

BIOGRAPHY AND ITS FICTIONS: ADA CAMBRIDGE AND THE TEMPTATIONS OF 'HERSTORY' – A REVIEW ARTICLE

Bradstock, Margaret and Louise Wakeling. *Rattling the Orthodoxies: A Life of Ada Cambridge* (Penguin Australian Women's Library; Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1991; paperback \$18.95).

Tate, Audrey. *Ada Cambridge: Her Life and Work 1844-1926* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991; cloth \$24.95).

Bradstock, Margaret and Louise Wakeling, ed. *Thirty Years in Australia* (1903; rpt. Kensington: University of New South Wales Press, 1989).

Morrison, Elizabeth, ed. *A Woman's Friendship* (1889; rpt. Kensington: University of New South Wales Press, 1988).

AS BRIAN MATTHEWS SO MEMORABLY and forcefully reminded the readers of *Louisa*, biography is inherently problematical and fraught with temptation. Although dealing with a more-or-less known life and factual evidence, it is far from being a detached and empirical undertaking. Instead, according to Matthews, the desire to create 'the sense of a full life being lived' lends it inescapably a fictionalizing tendency.¹ Data must be marshalled, connections made, and gaps filled to tell a coherent and, if possible, interesting story. Moreover, even allowing that a biographer may bring considerable objectivity to the task, information has still to be interpreted, so that 'it is inevitable that some vestiges of the narrating self will invade the notionally objective record.'² These comments, of course, were inspired by a subject about whom it was thought too little was known, and provide a rationale for the writer's consequent decision to make good the shortfall by allowing an alternative and more overtly speculative or fictional text to accompany the main, factually based rendition. Yet his key notion that 'the act of writing biography is stalked at every point by the temptation to invent'³ should not therefore be dismissed as merely extenuating or special pleading. Rather this is a general truth capable of diverse application, as has been illustrated again by the appearance of two independently researched biographies on a contemporary of Louisa Lawson, an English emigree who discovered her fictional vocation in Australia, Ada Cambridge.⁴ The works in question are Margaret Bradstock and Louise Wakeling's *Rattling the Orthodoxies: A Life of Ada Cambridge* and Audrey Tate's *Ada Cambridge: Her Life and Work 1844-1926*.

In view of the limited publishing opportunities afforded by the Australian marketplace, the nearly simultaneous issuing of two works devoted to a once neglected female author represents something of a phenomenon, and is directly attributable to a burgeoning concern with 'herstory'. The term, alluded to by Bradstock and Wakeling, encapsulates one aspect of the current feminist challenge to canonical conceptions. Specifically, it refers to attempts to rewrite and amplify the supposedly normative vision of history by reclaiming and reinterpreting the suppressed, underrated and all-but-invisible contributions and experiences of women throughout the ages. Part of the project is necessarily archaeological: a reconstructing of a lost and submerged past, in so far as this is possible, based on recovering traces and on reading between the lines of orthodox accounts. Another aspect of this program is largely reinterpetative, as in the case of Ada Cambridge. Here there is an abundance of primary material, because we are dealing with a once well known and prolific writer, who even published two

volumes of autobiographical reminiscences, one describing primarily her English past in *The Retrospect* (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 1912) and the other covering her colonial experience, or *Thirty Years in Australia* (London: Methuen, 1903). With either approach, however, the primary tasks related to presenting 'herstory' are to render belated justice to neglected female achievements, and to create an alternative history and models for future (specifically female) readers. Cambridge, moreover, must have seemed an ideal subject for reclamation and reinstatement — and the publication of these two biographies bears ample testimony to this perception. For her works constitute, by any standards, a substantial body of writings which examine central female concerns, while the vagaries of her critical reception assume exemplary proportions. From enjoying an international reputation, and a transatlantic as well as an Australasian readership, her works suffered a nearly total eclipse, as did those of other contemporaries, such as Jessie Couvreur, Rosa Praed and Mary Gaunt. This fall from reader and critical grace is now generally explained in terms of the narrowly nationalist and male preoccupations which, in the decades between the World Wars, became identified with genuine Australian literature, to the detriment of female spheres of interest, as well as of novelists whose themes and audience were often divided equally between the New and Old Worlds.

