

George Ivan Smith and Henry Handel Richardson: The Making of a Reader

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George Charles Ivan Smith (1915–1995) was, over his lifetime, a successful writer, broadcaster, war correspondent, movie producer, United Nations official, and academic. He was also a sensitive and determined man with a deep and abiding empathy with Richard Mahony and his creator, the Australian-born author, Henry Handel Richardson (pseudonym of Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson, 1870–1946). Anecdotes and facts about his involvement in Richardson’s literary and personal life may be found in various documents, including Richardson’s published correspondence with Mary Kernot, Smith’s own BBC broadcasts, Olga Roncoroni’s essay in *Henry Handel Richardson: Some Personal Impressions*, and Graeme Powell’s article, “Building an Archive: The H. H. Richardson Papers in the National Library of Australia.”¹ These disconnected and largely sketchy references do little to tell the story of Smith’s unwavering enthusiasm in promoting Richardson and her work in the final years of her life, nor do they explain his determination to preserve many of her manuscripts and other special collection items immediately following her death.

The completion of the *Catalogue of the Papers of George Ivan Smith 1888–1995* by Lucy McCann, senior archivist, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, in 2003, offered for the first time the opportunity to more fully research these stories.² The Bodleian’s Papers of George Ivan Smith include twenty-four letters exchanged during Richardson’s lifetime, thirty-three posthumous letters, and related documents.³ The preservation of these letters was unknown to the editors of *Henry Handel Richardson: The Letters*, published three years earlier. In addition, this body of correspondence and papers has not been cited in previous

¹Correspondence with Mary Kernot (1868–1954, Richardson’s friend from schooldays) in *Henry Handel Richardson: The Letters*, 3 vols., ed. Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele, (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2000), (hereafter cited as *Letters*, followed by vol. no. and letter no., except for introductory pages that are noted by page number in roman numerals); Smith’s broadcasts in Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Papers of George Ivan Smith (hereafter cited as Papers of G. I. Smith), MS. Eng. c. 6456/139–42 146–49, 180–82; Edna Purdie and Olga Roncoroni, ed., *Henry Handel Richardson: Some Personal Impressions* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1957), 148, 150, 174; Graeme Powell, “Building an Archive: The H. H. Richardson Papers in the National Library of Australia,” *Australian Literary Studies* 18, no. 3 (May 1998): 214.

²George Ivan Smith bequeathed his extensive collection of correspondence and papers to the Bodleian Libraries in 1993.

³Some posthumous original letters from Smith to Roncoroni, and drafts and copies from Roncoroni to Smith, are in Papers of H. H. Richardson, the National Library of Australia (hereafter cited as NLA), MS 133/2/395-414.

or subsequent publications concerning Richardson and her work. It holds most significance for Richardson studies for what it adds to the existing knowledge about the background to George Ivan Smith's broadcasts on Richardson (1942 and 1946), Richardson's broadcast reading from *The Way Home* (1944), and the creation of the collection of the Papers of Henry Handel Richardson (MS 133) in the National Library of Australia (1946).

This essay draws on the Papers of George Ivan Smith and other contemporaneous sources to explore Smith's efforts at the BBC / ABC and elsewhere to promote Richardson and her works. In addition it explores the reasons why at a seminal moment in history (the Second World War), the young Australian radio broadcaster working in London was committed to bringing the elderly novelist and her trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930), back into the public eye after her peak moment of fame in 1929. An examination of Smith's unusual upbringing, along with his personal and professional history in the periods leading up to and during his interactions with Richardson (and subsequently Olga Roncoroni)⁴ is instructive to this purpose.

George Ivan Smith's early life experiences and influences, notably in the prison system and commercial and public journalism, informed his reading and subsequent championing of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* and other works by Richardson. His recasting of her statement about *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* in "Some Notes on My Books" reveals his interpretative bias. Richardson wrote that in considering the story of the "misfits, who were physically and mentally incapable of adapting themselves to this strange hard new world" she sought to tell the story of one man. Drawing on Richardson's statement, Smith extrapolated a grander purpose: "She set out to write about the many pioneers who had little adventure and less good fortune, about misfits in a bewildering environment, about the gigantic battle in the human consciousness against dullness."⁵ Smith ascribed to Richardson an intention, consonant with his own preoccupation to inspire understanding between people and to foster faith in a spiritual purpose. He repeatedly demonstrated his belief in the potential of narrative form in general, and *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* in particular, to encourage this social cohesion.

Smith's sympathy for the 'misfits' of the world had been formed during his childhood. Much of the first eighteen years of his life was spent inside the walls of the New South Wales rehabilitation and prison systems where some of the most disregarded men in society were housed.⁶ In the year of his birth, his father,

⁴ Olga Maria Roncoroni (1893–1982), Richardson's companion and executor.

⁵ "Some Notes on My Books," *Virginia Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (Summer, 1940): 341–42. Reprinted in *Southerly: A Review of Australian Literature* (Sydney), no. 1 (1963): 14; "G. Ivan Smith's Introduction to Henry Handel Richardson 0645 G. M. T. 7/4/44" (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 5456/139).

⁶ Smith conflated the institutions in his article, "My 18 Years in Prison: The Story of an Enlightened

George Franklin Smith (1874–1943), was appointed the first superintendent of the newly founded Shaftesbury Inebriates Institute in Watsons Bay. Young George Ivan Smith engaged with the drug and alcohol dependant residents of his first home: offenders relocated from the prison system, returned soldiers, and voluntary patients.⁷ In 1922, G. F. Smith was installed as governor at the newly reconstructed and re-commissioned Parramatta Gaol where his reform agenda created direct and impressive results. In 1925, the Smith family again moved home as G. F. Smith was called upon to manage Bathurst Gaol following the worst prison riots in Australia's history.⁸ Two years later, a journalist observed that there had not been a single revolt against authority since G. F. Smith's appointment.⁹

Despite Governor Smith's accomplishments, his methods were time and again regarded with suspicion by the authorities. In 1928, the controller-general of prisons judged him "guilty of negligence and carelessness" and suspended him from his duties. He was charged with several offences relating to the supervision and maintenance of discipline, including authorising a small group of prisoners outside the prison walls with an unarmed warden to assist in picking up fallen apples from an over-abundant orchard and permitting prisoners to write, produce, and act in plays in which they wore not only "private clothes," but played female roles with "painted and powdered faces."¹⁰ There were no disruptive or harmful incidents as a result of his acts of creativity, trust and leniency. Perhaps his thirteen-year-old son observed the power of the media as newspaper reports and editorials fuelled public support for Governor Smith's reinstatement and forced a public enquiry. The Public Service Board decided in G. F. Smith's favour and ordered an urgent revision of prison regulations and general orders.¹¹ G. F. Smith was subsequently transferred to Goulburn Gaol which, in keeping with his reformist agenda, he renamed Goulburn Reformatory. The Smith family made their new home in the Governor's Residence inside the Reformatory walls.

George Ivan Smith wrote of his father: "He was Australia's foremost prison reformer and he believed so truly in the potential decency of all men, that his greatest worry about having me in that environment was to watch that I treated

Governor, a Notorious Jail-Breaker, and a Wife Murderer," *Leader*, 7 April 1945, 17–18 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6516/7–8).

⁷ G. I. Smith, "The House with the Golden Key," unpublished autobiography (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6517/151).

