

## Thea Astley's Modernism of the 'Deep North', or On (Un)Kindness

**Abstract:** Although she is often perceived as a writer of the local, the rural, or the regional, Thea Astley herself notes writing by American modernists as her primary literary influence, and emphasises the ethical value of transnational reading and writing. Similarly, she draws parallels between writing of the American 'Deep South' and her own writing of the 'Deep North', with a particular focus on the struggles of the racial or cultural outsider. In this essay I pursue Astley's peculiar blend of these literary genres – modernism, the gothic, and the transnational – as a means of understanding her conceptualisation of kindness and community. Although Astley rejects the necessity of literary community, her writing emphasises instead the value of interpersonal engagement and social responsibility. With a focus on her first novel, *Girl with a Monkey* (1958), this essay considers Astley's representation of the distinction between community and kindness, particularly for young Catholic women in Queensland in the early twentieth century. In its simultaneous critique of the expectations placed on women and its upholding of the values of kindness and charity, Astley considers our responsibilities in our relations with the Other and with community.

## Thea Astley's Modernism of the 'Deep North', or On (Un)Kindness

I think being kind is probably what matters more than anything in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Although she is often perceived as a writer of the Australian local, the rural, or the regional, Thea Astley herself notes writing by American modernists as her primary literary influence, and emphasises the ethical value of transnational reading and writing, terming it 'a form of liberal education ... we can't afford to miss out on'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, she draws parallels between writing of the American 'Deep South' and her own writing of the 'Deep North', with a particular focus on the struggles of the racial or cultural outsider. However, Susan Sheridan and Paul Genoni have also shown that while Astley 'embraced the "regional" identity of Queensland, her people and their dilemmas transcend that particularity'.<sup>3</sup> In this essay I want to pursue Astley's peculiar blend of these literary genres – modernism, the gothic, and the transnational – as a means of understanding her conceptualisation of 'community', or its failures. That is, although Astley rejects the necessity of literary community, her writing draws on her Catholic upbringing and education to emphasise instead the value of interpersonal engagement and social responsibility, of empathy for others, and consideration of the collective above the individual. However, this requirement of kindness is also shown to come into conflict with Astley's nascent feminist ideologies, precisely because it insists upon this kind of selflessness and a servitude towards men. With a focus on her first novel, *Girl with a Monkey* (1958), this essay considers Astley's representation of the distinction between community and kindness, particularly for young Catholic women in Queensland in the early twentieth century. In its simultaneous critique of the expectations placed on women and its upholding of the values

of kindness and charity, Astley considers our responsibilities in our relations with the Other and with community.

In a 1988 interview with Ray Willbanks, Astley concludes with a raw assertion, taken as the epigraph to this essay: 'I think being kind is probably what matters more than anything in the world'. This is a particularly apt observation for one to consider in the analysis of *Girl with a Monkey*, precisely because this novel is so powerfully about the terrible callousness, the unthinking consequences, and the snobbish lack of empathy that is a product of *not* being kind. Indeed, it is my central assertion here that *Girl with a Monkey*'s sense of the kind and the unkind requires reframing in the context of modernism as well as Astley's individual sense of her Catholicism. Karen Lamb has noted that for Astley, 'modernism was removed from a felt sense of being human, of people's inconsistencies; it was too removed from the local .... Just as Catholicism set itself above the human and the vulnerable, here was another "-ism" that seemed to be doing the same thing'.<sup>4</sup> Yet kindness is a critical affect in modernist literature, not just in Australia, but at its origins in Europe and America. The isolation and alienation that is so defining in modernism is in fact lamenting or even criticising the absence of kindness: of thinking and feeling what it is to be someone else, but also of recognising the (Levinasian) Other as someone in kind, someone to be perceived with empathy and in relation to one's own Self, rather than according to the separations of, for example, class, creed, race or gender. It is thus through its demonstration of the consequences of a lack of kindness that *Girl with a Monkey* suggests the importance of community and connection. Importantly, however, these values placed upon community and empathy are shown to be at odds with the *expectation* of charity imposed on young women of the period, especially those raised within the strictures of the Catholic church, as was true for Astley. That is, while Astley's novel underscores the importance of these connections with and respect for the Other demonstrated through the value of kindness, it also critiques the way in which women were expected to display such behaviours

to their own detriment, and even their own safety. *Girl with a Monkey* thus proposes the critical value of kindness even as it laments its limitations for women in the modernist period. This is Elsie's monkey: the conflict between her values and the consequences these have for her personal safety and happiness.

