the slim promise of a love affair with Madame de Bargeton. The same locus of desire, which runs through the French *bildungsroman* more generally,[19] defines his attempted movement of a young male protagonist from the poverty of the Latin Quarter towards the wealth and prestige of the *grands boulevards*; a movement which reveals the city though the desiring eyes of the protagonist. Stead's constriction of space inverts and complicates a narrative form in which desire is the engine for upward mobility in both the literary and socio-economic fields. Motifs of constriction appear throughout *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*: the narrative opens and closes with a description of military bases on Sydney's heads and harbour traffic has been brought to a halt by a Seaman's Strike.[20] Michael's claims to be "tired of wandering" and his need of "a passion, even if illusory" present his narrative almost as a structural imposition (53). He's aware of a kind of demand that he cannot meet but that he must attempt anyway. An infatuation with the wife of the bourgeois socialist Fulke Folliot, has the potential to function as a narrative motor akin to Madame de Bargeton in *Lost Illusions*, or Madame Arnoux in Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*. However, the aptly named "Marion" takes Michael, in a retrograde movement, into the realm of medieval

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[18] Franco Moretti is interested in identifying generic features of the European novel via mapping trajectories of characters signals his debt to Bourdieu's reading of Flaubert. He states: "It's the basic matrix of Balzac's narrative: two poles, and a current that discharges itself – *parvenir!* - from one to the other. And the magnetism of desire 'orients' the city along the axis described years ago by Pierre Bourdieu: from the *rive gauche*, towards the 'beehive' in the north-west." Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), 95.

[19] The historical model for this movement was of course Napoleon. (This is widely noted. See for example: Lukács, 47-65). Stead's description of Sydney Harbour may be suggestive of her interest in Napoleon's career: "between the pine-tops the grey towers of the Rose Bay convent rise, whose buttresses are planted in the evergreen scrub running down to the edge of this still water. Corsica hardly looks into a more lilied and reflectant tide" (74). Stead's interest in Napoleon is noted in Geering, "*A Web,*" 36, 55.

[20] Michael Wilding notes this constriction motif in "Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*," in *The Radical Tradition: Lawson, Furphy, Stead* (Townsville: Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1993), 162.

gothic fantasy.[21] Thus the ultimate form his affection will take is endogamous, where his desire is directed toward his half-sister Catherine. Rather than the sentimental education offered by the French *bildungsroman*, this novel explores "sentimental involution" (205). This phrase, offered by a young university student as a description of Michael's development, suggests both an ingrowing and a complication. Thwarted desire rebounds, intensifies, and leads to a strange kind of self-awareness: "desires flourish as their denial is pressed down; what they lack in satisfaction, they put forth in the fruit of understanding and sensibility. Then when they have fitted him to understand it, they […] make him the subtlest connoisseur of his own destruction" (284). This movement from "education" in the centre, to "involution" in the provinces, describes Stead's reworking of the narrative of disillusionment.

What is particularly striking, in one sense, is that Michael's stream-of-consciousness passages, those most reminiscent of modernist narrative experimentation, come out of the very denial of capture by the centre. The notion of a failure of education is also significant in as much as the *bildungsroman* also narrates the social development of a young character towards maturity as a national citizen. In Moretti's terms, the *bildungsroman* "gives a homeland to the individual. It reinforces the links between man and nature, man and other men, man and himself."[22] Michael's failure to achieve maturity might thus be read, in light of Kol Blount's remarkable eulogy, as a kind of critique of cultural nationalism in Australia.[23] Yet any attempt identify a privileged narrative

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[21] Michael Ackland suggests that Michael's turn to the medieval is symptomatic of the "the quintessentially modernist desire to épater la bourgeoisie" (63). He contrasts Michael's "escapist" use of the imagined medieval past to Joseph's constructive blending of reality with myth. Michael Ackland, "Dreaming of the Middle Ages: The Place of the 'mittelalterlich' and Socialist Awareness in Christina Stead's Early Fiction," *Australian Literary Studies* vol. 26 no. 3-4 (2011): 54-68.

[22] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World,* trans. Albert Spragia (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 29.

[23] Alejandro Martinez identifies a similar anxiety in Latin American and Hispanic/Latino *bildungsroman,* which he links to a regionally specific anxiety in discourses of national development: "A specific characteristic of the *bildungsroman* genre is its permanent anxiety about the success or failure of the young characters in accomplishing tasks; the challenges allow them to become not only heroes, but also the achievements justify them as national citizens. […] In this perspective, development and *bildungsroman* are narratives of Latin American maturity. In the reading of Latin American literature, the