⁸ George F. Smith, "When Prison Warders Used the Bayonet: Bashings, Riots at Bathurst," *Smith's Weekly* (Sydney), 8 October 1938, 10. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article234537350>.

⁹ "The Ascension: Prisoner's Painting in Bathurst Gaol: Fortune Behind Bars," *National Advocate* (Bathurst, NSW), 15 February 1927, 1 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6530/57).

¹⁰ "Governor of Bathurst Gaol," *Leader* (Orange, NSW), 23 May 1928, 2. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article254426739>.

¹¹ "To Be Transferred: Governor Smith of Bathurst Gaol," *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate* (Parramatta, NSW), 25 May 1928, 11. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article107096711>.

his charges with respect. He would not allow me to call them 'prisoners.' It was always the 'men' or when he used it, 'my men.'"¹² As with the 'folk' of the Inebriates' Institute, Smith's adolescent and teenage years involved engaging with convicted prisoners.¹³ Anecdotes of the most violent criminals showing spontaneous tenderness and care toward the Smith children bear witness to the trust established between G. F. and his wife May Smith (née Sullivan, 1887–1968) and their charges.¹⁴ A principle objective of G. F. Smith's governorship was to create an understanding of and between men. In a statement which was later reflected in his son's observations in his Introduction to Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life*, G. F. Smith wrote of Australia's early penal history: "In the early penal establishments men were put over other men whom they never tried to understand."¹⁵ His initiatives to promote understanding were founded on the necessity for communication. His programs included bringing schoolteachers into the Reformatory to run classes after hours, correspondence courses, and workshops. Community groups were encouraged to visit the Reformatory and to witness the progress of the reform system and the industry of the prisoners. With biting sarcasm, George Ivan Smith noted: "Almost with one accord they come with a hope of seeing a ghoulish assemblage of cannibals, fighting, rioting, cursing the walls that contain them, and in every way indulging in the savage ferocities of their peanut-eating forefathers. But I feel a compassion for the visitors, poor souls, so badly are they crestfallen. Their faces are so long as the proverbial fiddle, for (may the gods ease their gloom) they have seen instead, a congregation of real human beings, who are many ways finer and cleaner in thought than they themselves are."¹⁶ As George Ivan Smith began forming his creed for a better, more cooperative world order based on understanding he drew on his father's example. However, where G. F. Smith sought to educate prisoners and members of the public from inside prison walls, George Ivan Smith would take his stories of prisoners and prison life to those on the outside.

¹² George Ivan Smith, "My 18 Years in Prison," 17; Jack Creagh, "My Men': An Appreciation of Mr. George Smith, Retiring Governor of Goulburn Jail," *Grit*, 4 August 1938 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6530/65).

¹³ "Most folk in our house showed the signs of earth and tortures of the places deeper than earth, for my home also was the home for drug addicts and for drunkards" (from G. I. Smith, "The House with the Golden Key").

¹⁴ George Ivan Smith, Jr., "Behind Prison Walls: The Story of Scotty McColl: The Man Who Never Had a Chance," *Yass Tribune Courier* (NSW), 17 May 1934, 1. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article249515435>; retold in George Ivan Smith, "My 18 Years in Prison."

¹⁵ "Farewell to Governor George Smith: Unique Jail Ceremony for Retiring Official," *Nowra Leader* (NSW), 29 July 1938, 11 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6530/61). <https://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article213801059>.

¹⁶ George Ivan Smith, Jr., "Behind Prison Walls: Gaol Life: The Daily Routine for Prisoners," No. 2, *Yass Tribune-Courier* (NSW), 24 May 1934, 1. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article249515807>.

George Ivan Smith left his home inside the Goulburn Reformatory after completing his Leaving Certificate at Goulburn High School in 1933. The circumstance of the Great Depression forced him to abandon ambitions of university study and stable employment. Instead, he secured temporary work as a jackaroo on a large sheep station in the Southern Tablelands of NSW. In the evenings he wrote articles and submitted them to the local newspaper, the *Yass Tribune Herald*. These included compelling and compassionate true stories of individual prisoners and prison life in which he included pleas to the public and the authorities for reform. The six-part series entitled “Behind Prison Walls” featured weekly on the front page of the *Yass Tribune Herald* from May to June 1934.¹⁷ Written before his nineteenth birthday, these accounts are the earliest records of Smith using story-telling to stimulate understanding and social change. The responsibility he felt to tell a willingly ignorant public of the plight of the prisoners is clear: “Do any of us pause for even a brief second to think what becomes of the men whom we, as a democratic people, have sent to spend a life among prison bars? I do not think so; consequently I take it upon my ignoble shoulders to convey some slight knowledge of the things attending gaol life.”¹⁸

Ezra Norton (1897–1967), managing director of the tabloid newspaper, *Truth* (Sydney), came across one of these published essays and offered Smith a position as a cadet reporter. It did not take long for Smith to realise that sensationalised reporting of society’s scandals and problems reinforced negative sentiment and furthered social division. Drawing inspiration from his father, he put his principles ahead of his pay packet, and quit the job. He remained unemployed for three months during which time he claimed to have experienced “dark moments,” sleeping rough and going hungry, while at the same time working up ideas for creative change.

Disillusionment with the established voices of media engagement led twenty-year-old Smith to reflect that “if the world could preserve its Youth it could be saved from freezing into a stagnant pond of self-interest.”¹⁹ His first step towards engaging with youth was to attend the Workers’ Educational Association free night classes at the University of Sydney (1933–1934) to qualify as a school teacher.²⁰ His subsequent part-time teaching post at a small private school proved restrictive and fuelled his ambitions for a meaningful project to engage young people. Unable to fund his initial idea of a youth newspaper, he turned to the idea of a radio program.²¹ This time, it was lack of experience, rather than lack

¹⁷ In 1938, G. F. Smith submitted similarly styled stories in a series for *Smith’s Weekly* (Sydney).

¹⁸ George Ivan Smith, Jr., “Behind Prison Walls: The Story of Scotty McColl” 1.

¹⁹ G. I. Smith, Untitled autobiographical TS (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6517/145-48).

²⁰ Matthew Jordan, “Smith, George Charles Ivan (1915–1995),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University. <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/smith-george-charles-ivan-27646>.

²¹ TL Smith to Sir John Hammerton (1871–1949, creator of reference books and encyclopaedias), 15 May 1945 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6503/176).

of money, that was the stumbling block. Characteristically, Smith attended to this deficiency by writing and submitting dramatic scripts, which he was also using for teaching purposes, to the local radio station.²² After many rejections, his dramatisations of the Greek myths were accepted and performed. On the back of these productions, he applied to and was offered a job at the commercial radio station 2WL in Wollongong, NSW.²³

In 1937, with relevant experience and a steadfast ambition, Smith pitched his ideas about youth engagement to the national public broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC). Although his programming ideas were rejected, he was engaged as an announcer. He continued to push for a platform to present a youth program and within a month he was trialling his first weekly program from Sydney. *Young Ideas* was a program in which Smith interviewed young people on various issues of concern and interest. In addition, culturally diverse voices were heard through the broadcast of similar programs from various regions of the world and interviews with international guests. From Smith's perspective, radio offered the possibility of creating local and international communities of young people. He described being deeply "impressed with the possibilities of radio as a means towards greater international understanding."²⁴ His early ideas about the ways in which communication might promote compassionate understanding had found a newer, more direct, and more far-reaching medium of expression in the radio.