Astley was raised and educated within the Catholic faith, her parents were deeply devout (to the extent that they refused to recognise her marriage to a divorced man), and even as she moved away from some of the more formal aspects of Catholicism in her later life, she remained shaped by and an advocate of many of the teachings which had dominated her childhood and adolescence.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most profound of these concepts which she carried with her and espoused in many of her works throughout her career is 'kindness'. Within the Catholic faith, kindness or charity (*caritas*) is considered to be the great virtue, making one vulnerable in their engagements with the Other. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the human expression of God's love.<sup>6</sup> Thus in her novel *A Kindness Cup* (1974), which takes its title from the words to Robert Burns's poem, 'Auld Lang Syne' (1788), Astley underscores the need to connect with community in order to move towards healing the wounds of the past. It is only through kindness and love that resolution might occur, while evil and trauma occur in the 'absence of love'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Elaine Lindsay argues, this 'exercise of selfless love' is consistent throughout Astley's work and life as a demonstration of the way in which we might 'make God present in the world'.<sup>8</sup> In 1976 Astley asserted that 'as much as one dislikes the old chauvinist [St Paul] – his idea of charity is a good concept', and in 1990 she expressed her 'hope' that she had throughout the course of her life 'become more tolerant – kindly – being kind, to me, is a form of spiritual exercise'.<sup>9</sup> Despite these assertions of the value of kindness, it is also important that we do not overlook the expectations of women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that they, in the model of God, 'exercise ... selfless love', exhibiting perpetual care and kindness for others, even at their own expense. Kindness, then, can be seen

in its worst form as the unremitting expression of a training, or we might even say the inculcation, of women, especially within the doctrines of particular faiths. It is perhaps for this reason, then, that for so many feminist critics of the late twentieth century, Astley was seen to be ‘working from a negative view of society: there is [in such critiques] no recognition of the positive aspects of her prophetic role or of the loving kindness she advocates’.<sup>10</sup> Sheridan is subtler in her critique, noting that

... the early works are remarkable for the scorn with which she presents the conventionalities of gender. This scorn springs not from a specifically feminist indignation at the limitations those conventions impose on women, but rather from a perception of their capacity to falsify relations between women and men, both their expectations of one another and their self-perceptions.<sup>11</sup>

However, in this essay I show that an examination of kindness within the context of the generic hybridity of *Girl with a Monkey* – that is, its adoption of characteristics of both the Gothic and of Modernism – allows us to recognise a more nuanced conflict at play in Astley’s early narratives. Written as she broke away from her parents’ influence and as she was caring for her young family, *Girl with a Monkey* can be seen to figure a wrestling with the way in which those discourses of her past might apply in modern life, a representation of her lingering apprehension ‘about the Church’s moral governance of the lives of so many (and her own). Her approach to Catholicism became permanently split between nostalgia for the rituals of the sung Mass and virulent antagonism to religious moral policing’.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, *Girl with a Monkey* is a strikingly Catholic novel, particularly in its treatment of the Eucharist as cleansing, a site for meeting God.<sup>13</sup> However, it is also a radical critique of this training of women which makes them vulnerable and, simultaneously, a critique of Elsie’s unnecessary unkindness. It is, as

Astley herself described the novel in a letter to her friend, Martin Haley, ‘a study in emotions’.<sup>14</sup> If, this essay asks, kindness is ‘what matters more than anything in the world’, how are we to understand its absence in Astley’s first novel?

Astley’s use of the Gothic sheds some light on her interest in kindness, or its lack. Just as modernism is a genre which laments the absence of kindness in the modern world, the Gothic also critiques the consequences of unkindness through its focus on monstrous behaviours. Kerryn Goldsworthy has recognised Astley’s use of the Gothic through her ‘creation of an atmosphere of unease which progresses through suspense to menace’ in *Girl with a Monkey*, noting that it is in this way that

... the reader’s sympathy and growing concern for the central character is expertly manipulated right to the end. Just as we feel that disaster has been averted, there comes a piece of dialogue more violent in its effect on the reader than any punch-up; it elicits a massive shift in reader sympathy and makes the meaning of the novel’s title finally, entirely clear.<sup>15</sup>

