

**Deformity as Device
in the
Twentieth-Century Australian Novel**

by

C. A. Cranston, B.A., M.A.

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any tertiary institution and to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis or in the footnotes.

ABSTRACT

This study is based on several assumptions: it recognises that the person who is deformed has an existence both in the world and in the novel; it recognises that in both the world and the novel the deformed-being has borne a negative stigma. It also recognises that a literature reflects its culture, as must the characters who exist within that literature. As Harry Heseltine states succinctly: 'No writer invents his metaphors *ex nihilo*; in the long run he finds them somewhere in the range of possibility that his culture makes available to him'. This study asks: can that most marginalised of all characters, the deformed-being, provide any revelations about the self, about the novel, the reader of the novel, and the culture within which all exist? The answer in each case is an unequivocal yes.

Each chapter is devoted to a particular character in a major Australian novel; comparisons are made with other literary works, Australian and non-Australian. The individual chapters reveal the metaphors and symbolism attached to the character's particular deformity, and demonstrate how the deformed body informs the body of the text. The whole study presents an overall picture of deformity as a fairly consistent and an often-utilised metaphor. Chapter One provides a general survey of deformity as a metaphor. Chapter Two looks at Louis Stone's *Jonah* (1911), in which the hunchbacked larrikin character is a post-colonial interpretation of the traditionally conjoined outcast states, deformity and criminality. In Chapter Three the dwarf Jackie in Ruth Park's *Swords and Crowns and Rings* (1977) is seen as a metaphor for non-conformity during a time when Australia was signalling a resistance to the Old-World moulding. Chapter Four is also concerned with the post-colonial identity as revealed through the dwarf and

half-caste Billy Kwan in C. J. Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1978); it questions an identity that is 'imposed', whether at a national or individual level. In Chapter Five the relationship of the hunchbacked dwarf Rhoda Courtney with her adopted brother, the artist Duffield, in Patrick White's *The Vivisector* (1970) places deformity in the tradition of the *kunstlerroman*. In Chapter Six, Koch's *The Doubleman* (1985) is shown to combine elements of the *kunstlerroman* while raising questions about the post-colonial identity through the dualities arising out of the *doppelganger*: spiritual, bodily, and cultural displacement are all focussed by the device of Richard Miller's lameness. Chapter Seven moves from deformity that is congenital or disease-originated, to disability or deformity that is human-caused (either by negligence or intervention), thus allowing a discussion of the importance of the etiology of deformity as a device: in Thea Astley's *The Acolyte* (1972) Jack Holberg's blindness is caused by fly-strike. Chapter Eight examines the use of terror evoked through archetypal evolution of the lame crone Hester Harper in Elizabeth Jolley's *The Well* (1985). In Chapter Nine the crypto-dwarf Arthur Blackberry in James McQueen's *Hook's Mountain* (1982) is portrayed with the accompanying baggage of dwarf mythology; his implicit demise raises questions about our responses towards the deformed. Chapter Ten is a literary history of eugenics, as seen primarily through Eleanor Dark's *Prelude to Christopher* (1934) and Christina Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940). The conclusion discusses the initial problems of dealing with a taboo topic, along with reasons for excluding autobiographical treatments of deformity, biographical portrayals, war novels, and children's literature. Finally, Leslie Fiedler's comment that deformity is the reigning metaphor of our age is shown to be particularly apt in an Australian context.

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