

Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc.

Newsletter September 2013



October Oration postponed

Unfortunately the production of Bruce Beresford's new film has suffered from delays and he will not be back in Australia until November at the earliest. The Oration celebration, which had been planned for Friday 4 October 2013, has therefore been postponed. The good news is that Bruce may be able to join us for the Birthday Celebrations in Chiltern on 3 January 2014. It is difficult to predict his availability—he's willing but as we all realise the production of a film is not an exact science. We will make sure that we have a happy birthday celebration and keep our fingers crossed that Bruce will be with us.

HHR and her American women readers in 1932

In 1932 HHR was still enjoying international fame for her Australian trilogy, successfully published in an omnibus volume in 1930. In March she saw a review article on *The Getting of Wisdom* by Caroline Ruutz-Rees (1865-1954) the feminist, suffragist, and headmistress of Rosemary Hall, a leading Connecticut private girls' school. HHR nominates "Miss R-R" as one of the rare few to see that Laura is the 'writer in the making . . . attaching to herself only the wisdom that will be of most use to her in her future career' (HHR to Mary Kernot, 22 March 1932). This review had appeared in the *Saturday Review of Literature* for 27 February 1932 (p. 552), and it opened with a compliment to Richardson's 'sound sense of psychology in this day and generation, after Freud and Jung and Stanley Hall have spoken.'

Book collectors also wrote to HHR requesting signed copies of her books as well as accurate biographical information. One of these, the dancer, ethnomusicologist and teacher Gertude Prokosch Kurath (1903-1992)—like HHR, married to a distinguished professor of German—had bought three of HHR's novels and sent them to their author for her signature and an appropriate inscription about the date and place of their respective composition. Two of these volumes were evidently *The Getting of Wisdom* and *Maurice Guest*. Judging from the content of HHR's letter to Kurath, the third was almost certainly the trilogy in the 1930 omnibus format. Richardson was happy to oblige, and she included an interestingly forthright letter that has only recently come to light.

The letter is transcribed below, and was kindly sent to the HHR Society of Australia by its purchaser, David McCall of Melbourne, who also spotted HHR material offered recently at a Leski auction on 14 August (item 426). The letter was bought from a seller in New York, and we are grateful for David McCall's permission to publish it here.

Kurath's letter to HHR has not survived among the papers of either woman, and although Kurath indicates that she may be collecting information on HHR for a future piece in

the *Yale Review*, no such article has yet been traced. Even so, this significant new letter should be allocated the reference number 722a and given its place in the second volume of *Henry Handel Richardson: the Letters* (Melbourne, 2000), at page 376. On 11 March she had written to Jacob Schwartz for the address of the Rosemary School, in order to write to its headmistress. If written, it has not survived, but we might imagine its message from her comment to Schwarz: 'Certainly the Americans have always shown a greater appreciation for my work than the people here. No headmistress ever touched the G. of W. A few educational journals shook their heads over it—that's all.' From her home at 90 Regent's Park Road, London, N.W.1, HHR writes:

March 29th 1932

Dear Mrs Kurath

Please forgive my delay in answering your letter & in returning the notes to you. I have been ill and prevented from writing.

I now return the three volumes. I have signed them, & added place & date of their writing. Anything else would I fear have proved too long a story. "The Getting of Wisdom", for example, is my favourite for several reasons. For one thing, it was so easy to write—after the lengthy tragedy of "Maurice Guest." And it was short, & had humour, & found its "form" more readily than the larger books. I packed a great deal into it, too, which people are only now beginning to discover—I suppose you have seen Miss Ruutz-Rees' notice of it in the "Sat Review of Literature"?

Speaking of form, "Ultima Thule" perhaps holds first place. I pared all excrescences ruthlessly down. The Trilogy existed in my mind from the first—I mean as a whole. To see that, one has only to put the first sentences of *Australia Felix* beside the last of "Ultima Thule". Various unfortunate influences combined to make me take so long over the middle part of it—ill health, & personal troubles, & the war.