Following the success of *Young Ideas*, the ABC allowed Smith a second and third youth program, *Voice of Youth* and *Hobbies*. Of his three programs, a series on *Young Ideas* called "Dead End Jobs" had the greatest impact. Smith had established, through anecdotal evidence and statistics surreptitiously obtained from the NSW Premier, that unskilled workers, predominantly in the nineteen to twenty-one-year-old age group, were being dismissed from processing jobs and replaced by younger cheaper labour. Lack of training and skills created a conveyor belt effect whereby young adults were thrown out of the workforce with little prospects for future employment.²⁵ Following Smith's scripted dramatisations and interviews with unemployed youth, a NSW inquiry was instituted in which Smith was called to give evidence and put forward a plan to combat the problem.²⁶ A combined Commonwealth and State Government inquiry followed in Melbourne in July 1939.²⁷ Several recommendations of both inquiries were adopted, including

²² Untraced.

²³ The British Entertainment History Project: Oral History Interview Transcription. <https://historyproject.org.uk/sites/default/files/352%20George%20Ivan%20Smith.pdf>.

²⁴ G. I. Smith, "Biographical Note on George Ivan Smith, 3 February 1947" (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6503/225-26).

²⁵ "Broadcasting: Dead-End Jobs: Dramatising Case of Youth: Two Broadcasts," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 March 1939, 6. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/17576897>.

²⁶ G. I. Smith, Untitled autobiographical TS (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6517/147).

²⁷ "Youths in 'Dead End' Jobs: Subjects for Conference: States Share Problem," *Newcastle Morning*

raising the school leaving age in NSW and establishing the NSW Department of Youth.²⁸ One journalist noted in respect of Smith's contribution to the issues: "It has been found that a dramatised talk on the air is worth much plain argument."²⁹ If he had not known or learned about the power of invoking real-life stories of disadvantaged and disenfranchised people in the media during his childhood, Smith certainly understood it by this stage of his life.

After running his youth programs in Sydney for little over a year, Smith was made Director of the New South Wales arm of the ABC's Talks Department. At the outbreak of war he was appointed the first Controller of the Australian Shortwave Service, a twelve-language service that, among other things, relayed programs to troops stationed overseas. Following that, he was appointed the first director of the newly founded Australian overseas service, Australia Calling (later known as Radio Australia) which was officially opened in Melbourne by Prime Minister Menzies on 20 December 1939.³⁰ In 1941, Smith was seconded to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in London to serve a one year term as Empire Talks Assistant and adviser on Pacific Programs; and on 2 July 1942, he was employed by the BBC as Director of the Pacific Service.³¹ It was his intention to return to the ABC in Australia after an extended time.

It was in his capacity as Director of Pacific Services that Smith first approached Henry Handel Richardson with the idea of a recorded interview to be broadcast to Australia. Richardson declined the invitation, citing poor health and a "wretched throat."³² As an alternative, she proposed a personal interview at her home, Green Ridges, in Hastings, East Sussex, from which Smith could draw information for broadcast. As a codicil, she insisted that her private life, beyond what she had published in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, was not to be a subject of interrogation.³³ Agreeing to her terms, Smith journeyed to Richardson's home in

Herald and Miners' Advocate (NSW), 24 June 1939, 12. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/134183979/10080023>; "Dead End' Jobs: Problem of Juvenile Employment Investigation to Be Conducted," *Northern Miner* (Charters Towers, Qld), 5 July 1939, 2. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/81481030>.

²⁸ "School Leaving Age Up Next Year: Counter to Dead End Jobs," *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* (NSW), 27 November 1940, 7 <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/132809460>; "Avoiding 'Dead End Jobs,'" *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 Sept. 1940, 9. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/27948461>.

²⁹ "Broadcasting: Dead-End Jobs."

³⁰ "Batman", "Around Melbourne: The Hotdog is Still Too Thin," *The Bulletin* (Sydney) 86, no. 4426 (19 December 1964), 41.

³¹ Transfer document from Sir Guy Williams (Overseas Establishment Officer) to Smith (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6455/151).

³² Richardson to Oliver Stonor, 19 November 1942, *Letters*, vol. 3, 1364.

³³ Henry Handel Richardson, "Some Notes on My Books," *Virginia Quarterly* 16, no. 3, (Summer, 1940): 334-74. Smith drew on "Some Notes on My Books" for his broadcast (Richardson to Kernot,

the battle-ready coastal town. Shutting the door on the damage and fortifications of the township, Smith described the scene for his listeners: an author at home in an English idyll. Where others had found Richardson to be an austere and distant figure, Smith found her warm and friendly.³⁴ Later in the broadcast talk, he recounted the sweep of fighters flying overhead to remind listeners of the immediate chaos and danger surrounding Richardson's home.

Despite her anxiety, poor health, and difficulty writing fiction at this time, Richardson found joy in the company of this twenty-seven-year-old "wildly enthusiastic admirer of the *Trilogy*."³⁵ She noted that Smith was: "A very nice young fellow who had just arrived in England: with the wish to see, he said, two people in particular. Of whom I was one (the other Bernard Shaw)."³⁶ His wishes in this regard were fulfilled. He met George Bernard Shaw at lunch at the Astor's grand estate, Cliveden House, sometime before meeting Richardson. Smith introduced his broadcast on Richardson with an anecdote derived from this meeting which included a quote from Shaw: "The world doesn't recognise the real importance of the writer. It is the writer who fits you for life by describing for you the experiences of life." Smith went on to recount General Sir Alan Gordon Cunningham (1887–1983) deferring to Shaw as they entered the room for lunch: "After you, sir. The pen is mightier than the sword." The central point which Smith was seeking to introduce via this tale was his conception of the power of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* to effect change throughout the world:

You know, how many times have we used that phrase ["The pen is mightier than the sword"] without thinking what it means—thinking for instance that our great writers give us taste and culture which must be the base for any social reconstruction. When I read Henry Handel Richardson, I'm struck by that power in her pen—she has helped to make people in other countries conscious of Australia and its pioneering spirit.

Smith recalled Richardson's confidence that the spirit of Australia will "win victory in the end" and pave a way forward for improved social, economic, and educational welfare.³⁷ The notion that communication of Australia's unique spirit could contribute to international healing is also evident in Smith's correspondence with others at the time. In a letter to his friend Harry Bullock, he wrote:

Australia has got so much to teach the world of pioneering and of freedom from fear; America has got so much to teach of efficiency and system and Britain's got

20 August 1942, *Letters*, vol. 3, 1359).

³⁴ "Calling Australia by George Ivan Smith | Censored by R. S. Lee | Live: Tuesday, 11th August, 1942: 07.45–08.00 G. M. T." (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/148).

³⁵ Richardson to Kernot, 20 August 1942, *Letters*, vol. 3, 1359.

³⁶ Richardson to Stonor, 19 November 1942, *Letters*, vol. 3, 1364.

³⁷ "Calling Australia."

so much to give of really solid character and stability. The only hope is for us to be broad minded enough and long visioned enough to look beyond these petty fogging differences of character and accept once and for all the great foundation of things in common which lies at the base of all English-speaking communities.³⁸

Smith's response to the war echoed his interpretation of Richardson's intention in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*.