Within the context of the feminist program of reclamation, the standard biographical task of underscoring what is of abiding interest and value in a writer's life and work assumes a specific form, and is open to particular temptations. Most obviously, emphases will be laid in keeping with the needs of this subsuming, revisionary enterprise, while the desire to make 'herstory' readable and ideologically sound can lead to conflation, to omissions and, most strikingly, to what amounts to a concerted rereading of supposed facts, thereby raising the issue of which version, the received or the revised, is the more fictional. Bradstock and Wakeling's biography, which openly aligns itself with the politics of 'herstory', illustrates these points. As the Introduction makes clear, they subscribe to familiar assumptions and strategies of feminist studies. The ensuing monograph is to be in part a reading against the grain (Cambridge was, we are told, 'a writer at odds with her genre [the romance]', [B.viii]),⁵ and in part a search for 'intellectual precedents to ideas expressed in contemporary women's writing' (B.xv). Also, as in the case of Brian Matthews, considerable weight is laid on the invented and subjective nature of biography: it, 'no less than the selectively shaped autobiography, is fictive in essence, an imaginative construct of which little, if anything, can be taken as incontrovertible "fact"' (B.xvi). But there are crucial differences of approach between the studies by Matthews and by Bradstock and Wakeling. In *Louisa*, the innovative, split narrative foregrounds the problematical status of the biography by constantly dramatizing its fictional dimension. In the more recent work, on the other hand, the boundaries between supposed fact and possible invention are less clear cut. Here concern with 'intellectual precedents' produces, in effect, a tendency to read the past in terms of modern preoccupations, and there are indices of a certain degree of authorial identification and self-projection which is not always easy to identify in the main text. The Introduction, however, does state plainly that Ada Cambridge came to constitute part of their daily lives and mental landscapes: she was 'often the third person in the room. She became, in effect, our favourite mutual obsession' (B.xiv),

rendering the ensuing life-story, as Bradstock and Wakeling stress in conclusion, 'not the "truth" but our truth about Ada Cambridge' (B.xvi).

A feminist orientation, of course, can manifest itself diversely and engender distinctive approaches, as is amply demonstrated by Ada Cambridge's recent biographers. In spite of a common desire to reclaim and mete out belated justice to an important female writer, their accounts are informed by divergent assumptions which largely account for their many crucial differences of interpretation and presentation. The standpoint of Bradstock and Wakeling, for instance, though not entirely separatist (that is, concerned with women living for and with other women), does tend to downplay, ignore or otherwise belittle Cambridge's male associations. While this may redress certain patriarchal imbalances enshrined by conventional history, it does not necessarily accord with the details of Cambridge's life and writings. Consequently there is considerable stress laid on alleged contradictions in their subject matter, ranging from 'contradictory facets of her "personality"' (B.xi), and antithetical impulses in her fiction, reflecting a cast of mind at once 'anti-establishment' (B.x) and yet imbued with unchallenged patriarchal norms, to the more problematical notion that 'Cambridge was not always perfectly in control of her literary creations, a not unusual situation for a writer' (B.viii).⁶ Audrey Tate, on the other hand, attributes to Cambridge priorities, values and characteristics which often would make many of the target audience of the Penguin Australian Women's Library wince. Cambridge, we are told, viewed marriage and motherhood as being indisputably woman's most important vocation, that home and domestic concerns were her decided priority, and that 'she saw the relationship between men and women as the most central issue of life' (T.2).⁷ Overall, this less ideologically imbued position is far more accommodating of diverse impulses, involves a less strained handling of facets of Cambridge's life, and none-the-less does not seriously impede the revisionary notion that 'the story of her life challenges the stereotype of the nineteenth-century middle-class woman as prudish and repressed, under the domination of her husband, without a mind or will of her own' (T.1).