consciousness in Michael must encounter the significant commentary offered by other characters. The university student's "involution" comment is typical in this respect, of a narrative which both offers the young man from the provinces narrative (albeit one heavily influenced by its modernist transformations of the genre) and, through its polyphony, a variety of critiques. One significant critique is offered by Stead's third "poet," Michael's half-sister Catherine Baguenault. If there is no equivalent to Catherine in Balzac's novel that is because women function largely as markers of social advancement in *Lost Illusions*.[24] In fact, Stead signals that Catherine has been inserted into a structure in which she would not usually fit by highlighting "Catherine's Narrative," a heading reproduced in the text, in which Catherine reveals details of her ingrown, ultimately incestuous relationship with Michael. Indeed, Catherine's analysis of the social dimensions of her gender precisely reflects the role women play in the *bildungsroman*: "to men, women are a means to become initiated" (172). Stead offers Catherine's own sentimental involution as a counter to Michael's and it is recorded in a drawing that Joseph sees in the dingy Woolloomooloo apartment

characters face an ironic situation: they become mature in an immature nation. Moreover, their process of social and intellectual development runs in parallel with the characters' quest for national identity; the Bildungsroman registers somehow the particularities of the developing national environments in which the young characters move" (6). Yet in noting this tension, he adds the import reflection that "development is part of an ideal modern Latin American identity" (81-82) largely influenced by perceptions of cultural and economic inferiority in comparison with North American and European models of national identity. Alejandro Martinez, *Developments: Encounters of Formation in the Latin American and Hispanic/Latino Bildungsroman* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014). A slightly different, but in many ways analogous, version of this argument is offered by Manfred Mackenzie in his essay "Christina Stead and the National/Natural Uncanny." Mackenzie argues that Michael's narrative might be read as a failure "to project into the-space-that-is-Australia a variant of European Romantic nationalism, a 'national' or 'organic' nationalism that rests upon the idea of attachment to a particular soil or territory […] Kol Blount's bardic, aria-like address represents Michael Baguenault's public meaning, one might say his meaning as a failed cultural nationalist" (201). Manfred Mackenzie "Christina Stead and the National/Natural Uncanny" *Southerly* 56.4 (1996-1997): 201-18.

[24] For a discussion of this in *Lost Illusions* see Bruce Robbins's chapter "Erotic Patronage: Rousseau, Constant, Balzac, Stendhal." Robbins's argument that the *künstlerroman* is interested in the question of upwards social mobility builds on Bourdieu's interrogation of art's stance of disinterest to material conditions in *The Rules of Art*. Bruce Robbins, *Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Toward a literary history of the welfare state* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 22-54.

of another of the "poor men," the keenly perceptive Marxist intellectual Baruch Mendelssohn:

> He looked non-committally for a long time, the next evening, at the drawing which Baruch was working at, called, *La Femme s'échappe de la Forêt*, showing a naked woman with agonised contortion of body and face bursting through a thicket, tearing her thigh on a splintered tree, while a boa constrictor and a tropical vine loaded with large lilies hung before her and impeded her.
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> "Queer," said Joseph; "what does that mean?"
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> "Woman escapes from the forest. It means, the middle-class woman trying to free herself, and still impeded by romantic notions and ferocious, because ambushed, sensuality." (160-161)

However, Stead's involution of this narrative structure also consists of an attempt to capture urban experience from multiple perspectives. This is signalled in the "seven" of her title. In Balzac, it is, for the most part, Lucien's movement through Paris that brings the city to life. His narrative is erected as a clear symbol of the crushing effects of burgeoning bourgeois capitalism and other characters are subsumed (if not directly into his story) into this grand theme of the novel of which his narrative is uniquely indicative. David is also important, but offers a provincial counter-point to essentially the same theme. But in Stead, Michael's suicide, perhaps the singularly important narrative event in *Seven Poor Men*, stresses a plurality of perspective over a single uniting consciousness. Michael's death comes well before the end of the novel and Stead explores the various impacts his death has on a variety of characters, many of whom are affected quite differently. The suicide is perhaps most important for the way that it interrupts webs of connection between the lives of her cast of urban radicals. In the "Endpiece" a storm rages and: "The threads of the mesh appear and are woven out of the bodies of flying men and women with the gestures interlocked in thousands of attitudes of passion" (332). Balzac's twinning of characters is most clearly seen in the pairing of his two poets. In Stead's novel, Michael and Joseph are paired, but so are Michael and Catherine, and Michael and the

"paralysed youth" Kol Blount.[25] The relationship between Baruch and Joseph is vital at some stages in the narrative as Joseph is brought under the wing of the Marxist intellectual and yet Baruch is also paired with Catherine who is also paired with Marion's husband Fulke Folliot. The result is to create an image of a complex of relationships well described by Stead's metaphor of a "mesh" (332). Stead might have drawn on the French realists for the construction of many-charactered novels, but the startling and modern vision of an urban centre populated by multiple consciousnesses has much more in common with *Ulysses.*[26] It is through these interrelationships and multiple perspectives, which unlike Joyce are not united to the same extent by a substructure of myth, that Stead's novel gains its polyphony and performs its act of involution. In her address to the 1939 American Writers' Congress "Uses of the Many-Charactered Novel" Stead argued for an urban "novel of strife" in which characters "hold back the totalising impulses of their creator and provide all morals and checks by their many-sidedness."[27] In Stead's view, such novels (and she cites the works of Dos Passos, Aragon and Balzac as examples) are "mostly ironic," offering "sidelong critique."[28] What we find (unusually) in *Seven Poor Men* is an invoking of this narrative of disillusionment, in view in many ways reified by Kol Blount's eulogy which arguably casts Michael's narrative as uniquely privileged, at the same time that such a narrative it is critiqued via the many-sidedness of the ensemble cast of the group novel.

