

THE GETTING OF WISDOM

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THE GETTING OF WISDOM

Edited by

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and

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GENERAL EDITOR'S FOREWORD

THE Academy Editions of Australian Literature is the first series of critical editions of major works of the nation's literature. The series provides reliable reading texts and contextual annotation based on rigorous scholarship and thorough textual collation. The term 'Literature' in the series title is interpreted broadly. It is taken to extend beyond the traditional literary genres and to encompass other forms, for instance, personal diaries and plays for the popular stage.

The project was initiated by the Australian Academy of the Humanities as a response to the unreliability of most currently available printings of Australian works dating from the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. It is not generally appreciated that the normal circumstances of the transmission of the text of a literary work, say a full-length novel which undergoes several type-settings over a fifty- or hundred-year period, invariably lead to some thousands of textual changes. Most of these are variants of punctuation and other matters of detail, consequent on the publisher restyling each new edition for its intended audience (magazine or newspaper, Australian, British or American). However, a significant number of changes in wording inevitably occurs as each new typesetting is proofread, to whatever degree of accuracy the time permits, against its copy – typically the immediately previous printing. Rarely do publishers scrupulously check the new edition against the original one. Where photo-lithographic reprints of early editions have been decided upon, the choice has usually been determined by the modern one-volume format, whereas original printings of nineteenth-century novels were typically in two or three volumes.

The textual changes of new typesettings are not often sanctioned by the author, even if still alive: authors tend to have their eye on what they are writing at the moment rather than on the textual accuracy of reprintings of what they have written in the past. The accumulated changes are also historically misleading in that they do not represent exactly what the original audiences read and therefore distort our understanding of the relationship between those audiences and the version of the work which they read. This is particularly important in the case of Australian literary works which were often written for publication or serialisation in a local magazine or newspaper, were revised by the author, and then reshaped by well-meaning but interventionist editors for first publication in book form. Further textual changes or abridgement often occurred in the course of first overseas publication and by the reissuing of the work in cheap, double-column or collected works formats. American editions usually varied from their British counterparts, and both contained departures from their Australian original. All this assumes that the works have actually remained available. In the case of plays for the commercial stage, poems published in fugitive broadsheets or in brief-lived newspapers, and privately kept diaries, our access is conditioned by the accidents of their collection by family, individual collectors and libraries.

The case for full-scale critical editions which would address these problems for major Australian works is overwhelming. The Academy Editions volumes clarify the often confusing textual histories of these works and establish reliable reading texts. Notation of textual variance in the different versions is provided, together with historical and other explanations of whatever in the texts may be no longer clear to the modern reader.

The Introduction gives a history of the writing, revision, production and reception of the work (or body of works), and will be found to contain much hitherto unknown information. A biographical context is provided, focusing particularly on and around the time of writing and publication. The author's relevant dealings with amanuenses, editors, publishers and advisers, as revealed in letters, memoirs and publishers' archives, are canvassed for any effect they may have had on the work and on how the author saw his or her task and audience. All extant manuscript and other pre-

publication material is described, as well as any serialisations and the early publications in book form. These have been collated as a preliminary to the editing process, and their variant readings are recorded in textual apparatus. Important categories of variants may appear also at the foot of the reading page.

The historical account in the Introduction lays the groundwork for the description of the editorial principles adopted. Given the range of authors, genres and historical periods covered by the Academy Editions series, no uniform editorial approach has been prescribed in advance. Where previously unpublished material is extant in only one version, the choice of copy-text is straightforward. However the editor must still decide how, in a myriad of ways, to balance the needs of a modern readership against the historical interest of the manuscript's peculiarities of presentation. In the case of prose fiction volumes, editors are obliged to make a difficult choice between a textual presentation that gives highest authority to authorial intention and one that has a documentary form of the text as its authority. As the Academy Editions series is intended to serve a predominantly Australian readership, both now and in the future, some editions will favour the form of the work read by its earliest Australian audiences before being reshaped overseas. Whatever the approach taken by the editor, original spellings and punctuation are respected wherever they would not actively mislead the modern reader, and unavoidable decisions to emend the copy-text are recorded.