

Objects of Desire

A Collection of Short Stories

by

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The Exegesis and Portfolio

Submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts by Research in Creative
Writing

Discipline of English

School of Humanities

The University of Adelaide

December 2010

Table of Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| Abstract..... | 1 |
| Statement of Originality..... | 3 |
| Exegesis..... | 4 |
| Objects of Desire..... | 33 |

The stories in this collection, 'Objects of Desire,' fit somewhere between memoir and fiction and they have been mostly inspired by recollections of the Upper Murray area in which I was brought up in the 1950s and 60s.

I think they provide a different view of Australian childhood from a period in part of the country which has not otherwise been examined or celebrated except in a superficial and sentimental way. Its ethos, while representative of the conservatism of the time in Australia, had particular qualities, often parochial and insular, but also reflective of peculiar freedoms that the region enjoyed. The at times stifling nature of small country towns has often to be weighed against their more relaxed physical qualities. The area also had a polyglot quality due to European immigration, while the seasonal influx of itinerant harvest workers introduced a volatile dynamic.

My research has involved contact with sources who have supplemented my memories with often surprising recollections of their own. At times the stories I have written seem to have anticipated incidents which other people's anecdotes later confirmed. At times too, I should add, visits I paid to the area in the last two years have challenged prejudices I held.

I have dwelt at length in the exegesis on Harry Taylor, a survivor of the New Australia settlement, who passionately pursued his liberal views in the newspaper which he invigorated when he settled in Renmark. I have been more than intrigued by the endurance of his beliefs in the face of what I imagine to have been the indifference, even then, of the community which he so nourished.

Access to archives of *The Murray Pioneer* subsequent to Taylor's passing, and from the time I lived there, attribute a quaint feel to the period. It is perhaps the fate of

all popular journalism to be ridiculed by time, but, lacking Harry Taylor's crusading spirit, and in a society where so much was thought best hidden or left unspoken, his descendants, like the region's local historians, were almost strenuously faithful to their audience's expectations.

The sense of loss and futility or defeat which attends many of these stories is less sentimental. It comes from personal experience but also from what may be read between the lines of the area's local chroniclers. In a sense I think the stories are representative of the spirit of the place and time, and of the gulf which lay, as in New Australia, between innocent ambition and its fulfilment. It was impossible to grow up there and not be marked forever.

Statement of Originality

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made.

I give consent to this copy of my portfolio being made available in the University Library.

Reg Taylor

9th December 2010