Accordingly, the narrative of Michael's sister Catherine brings into stark contrast the sense of gender entitlement lurking at the heart of the *bildungsroman* (in many ways she is more energetic and clear-sighted than Michael), but it also contributes to another wider critique of the narrative of disillusionment and artistic ambition from the perspective of class. In Balzac's own Restoration terms, cultural and economic capital rests with the aristocracy and d'Arthez, the

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[25] Margaret Harris notes the "various pairings and groupings, even doublings" among the principal characters of *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (146).

[26] This comparison is noted by Wilding, 160, and Delia Falconer in "Introduction" to Stead "*Seven Poor Men,*" ii.

[27] Christina Stead, "Uses of the Many-Charactered Novel," in R. G. Geering and A. Segerberg (eds.) *Christina Stead: Selected Fiction and Nonfiction* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1994), 196-199, (pp. 197-198)

[28] Stead "Many-Charactered Novel," 198.

figure who represents the autonomy of the artist appears later on in the *Human Comedy* as a minor noble.[29] It's worth noting at this point some of the significant political differences that distinguish Balzac's and Stead's use of the narrative of disillusionment. Balzac was of course a Legitimist and his model of the artist-as-aristocrat owes much to his political beliefs. That being said, Lucien's narrative, in as much as it exposes the workings of a capitalised literary field, contributes to not only a wider discussion of class in *Lost Illusions* but also, perhaps inadvertently, reveals the interaction between cultural capital and literary production.[30] Key to Bourdieu's analysis of the *bildungsroman* is the idea that for all its claims to authenticity, the literary field remains subject to social and political fields. Bourdieu's pertinent observation is that the illusion of the autonomy of the artwork is vital to a process of fetishisation of the art object through which such an object comes to function (in the case of Flaubert's post-1848 France) as a marker of bourgeois taste.[31] Brigid Rooney has noted that Stead is an author who was well aware of the "game of cultural production" and we can see evidence of such awareness even (and appropriately so) in her first

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[29] D'Arthez is one of Balzac's literary avatars: on the back of literary success, "de" Balzac succeeded in adding the aristocratic appellation to his own name. Spurr discusses this in "Portraits of the Artist," 48.

[30] The question of how Balzac's publicly signalled political affiliations interact with his representation of Restoration France under the conditions of burgeoning modern capitalism is complex. At the heart of this question is how the ideology of an author inflects the representation, in the case of Balzac, of a whole society. Such debates are beyond the scope of this essay but it's worth noting that Balzac was never short of prominent left-wing admirers, notably Marx, Engels and Lukács. Engels identified the tension between Balzac's political views and his work in a famous letter to Margaret Harkness, describing Balzac's critique of aristocracy and savage critique of the *bourgeoisie* as a triumph of realism: "The realism I allude to may crop out even in spite of the author's opinions. […] Balzac was politically a Legitimist; his great work is a constant elegy on the inevitable decay of good society, his sympathies are all with the class doomed to extinction. […] That Balzac […] was compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices, that he saw the necessity of the downfall of his favourite nobles, and described them as people deserving no better fate; and that he saw the real men of the future where, for the time being, they alone were to be found - that I consider one of the greatest triumphs of Realism." Friedrich Engels to Margaret Darkness (1888) in *Marx and Engels*, *Literature and Art* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 91-92.

[31] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 134.

novel.[32] *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* offers a critique of a transnational literary field which is at least partly influenced by her reading of *Lost Illusions*. We are clearly in the world of literary production in *Seven Poor* men. Nearly all the key characters have an important relationship to the production of texts. There are journalists, librarians, an aspiring academic, and crucially, a number of printers. Balzac's "great […] antithesis" between the provinces and the centre is also defined by an exploitative financial relationship: Lucien's increasingly extravagant lifestyle is financed by David's hard work and sacrifice in Angoulême. In the literary realm, as Franco Moretti notes: the provinces have the laborious tasks of printing and paper production, while the capital has "the privilege of covering those beautiful white sheets with fascinating ideas (and glittering nonsense)."[33] *Seven Poor Men* also prominently features a provincial print-shop, the "Tank Stream Press," where Joseph and Baruch are employed by another of the "poor men" Gregory Chamberlain. Consistent with the motif of involution, the print shop, which in Balzac's novel is located in provincial Angoulême appears at the start of Stead's third chapter, just as the plot moves into the inner-city. Not only does the press play the key function of uniting Stead's cast of poor men, all of whom visit it with the exception of the "paralysed youth" Kol Blount, the description of its location in Lachlan Place (that is Macquarie Place) charges it with symbolic meaning. For much of the twentieth century Macquarie Place was seen as the site from which Governor Phillip, with an unfurling of the union jack, apparently took possession of the whole Australian continent. [34] It is also the home of Governor Lachlan Macquarie's Egyptian Obelisk, planted in the centre of the square to function as mile zero for the measurement of road distances in the colony. As Kirkpatrick puts it: "It is from this location Stead has taken the […] 'measure' of Sydney."[35] The Tank-Stream Press, partly because of its privileged symbolic location, thus