Smith believed that Richardson exemplified her faith in the Australian spirit through the character of Richard Mahony and, particularly in a section from the final scene of *Australia Felix* (1917). As Richard Mahony prepares to leave the Australian shore, he gazes down into the dark and fathomless sea and acknowledges his gratitude and obligation to a higher power to continue on his course: "—From thee cometh victory, from Thee cometh wisdom, and Thine is the glory, and I am Thy servant."³⁹ By extension, Smith found Richardson's will to live during the four years of hardship that he knew her consistent with the messages of human courage and perseverance that he read in her fiction.⁴⁰ After her death in 1946, Smith wrote that the above passage from *Australia Felix*, which he claimed Richardson had recited to him on a number of occasions, might serve as the epitaph of Richardson's story. He predicted that her great legacy in the domain of world literature would be her contribution of the story of Australia's pioneering spirit.⁴¹ Whether Richardson intended or would otherwise have identified the purpose and potential which Smith read in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* is unknowable, but whatever her previous thoughts, she seemed to embrace and enjoy Smith's responses to her work.

A year after his broadcast on Richardson, Smith again asked her to participate in an interview to be relayed to Australia. On this occasion, she agreed to a recording but maintained her position on an unscripted interview. As an alternative, she proposed a reading from one of her books. Smith tried negotiating for a freshly prepared script, but Richardson stuck firmly to her original offer of "a reading or nothing."⁴² Seven months later and after many setbacks, at 11.45 a.m. on 28 March 1944, Henry Handel Richardson read from the second half of the "Proem" to *The Way Home*. This first and only recording of Richardson's voice was broadcast via the BBC Pacific Service to Australia on Friday 7 April 1944, at 8.45 p.m. (AEST). An introduction by George Ivan Smith took just under four

³⁸ TL Smith to Harry Bullock (Australian Naval Liaison Officer, Vila, New Hebrides), 3 December 1942 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6503/33).

³⁹ From 1 Esdras 4:59.

⁴⁰ "The Appreciation Of / Life and Works of Henry Handel Richardson," Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/182.

⁴¹ G. I. Smith, "Henry Handel Richardson," 20 March 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/146).

⁴² TLS, 27 August 1943 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/155).

minutes and the reading, including a short introduction composed and read by Richardson, took just under eleven minutes. Her deep and steady voice veiled the anxiety and difficulty she and Roncoroni experienced on the trip from Hastings to London.⁴³ The BBC did not preserve a recording of the broadcast.⁴⁴ However, a transcription disc was sent to the ABC in Australia.⁴⁵

Richardson contextualised her choice of passage for her listeners: “the passage I have chosen seems to me not altogether inappropriate at the present time. Richard and Mary are returning from Australia to England, where Richard intends to make his home, and these are some of his thoughts and feelings as the ship nears the English shore.” On a number of occasions, she stated the relevance of this passage written during the First World War to the present wartime situation without clarifying her meaning.⁴⁶ Perhaps the answer is to be found in Richard Mahony’s contemplation of his purpose in the world near the end of the passage:

He saw his race as the guardian of a vast reserve fund of spiritual force, to which all alike contributed—as each was free at will or at need to draw on it—a hoard, not of the things themselves, but of their ghostly sublimes: the quintessence of all achievement, all endeavour; of failure, suffering, joy, pain. And, if this image held, it would throw light on the obscure purpose of such a seemingly aimless life as his had been; a life ragged with broken ends. Only in this way, he must believe, had it been possible to distil the precious drop of oil, that was *his* ultimate essence.⁴⁷

This passage speaks of the possibility of a universal human spirit and sympathetic understanding. During World War 1, Richardson wrote about the common plight of individuals in warring nations: “I am one of those who know that we are not fighting the German people (who had no more wish for war than ourselves) but an intolerable militarism which belongs by rights to the middle ages, & has become a menace to all Europe.”⁴⁸ In 1944, the BBC had identified the possible value of the

⁴³ Richardson to Kernot, *Letters*, vol. 3, 1406.

⁴⁴ TLS Cyril Conner (Director of Overseas Programme Services, BBC) to Smith, 24 October 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/205).

⁴⁵ ALS Richardson to Smith, 27 June 1944 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/166). In 1947, Smith organised for two copies of the ABC disc to be sent to Roncoroni via the BBC in London (TLS Roncoroni to Smith, 12 December 1947, Papers of G. I. Smith MS. Eng. c. 6456/212). A transcription disc which was previously seen at the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW has not been located. A tape-recorded copy is in the ABC Archives, Sydney. A part of the reading is available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p016p5mb/topics/The_Fortunes_of_Richard_Mahony.

⁴⁶ Richardson to W. W. Norton, 18 April 1944, *Letters* vol. 3, 1407, Richardson to Kernot, 18 May 1944, *Letters* vol. 3, 1409. Richardson wrote to Kernot that Smith thought the passage was “most appropriate to the present time” (10 April 1944, *Letters* vol. 3, 1406).

⁴⁷ TS “As Recorded: Prose Reading by Henry Handel Richardson of Extacts from ‘THE WAY HOME’ by Henry Handel Richardson,” Produced by G. Ivan Smith, Censored by G. Ivan Smith (Papers of G. I. Smith MS. Eng. c. 6456/142–44).

⁴⁸ Richardson to Kernot, 8 August 1914, *Letters*, vol. 1, 348.

passage for the current war effort. Richardson wrote: "I have just had a letter from them asking to be allowed to use it in their Propaganda Series, for transmission *anywhere* overseas. It might mean a new bit of life for the old book, were it only in print."⁴⁹ It would seem likely that Smith was behind this unrecovered letter from the BBC as the idea of an international broadcast transmission of Richardson's passage would be consistent with Smith's message of the power of her writing to communicate and promote greater understanding and resilience.

As well as his broader humanitarian project, Smith's personal papers indicate that his attraction to *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* and its eponymous protagonist might have been informed by his own state of mind. In a time and place where the worst of human nature was displayed every day, Smith was experiencing feelings of failure and disconnection in his personal and professional life. His younger brother, John Barker Ivan Smith (1919–1945), had been captured by the Japanese in Singapore in February 1942. After two years imprisonment in Changi Prison in Singapore and then Berhala Island in Borneo, he was murdered on the Sandakan-Ranau death march.⁵⁰ During the time of his brother's imprisonment, on 25 June 1943, George Ivan Smith received a telegram from Sydney informing him of the sudden death of his father.⁵¹ He honoured his father's memory in his autobiographical writing and through the preservation of newspaper articles and other papers concerning him.⁵² If he believed that Richardson also paid tribute to her father, Walter Lindesay Richardson (1825–1879), in the character of Richard Mahony, he kept it to himself according to her wishes.⁵³

In response to an unrecovered letter from Smith, his close friend Bryan Brooke urged him out of what he saw as a period of unhelpful introspection:

I agree there's a tremendous amount of artificiality in the circles you have to work in. But at least you realise that. You see the truth about life and armed with that advantage you could do much good. It's in your power to put across big stuff, may you not be going back on ordinary people like myself if you give up your chances and potentialities just because you don't like the hot-house? Your answer is that the hot-house is making you artificial too. But if you can see that artificiality can't you stand up and avoid it, particularly if you increase your outside interests (in boys clubs, for instance)?⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Richardson to Kernot, 18 May 1944, *Letters*, vol. 3, 1409.

⁵⁰ <https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/7355109/person/-446997083/facts>.

