

“A Policy of Splendid Isolation”: Angus and Robertson, George G. Harrap and the Politics of Co-operation in the Australian Book Trade during the Late 1930s

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The tension between British and Australian publishers has long been a central thesis of antipodean print culture histories about the early twentieth century, particularly in relation to Angus and Robertson, whom British publishers looked upon with some unease. However, John Barnes in arguing that the “model of Australian creativity and originality unappreciated and resisted by London publishers has been generally accepted,” demonstrates the utility of questioning this history by revealing the readiness of some British publishers (like Blackwood, Duckworth and Jonathan Cape) to contribute “significantly towards the beginnings of an [Australian] national literature.”¹ Similarly, though the archival record chronicles a certain amount of antagonism towards Angus and Robertson and shows that British publishers as a collective actively made the path of an Australian publisher more difficult through confirming agreements that froze out opposition, pre-Second World War documents also reveal an attempt to create a co-operative “axis” between Angus and Robertson in Sydney and George G. Harrap and Co. in London, with the Australasian Publishing Co. (who was considered “a part of the Harrap organisation”)² as sales representative to both.³ Their collective aim, to quote Walter Harrap, was to “work

¹ John Barnes, “Heaven Forbid that I Should Think of Treating with an English Publisher’: The Dilemma of Literary Nationalists in Federated Australia,” in Simon Eliot, Andrew Nash and Ian Willison, eds. *Literary Cultures and the Material Book* (London: The British Library, 2007), 409. To establish his point, Barnes refers to: the publishing history of Joseph Furphy’s *Such is Life* by Jonathan Cape fifteen years after the author’s death; Henry Lawson’s experiences in London, particularly his positive treatment by British publishers during 1900–1902; the publication of Miles Franklin’s *My Brilliant Career* by Blackwood; and the unacknowledged work of publisher’s reader Edward Garnett who introduced the Overseas Library through Duckworth. See also Peter Morton, “Australia’s England, 1880–1950” in Peter Pierce, ed., *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press (2009), 255–281.

² George Ferguson to Walter Harrap, 26 October 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML. All correspondence is sourced from the second collection of material related to the documentary archives of Angus and Robertson, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. Permission to use these records was granted by the HarperCollins Subsidiary Rights Manager, 4 June 2008. Research for this article is located within the context of, and was made possible by, Richard Nile’s CI-1 ARC Discovery grant “Colonial Publishing and Literary Democracy in Australia: An Analysis of the Influence on Australian Literature of British and Australian Publishing.” I am very grateful to Richard Nile, Rana Ensor, John Yiannakis, William Smithwick and Tim Dolin, who provided feedback on a draft of this paper presented at *Literature and Politics*, 3rd annual conference of the Australasian Association for Literature. I am also in debt to the generous curatorial assistance provided by Arthur Easton, who sadly passed away on Anzac Day 2009, in regards to the Angus and Robertson archives.

³ The Australasian Publishing Company was established by George Harrap, son of publisher George

closely in harmony but yet as distinct entities.”⁴ The Australian market might have been perceived to be the “special preserve” of some British publishers but in the late 1930s Harrap took a broader view that Angus and Robertson could be “used in an intelligent way as part of one huge machine whose object it is to increase the sale of books in the English language.”⁵

Conscious of how the Australian and British book trade might react, Walter Harrap, in writing to Stanley Bartlett of the Australasian Publishing Co. about his London-based discussions with Angus and Robertson publisher George Ferguson, remarked that “a copy of this letter will be given to Mr Ferguson but it will not be seen by anyone and will be destroyed when he has read it.”⁶ Fortunately, copies of these personal discussions survive in the Mitchell Library and thus this paper will briefly trace Angus and Robertson’s negotiations within the “axis” and the broader issues confronting an Australian company which sought to become a publisher of consequence within early twentieth-century English-speaking markets. Because the production and selling of the written word “transgresses the boundary between the incommensurable sacred and the marketable profane”⁷—with books often the centrepiece for arguments about literary merit, national representation and commercialism—publishing company histories can provide useful case studies that join together economic, social, cultural, political and legal or copyright tensions. My intention therefore is not to contradict the established history of Australian publishers struggling to develop during the early twentieth century within “the framework of old imperial connections”⁸ nor is it to recuperate the reputation of British publishers in Australian print cultures studies. Rather my aim is to complicate that history through exploring the ways in which some Australian companies actively sought out “new imperial connections” during the pre-Second World War period. On the one hand, the local industry is indeed characterised by a sense of exasperation at Australia continuing after Federation to be regarded as “an appendage of Great Britain”⁹ and, according to Martyn Lyons, “as a huge continental extension of a