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[32] Brigid Rooney applies Bourdieu's theories to shed light on Stead's representation of authorship in fiction and interviews: "Writers behaving badly: Stead, Bourdieu and Australian Literary Culture," *Australian Literary Studies* 20.1 (May 2001): 76-87 (p. 76).

[33] Moretti, "*Atlas,*" 68.

[34] Mary Casey and Tony Lowe point out that this was a misconception (Possession Island was the key place) that had the currency of truth during the early twentieth century. *Conservation Issues: The Obelisk, Macquarie Place* (Sydney: Casey & Lowe for City of Sydney, 2003), 37.

[35] Kirkpatrick, "Walking," 62.

functions as a kind of pole around which local knowledges congregate particularly through the movement of her characters Michael, Catherine and Joseph who function as vehicles for Stead's very detailed, "naturalistic" recording of 1920s Sydney.

Stead's public claims to be working in a mode of naturalism inherited from her literary influences, Balzac and Zola, and her scientist father, lend her descriptions of place and character an air of authority. She often claimed to just be recording what she saw, and that nothing was made up, in a way that disguised her reworking of material and literary influences.[36] Despite the slipperiness of the term naturalism when applied to Stead, the depiction of Sydney in *Seven Poor Men* is undoubtedly influenced by Stead's wandering through her city as she scrimped on her bus fares to pay for a ticket to leave Australia. Thus it is possible that the "Tank Stream Press" was modelled on the "Carrington Printers" listed in the 1924 Sands directory at number 11 Macquarie Place, but it also has another, partially disguised, provenance. Detailed comparison of Seven Poor Men with *Lost Illusions* reveals the degree to which Stead's print shop is a purposeful forgery of Balzac's, from details of its location to the specifics of its floor plan:

> Near the quays is Lachlan place where there is a small triangular park […] A wide old doorway opened […] and over it was the name, white on blue, "Tank Stream Press, Ground Floor." The tobacconist […] rented out to several establishments the mouldy apartments of the ground and first floor. In the attic was a man who did heliogravure. The building had once been a private house. Its court was now a cart-dock and opened into the other street […]. The distinctive smell of the building came from […] the printing ink. Joseph walked through the old doorway, went by a staircase […]. He opened the glass back-door and moved among the presses […] putting his finger in the dust in the little glassed-in office of Chamberlain, the owner […]. He heard old Williams sluicing down the yard. (74-76)

Balzac's printing house, on the other hand:

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[36] Diana Brydon, *Christina Stead* (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1987), 1.

[…] had been established […] in the angle made by the Rue de Beaulieu and the Place du Mûrier; it had been devoted to its present purposes for a long time past. The ground floor consisted of a single huge room […] that gave upon the yard at the back. A passage at the side led to the private office […] customers usually preferred to enter by way of the glass door in the street front […]. A couple of glass-windowed cages had been built out into the yard at the back; the foreman sat in state in the one, the master printer in the other […]. On the one side of the space stood the kitchen […]. Here […] the forms […] were washed. Inky streams issuing thence blended with the ooze from the kitchen sink, and found their way on to […] the street outside; till peasants coming into the town […] believed that the Devil was taking a wash inside the establishment […]. The house above the printing office […] consisted of three rooms on the first floor and a couple of attics in the roof. (11-12)

Both print shops, located on triangular parks, were previously residential buildings; both are located on the ground-floor with rooms and then an attic above; there are courtyards at the back; customers enter through a glass door; bosses sit in a sort of glass-lined office and ink oozes out from the small kitchen into the street. In Balzac's text, moreover, the print shop resembles a satanic bathroom because of the black ink which "blended with the ooze from the kitchen sink" flows out onto the streets of Angoulême (12). Stead's building stinks of ink: "The distinctive smell of the building came […] from the printing-ink" (75) and she adapts Balzac's image into the heading of Chapter Three which describes the "Tank Stream Press" as "A Devil's Kitchen, where the word is made bread" (67). In this movement from devil's bathroom to "kitchen" we see something of Stead's delight in appropriating, (in as much as the print-shop is the most obvious symbol of her borrowing) a heavily gender-coded narrative We might also read such a move in terms of a province/centre involution: a site of refuse and hard labour (printing for the capital), becomes a site of rebellious alchemical invention. But Stead's critique goes further still, by providing a scathing critique of originality as a function of the literary field. In the passages immediately following Stead's description we learn that business is going poorly, forcing the owner Chamberlain to resort to nefarious activities including a counterfeiting operation. The brains behind the scheme is the shrewd capitalist Montagu who ironically comments on the huge quantity of "original etchings" in