I had always had it in mind to write a book about Australia. If only to show the country as it really exists—now that its first romantic days are done. Actually, a wealth of material is waiting for its writers to make use of—if only they will see it with unprejudiced eyes.

I am looking forward very much to your article in the *Yale Review*. My kind friends in America have done, & are still doing much to make up to me for the long years of neglect & silence. I am indeed very grateful.

With kind regards

Sincerely Yrs

Henry Handel Richardson

Clive Probyn
Mittagong

Lake View



Lake View

Beryl Pickering, the National Trust's *Lake View* Property Manager, tells us that the North-East Ladies Auxiliary continues to provide financial support for *Lake View*. Their latest contribution will be spent on a major repair of the verandah floor which she is hoping the Trust itself will commit funds to. If the Trust funds the verandah repairs, the Ladies Auxiliary money will be put towards repairing cracks in several of the internal walls. Some external painting is also due to happen this spring. Visitor numbers at Lake View are steady and with Lake Anderson absolutely full and overflowing the setting is looking lovely. We appreciate all the financial assistance that the National Trust and particularly the North-East Ladies Auxiliary provides for the house and garden.

News from Leipzig

When Susan Schaale headed off to complete her voluntary stint on the reception desk at the Zeitgeschichtliches Forum of Contemporary History (otherwise known as the GDR Museum) in Leipzig on Saturday 2 July 2011 she, like most other people in that lovely east German city, had never heard of Henry Handel Richardson. By the end of the day she hadn't quite become the 'full bottle', but her interest in HHR had certainly been aroused as a result of politely questioning me and Gordon Campbell about our reason for visiting Leipzig.

As a student of English literature she was somewhat surprised to learn that an Australian author had lived in and written about Leipzig. Her subsequent enquiries revealed that she wasn't the only person in Leipzig with absolutely no knowledge of either HHR or her writings, particularly *Maurice Guest*, which, of course, is set in Leipzig. I maintained contact with Susan, encouraging her newfound interest in HHR, which amongst other things led to her becoming our first German member. At the same time, but completely by coincidence, Professor Stefan Welz from Leipzig University also joined the Society.

Now, two years on, Susan has just completed her Bachelor Thesis "The Biographical Background of Henry Handel Richardson's *Maurice Guest*." As Susan herself says, "The aim of the thesis is to examine the correspondence of the scenery and student milieu depicted in *Maurice Guest* and the actual historical Leipzig experience of HHR, to find out

whether the representation of city and student life are realistic."



Susan Schaale

Apart from briefly looking at HHR's Life and Work, the thesis compares the background through Leipzig itself, the Conservatorium, social milieu and student life. Susan was a bit nervous about sending us her thesis, asking us to "Please excuse language mistakes in the research paper. I am still working hard on my English."

Susan's academic year is now over and in late September she will commence work in England as a Foreign Language Assistant of German at Kings Heath Girls Grammar School, Birmingham. This will be her first experience of England.

We wish her well as she sets out on her teaching career in the Old Dart and look forward to helping her enjoy Australia too, if and when an opportunity presents itself, studying HHR in Germany

Graeme Charles
Chiltern

Please don't forget your 2013 subscriptions

Please don't forget that subscriptions were due to be paid from 4 January 2013. If you haven't already done so, please post your cheque for \$15 to: The Treasurer, Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia, 69 Conness Street, Chiltern, Victoria 3683.

HHRSA Committee

President: Clive Probyn
Vice-President: Graeme Charles
Secretary: Janey Runci
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Acting Secretary: Meg Probyn
Committee Members:

Helen McBurney
Heather McNeill

Website: www.henryhandelrichardsonsociety.org.au

Contact details for Newsletter Editor: Meg Probyn

Tel: (02) 4871 3134

Email: probyn44@bigpond.com