G. (Godfrey) Harrap and elder brother to Walter Harrap, during a visit to Australia in 1915 and was the outcome of a partnership with Constable & Company and Houghton Mifflin Company. However, over time, “the bonds which joined the three parties to the venture ... [became] loosened” and control of the firm was eventually handed over to its existing manager Stanley Bartlett in 1922. Through the restructured Australasian Publishing Co, Bartlett continued to represent George G. Harrap as their Australian agent. For further details, see George G. Harrap, *Some Memories, 1901–1935: A Publisher’s Contribution to the History of Publishing*, London: Harrap (1935).

⁴ Walter Harrap to Stanley Bartlett, 2 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁵ Walter Harrap to Stanley Bartlett, 2 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁶ Walter Harrap to Stanley Bartlett, 2 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁷ Laura J. Miller, *Reluctant Capitalists: Bookselling and the Culture of Consumption*, London: University of Chicago Press (2006), 19.

⁸ Richard Nile and David Walker, “Marketing the Literary Imagination: Production of Australian Literature, 1915–1965,” *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia, Australian Literary Studies (Special Issue)* 13.4 (October 1988): 284.

⁹ Angus and Robertson to JP Lippincott Company (Philadelphia), 16 June 1918, MSS 314/53 ML.

typical British circulating library.”¹⁰ Yet on the other hand, in some quarters the industry is energised by the potential opportunities afforded through negotiating with London publishers in placing Australian books “behind the lines”¹¹ and the possibilities of establishing an Australian export market, what Richard Nile and David Walker refer to as “the complex art of owning and disowning London, of courting its influence and resenting its power.”¹²

Like many complicated relationships of love and hate, this particular tale of two major publishers begins with a gift and some cordial pats on the back, in this case the “most acceptable gift” of an Australian-made book sent in 1938 from George Ferguson to Walter Harrap, who replied with the considered praise that: “many a book on this side is published that is not half so well produced.”¹³ Sending books as gifts was an integral part of Angus and Robertson’s promotional strategy that also included delivering food parcels to British publishers, printers and binders regularly welcoming Australian delicacies as a “relief from the monotony of the average [English] everyday diet.”¹⁴ Equally appreciative, Walter Harrap wanted to build on a two-hour talk he had had with Ferguson at a London luncheon¹⁵ and included with his thanks a copy of a highly-confidential letter sent to Stanley

¹⁰ Martyn Lyons, “Britain’s Largest Export Market,” in Martyn Lyons and John Arnold, eds, *A History of the Book in Australia 1891–1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press (2001), 25.

¹¹ Angus and Robertson’s actual metaphor for breaking into the London market as publishers and booksellers was “to get in behind,” a military concept suggested by the gardener of Hector MacQuarrie, which led to the company establishing a British branch, an endeavour named “Operation London”. See Neil James, *Spheres of Influence: Angus and Robertson and Australian Literature From the Thirties to the Sixties*, (PhD, University of Sydney, 2000), 260.

¹² Richard Nile and David Walker, “The ‘Paternoster Row Machine’ and the Australian Book Trade, 1890–1945,” in Martyn Lyons and John Arnold, eds, *A History of the Book in Australia 1891–1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press (2001), 17.

¹³ Walter Harrap to George Ferguson, 2 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

¹⁴ H. J. Jarrold to George Ferguson, 31 January 1949, MSS 3269/364 ML. For further examples of Angus and Robertson sending food parcels to the United Kingdom, see also W. E. Dedrick to George Ferguson, 8 June 1948, MSS 3269/348 ML; Sheila Hodges to George Ferguson, 10 February 1949, MSS 3269/293 ML; and Walter Harrap to George Ferguson, 4 November 1949, MSS 3269/322 ML.

¹⁵ George Ferguson was in London overseeing the conversion of the Australian Book Company (which Ferguson took over following the death of Angus and Robertson’s London agent Henry George a week after he arrived in the UK) into the new Angus and Robertson branch, eventually relocated to 48 Bloomsbury Street. Though the new branch continued Henry George’s work in “the movement of British books to Australia for sale” in the Angus and Robertson bookshop, Ferguson also sought to “develop a London end to the firm’s publishing ... , an organisation in London which could sell the books” being produced in Australia. (George Ferguson, interview with Suzanne Lunney, 11 May 1976, National Library, TRC 452, 33–35.) Walter Harrap eventually became the first person Ferguson telephoned or went to see every time he came to London. (George Ferguson to Ian Harrap on the death of Walter Harrap, 21 April 1967, MSS 3269/322 ML.) For more background on George Ferguson, see Neil James, “‘The Fountainhead’: George Ferguson and Angus and Robertson,” *Publishing Studies* 7 (Autumn 1999): 6–16, and Neil James “‘Basically We Thought About Books’—An Interview with George Ferguson,” *Publishing Studies* 5 (Spring 1997): 8–16.