Australia, of which the shop itself is one (78). Moreover, at the closing of the print shop narrative arc a private detective appears looking for "cheap swindlers, counterfeiters" and "smugglers" (292). Montagu and Chamberlain are nowhere to be found so it is Baruch that speaks with the detective:

> "I don't care twopence about this Montagu or whatever his name is, I've only seen him a few times, but he strikes me as a bounder, and as you say, he's got 'Don't trust me' written on his mug. But I'd like to know what he's been up to; is it misrepresentation selling his antiques?"
>
> "No," said the man, taking his glass, "I can't tell you; but it's not that, it's worse."
>
> "What, smuggling?"
>
> "Don't ask," said the man. "I can't tell you. You'll know soon enough."
>
> […]
>
> "Do you think it's going to snow?" asked Baruch.
>
> "What?"
>
> "Snow?" said Baruch.
>
> The detective winked at him. "You're smart, feller, aren't you? (294-295)

In this coded conversation, Baruch's initial comments confirm his awareness of Montagu's nefarious "misrepresentation." His comment "do you think it's going to snow?" is a delightfully antipodean inversion (on a sweltering Sydney day). The reference to "snow" here suggests a tacit acknowledgement of the drug smuggling operation taking place. But the idea of something being smuggled in or concealed applies equally to the submerged reference to the smuggled-in print shop.[37]

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[37] The *OED* lists the first use of "snow" in reference to drugs in 1914, and cites an American origin. Its use as a verb (as Baruch uses it) is right up to the minute: the *OED* cites 1927 and an American origin. A meaning of "to snow" listed in *The Macquarie Dictionary* as "to overwhelm (someone) with facts and information in an attempt to distract attention from some aspect of the situation" seems particularly pertinent to the discussion in Stead's text. As noted in the *OED,* this is something of an extension of the expression "to be snowed in" or "snowed under" which carries the idea of something being submerged or covered up. The use of "to snow" (or alternatively a "snow job") in

The coding of the forged shop as scandalous is significant for a number of reasons. It is, in the first instance, a kind of self-reflexive literary insertion into a narrative which, in so many respects claims to be working within relatively defined limits: one city, presented through a "naturalistic" mode which privileges local knowledge, voices and perception.[38] It might also be understood as offering a critique of originality from the perspective of the provinces and of class, based on an understanding of authenticity as an operation of literary power. In his sniffing out of swindlers and counterfeiters, Stead's detective recalls the Victorian figure of the plagiarism hunter: a type of literary journalist specialised in "elucidating the provenance the literary object, rather than the synchronic qualities of its literary merit."[39] As Robert Macfarlane notes, such figures acted as champions of originality in the context of such mass-reproductive technologies as stereotyping and the periodical journal. The "forgery" is most readily confirmed through the detective's allusion to Poe's "The Purloined Letter." Commenting on Poe's story, Stead's detective argues: "it's not possible they would have missed a letter if they'd *ripped the place to pieces*" (293). This ripping of "the place to pieces" reflects directly on Stead's own literary borrowing: ripping apart Stead's purloined press, that is breaking it into its constituent descriptive pieces, is the very process which leads to the uncovering of the "forgery" of Balzac's description.[40] Stead's interrogation of

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the sense of to steal or to commit an act of deception is cited by both Sidney J. Baker as being in use in Australia, but it is a later usage dating from American influence in the Second World War. Sidney J. Baker, *A Popular Dictionary of Australian Slang* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1943), 178.

[38] Hazel Rowley suggests that this tension between different aesthetic practices as well as a certain play with narrative reflexivity are typical of Stead's work: "In so far as Stead believed that a polished style would come between the world and her reader, hers is a naturalistic view of art. However the desire to leave the traces of the preceding creative act - to evoke the author sitting at the typewriter so to speak - is an *anti-realist* [emphasis in original]- impulse which celebrates art as process. This duality - realism versus anti-realism, life versus art - is ever present in Stead's universe. […]There are […] thinly concealed self-reflexive passages embedded in her fiction. […] Stories within stories, embedded narrative: Stead delighted in building Chinese boxes with narrative" (316-317). Hazel Rowley, *Christina Stead: A Biography* (Melbourne: Minerva, 1994).

[39] Robert Macfarlane, *Original Copy: Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 41.