Probably the most strikingly divergent and coloured area of the two presentations concerns the relative importance of male and female associations in Cambridge's life. Tate's norms are unambiguously heterosexual. For instance, we hear that 'Though Ada says she hated this particular young man for his attentions, there was nothing wrong with her psychosexual development for she later "cottoned on" to his brother' (T.17). Although apparently trivial, this does mean that George Cross, the minister-husband initially responsible for her voyage to the colonies, is portrayed as an integral and vital element of Cambridge's story who merits detailed treatment, and not merely as a hindrance to, or negative touchstone of, her finer impulses. Their marriage, we are told, 'was to be the flowering of Ada's life' (T.55), and Tate supports her claim by carefully documenting its 47-year-long course. From the halcyon honeymoon, we are encouraged to follow their united struggle against up-country conditions through to the companionate state of their union in Williamstown and in England. Nor is this progress presented as being free from tensions and pitfalls. In fact, the strength of Tate's account lies in its ability both to explore judiciously the various possibilities suggested by the available evidence, whether they point to a hypothetical liaison at Sydney in 1897, flirtation with sea captains and other specimens of 'rugged masculinity'

(T.141-2), or to growing spiritual dissension and possible emotional estrangement in the marriage; and to reach balanced rather than forced or convenient conclusions, even if it means leaving significant issues unresolved: 'Whether her later preoccupation with marital difficulties arose from a dissatisfaction with her own marriage or whether it was simply the product of a shrewd observation of life around her, we do not know' (T.2-3). Similarly, the important and complex friendship with the Dutchman 'Dik', who merits a whole chapter in *Thirty Years in Australia*, receives due treatment, while both aspects of Ada's response to her father, which emerge in *The Retrospect*, are also acknowledged: an awareness of his weaknesses and yet a deep-seated love, to which is attributed her 'idealized treatment of male/female relationships in her novels' (T.12).

The countervision, as put by Bradstock and Wakeling, depends in part on innuendo, unsupported asides, and the occasional neglect of conflicting information. George, from the outset, is cast in the role of threatened, conservative clergyman to his uncomfortably non-conformist wife: a stereotypical confrontation which will yield the familiar paradigm of the constrained but undaunted woman writer, seeking eagerly for understanding female support as she struggles against the Victorian patriarchy. Consequently George is remorselessly undercut at every opportunity. When he and his wife become lost in unfamiliar countryside, for example, we hear 'in spite of George's reputation of being able to "ride and drive . . . and go anywhere without losing himself", he managed to "bush" them in riverside scrub that night, failing to make the first homestead by nightfall' (B.41). Tate records the same event without belittling irony, knowing that such occurrences were common enough and having already registered the local church's recognition that new ministers would need 'to acquire practical experience and training in Australian conditions' (T.51). Similarly George's, by our standards, unjustified killing of wildlife serves as a measure of his response to idyllic nature, while he is repeatedly presented as financially inept, as in 'George's stipend seemed to decrease rather than increase in proportion to his length of service' (B.43). Again Tate's more comprehensive perspective tends to mitigate these supposed defects, as when her thorough account of the scandalous penury suffered by Anglican, country curates renders comprehensible salary fluctuations, and suggests that Ada was doing far more than providing the stock 'justification for a married woman, and a parson's wife at that, to be "wasting her time" writing' (B.43), when she explained her career in terms of a need 'to add something to the family resources when they threatened to give out.' Other male personae on the stage of Cambridge's life fare no better. Dik features as an undescribed supernumerary in two incidents which illustrate the potential perils faced by a woman in the bush, and *a propos* her childhood we are told: 'Ada's father does not seem to have inspired her respect, and one wonders to what extent her own experiences gave rise to her depictions of fathers as weak, irrelevant or tyrannical' (B.9). The two biographies, then, on the issue of the role of men in her life, provide a modern version of William Blake's pithy dictum on oppositional reading, that 'both read the Bible day & night / But thou readst black where I read white'.⁸

The Bradstock and Wakeling biography certainly has valid points to make on Cambridge's attitudes towards the two sexes, but real care is required in evaluating its assertions, which are sometimes based on ideologically redolent procedures. This bias, unfortunately, is often only apparent if the reader has access to additional sources of

information, as when it is suggested that the Crosses' marriage, by the time of their return voyage to England in 1908, was in a virtually irreparable state of emotional and spiritual disjunction: 'More often than not, the Reverend went off with his gun to shoot a few partridges, and a picture emerges of a couple who lived in almost separate spheres' (B.194). Tate, while also citing their largely separate activities, goes on, however, to note that 'There were three more lovely days during which George arrived to fetch her and she took him to Maidstone to share with him some of her joy' (T.214), faithfully following Ada's account in *The Retrospect*. Thanks to such supplementary data, reader credibility is not strained by Tate's conclusion that, with George's death, 'Ada lost not only a husband, but a good and faithful friend' (T.233). Admittedly, on rare occasions Bradstock and Wakeling do implicitly acknowledge a degree of excess in their version of 'herstory', as in the following summary judgment passed on the Crosses' rural existence in the early 1880s:

Indeed, with respect to their social life, he [George] begins to appear more and more as a sleeping partner in their version of companionate marriage. (To be fair, there are indications that his leisure interests were very different from Ada's, and that there was some degree of mutual tolerance of their differences.) (B.75)

Yet the parenthetical gesture of redress sits awkwardly as an afterthought, extraneous to the persistent thrust of an argument in which asides most frequently suppose an appreciative audience with kindred sympathies: 'At such times [during bayside walks], she tells us, "then I stand and gaze and imagine things until George gets cross because I cannot drag myself away". (Was George sometimes a 'Cross' in more ways than one?)' (B.167). The passage is indeed revelatory, though not merely of Ada's bitterness at patriarchally prescribed roles, but also of the difficulty of mounting a countervision to Tate's moving, if ideologically less acceptable, version of the Crosses' long and complex partnership, which concludes that George was 'a vital element' in Ada's life, and probably one that 'gave as much as it took away' (T.232) from her authorial endeavours.

Almost as difficult to reconcile are the respective positions adopted on Ada Cambridge's response to women. To detail major divergencies again would be tedious and to some extent supererogatory, because their respective arguments are partly inherent in, and dependent on, the presentation of Cambridge's involvement with males. A major and iterated theme of the Bradstock and Wakeling biography is Ada's 'tremendous need for female friendship' (B.26), coupled with what amounts, in comparison with Tate's account, to an underplaying of her negative response to various categories of her own sex, from governesses and old maids to ruthless husband-chasers and dangerous, manipulating females. We should, of course, no more expect to find such emphases here than references to Ada's concern with the damage 'some woman' can do to 'the best of men' (T.71 & 87), or comments like 'Ada rejoiced in her maternity' (T.57), or 'from youth to old age Ada positively glowed in male company' (T.145). Similarly, it is Tate who raises in full the unpleasant and sexually explosive implications of her unhappy childhood experience with a governess, whereas Bradstock and Wakeling cite part of Cambridge's reminiscences without comment. Instead, their account focuses on positive encounters with her own sex, and again Victorian reticence provides sufficient reason for the magnifying of occasional remarks:

It is also notable that Ada's female friendships here, though short-lived, seemed to be intense when she did find soul-mates. She refers to this woman as 'the most uncommon woman I have ever met, as she was one of the most adorable', and mentions the many evenings they spent exploring the country together. (B.36-7)

Predicably, however, the biographies diverge sharply in interpreting individual situations. Bradstock and Wakeling are persuaded of 'a close friendship' between Ada and Ethel Turner. Tate remarks that 'The friendship with Ethel does not seem to have developed into an intimate one' (T.177-8). A key letter (cited B.155-6) lends itself to either interpretation, and underscores again the importance of the reader's own premises. On balance, Tate gives a more comprehensive account of Cambridge's diverse attitudes to women, while Bradstock and Wakeling contribute significantly to a more orthodoxly feminist profile of the writer by highlighting an underrated aspect of her psychological and mental world.

Viewed in more general terms, Tate's biography is superior in its overall coverage of diverse facets of Cambridge's life, whereas the version of 'herstory' presented by Bradstock and Wakeling, in comparison, is far from even-handed. This admittedly is not their primary intention, which, in part, is apparently to provide illumination of the 'prehistory' of contemporary feminist writing. Thus throughout there is a tacit concern with exemplary models and ideals, according to which Cambridge's life and work are judged. This often produces not a semblance of detached recording, but of committed and corrective engagement with the material, as in the following comments on Cambridge's important, late statement on the lot of women, in the essay entitled 'Hobbled':

Although she is not entirely wrong in seeing women as colluding in their continued low rating in the world, Cambridge, like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, again, with whom she shares many ideas and contradictions, if not her radical solutions, placed too much importance on women's moral superiority and their nurturing roles, thereby reinforcing the traditional division of public and private spheres for men and women. (B.208)