Bartlett expounding all details of Harrap's "triangular proposal."¹⁶ Doubling as an Australian representative for Harrap, Bartlett was not new to the controversy regarding the relative dangers or advantages of Australian companies publishing in their own territory and he was in favour of a co-operative move for three reasons: it closely resembled a similar proposition Bartlett had tabled two years earlier; he was anxious other publishing houses might seize this opportunity before their plan was in place; and, in his view of Angus and Robertson's "progressive policy" and highly successful (though universally despised) mail order business, Bartlett conceded there was "no better organisation in Australia with whom ... [they] could co-operate with than A & R [Angus and Robertson]."¹⁷

Thus, perhaps motivated by a desire to contain the competition posed by an Australian branch of this "premier book-selling organisation"¹⁸ (as they considered them) being established next to the British Library, Harrap's wanted to reverse the steady decline of their own business with Angus and Robertson in view of the company's newly increased London buying. (Walter Harrap would reveal the following year that he was simply mildly irked that "the best bookselling concern in the world"—that is, it would seem in this instance, Angus and Robertson—was "not putting every ha'porth of its energy into the selling of Harrap books.")¹⁹ In essence, Harrap's proposition would invite Angus and Robertson to publish under a joint imprint any of Harrap's general books that they were inclined to produce in Australia on royalty terms that would both satisfy the author and provide Harrap's some profit on their property. In return, Angus and Robertson would undertake not to purchase direct from the copyright owners any books that Harrap sought to publish in England. The Australasian Publishing Co., to be appointed as independent selling agents, would receive a commission on all sales in the Australian territory beyond Angus and Robertson's shops.²⁰ Additionally, Harrap's would obtain the right to produce from Angus and Robertson's catalogue any titles that were not published outside Australia, provided Angus and Robertson clearly showed to Harrap's each book's legitimate overheads and profit.

As an example of what we might today call a business-to-business stratagem, on appearances it seemed to balance the advantages to each side fairly evenly and was generally perceived by all parties as a major step to improve relations between bookselling and publishing establishments.²¹ Ferguson considered Harrap to

¹⁶ Stanley Bartlett to Walter Harrap, 22 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

¹⁷ Stanley Bartlett to Walter Harrap, 22 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

¹⁸ Walter Harrap to Stanley Bartlett, 2 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

¹⁹ Walter Harrap to George Ferguson, 23 June 1939, MSS 3269/322 ML.

²⁰ Walter Harrap to Stanley Bartlett, 2 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

²¹ One of the core benefits to A & R was that "they would only pay royalties on books actually sold." For Harrap, a primary advantage was that "A & R would make every endeavour, through their retail organisation, to increase the sale of Harrap books generally." And for the Australasian Publishing Co., partnership with a new agency like A & R meant the creation of a new source of income. Walter Harrap to Stanley Bartlett, 2 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

be “in the front rank of British publishers” who had “a strong list of fiction and general literature” and whose position as a competitor for “new literary stars” could conceivably be reinforced if future Harrap titles were “exploited and promoted throughout Australasia to a greater extent than those of other English publishers.”²² Similarly, Harrap reasoned that Angus and Robertson “could very much widen the market for their [own] books, because, while so many of them ... [were] not of sufficient consequence outside Australia to warrant their publication” on a large-scale basis, “it would be possible to sell quantities ranging from 250 to a thousand if sheets could be obtained at an economical figure;”²³ in other words, the possibilities of an export market through trading copyrights. And the Australasian Publishing Co. were well known and “respected by Australian booksellers” whose knowledge and experience of the book trade would “be of great value.”²⁴ Suffice to say, Angus and Robertson did not foresee any difficulty with the scheme.