[40] Recall the key insight that allows C. Auguste Dulpin to find the purloined letter. That is, the best place to hide a stolen letter is in plain view. The print shop is in plain view in

originality echoes the criticism Walter Benjamin made in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." (What could be more representative of mechanical reproduction than a print shop?) Benjamin saw the destruction of the "aura" of originality that had defined an artwork prior to the ability to reproduce it as a liberation of the artwork from ritual.[41] He regarded his essay as "a decisive advance in the direction of a materialistic theory of art."[42] In other words, Benjamin's claim is that art can only be understood against the background of its conditions of production. Stead's print shop, in as much as it aligns the local and the imported as well as writing and printing, is exemplary of artistic production defined by the conditions of its production. As Uwe Steiner suggests, Benjamin's aim in this essay is to "make the writer aware of his social function, with which the control over certain means of production is connected."[43] Such a reflection aligns pertinently with Stead's representation of printing in *Seven Poor Men*. The owner of the press, Chamberlain sees himself as an "artist" or "faber", an illusion that blinds him to the way in which Montagu exploits him and also to the fact that he neglects his workers. Chamberlain prides himself on his distinction of taste and the ability to recognise "authentic" works from reproductions which helps him in his counterfeiting operation: "these forgers have the experts in mind when they forge, but the instinct for artistic value is what you can't so easily fool" (78). He, however, is ironically unaware of his status as the owner of a forged press. In short, he's a dupe. In Bourdieu's terms: believing in the original, the naturalised and sacralised literary object. Moreover, Chamberlain's blindness has serious consequences for his workers. Baruch criticises Chamberlain for not forking-out the owed back-pay, and here we find another interesting play on this "word made bread" metaphor: it is recast as "dough" or money:

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Stead's narrative in many respects including: its important symbolic location; its function in uniting characters; and its appearance at the start of Chapter Three in which the narrative takes a turn toward inner Sydney.

[41] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the age of mechanical reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992), 211-44.

[42] Uwe Steiner, *Walter Benjamin: an introduction to his work and thought*, trans. Michael Winkler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 115.

[43] Steiner, "*Walter Benjamin,*" 108.

> Before the mind some matters, before letters, let's start with bread, reversing St John by a simple process of the oesophagus. When are you going to let us have the dough, the specie, the shekels? We'll take it in any currency or form, bullion. Treasury Bills, Argentine bonds, George III pennies, new mint, anything but I.O.U.'s or tram-tickets. I mean, I know Montagu is a worthy character and society ought to keep him on the strength of his having known Whistler's exploiter, I realise that: but why assume the duty of Society? I mean, what about your honest toilers? (95)[44]

Baruch's exasperated desire to be paid in any currency is a reference to Frederick Leyland's infamous feud with James McNeil Whistler and draws a link between Montagu's exploitation of Chamberlain who in turn exploits his workers. Importantly, making the (borrowed) "word" into "bread" gets to the heart of Stead's problem in her adaptation of Balzac. As a Marxist and a "naturalist" Stead was intimately concerned with the material reality of natural and economic environments and conditions. There is something of Stead's desire for ambition in *Seven Poor Men*, imagined, in part as the flight from the provinces that accompanied the production and publication of her first novel, and dramatised through the lives of her more tortured ambitious characters. However, there's a sense in which the provinces are never left behind. Joyce's Stephen Dedalus was a young artist adopting foreign models and genres to the material circumstances of Ireland. He images himself as "a priest of the eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life" (Joyce 240). Stead's "reversing St John by a simple process of the oesophagus" draws our attention to the chewed bolus bearing the traces of mastication by her "poor" characters. Stead's text is a kind of reworked, chewed up product of the "devil's kitchen," one that returns to the physicality and materiality of place and the conditions of production.

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[44] This passage includes a reference to Frederick Leyland, a wealthy shipping magnate who was patron to John Ruskin and Whistler. Unsatisfied with what he saw as Whistler's extravagant expenditure in redecorating the "peacock room" he famously refused to pay. Finally, he said he would pay in pounds, rather than guineas. Baruch's rant about various forms of payment parodies this famous conversation.

While Stead had one eye on Paris where she was looking for a publisher (the manuscript of "Death in the Antipodes" would end up being reviewed by none other than Sylvia Beach), the other was fixed on Australia and the particular operations of the local literary field. As well as contributing to Stead's critique of originality, the operation of the "literary detective" hunting for forgery also takes on a particular meaning in early twentieth-century Australia in which burgeoning nationalism inflected the political right and left as well as well as the literary world.[45] Key figures in the literary field in Australia were the bohemian group clustered around the magazine *Vision* (which appear in *Seven Poor Men* but from an outsiders' perspective – through the eyes of the poor man Joseph), and the emerging cultural-nationalist school grouped around Vance and Nettie Palmer.[46] Simon During's reading of Stead's fiction draws on both Bourdieu and Pascale Casanova's "extension" of Bourdieu's nationally bounded field model to describe the interactions of local literary fields in world literary space in *The World Republic of Letters*. In applying Casanova's model to Stead, During comments on the difficulty Stead faced as a young ambitious writer eager to enter world literary space from a local literary field whose key power-brokers

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[45] Simon During's discussion of Stead's work draws heavily on Bourdieu and Casanova to analyse Stead's position in both world and Australian literary space: "Australian literary culture at that time was in fact positioned between a local book trade most wholly committed to imported titles, a philistine public sphere which habitually censored avant-garde writing on ground of obscenity, an educational system largely dedicated to the values of imperial Britishness, and a counterhegemonic nationalist ideology with both left and right inflections and which, in the literary world, was often invoked precisely in order to stimulate the local publishing industry. This was not a situation from which writers could easily join the international literary field." Simon During, *Exit Capitalism: literary culture, theory, and post-secular modernity* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 78-79. For discussion of the Australian cultural-nationalists see David Walker, *Dream and Disillusion: a search for Australian cultural Identity* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976). For discussion of Stead's complex relationship to the *Vision* group see Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945* (North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1991), Chapter 2.