Hence, too, some events warrant disproportionate attention or neglect. The significant 1908 return to, and sojourn in, England, for instance, merits only a paragraph of half a page, while the seminal nature of the 1887 Sydney trip is virtually passed over. Similarly, selective emphasis on certain aspects of Ada's story tends to produce an occasional telescoping of events in ways which allow the broad outline of the biographers' 'truth about Ada Cambridge' to emerge starkly, as in Chapter Two, which deals sweepingly with the crucial time from approximately the writer's late teens to her early thirties. Tate's more leisurely, sequential account exhibits the wealth of fascinating (and sometimes conflicting) details which fall outside this procedure. Especially valuable are the insights offered into Ada's life in England prior to her voyage south in 1870, including the struggle of the Cambridge sisters to maintain their personal dignity after the loss of family wealth, her significant production of prose and hymns, and the tantalizing possibility of an unhappy love affair — diverse experiences which would later help to sustain her commercial writing. And this more inclusive analysis is maintained in the *New World*, irrespective of whether the issue is family finances, the author's quest for faith, or her health and its impact on her domestic

circumstances. Tate's biography is also impressive in its treatment of her various creative endeavours, skilfully tracing her less well known development as a poet and an essayist, and also providing fascinating insight into Ada's probable collaboration, in 1879, with George on a controversial and ill-fated ecclesiastical article: a previously neglected episode in the Cross partnership which raises the possibility of a more complex pattern of intellectual and spiritual exchange between them than is generally allowed.

In short, there is no doubt which of these two works will become the standard biography. Tate's *Ada Cambridge* is admirably lucid, comprehensive and judicious. It succeeds in the difficult task of incorporating contemporary feminist insights with genuine sympathy for Victorian sensibilities, and provides a compelling case for Cambridge's abiding stature, and for the breadth and complexity of her writings. This is less the apparent aim of Bradstock and Wakeling's biography than, as its title suggests, to rattle the orthodoxies. This it does admirably by viewing Cambridge in terms of the general dilemmas confronting nineteenth-century female writers, and by applying to her work reading strategies and insights developed in other areas of literary and critical discourse. But in matters of divergent assessment, which are not infrequent between the two studies, it is Tate's version which usually carries more conviction, because of its scrupulous attention to a wider range of complexities and occurrences, and because it avoids the temptation to indulge in hagiography or idealization. Bradstock and Wakeling assert, for instance, on the occasion of the Crosses' arrival in Williamstown, that 'Her artistic soul preferred the "picturesque" to the "imposing"' (B148). Tate's work, on this issue as on so much else, affords the basis for a more complex understanding. It confirms that Cambridge responded favourably to manifestations of the picturesque and that she was critical of vulgar ostentation. Yet Tate also documents an unbroken record of Ada's love of superior surrounds and luxury, and that the Crosses 'did enjoy mixing with the "best people"' (T.171). Moreover, there seems little doubt that she maintained a strong sense of social caste to the end, despite her anger vented against social injustice, and that the latter in no way dampened her enduring enjoyment of the pleasures which only wealth could buy, as in this account of part of her 1908 stay in England: 'The house in which Ada stayed was the stuff of her heart — large and gracious, the walls set thick with valuable paintings, rooms full of fine family furniture and crested silver, together with a bevy of trained servants' (T.213). The Cambridge who emerges from Tate's pages may be less exemplary, but she is more human, and the more interesting artist for her capacity to attack foibles and class-related attitudes which she seems personally to have shared on occasions.

Fortunately, the appearance of these biographies also coincides with the reprinting of two works which throw light on some of the issues discussed earlier, Margaret Bradstock and Louise Wakeling's edition of *Thirty Years in Australia* and Elizabeth Morrison's of *A Woman's Friendship*. The former will enable readers to judge for themselves many claims of the respective biographers, and to see how Cambridge set about fashioning her own version of 'herstory'. To this end, the editorial Introduction is particularly valuable, as it offers a balanced view of Cambridge's career, as well as a brief but informative survey of her apparent intentions in this autobiography. The other book, *A Woman's Friendship*, affords Cambridge's most extensive fictional

treatment of the women's movement, and is now reprinted with a comprehensive scholarly apparatus, consisting of introduction, notes and the first publication of a related story, 'The Reform Club'. Written at the height of Cambridge's creative powers, it brings into sharp focus both the vexed question of her attitudes towards her own sex and the larger issue of her stature as a writer.