But this plan was not without some early points of contention raised by the Australasian Publishing Co. Stanley Bartlett, though clearly supportive of the proposal, advised Walter Harrap of the “pitfalls” and “very grave dangers” if such an “axis” came into operation.²⁵ “I think,” Bartlett claimed, “without the shadow of a doubt we [meaning Harrap and the Australasian Publishing Co.] would be at once ostracized by most of the other booksellers” in Australia and that “the success of the books placed in the hands of A & R” would be “at the expense of the rest of your catalogue.”²⁶ Bartlett explained in quite frank terms that as publisher-booksellers, Angus and Robertson were “very unpopular” in the Australian book trade due to the “extraordinary mail order list” they possessed and their efforts to “gather in business” from around the whole of Australia.²⁷ Bartlett related a case of booksellers in Queensland whose circumstances forced them to either sell Angus and Robertson’s products in order to address the demand for a competitor’s catalogue or to stand by and watch the company “encroach still further on the Brisbane market.”²⁸

Admittedly, disputes between Australian booksellers and Angus and Robertson over the infringement of another’s sales territory had a deep history and Bartlett’s concern was not without merit. Because Angus and Robertson doubled as publishers and booksellers, linking literary and cultural considerations with the economies of storing, selling and posting heavy objects, Perth-based Alberts Bookshop in the 1920s were among the first to register some clear disfavour towards the company’s self-described continental thinking.²⁹ Like many booksellers after them, Alberts

²² George Ferguson to Walter Harrap, 26 October 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

²³ Walter Harrap to Stanley Bartlett, 2 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

²⁴ George Ferguson to Walter Harrap, 26 October 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

²⁵ Stanley Bartlett to Walter Harrap, 22 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

²⁶ Stanley Bartlett to Walter Harrap, 22 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

²⁷ Stanley Bartlett to Walter Harrap, 22 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

²⁸ Stanley Bartlett to Walter Harrap, 22 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

²⁹ George Robertson to HG Albert, 29 November 1927, MSS 314/2 ML.

petitioned Angus and Robertson to "confine ... [their] retail activities to NSW"³⁰ and though Perth, being "almost as far from Sydney as Moscow is from London," would eventually become a distribution "headache"³¹ in the 1950s, Angus and Robertson "did not expect to escape censure"³² and continued wholesaling market books throughout the country. Bartlett disclosed that he personally had "fought for some move that would cut across this increasing menace" from Angus and Robertson and that there seemed little in the scheme for Harrap's other than "resentment" and "opposition" from Australian booksellers.³³ But, in the end, he acknowledged that the Australasian Publishing Co. "should recognise A & R as neighbours, rather than the opposition"³⁴ and that he would support Harrap's role. Bartlett was, however, ambivalent about pushing the proposal forward, arguing that "a good deal of water must pass under the bridge before anything ... can be evolved."³⁵

With fifty years of adventure in the Australian book trade successfully behind them, Angus and Robertson responded rather self-assuredly with the view that the proposal seemed highly "workable and profitable" and that the three organisations "ought to be able to co-operate to their mutual benefit," judging the scheme to be more than just an "interesting mental exercise."³⁶ George Ferguson acknowledged that Bartlett would perhaps "hear more candid expressions" of the book trade's feeling towards Angus and Robertson but, not surprisingly, he disputed the suggestion that Australian booksellers stocked his company's books "against their will." Furthermore, he denied the existence of any unpopularity on the grounds that Angus and Robertson created the market for each book at their own expense and gave booksellers at least a thirty-three percent discount, which was in addition to paying "half the cost of freight in Australia and the total cost in New Zealand."³⁷ Ferguson surmised that "a lot of English publishers would be very happy if they could so arrange things that booksellers had to give special prominence to their books." Angus and Robertson, he argued, were able in fact "to create a market, within limits, for almost any book" and should this "alleged unpopularity" even exist, it could be reasonably discharged by having booksellers purchase direct through the Australasian Publishing Co., as per one of the proposal's recommendations.³⁸

³⁰ George Robertson to HG Albert, 29 November 1927, MSS 314/2 ML.

³¹ Aubrey Cousins to Walter Harrap, 1 June 1953, MSS 3269/322 ML.

³² George Robertson to HG Albert, 29 November 1927, MSS 314/2 ML.