[46] Modjeska's important claim is that women were only admitted into Australian bohemian circles on very specific terms and not taken seriously as intellectual figures. The fact that it is Joseph that sees the *Vision* group from the outside (and not, for example, Catherine) might be explained via the discourses of gender that circulated in the political left during the early twentieth century.

largely defined themselves in opposition to foreign, modern influences which were often represented as "poisonous" and "diseased."[47]

In addition to the operations of local literary power brokers, was the very real impact of censorship in early twentieth-century Australia. Customs had a large influence on a market heavily dependent on foreign imports and acted, like Stead's detective, in the interests of "public morality" (293) when they banned such scandalous texts as Balzac's *Droll Stories* and Joyce's *Ulysses*.[48] *Seven Poor Men* opens with a scene in which the aptly named customs launch "Hygeia" pulls out to an incoming ship. The possibilities that face the ship (entry into the port, or "disgrace" and "quarantine"), reflect on the risks Stead took in importing scandalous foreign material in the cultural field of 1920s Sydney (2). Stead's acknowledging of her borrowing as a partially disguised "forgery" – an illicit copying thus makes sense in a context in which narratives addressed the city, rather than the safer territory of "the bush" – was something of a novelty. As Michael Wilding rightly suggests: "In writing about Sydney [Stead] is *creating a new world, a new myth* to replace or complement the outback myth; and she is making a personal and national assertion in putting Sydney on the fictional map"[49] (my emphases). The very devilishness of Stead's "forgery" depends on it being firstly reworked and secondly in escaping the bounds of the bonded warehouses surrounding Lachlan Place into wider society. Stead contrasts her importing of foreign material in a way that is suggestive of local experience with the conspicuous learning of Chamberlain and the bourgeois Folliots whose house is full of foreign displays of their refined taste, representative, as Susan Carson writes, of their "uncritical allegiance to literary modernism."[50] Accordingly they are "protected rather than harassed by the

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[47] See for example, the foreword to *Vision II*: "Wherever we find a dead or disintegrated condition of mind, or wherever mind becomes diseased and poisonous, we can almost always trace to France the cause of decline." "Foreword," *Vision: A Literary Quarterly, II* (August, 1924).

[48] Nicole Moore discusses the banning of books in Australia in *The Censor's Library* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2012), 29 (Balzac) and 111 (Joyce).

[49] Wilding "*Seven Poor Men,*" 160.

[50] Susan Carson, "From Sydney to Shanghai: Australian and Chinese Women Writing Modernism," in *Pacific Rim Modernisms,* ed. Mary Anne Gillies, Helen Sword, and Steven Yao (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 184.

police, on account of their parents, and Marion had little difficulty when she went down to smoodge Fulke's interdicted books in French and German through the Customs" (61).

The closing passages of *Seven Poor Men* give us an indication of how Stead potentially imagined her importation of the urban novel might be successful. As in *Lost Illusions*, the print-shop narrative winds up with the failure of the print shop and with Joseph/David retreating to the domestic realm. However, both take with them a sense of their implication in a wider scheme of modernity that (quite painfully for David) binds provinces to centres in a variety of complex relations. The Marxist intellectual Baruch, who has taken Joseph under his tutelage, is frequently at pains to explain this. As he suggests to Withers in the presence of Joseph:

> Our relations are stereotyped […]. This identical situation occurs in hundreds of small shops, because we're not organised […].You're intriguing with a man you know to be a pig, Montagu; I'm counting on getting away to America. That's the great secret: how does a small minority oppress a large majority?—we count on making a getaway. We don't realise our whole life is bound up with a million others: we're all individuals. (201)

Finally, Joseph reveals that he has come to see himself as a "character" in a larger work:

> This is how I think of it. I'm a letter of ordinary script. Events are printed with me face downwards. I will be thrown away when I am used up and there will be an "I" the less. No one will know. The presses will go on printing; plenty more have been made to replace me. (329-330)

Yet it is precisely here that we note an important difference in the way Balzac's and Stead's respective narratives treat the provinces. For while Joseph might have gained an awareness of his smallness in the scheme of things, Stead makes the important choice of granting the role of narrator to Joseph at the end of the novel (a move that echoes the merging of Joyce's narrator with Stephen's voice in *Portrait*). This suggests that Joseph is now free to retell the narrative as he

sees fit and crucially, Joseph's retelling will be a form that is locally-bound, the oral tale:[51]

> And so he sits long into the night with his hand in his wife's hand, and tells her the history of him, Joseph, of Michael and Catherine, his cousins, and of many others who surely live no more: for they cannot have a sequel, the creatures of our youth. And thus he begins:
> "We were seven friends, at that time, yes, seven poor men …" (333)

Thus, the most provincial, the lowliest of the poor men, and one who imagines himself as a creature of the city itself, is elevated to the key narrative position.[52] Unlike Balzac's David Séchard, Joseph becomes both printer and storyteller.