The Gothic, then, is critical to Astley’s presentation of kindness, for it is only in this sense of unease, our uncertainty about with whom to align, that we come to understand her simultaneous support for and critique of both Elsie and Harry.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps it is even more particularly in the Southern Gothic (and here, the Northern Gothic – the Gothic at its geographical extremes) that such unkindness is evident. Typical tropes of this subgenre include madness, alcoholism, psychological stress and distress, the small town, all of which are magnified by the intensity of the hot weather. As Teresa Goddu has noted, the American Gothic is a ‘regional form. Identified with doom and gloom, the American South serves as the nation’s “other,” becoming the repository for everything from

which the nation wishes to dissociate itself. The benighted South is able to support the irrational impulses of the gothic that the nation as a whole, born of Enlightenment ideals, cannot'.<sup>17</sup> Astley's much-cited views of Queensland support such a perspective; in 'Being a Queenslander', she observes that '[o]ur manners [are] indifferent, laconic, in temperatures that can run at over ninety for weeks on end', and that

Growing up in Brisbane in the thirties and forties meant alignment with a shabby town, a sprawling timber settlement on a lazy river; meant heat and dust and the benefits of the sub-tropics – brighter trees, tougher sunlight, slower-moving people and a delicious tendency to procrastinate. I think it was the weather. These virtues were praised to the n<sup>th</sup> power north of Rocky.<sup>18</sup>

This regional intensity provides a home for the unusual characters who band together to exclude the outsider or Other. It is this character in whom Astley is most interested, noting in a 1986 interview that her 'main concerns in writing really have always been with the outsider', and that 'I'm very interested in people outside the mainstream of what? – urban living – and that is what my books are mainly concerned with, people who've missed out'.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, even earlier, in 1972, she claims that: 'My main interest ... is the misfit. Not the spectacular outsider, but the seedy little non-grandiose non-fitter who lives in his own mini-hell .... [My] novels have always been ... a plea for charity'; that is, a plea for kindness and love for the Other.<sup>20</sup> Of Carson McCullers, she also specifically compliments this characteristic, noting 'I like her use of screwball, zany characters'.<sup>21</sup> Returning to the significance of modernism, this 'misfit', this person who has 'missed out', has echoes of T.S. Eliot's Prufrock. Thus, Astley's 'plea for charity', for extending a hand to the 'misfit', to the 'oppressed', her interest in kindness and unkindness, in community and its failures, in isolated individuals and their

victimisation is best understood as her ‘Gothic modernism’, her modernism of the ‘Deep North’. This reading thus not only helps us to understand Astley’s particular contribution to Australian literature, as well as to those two genres as they appear in Australia, but also to the strange merging of these two genres more generally.

Gothic modernism or modernist Gothic may appear to be a contradiction in terms, suggesting a strange combination of genres characterised by innovation and experiment on the one hand, and tropes and conventions on the other. But as Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace have argued, in their seminal work *Gothic Modernisms*, British literary modernism can actually be seen to be ‘indebted to an innovative, anti-realist tradition inaugurated in the popular fiction of the *fin de siècle* – Gothic Horror, sensation fiction, science fiction’, particularly through its interest in degeneration, morality and immorality (or amorality), and the unstable individual and collective self.<sup>22</sup> John Paul Riquelme has also shown that modernism and the Gothic in fact share some critical formal, affective, and ethical modes. Modernism, he says,

... reacts against the culturally dominant belief in progress, which conceives history as linear and always improving, and the belief in reason as dominant in the human makeup. It questions the assumption that a person’s identity is stable and singular. In fiction, the narratives associated with it tend to be fragmented and nonlinear, often without determinate closure. The language is often highly stylised and tends to draw attention to itself, whereas the language of realism tends to be self-effacing. These and other features provided a basis for a crossover between modernism and Gothic, which also tends to be highly stylised, to swerve from realism, to be temporally strange, and to present characters who are not stable psychological presences.<sup>23</sup>



All of these aspects are true of Astley's *Girl with a Monkey*, and indeed of its central characters, Elsie and Harry, whose irrational, unstable, and selfish behaviours structure the novel. For example, early in the narrative, Elsie receives a birthday telegram from her parents. However, the missive only invokes in Elsie an attitude of 'detachment' and 'bitter[ness]' as she questions her own identity, the idea of 'Home', and her parents' expression of love and affection made only indirectly through this idealisation of the family space.<sup>24</sup> It is a moment which not only calls into question the traditional structures on which identity depends, and thereby establishing the shaky foundation of Elsie's own identity, but also associates this with a Gothic uncanniness, a sense of home and family – and thus the Self – made strange and unfamiliar. The contrast between her parents' adherence to 'conventional duty' and Elsie's memory of their determination to expel her from that 'Home' also suggests a performance of good behaviour or kindness which precipitates that expectation for Elsie.<sup>25</sup> That is, as Riquelme adds,

Despite national differences, the convergence of modernism and Gothic on both sides of the Atlantic involves challenges to hierarchical thinking and behaviour, specifically to attitudes relying on clear boundaries that support exclusionary practices. Hierarchies of value and power separate one type of human being from others (based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, and other considerations) in ways that distinguish people and groups as better and worse, or, in an extreme version, good and evil. This kind of contrast informs representations in Gothic narratives that both call up the hierarchy and question it regarding what constitutes the fully human and valuable.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, it is precisely through its Gothic modernism that *Girl with a Monkey* both establishes and questions the value of kindness.