⁵¹ Telegram (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c.6529/129). For no apparent reason, Richardson expressed her belated condolences to Smith on 5 April the following year (1944), ALS (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/164).

⁵² Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6530; MS. Photogr. c. 104/9–22; "The House with the Golden Key."

⁵³ Smith stated that Richardson vigorously denied that her characters were drawn from actual people in "Calling Australia."

⁵⁴ ALS Bryan Brooke (1915–1998, British surgeon and academic) to Smith, 3 November 1944

Smith's sense of the artificiality of his situation is resonant of Richard Mahony's state of mind at the end of *Australia Felix*:

His life there reminded him of a gaudy drop scene, let down before an empty stage; a painted sham, with darkness and vacuity behind. At bottom, none of these distinctions and successes meant anything to him; not a scrap of mental pabulum could be got from them: rather would he have chosen to be poor, and a nobody, among people whose thoughts flew to meet his, half-way.⁵⁵

Brooke notes that Smith's "depression" was the result of his "mal-adjustment" to England, and he described the angst of the previous three years as having culminated in the tense reunion in London with his wife, Madeleine. He chastised Smith for his treatment of Madeleine and suggested to him that their separation was foreseeable.⁵⁶ In January 1945, Smith took sickleave from the BBC on doctor's orders for "trouble with nerves."⁵⁷

Whilst there is no indication in the extant correspondence that Smith had confided to Richardson about his marital or other problems, we know that he shared at least a small expression of his vulnerability and sensitivity with Richardson in the form of poetry.⁵⁸ Poetry was a meaningful form of expression for Smith from a young age. In 1943, he sought to have his poetry validated and appreciated in a serious literary publication. Richardson was among several writers and friends to whom he showed his work and asked for advice. She feigned a lack of expertise in the matter of reading poetry rather than offer much in the way of criticism or praise: "I found it extremely interesting & much admired your rich flow of language; you never seem at a loss for a word—or a simile. Be just a little careful, though, not to overstrain your similes & metaphors."⁵⁹ She did not find resonance in the themes and sentiments of the poems with her work. By contrast, Richard Church (English poet, writer, and critic, 1871–1972) offered

(Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6503/101–2).

⁵⁵ Richardson, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony: Australia Felix*, ed. Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele, (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2007), 348.

⁵⁶ Smith married Madeleine (née la Barte Oakes, 1909–1964 or 1966), schoolteacher from Queensland in Chatswood, NSW, in 1936. Their first son was born on 16 September 1937, and died the following day. Almost two years later a second son was born followed by a daughter in 1940. Madeleine arrived in London from Australia on 10 May 1943. Smith and Richardson exchanged pleasantries about Madeleine, but a meeting between them does not seem to have eventuated. In April 1944, Richardson offered to Smith her best wishes for Madeleine to have a "safe & speedy journey," ALS 5 April 1944 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456).

⁵⁷ TL Smith to Dr P. Fischel (Jonathan Cape), 15 January 1945 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6503/144); TLS Maurice [unidentified] to Smith, 28 January 1945 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6503/150–51).

⁵⁸ A quotation from a letter in Smith's obituary broadcast evidences that not all correspondence between him and Richardson survived. It is not known how many times they met.

⁵⁹ ALS 8 December 1943 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/160).

insights concerning Smith's poetry which could, in part, have been addressed to Richard Mahony in *The Way Home*:

It is probable that the huge translation which has been going on in your mind during the acclimatisation to this northern world, has not yet been fully assimilated. How could it be?

I take it, therefore, that these poems are in the nature of experiment; soul-testing pieces by which you seek to discover your own identity, which strange environment, of place, people, etc. have threatened to overwhelm. It is valuable work, and I believe that you are finding your way to a voice of your own.⁶⁰

In December 1944, Richardson, recovering from emergency surgery for advanced-stage colon cancer, accepted an offer by Smith to read the proofs of the five poems to be published in *Poetry London X*.⁶¹ If this eventuated, the response has not survived.

In addition to his personal woes, Richardson may also not have known that Smith was feeling impatient with his work in public broadcasting. Uncertainty over military service had hung over his employment at the BBC. On 1 September 1943, Smith tendered a letter of resignation to the BBC and ABC contingent upon obtaining a position as a pilot with the R. A. F.⁶² One month later, he was obliged to decline a position of Air Gunner so as not to compromise his terms of engagement with the BBC.⁶³ Under a Regulation that came into being on 20 January 1944, Smith was required to register as a citizen of a Dominion of the United Kingdom. Richardson wrote to him in April: "I want very much to see you again, before your call comes."⁶⁴ In November he received his call-up papers from the Ministry of Labour and National Service. His application for deferment of military service was successful subject to him remaining in his current employment and "the exigencies of the military situation."⁶⁵ Letters from friends suggest that Smith was seeking an alternative path both to his position at the BBC and military service. Arnold Haskell urged him not to quit his job at the BBC until a substantive literary position of some sort presented. Bryan Brooke advised that "chucking in your present work" was defeatist.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ TLS 5 March 1944 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6503/58).

⁶¹ ALS Richardson to Smith, December 1944 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/170). *Poetry London X* (1939–1951), ed. J. T. Tambimuttu, (London: Nicholson & Watson) is described on the British Library website as "the most influential literary magazine of the 1940s." www.bl.uk/ebj/2009articles/article9.html.

⁶² TL (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6455/174).

⁶³ TL Smith to BBC, 1 October 1943 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6455/176).

⁶⁴ ALS 5 April 1944 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/164).

⁶⁵ TL, no addressee, 14 November 1944 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6455/179–87).

⁶⁶ ALS Arnold Haskell (1903–1980, ballet critic) to Smith, n. d. (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6503/96–97); ALS Bryan Brooke to Smith, 3 November 1944 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6503/101).

In December 1944, Richardson expressed her surprise that Smith had decided not to return to Australia. The letter in which he gives his reasons for this decision has not survived. His resignation letter to the ABC of 2 May 1945 states that he was choosing to remain in England for “personal reasons.”⁶⁷ Explanation might be found in his marriage a year later to Mary Douglass (1909–1999) in London. On 21 August 1945, he also gave notice to the BBC of his resignation.⁶⁸ A few months earlier, he had pitched an idea and outline for a magazine for young people: “It had been my intention for some years to run a magazine in Australia for people between 16 and 30, but for lack of resources, I did the same kind of thing in a weekly radio programme, something along the lines of “To Start you Talking” on the BBC.”⁶⁹ His idea of a print-based magazine was once again shelved for the prospect of running similar ideas through a newer medium. He joined the film company, the J. Arthur Rank Organisation, as an associate producer and literary editor of monthly newsreel and documentary films. He produced, edited, and directed *This Modern Age* from 1945–1947.

During this time, the BBC continued to use Smith as a conduit to Henry Handel Richardson. On hearing that a film was to be made by Metro Goldwyn Mayer in Hollywood of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, a representative of the BBC contacted Smith to see if he would be able to arrange an interview with Richardson to be broadcast to Australia. Smith once again appealed to Richardson:

Naturally, I hope you will do this, and could arrange to bring a recording car to your home on 9th and 10th March. There would be no need for you to prepare a script. It would simply be a matter of my asking you one or two questions about the writing of the trilogy.⁷⁰

Unfortunately, Richardson’s declining health prohibited an interview or a discussion of the new movie or film in general. At most, the film-loving author might have heard Smith’s broadcast on the BBC about his new project with Hollywood’s great rival, the Rank Organisation.⁷¹ In this broadcast, Smith further extended his concept of global co-operation to include the visual medium: “like radio, the cinema has important work to do towards a better international understanding.”⁷²

⁶⁷ TL Smith to Sir Charles Moses (1900–1988, general manager ABC) (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6503/174).