Thirty Years in Australia, as Ada Cambridge argued during her last years to a prospective publisher, was certainly worthy of being reissued, as it provides significant insights into her personal life and the age in general. Indeed, her individual experiences are particularly valuable because they embrace Old and New World cultures, as well as conditions in the cities and country areas of the colonies, and because of her ever-present critical consciousness. For as she is aware and remarks self-admonishingly, 'distance lends enchantment' (p.54), just as she is able to rein in her commentary even in its most fulsome rhetorical flights with a typically bracing reflection:

In the exquisite lights, the clear distances, the fine atmosphere of this climate, Nature has to be beautiful, whatever she wears. I love her in this grey-green gown — and I have been a bushwoman for twenty-three years in all. The trouble is, of course, that man, who does not live by bread alone, lives still less on scenery. (p.61)

The text still has considerable immediacy, and the reader will encounter here important aspects of Cambridge's experience not treated fully in either biography, such as the fascinating account of her 'passion for unconventional excursions into what answers here to Gissing's Nether-World' (p.236). The major blemish in what is otherwise a pleasing edition is the proofreading. *Thirty Years in Australia* has obviously been reset, and in the process a number of errors have crept into the text, as on pages 78, 79, 86, 107, 112, 116, 128, 129, 136, 145, 147. Most of these are typographical, ranging from transpositions like 'taht' for that (p.78), through uncorrected repetitions ('until our return; our return', p.79), to omitted letters ('by [t]he reflected feeling', p.241) and even words ('The first night at [B-] gave rise', p.112). Occasional incidentals, like an omitted comma in 'The bright little creature [,] perfection in my eyes' (p.109), do not seriously impede the narrative flow, and are not listed above. More important is the fact that I discovered no substantial omission of material, such as pages, paragraphs or sentences, from the original. The full text is there for the modern reader, and oversights, like those documented here, will not unduly detract from its enjoyment.

A Woman's Friendship, prepared by Elizabeth Morrison, is in every way a model edition. The text has been scrupulously prepared, first by recourse to microfilm copy and then checked finally against hard copy in the State Library of Victoria. Something of the sense of its original serial publication has also been unobtrusively and fittingly retained, through headings which specify the location and date of each episode, as well as through reprinting the conventional closing gesture, which still serves to goad on reader interest: 'To be continued'. Morrison also uses to good advantage the scope allowed for scholarly introduction and notes by the Colonial Texts Series. This enables her to contribute important knowledge on a range of issues, such as modes of production and publication, and on the 'woman question', whereas Bradstock and Wakeling, not enjoying such scholarly luxuries, are faced with some difficult decisions, such as whether or not to intervene in the text by altering Cambridge's frequent use of

initials for places or personal names. Hence Cambridge's original 'B-' becomes Beechworth in their edition. This is not ideal, but it does improve clarity and readability, while it also highlights the need for more series such as that produced under the aegis of the Australian Defence Force Academy to ensure the accurate transmission of our colonial heritage. Moreover, perhaps it is in a series such as this that novellas like *A Woman's Friendship* can best be reprinted. A form which enjoyed considerable popularity in the last century, the novella, by today's publishing standards, is too short to appear in the normal novel format and too long to fit easily into collections of shorter fiction, but lends itself ideally to more complex scholarly presentation.