Riquelme's work on Gothic modernism has been critical to the field, but it relies on a repeated insistence on its development in Europe and America. Part of my claim about Astley's work therefore is to situate Gothic modernism as also peculiar to Australia and its own particular blend of social issues to do with class, race, and gender. This can be particularly understood through this novel's striking literary affinity with Tennessee Williams's play, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947; adapted to film in 1951). This is a narrative itself associated with both modernism and the Gothic, suggesting too that the Southern Gothic is itself a modernist genre. *Girl with a Monkey* calls up *Streetcar*'s fear of the working-class lover, his anger and frustration at his social position, his dangerous alcoholism and violence, and our sympathy for the downtrodden women in his life – all ways in which we might see Harry to be constructed as Other to Elsie. But this is important precisely because Astley does this in order to subvert our expectations and disrupt our sympathies or feelings of kindness, diverting us back and forth between the 'girl' and her 'monkey'. If, as Riquelme has it, 'modernist Gothic frequently challenges prejudicial thinking by means of contradictions, ambivalences, and the coexistence of opposites that blur boundaries and make the maintaining of hierarchies difficult', then *Girl with a Monkey* does this in a context of prejudice against class, region, and gender which demonstrates modernism's affiliation with socialist politics in Australia at mid-century.<sup>27</sup> To be sure, Astley's critique of Elsie's inculcation in a social doctrine which demands her kindness, thereby enabling Elsie to be *unkind*, is a radical move. But also radical is her exposure of Elsie's snobbish attitudes towards working-class Harry, himself a symbolisation of the Australian Legend in its modern form, and thus calling up what Lindsay calls the 'localised ... theology' of 'Jesus as underdog' and 'God as battler' with which the Legend is associated, and thereby *not* Other to traditional constructions of Australian identity at all.<sup>28</sup> That is, Susan Lever has noted that Australia's commitment to modernity is 'often expressed in novels that promoted national pride in egalitarian ideals while deploring the failure

to provide equality of economic opportunity'.<sup>29</sup> Following Patrick White's lead in his commitment to the novel as 'a place to test ideas against complex spiritual, psychological and emotional experience, not only an avenue for national storytelling', she adds, Australian novelists since the 1950s

... have been grappling with the irresolvable elements in Australian life – the good life that allows social mobility to some working people, but manages to deny it to those on the fringe ...; the political equality that acknowledges the rights of women, but leaves some of them poor and excluded from full participation in work and wealth; the cheerful materialism that gives many Australians only superficial contentment.<sup>30</sup>

What is critical about *Girl with a Monkey* are these 'irresolvable elements': the way in which it exploits our expectations about the aspects of 'political equality' in various forms with which we expect to sympathise, thus becoming strangely and simultaneously subversive and conservative in its kindness towards the figures of the Australian Legend and of the modern woman.

For much of the narrative, it is Elsie who appears to be the outsider, the 'misfit'. We first meet her as she hurriedly attempts to pack her belongings and leave Townsville, desperately hoping to avoid the dangerous man with whom she has just ended a relationship. Yet her snobbishness is subtly flagged in her plans to return to Brisbane, which she figures as the site of safety, of civilisation and modernity, whereas Townsville is hot, dusty, a place where she must pile her suitcases against the inside of the hotel door, where memories of violent threats lie around every corner. Even as Elsie attempts to protect herself from contamination by Harry, to be in a relationship with whom would make her 'so full of him, everything else would be obscured', her oozing, painful, carbuncular leg suggests that she is already infected

by this diseased, rotting place. She is thus clearly out of place here, and Elsie herself would have us believe that this is because she is an independent New Woman, an intellectual, unappreciated at work and in her personal life.<sup>31</sup> But even as she lays her plans, determined to leave unscathed, her leg betrays her as already marked, already tainted – ironically, by the kind gesture towards an unwell student on which she dwells as evidence of her good behaviour.