⁶⁸ TL (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6455/188).

⁶⁹ TL to Sir John Hammerton, 15 May 1945 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6503/190).

⁷⁰ TL 25 February 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6455/[171]).

⁷¹ “I’ve been a film fan since the days of the war; & never fail to see one picture a week. I am a staunch believer in the future of the Cinema” (Richardson to Kernot, 19 October 1936, *Letters*, vol. 3, 1032). Roncoroni recalled that weekly visits to the cinema continued through the war “though one had often to go down to the underground shelters in the middle of a performance and wait there until the Germans had dropped their bombs on the town” (Purdie and Roncoroni, 140).

⁷² “Until recently director of the BBC’s short-wave Pacific Service, GEORGE IVAN SMITH, an

Smith's letter requesting an interview was his final correspondence with Richardson. From this point onwards, Olga Roncoroni acted as Richardson's representative in correspondence with Smith. In response to Roncoroni's explanation for turning down the offer of an interview, Smith offered to contact the Australian Minister to arrange "comfortable passage" to Australia for Richardson as respite from the conditions in England. Richardson's swiftly deteriorating condition meant that this kind proposal was beyond consideration.

In response to an offer made by Smith on 8 March 1946 to do whatever he could on Richardson's behalf, Roncoroni asked him to join in the task of finding a way to ensure that her work only be associated with her pen name, Henry Handel Richardson. She also asked him to "find a means of squashing the ridiculous fable" that Richardson's real first name was Henrietta.⁷³ She explained that the fabled Henrietta had caused significant problems in regard to the signing of the contracts with MGM for the film rights to *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. As an afterthought, Richardson asked Roncoroni to pass on to Smith that the information about the difficulty with the contract must be kept out of the public arena.⁷⁴ In a separate attachment, Roncoroni confided to Smith that Richardson was unaware of her true medical prognosis. She noted, in what was most likely a disguised directive to Smith to keep silent on the issue of her health, that Richardson continued to read press cuttings from Australia about herself and her works.⁷⁵

At 1.25 a.m. on 20 March 1946, Henry Handel Richardson died at her home in Hastings. The following day, George Ivan Smith broadcast to Australia "The Appreciation Of / Life and Works of Henry Handel Richardson" on the Pacific Service of the BBC.⁷⁶ Amongst other things, Smith used this opportunity to carry out Richardson's wish that he clarify the story of her pseudonym and its derivation without ever referring to her real name. He sent a typed copy of his speech to Roncoroni three days later. He also enclosed a reply to a letter he wrote to the Controller of the Overseas Services of the BBC, J. B. Clark, about the lack of attention which the BBC Home Service had given to Richardson's

Australian, has now 'gone into films'. He recounts some of his first experiences and confesses to a new appreciation of the potentialities of 'visuals' in promoting international understanding." British Broadcasting Corporation, "A Radio Man in Filmland," *London Calling*, 18 March 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6516/12-13).

⁷³ Smith to Roncoroni, 8 March 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/173). Kernot and Nettie Palmer (literary critic and writer, 1885-1964), were already on the case in Australia.

⁷⁴ TLS with autographed postscript in Roncoroni's hand, 17 March 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/174). Despite contracts having been signed and money paid to Richardson, the film was never made.

⁷⁵ TLS with handwritten addition (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/175).

⁷⁶ Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/180-81.

death.⁷⁷ Roncoroni described the “indifference” in England to Richardson’s death as amazing and appalling, expressing gratitude to Smith for his intervention on Richardson’s behalf.⁷⁸ On 25 March 1946, Richardson was cremated at Golders Green. Twelve days later, Smith was one of a very small group of mourners to attend the scattering of Richardson’s ashes, together with those of her husband, from a boat off the shore of Hastings.⁷⁹

After her death, Smith shifted his efforts from promoting Richardson’s writing to securing her literary legacy. It had become evident that if this were to eventuate, it would be in Australia, not England. In his letter to Roncoroni of 26 March 1946, Smith introduced the idea of collecting and creating material for a Commonwealth funded literary archive in Australia:

One day Miss Richardson’s life story must be recorded. It would be a labour of love, and a high privilege, to assist in assembling the material, and I hope that you will bear in mind that I am at your service. One should, as soon as possible, ask her friends for copies of any letters which have historical importance. We owe it to her, and to the host of readers—the numbers of which will grow with time. I have no doubt at all that in twenty or thirty years’ time, the whole world will acclaim her work amongst the classics of this generation.

And will you forgive me for making the suggestion that any manuscripts, or early editions signed by Henry Handel Richardson, should be preserved for the Commonwealth Government. I think it is the duty of the Commonwealth to purchase from the estate any important links with the writer who has done more than any other to tell their story to the world.

If you agree that this should be arranged, I can, with your approval, take it up with the Australian Prime Minister.⁸⁰

Roncoroni seized on Smith’s idea of writing to Richardson’s long-time personal correspondents, Mary Kernot and Robert Hichens (English author, 1885–1964), to determine if they held their letters from Richardson.⁸¹

She was reluctant, however, to act on the topic of manuscripts and typescripts without the advice of Captain Arnold A. E. Gyde (1894–1959), publicity officer at Heinemann and trusted friend and adviser to Richardson. She stated that she would delay examining the materials until Gyde returned from Australia in June. In the meantime, she said she would act on the only instruction left

⁷⁷ TS Clark to Smith, 25 Mar. 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/176).

⁷⁸ TLS Roncoroni to Smith (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS Eng. c. 6456/178).

⁷⁹ Purdie and Roncoroni, 174–75.

⁸⁰ TLS (Papers of Henry Handel Richardson, NLA MS 133/2/395–96).

⁸¹ Mary Kernot negotiated with the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW for her correspondence to be duplicated and archived with an embargo on the Richardson side for 50 years. Robert Hichens’ letters to Richardson were lost at sea on the return to Richardson in England from Kernot in Australia. He did not retain her letters to him.

by Richardson which was to “burn unread” selected papers.⁸² On 20 April, Roncoroni wrote to Smith to say that Gyde endorsed his proposal for the Government to purchase Richardson’s literary effects. She indicated that there were further issues relating to the estate which would only be attended to after his return. Ten days later, Roncoroni, presumably with the imprimatur of Gyde, wrote to Smith asking if his offer to help was still in play. She included a list of items that would be open for purchase, including typescripts and a fair copy manuscript of Richardson’s translation from Danish of *Niels Lybne*. Regrettably, she acted with Gyde to destroy a number of letters to Richardson, including from Thomas Hardy, John Masefield, George Moore, and other writers. Roncoroni also hastily destroyed her letters from Richardson.⁸³ Gyde appears to have been directing Roncoroni down a very different path to Smith in considering the shaping of Richardson’s literary legacy. In many ways, he was acting in the interests of immediate publicity and profit over preservation and public interest in regard to Richardson’s literary effects. For example, he advised, or at least supported, Roncoroni on the sale to a commercial bookseller of the books which Richardson had used for researching *The Young Cosima* (1939).⁸⁴

On 3 July, Smith wrote two letters outlining the idea of the purchase to the Australian Government. The first letter, along with the list of items on offer, went to John Albert Beasley (1895–1949), Resident Minister in London, with the request that the Government make an offer on behalf of the Commonwealth National Library in Canberra.⁸⁵

It would be a very unfortunate mistake I believe to allow these manuscripts to become part of any private collection—their true place is in our Commonwealth archives, and although the executors have problems which make it impossible for

⁸² Roncoroni to Nettie Palmer, 15 May 1946 (Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, NLA MS 1174/1/6988).