A Woman's Friendship is not a major creation of Ada Cambridge, but it is a representative one. For one thing, it does not have the full and complex plot unfolding which is a feature of her longer fiction. Instead, it concentrates on the development of a central situation and its implications and, in terms of its portrayal of the growth, disintegration and final renewal of the friendship between the two leading women, resembles less a novel than the short story 'Mrs. Carlisle's Enemy'. Its greater length, however, is used to provide a penetrating investigation of motivation and patterns of socialization, which are focused through the contemporary issue of women's rights. This aspect is adequately discussed in the Introduction to the recent edition and in the two biographies. Other and less obvious dimensions of the work, however, have inspired little comment. For instance, none of these studies draws attention to the ways in which Cambridge subverts romance tradition and conventional paradigms, both to highlight their inadequacy as a guide to human behaviour, and to provide a rewriting of patriarchal myths. As the authorial voice notes early in the story, the wife most at risk, Patty Kinnaird, is acting 'gaily as if this were just a world of pleasant men and well-treated women' (p.45). Later the female protagonists will be led to what appears to be a modern, affluent version of Edenic conditions, where the male lead plays an unscrupulous tempter, sure of escaping censure because, although he 'had a lot to answer for — a lot — . . . being a man, no one imputed blame to him' (p.115). Should anyone doubt either Ada's sympathetic concern with issues touching woman's estate, or her very great skills as a writer, they need only read the rest of this climactic scene, which takes place in the concert hall during the Melbourne Exhibition of 1888 (pp.114-16). There Patty and even the most obtuse reader are enlightened to gender-based injustice and patriarchally condoned expectations through the casual exchanges of two unnamed males who, from their superior vantage-point in the gallery, as in life, survey and comment on the social floor-plan beneath them, of which they are the 'natural' beneficiaries.

Belatedly but with vigour, then, some measure of justice is being meted out to Ada Cambridge, though there is still much to do. Recent years have seen the publication of some of her major novels, such as *A Marked Man* and *The Three Miss Kings*, and now four further works have appeared which contribute significantly to an understanding of her ideas, preoccupations and milieu. As Elizabeth Morrison notes, the common aim is 'to reinstate . . . Ada Cambridge, to the position she once held as a leading novelist of late nineteenth century Australia' (p.xiii), and to redress the widespread notion of her *oeuvre* as consisting largely of conventional and trivial romance material. Such a view is clearly no longer tenable, although Cambridge's fiction, unfortunately,

is still far from being a permanent and readily available part of our literary heritage. Writings recently reissued after years of neglect are now already out of print, and, apart from the works surveyed here and a few examples of shorter fiction in anthologies, the only other piece of extended prose available is *Sisters* (Penguin Australian Women's Library, 1989). This time, however, the shift of fortune is not directly attributable to patriarchal neglect or displeasure, or to the fact that, as Patty Kinnaird remarks, 'A man can't bear to see a woman going outside the rules, even if she has the courage for it' (*A Woman's Friendship*, p.12). Rather recession and market forces are combining to produce quick remaindering and considerable losses, coupled with a foreseeable unwillingness on the part of publishers to reissue again works which 'did not take'. Acceptance and recognition, however, usually take longer than the shelf-life allowed by publishing houses, though this time there seems little reason to fear for her renewed eclipse, with the emergence of challenging and scholarly works, such as those by Tate, Bradstock and Wakeling, and Morrison, which confirm Cambridge's achievement and ensure that she will remain in the forefront of academic research.

Michael Ackland,
Monash University.

NOTES

1. Brian Matthew, *Louisa* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1987), p.5.
2. *Louisa*, p.7.
3. *Louisa*, p.6.
4. Cambridge had, of course, published before she left England, but the commencement of her professional writing career is normally dated from the appearance of 'Up the Murray' in 1875.
5. B indicates a page reference to Margaret Bradstock and Louise Wakeling, *Rattling the Orthodoxies: A Life of Ada Cambridge*.
6. Although there is little to object to in this as a general proposition, in practice it can provide a convenient explanation for awkward elements of a story which do not 'fit', or might otherwise render questionable a particular interpretation, while it also pre-empts, in effect, the issue of who or what is responsible for the alleged dissonances: the writer's craft and ideas or the reader's own assumptions.
7. T indicates a page reference to Audrey Tate, *Ada Cambridge: Her Life and Work 1844-1926*.
8. William Blake, 'The Everlasting Gospel', in David V. Erdman, ed. *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), p.516.

Copyright of Full Text rests with the original copyright owner and, except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, copying this copyright material is prohibited without the permission of the owner or its exclusive licensee or agent or by way of a license from Copyright Agency Limited. For information about such licences contact Copyright Agency Limited on (02) 93947600 (ph) or (02) 93947601 (fax)