³³ In fact, the APC believed all advantages in the proposal were "distinctly on the side of A&R because there is a growing feeling amongst Australian authors that first having their book published locally deprives them of the possibility of overseas representation." Stanley Bartlett to Walter Harrap, 22 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

³⁴ Stanley Bartlett to Walter Harrap, 22 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

³⁵ Stanley Bartlett to Walter Harrap, 22 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

³⁶ George Ferguson to Walter Harrap, 26 October 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

³⁷ George Ferguson to Walter Harrap, 26 October 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

³⁸ George Ferguson to Walter Harrap, 26 October 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

Certainly, Walter Harrap believed publishing was “no playground for fools, nor for ideologies based on wishful thinking,”³⁹ and, in seeing this openly expressed “enthusiasm” by Angus and Robertson after hearing Bartlett’s reservations,⁴⁰ Harrap’s remained keen to “work up a close companionship” with the Australian company.⁴¹ All three firms thus emphasised the necessity of continuing the next stage of discussion in person, though another ten months would pass before any further progress could be tabled. By then, in mid-1939, Angus and Robertson director Walter Cousins was “heartily in favour of some form of co-operation”⁴² and even Bartlett had put aside his early hesitations, looking upon the “axis” proposal as something “well worth discussing.”⁴³ Unfortunately, however, a European war was now on the horizon which would have long-term effects on the Australian and British book trade. These would range from the difficulties of paper shortages and quotas to the “wretched business of restricting the importation of Australian books” into the United Kingdom.⁴⁴ The war would change publishing practices in both countries and the term “axis”, first employed by Walter Harrap to describe the proposal, would take on an unsavoury association and drop out of use.

Because the Second World War contributed also to significant gaps in the Australian archival record, gaps which in some documentary holdings run from June 1939 to as late as October 1946, it is difficult to calculate conclusively whether optimism over the “axis” scheme would have ever translated into something substantial and beneficial to all parties or whether it would remain forever stalled at negotiations.⁴⁵ But there is, it seems to me, a clue that indicates the opportunities which the war suddenly made impossible to realise. Where the documentary gap finishes, correspondence continues seemingly uninterrupted between Ferguson, Harrap and Bartlett for another two decades and friendships deepen, especially in their mutual regard for the subject of cricket. Of particular significance, therefore, is the record of collaboration that emerges from 1948 onwards over a series of books about cricket by one Alban George (or “Johnnie”) Moyes⁴⁶ whose publication and

³⁹ Walter Harrap to A. A. Ritchie, 16 October 1946, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁴⁰ George Ferguson to Walter Harrap, 11 July 1939, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁴¹ Walter Harrap to George Ferguson, 23 June 1939, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁴² George Ferguson to Walter Harrap, 11 July 1939, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁴³ Walter Harrap to George Ferguson, 25 July 1939, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁴⁴ George Ferguson to Walter Harrap, 19 October 1948, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁴⁵ In a similar context, talking about the new London branch of Angus and Robertson, George Ferguson would later recall that “[t]he War, of course, interrupted. We had no sooner got the thing set up and working reasonably [in 1938] and I came back, and then in a matter of a few months the War was on.” Soon, Ferguson was called up on duty and “served in various areas, always in artillery” until his demobilisation towards the end of 1945. (Ferguson, interview with Lunney, 35, 40–41.)

⁴⁶ To name a few of the books: A. G. (Alban George / Johnnie) Moyes, *Bradman* (London; Sydney: Harrap, 1948); A. G. Moyes, *A Century of Cricketers* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1950); A. G. Moyes, *A Century of Cricketers* (London: Harrap, 1950); A. G. Moyes, *The Fight for the Ashes 1950–1951: A Critical Account of the English Tour in Australia* (London: Harrap, 1951); A. G. Moyes, *With the West Indies in Australia, 1951–52* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1952); A. G. Moyes, *Australian*

distribution between all three firms reflected the ideas of the original "axis" proposal. Indeed, Ferguson would remark to Walter Harrap that "if it were not for the fact that you and we are cooperating there would be no book at all."⁴⁷ Without question, Ferguson considered Moyes to be that rare breed of writer, a "joint author",⁴⁸ and the publication record of books by Johnnie Moyes which bear the imprint "Angus and Robertson in association with Harrap," alongside publications divided between the companies, supports Ferguson's claim.

In matching the post-war exchange of letters with the 1930s, what conclusions might be tentatively drawn? Stanley Unwin noted during his introduction to a report by the British Book Trade Organisation in 1939 that "it is so much easier to try to grab someone else's business than to create a new connection; to lure away another's author rather than to develop a new idea."⁴⁹ With Unwin's London house listed in the second volume of *A History of the Book in Australia* as co-founders of a cartel "designed to establish [British] publishers as the major power behind the fiction industry,"⁵⁰ it might be reasonable to conclude that Stanley Unwin had some awareness of this practice. However, the history of correspondence between George Ferguson and Walter Harrap briskly indicated here suggests that alternative forms of engagement between British and Australian publishers could occur, that alternative paths to establishing an Australian export market were negotiable, and that these need not necessarily be totally informed by the model of an aspiring colonial company appropriating the "cultural apparatus of the imperial power" (nor vice versa).⁵¹