⁸³ *Letters*, vol. 1, xxiv.

⁸⁴ *Letters*, vol. 1, xxiv. In a letter to J. R. W. Taylor at the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Gyde misrepresented himself as Richardson’s executor and dismissed Mary Kernot as not “the type of person able to give you anything interesting” (TLS, 22 July 1946, Reed Books Library, Rushden, Northamptonshire). Kernot’s correspondence with Richardson is the most extensive and personal surviving material by and about Richardson. Information, about Gyde’s influence on the sale of Richardson’s research books for *The Young Cosima* is found in correspondence from Roncoroni to Gyde (TLS, 21 July 1946, Reed Books Library and TLS Roncoroni to N. Palmer, 8 September 1947, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, NLA, MS 1174/1/72263). E. Morris Miller (1881–1964), academic, vice-chancellor, and honorary librarian at the University of Tasmania, identified the existence of 93 items from Richardson’s collection relating to *The Young Cosima* in the catalogue of Howes Bookshop, Hastings. In 1947, they were purchased by the University of Tasmania Library. L. A. Triebel, “Henry Handel Richardson’s *The Young Cosima*,” *Southerly*, 9, no. 1, (March 1948): 18–19.

⁸⁵ From 1923 the Parliamentary Library of Australia used two names to describe its dual purposes of collecting parliamentary and national materials: The Commonwealth Parliament Library and The Commonwealth National Library.

them to offer the manuscripts gratis, I do feel that our Government will recognise the importance of purchasing these records at their true value.⁸⁶

He doubled down on his efforts by writing a second letter to his friend, Lloyd Ross (1901–1987), Director of Public Relations in the Ministry of Post War Reconstruction, with the aim of ensuring that the process also was progressing in Australia: “If you know the Commonwealth Librarian or anybody in Canberra who is especially interested, would you be good enough to pave the way at that end.”⁸⁷ Smith kept Roncoroni informed of the progress and she was greatly relieved to have these matters taken out of her hands at a time when she was overwhelmed in every way.⁸⁸ While Smith awaited further news from Australia, he asked Roncoroni if he could acquire something belonging to Richardson for himself. Roncoroni refused to accept money and offered a choice of a number of first editions. Unsurprisingly, the volume that Smith selected was a signed copy of the *Trilogy*.⁸⁹ Roncoroni added to this a first edition of *Maurice Guest*, a signed copy of *Two Studies*,⁹⁰ and, later *The Getting of Wisdom*.⁹¹

Beasley wrote to Smith on 12 July 1946 to say that he was very interested in the items and had passed his letter and the list of manuscripts to Kenneth Binns (1882–1969), Head Librarian of the Commonwealth National Library (1928–1947), for his consideration.⁹² Beasley wanted to know if the books Richardson used for the Australian research for *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* were in Roncoroni’s possession. Roncoroni responded to Smith that the shabby volumes were scattered around the house and she did not think that the state they were in rendered them satisfactory for sale. In the same way that she was incorrect in her assessment of the desirability for a public institution of the books that Richardson had used for researching *The Young Cosima* (1939), Roncoroni misjudged the interest in these books.⁹³ Twenty-three books were considered for the impending purchase. The request prompted her to consider offering up some related manuscript items:

I have also found some notes for the *Trilogy* in H. H. R.’s own handwriting. There are three board-covered exercise books—one of them only half-full—some type-written sheets and one or two other small collections of jottings, some even on loose pieces of paper. These may or may not be of interest—they showed how she

⁸⁶ TL (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/187).

⁸⁷ TL 3 July 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/186).

⁸⁸ ALS 4 July 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/190).

⁸⁹ TLS 17 July 1946 (Papers of H. H. Richardson, NLA MS 133/2/403).

⁹⁰ ALS 25 July 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/195; edited draft at Papers of H. H. Richardson, NLA MS 133/2/404–5).

⁹¹ TLS 7 January 1947 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/206–7).

⁹² TLS (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/188).

⁹³ See note 84 above.

worked. The notes are drawn partly from the books I've listed and include some made on her last voyage to Australia in 1912, which voyage she undertook in order to verify her scenes, etc. for the *Trilogy*.⁹⁴

Smith responded that although he could not judge the value of the various documents, he would imagine the notes to be of great interest.⁹⁵

As Beasley was needed as Deputy Leader of the Australian delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris, he handed over the task of the purchase to Lionel Courtenay St Aubyn Key (1903–1982), Liaison Officer in London for the National Library and the Librarian of the Australian Library of Information at Australia House, London. Key wrote to Smith:

The Librarian of the Commonwealth National Library, Mr. Kenneth Binns, has now written asking if it would be possible for me to inspect the manuscripts and to discuss the matter of their acquisition by the Commonwealth with the Executors. In Mr. Binns' words, "I certainly regard her as our greatest Australian novelist, and would like to acquire them."⁹⁶

Smith worked on arranging a meeting between himself, Roncoroni and Key at Green Ridges to go through the items and advised Roncoroni on strategy for determining a price for the works. He thought the figure of one hundred guineas which had been loosely proposed was too low and that she should drive a harder bargain even if this involved bending the truth by invoking a phantom private collector. He suggested that she ask for one hundred and fifty guineas for the listed items and a separate price for the notes for the *Trilogy*: "The Commonwealth is particularly interested in this since it shows the author's method of working. I am not very good at suggesting figures for materials of this kind, but I should have thought at least twenty-five guineas for this material alone."⁹⁷ Gyde agreed with the proposal of one hundred and fifty pounds for the previously listed items and the typescript of *Myself When Young* which would be added to the collection at a later date.⁹⁸ Roncoroni subsequently discovered handwritten paragraphs of *The*

⁹⁴ TLS 15 July 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/193); the edited draft manuscript MS of this letter at Papers of H. H. Richardson, NLA MS 133/2/397–98 ends with the following paragraph: "It is probable that I shall have to have a spell in hospital, but my friend, Miss Stumpp, will be here & has undertaken to dispatch anything that is necessary during my [abs]ence." On 23 August, Roncoroni was admitted to the Maudsley Hospital for psychiatric treatment.

⁹⁵ TLS 17 July 1946 (Papers of H. H. Richardson, NLA MS 133/2/403).

⁹⁶ TL 31 July 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/196).

⁹⁷ TLS (Papers of H. H. Richardson, NLA MS 133/2/406).