As in Balzac's use of travelling letters to connect province and centre, Stead inserts a discrete (purloined) intertext – that is, Balzac's nineteenth-century French print-shop in its entirety – into an otherwise spatially and temporally bounded narrative. Such purloining allows movement beyond rigid formulations: in Balzac's text the provincial town and the capital, and in Stead's transnational narrative, the temporally and spatially bounded limits of nation-states at a time in which the borders of the literary field in Australia were being particularly heavily policed. Smuggled in, we can see how Stead is mapping Balzac's narrative of the arrival of modernity (in both texts the old house is converted into a printing press) onto Sydney. Macquarie Place was in a similar process of transition: the verdant oasis at the heart of Sydney was a "microcosm of the development of the Colony" and the houses that once stood there were in the process in being transformed into part of the city's CBD.[53] In the background, the Sydney Harbour Bridge is in the process of construction. And it is the print shop itself which is the essential point of connection. It has somehow managed to escape the censorial action of borders. The setting of both Stead's and

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[51] A focus on the speech of characters has been identified as one of the key features of Stead's aesthetic. See for example, Rowley "*Christina Stead,*" 316.

[52] There are numerous passages in *Seven Poor Men* which indicate that Joseph sees himself as a creature of the city, perhaps the most suggestive is this one: "This is my city, here I was born and bred, I cannot be lost here, nothing can happen to me. […] I know the stones, the turnings; I know where the Markets are, there to the right and behind." (133)

[53] Casey and Lowe "*Conservation issues,*" 104.

Balzac's shops on a little triangular plot is something of a miraculous accident: a perfect fit, but one that uncomfortably aligns the literary influence with the material reality of Sydney. There's a similar doubleness in Stead's claim about the provenance of the Baguenaults. In addition to their literary heritage, there is Stead's claim that: "I found the name [Baguenault] in the British Museum; it's associated with the Huguenot migration to Ireland. The original family was a Watson's Bay family in Sydney, and they were as I described them, a Catholic family, interesting people."[54] Stead seems to have had an eye for such moments of frisson between local experience and literary description. Louise Yelin draws attention to the episode in *The Man Who Loved Children* in which a marlin is caught and boiled down for liver oil. Here a real life incident at Boongarre (Stead's childhood home - with a shark) is not only adapted to a new American setting, but also almost perfectly echoes a scene in Melville.[55] Hazel Rowley also draws attention to the way in which letters from David Stead are inserted verbatim into the text of *The Man Who Loved Children*.[56]

The print shop is also key in the sense that it is symbolic of a literary hybridity that functions throughout the text at large. *Seven Poor Men* is a novel that draws from a variety of literary influences including in addition to "naturalistic" modes, modernist interrogations of narrative perspective and verbal excess. The anti-realist self-reflexive aspect of the print shop's progeny is combined with realist modes of representation: a man in the attic of the print-shop does "heliogravure." This chemical process, which indexically registers the effect of light, is very appropriate in a novel that is keenly aware of the recording of the particularity of place. Other mechanical means of the registering or recording of experience that appear in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* are also richly suggestive. Baruch registers conversations like a "kind of endless gramophone record, a wax matrix" (329). The novel embraces the fluidity of the travelling text, with an

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[54] John B. Beston, "An Interview with Christina Stead," *World Literature Written in English*, 15 (1976), 94.

[55] Louise Yelin, *From the margins of Empire: Christina Stead, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 27-28.

[56] Rowley's comments on Stead's "purloined" letters are in "How Real is Sam Pollit? 'Dramatic Truth' and 'Proces-Verbal' in *The Man Who Loved Children*," in *The Magic Phrase: Critical Essays on Christina Stead*, ed. Margaret Harris (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000), 163-173.

awareness perhaps that (as Benjamin suggests in "Work of Art") reproduction makes the artwork transportable, participatory and, above all, political. *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* charts the passions of youth and expresses the ambition of its young author to make her first literary mark even as it critiques such a move in the polyphonous form of the group novel, albeit one that often dares to enter the various consciousnesses of its various characters.[57] Stead's reworking of her key literary influences and the narrative of disillusionment also offers a complex play of the insider/outsider position of the young woman from the provinces who sought literary fame in Paris. It is a brilliant "forgery": an illicit copy, and a melted-down, reworked, reproduction cooked up in a devil's kitchen. It is intimately connected with Stead's movement from Sydney to Paris, a theme the text itself suggests through its literary borrowing of *Lost Illusions*. And yet, it bears all the traces of its material production, right down to a borrowed print shop.

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[57] This is perhaps most true of the three Baguenaults, all of whom seem to focalise the narrative at various points. There are elements of Stead in each of them.