Nearly fifteen years after Walter Harrap put the challenge to what he characterised as the "policy of splendid isolation"⁵² which conventionally existed between British and Australian publishers, Harrap welcomed George Ferguson in 1953 with "congratulations, brother" on the voting-in of Angus and Robertson as full members to the London-based Publishers Association, which was a significant imperial connection and, I suspect, a rare achievement for an Australian publisher.⁵³ Harrap, perhaps reflecting on his company's long association with Angus and Robertson,

Bowlers: From Spofforth to Lindwall (London; Sydney: Angus and Robertson in association with Harrap, 1953); A. G. Moyes, *Australian Batsmen: From Charles Bannerman to Neil Harvey* (London; Sydney: Angus and Robertson in association with Harrap, 1954); A. G. Moyes, *Australian Cricket: A History* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1959).

⁴⁷ George Ferguson to Walter Harrap, 23 November 1950, MSS 3269/322 ML. It is worth noting that "books based on one test match series are ephemeral." Walter Harrap to George Ferguson, 1 December 1950, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁴⁸ George Ferguson to Walter Harrap, 22 April 1954, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁴⁹ F. D. Sanders, *British Book Trade Organisation: A Report on the Work of the Joint Committee with an Introduction by Stanley Unwin*, London: George Allen and Unwin (1939), 13.

⁵⁰ Nile and Walker, "Paternoster Row Machine," 9.

⁵¹ Luke Trainor, "Australian Writers, British Publishers, 1870–1902: Talking to the Nation?" *Australian Historical Studies* 127 (2006): 140.

⁵² Walter Harrap to Stanley Bartlett, 2 September 1938, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁵³ Walter Harrap to George Ferguson, 30 December 1953, MSS 3269/322 ML.

regarded friendship between British, Australian and even American publishers as being “worth its weight in gold when you run a business” and felt that Ferguson’s visits to London over the years had done “nothing but good.”⁵⁴ Harrap confided to Ferguson that “perhaps it might be a good scheme if a number of other Australian leaders ... took a leaf out of your book and came over here if only to see what sort of villains we really are.”⁵⁵

Just seven years earlier, Harrap had discussed the Australian situation with the Council of the Publishers Association, urging that “nothing will be gained if we sling brickbats at each other. At our end, all that we really have to gain is the continued friendship of the Australian book trade. If, therefore we show a willingness to co-operate, then I hope no-one in Australia will be looking round the corner for some ulterior motive.”⁵⁶ Though such a statement is easily open to a modern cynical interpretation and indeed contrasts starkly with some of the recorded activities of the Publishers Association,⁵⁷ it is nevertheless consistent with Harrap’s later views that, with Angus and Robertson’s admittance to the Publishers Association, London publishers “should know the country and the people” of Australia. Half the trouble Harrap could detect occurred “through people misunderstanding the folk they are dealing with.”⁵⁸

How then does this apparent civic-mindedness and refined sentiment between presumably rival publishers square with the broader history of an Australian industry dominated by large British corporations? Laura Miller defines the market as a thing “governed by the imperative that participants compete with one another for relative advantage.”⁵⁹ On this view, certainly “London publishers and the importance of the Australian market to their profit margins” remains central to any history of the development of an independent Australian book trade.⁶⁰ Yet, the three decades of friendly correspondence and negotiation between the firms of George G. Harrap and Angus and Robertson also offer the possibility of a parallel history which goes beyond the mere exchange or protection of copyrights for economic privileges, one in which not all British publishers “paid homage to the motive of achieving maximum material gain”⁶¹ at the expense of local Australian publishing and writing.

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⁵⁴ Walter Harrap to George Ferguson, 4 October 1954, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁵⁵ Walter Harrap to George Ferguson, 4 October 1954, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁵⁶ Walter Harrap to A. A. Ritchie, 16 October 1946, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁵⁷ See for example Richard Nile, “Cartels, Capitalism and the Australian Booktrade,” *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media and Culture* 4.1 (1990): 71–91.

⁵⁸ Walter Harrap to George Ferguson, 4 October 1954, MSS 3269/322 ML.

⁵⁹ Miller, *Reluctant Capitalists*, 8.

⁶⁰ Nile and Walker, “Paternoster Row Machine,” 9.

⁶¹ Miller, *Reluctant Capitalists*, 9.