⁹⁸ TLS Gyde to Roncononi, 9 August 1946, Reed Books Library. Roncoroni and Key's successor, Clifford Burmester, separately negotiated the purchase price of the manuscript and typescript versions of "Myself When Young," "The Art of Henry Handel Richardson" by J. G. Robertson, and the typescript of the version to be published in 1948 (Roncoroni to Kernot, 5 May 1948, Correspondence between Olga Roncoroni and Mary Kernot concerning Henry Handel Richardson,

Young Cosima which she added to the list for Key.⁹⁹ At the meeting with Key and Smith, Roncoroni asked for two hundred pounds for all of the items on offer.¹⁰⁰ Key recommended the purchase to Binns in Australia.¹⁰¹ On 2 October 1946, Key wrote to Smith to confirm the purchase.¹⁰² In November 1947, the first acquisition to comprise the Papers of Henry Handel Richardson (MS 133) was received in Canberra.¹⁰³

Smith continued for a short time to try to assist Roncoroni in her efforts to keep Richardson's name in the media. In January 1947, he reviewed a ten-minute proposed broadcast speech she had written, noting that the intimacy of the piece might make it too confrontational for a listening audience.¹⁰⁴ He passed the draft copy to John Gough at the BBC, where he repeated his view, albeit less delicately.¹⁰⁵ Given Roncoroni's association with Richardson, he thought there were great possibilities for her contribution: "the stories she can tell are so good." He suggested asking her to modify according to BBC specifications or to return the draft so that he could pass it on to the *Sydney Morning Herald* London office. He also proposed an idea, first canvassed by Gyde, of a rendition of the songs composed by Richardson to be sung by Gyde's wife and regular BBC performer, Sophie Wyss.¹⁰⁶ Roncoroni's broadcast did not eventuate and the script has not surfaced.¹⁰⁷ Sophie Wyss did not perform the songs for the BBC.¹⁰⁸

Smith's extant correspondence concerning Henry Handel Richardson breaks off at this point. Before taking up in December 1947 the new role of Director of External Affairs for the United Nations Information Centre at Lake Success, New York, Smith returned to Australia. The way home for Smith, like Richard Mahony, was complex and ill-defined: "When you have been away for several

1946-1954, Mitchell Library (hereafter cited as ML) MSS 6092). The items were received by the NLA in October 1948.

⁹⁹ TLS Roncoroni to Smith, 7 August 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/198).

¹⁰⁰ ALS 13 August 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/200).

¹⁰¹ TLS 15 August 1946 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/201).

¹⁰² TLS (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/203).

¹⁰³ The items of the first acquisition comprised: scripts of *Niels Lyhne*, *Maurice Guest*, *The Getting of Wisdom*, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (*Australia Felix*, *The Way Home*, and *Ultima Thule*) and notes, *The End of a Childhood*, *The Young Cosima*, and short stories. The twenty-three books used by Richardson for researching *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* are housed outside of MS 133. (Paper Accession file for MS 133. Dr Isobel Johnstone, Ref. Officer, Pictures and Manuscripts, NLA, e-mail message to Rachel Solomon, 24 April 2020.) For details of later acquisitions see <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-411192170/findingaid#provenance>; and Powell, 214-17.

¹⁰⁴ TLS Smith to Roncoroni, 20 January 1947 (Papers of H. H. Richardson, NLA MS 133/2/413).

¹⁰⁵ TL 28 January 1947 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/209).

¹⁰⁶ TL 28 January 1947 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6456/209).

¹⁰⁷ Roncoroni sent Kernot a copy of "the broadcast which was never broadcast!" (Roncoroni to Kernot, 28 February 1949, ML MSS 6092).

¹⁰⁸ *Henry Handel Richardson (1870-1946): The Music*, 2 vols., ed. Bruce Steele and Richard Divall, (Melbourne: Marshall Hall Trust, 1999), xi-xii.

years, there comes a time when the attraction of new lands begins to fade a little, and one is searching again for the friends, and the atmospheres which have such a profound influence on us when we are growing up. In a way, you begin to feel that you have no roots.”¹⁰⁹ Smith continued as an international citizen. He represented the United Nations in various roles around the world, notably Africa and the Middle East, from 1947–1975. He was visiting lecturer at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University from 1963–1978 and at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Harvard University from 1966–1967. He led an active retirement in Gloucestershire, continuing to act in an advisory capacity for the United Nations, as well as travelling, writing, and lecturing. His book, *Ghosts of Kampala: the Rise and Fall of Idi Amin*, was published in 1980. His research and writing on his pioneering ancestors in Australia and his autobiography were not completed by the time of his death in 1995.

It goes beyond the scope of this essay to more fully enumerate Smith’s extraordinary career achievements from 1947 at the United Nations and elsewhere.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, one observation about his approach to political life merits mention. Manuel Fröhlich wrote of George Ivan Smith and United Nations Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld: “Literature, the arts and philosophy infused the sphere of the political with innovative insights and gave sound orientation beyond the short-sightedness of ideology, pure self-interest and skirmishes for prestige.”¹¹¹ Smith’s most valued novel shifted from *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* during World War 2 to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* after Congolese independence in 1960, but his core belief in the unique potential of fiction to contribute to international understanding endured. This is perhaps all the more interesting given that Smith had adopted several genres and media to accomplish his purposes, including documentary, diplomacy and speech-making, at the ABC, BBC, the Rank Organisation, and the United Nations.

Without George Ivan Smith’s quick thinking and immediate action, we most probably would not have MS 133, the Papers of Henry Handel Richardson in the National Library of Australia. At best, a reduced archive might have been established in the National Library or the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.¹¹² After Richardson’s death, Roncoroni was overwhelmed with financial

¹⁰⁹ “Guest Column by George Ivan Smith,” *Radio-Active: The ABC Staff Journal* (Sydney), 16 May 1949 (Papers of G. I. Smith, MS. Eng. c. 6516).

¹¹⁰ See Manuel Fröhlich, “Beyond Diplomacy: Perspectives on Dag Hammarskjöld from the Papers of George Ivan Smith,” *Cross Currents*, no. 2 (March 2008): 9–35, http://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/cc2_web.pdf; <https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/2789>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Ivan_Smith.

¹¹¹ Fröhlich, 17.

¹¹² Kernot identified the Mitchell Library and the National Library as possible repositories for Richardson’s manuscripts in July 1946. ALS Kernot to Roncoroni, 28 July 1946, ML MSS 6092.

and health concerns and there is every reason to believe that she was vulnerable to making expedient commercial deals or destroying more of Richardson's papers.¹¹³ Critically, with Smith assisting her, she came to recognise the importance of establishing a permanent public archive for Richardson's legacy to be enjoyed by generations to come.

Creating an archive of Richardson's papers was an extension of the work Smith did for Richardson during her lifetime. His guiding principle, adopted from early childhood, was that information and the dissemination of ideas were crucial to forming functional societies. Richardson's fiction reflected back to him the same ideas that he had been propagating in his autobiographical writing, dramatic scripts, journalism, broadcasts, poetry, and documentary films. In Richard Mahony, he might have seen the individual men from the Inebriates' Institute and the prisons, the young and discarded workers of the production lines in New South Wales, and the troops on the fields to whom he directed radio communication from Australia. He also might have recognised himself. From his first broadcast on Richardson, he indicated that he read in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* a story of more than one man. He read an instructive tale about the unique qualities of the Australian pioneering spirit to overcome the difficulties of the human condition. Inspired by his desire to share this tale with the world, George Ivan Smith's timely efforts to establish a permanent public archive for research and consultation should be recognised amongst the greatest contributions to Henry Handel Richardson's ongoing legacy.

Melbourne

¹¹³ ALS Kernot to Nettie Palmer, 28 May 1946 (Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, NLA MS 1174/1/6991).