However, there are two key moments which suggest Elsie's immorality, her unkindness, and the sense in which she is not the outsider, but rather one of those who creates the boundaries, who locks others out, as she and her friend Laura do to the desperate Harry, coolly blowing cigarette rings into his confused face. The first of these is when the two of them sit on the beach; Elsie paints while Harry attempts to engage her in conversation, but she continually thwarts his attempts to speak to her about her own interests and refuses to engage when he tells her an intensely personal and painful memory. More than this, however, it is in this example that we find Elsie's intellectual and social snobbishness: when he tells her that he has read a book she recommended, 'Elsie always felt slightly surprised to hear he could actually read' (48). She pays little attention to his conversation, since she 'was far too absorbed in her anaemic artistic efforts either to hear or really to care what he said' (49) – she is more interested, in other words, in her idealisation of her own intellectualised self than in engagement with the Other.<sup>32</sup> Thus, '[s]he rebuffed him gently, preferring fantastic, impossible dreaming to having his shortcomings as spiritual lover or future hotelier brought home to her by being forced to relinquish what she was doing, and giving him her whole attention instead of this simulacrum'.<sup>33</sup> Seeking to impress upon him this superiority, she recites to him a few lines of her own poetry, 'for nothing filled her with such venial pleasure as the exposure of her own emotions', then becomes angry when he mistakes it for the work of Shakespeare, before finally correcting his grammar when he compliments her words:

‘Where do all the thoughts come from? Out of that funny little head?’ he said, twisting one plait. ‘I’ve never wrote a thing. I couldn’t.’

‘Written, Harry,’ said Elsie, purist to the last.<sup>34</sup>

Sheridan has made clear the ways in which this demonstrates Astley’s critique of the shallow aspects of modernity, of ‘girls’ and women’s capacity to harm each other, and men’ in Astley’s early work, noting that ‘[h]er self-dramatising and plays for sympathy are gently but relentlessly revealed by the narrative to constitute the “monkey” of addiction that drives her. She is even punished, as Job was by God, with an extremely painful boil’ and is thus ‘not allowed to escape the moral consequences of her actions’.<sup>35</sup> For Sheridan, such an example of ‘Astley’s satirical stance involved her ... in a modernist rejection of this feminine modernity as innately trivial, distracting and undermining serious aesthetic, intellectual and spiritual values’.<sup>36</sup> I wholeheartedly agree with Sheridan’s assessment. But to this I want to add a recognition of the way in which Astley also uses genre as a further critique of Elsie’s attitude. Elsie’s snobbishness calls up constructions of the *male* Modernist artist as an ‘individual talent’, gathering about her the wisdom and intellectual power of her wide reading to belittle and humble her listener/reader, rather than to engage in a process of spiritual and moral education. Indeed, more than this, Elsie’s recitation of the poetry, the words of others, might itself be seen more simply as prosopopeia, the speech of the dead. She mixes Donne, Browning, Tagore, but with none of the irony or wit of the modernist poet’s intertextuality. Indeed, it is a Gothic performance, not a modernist one, as Elsie herself might like to think. She has no ear for Harry’s dialect, for the energy and originality of his own speech, only for her prejudiced ideas about what literature should be. It is a solipsistic exchange, as are all Elsie’s interactions, in which only she and her own idea of herself matter.

The second example is when, through the eruption of memory and the merging of the past and present, the narrative reveals Elsie's infidelity to both Harry and Jon:

She had explained the dishonesty of her own behaviour quite satisfactorily to herself, yet when it became a question of substantiating her reasons to one of the persons concerned, it was as if she were trying to write on water. So often she had been the one wanting, and at the same time the one unwanted, that she now achieved a keen, unexplored pleasure in this newfound indifference, this resolution not to become emotionally involved.<sup>37</sup>

It is another example, of course, of Elsie's selfishness, her unkindness, a strange retaliation against those who have been unkind to her. But it is also, importantly, a critique of her 'indifference', her lack of 'emotional involvement' – in other words, her detachment from others. *Girl with a Monkey's* problem, at its heart, then, lies in this conflict for Elsie, the conflict between being a 'good Catholic girl' and being a modern woman. In this atmosphere of external and internal threat – that is, the threat of Harry's violence and the threat of her own unbridled desire – Elsie's only protection is her unkindness. The novel cannot propose a solution, except to permit Elsie's physical, if not moral, escape. It is up to the reader to recognise the unresolvability of this dilemma, and to approve Elsie's rejection of kindness as a value system, even as it does ironically undermine her admiration of the goals of Modernist art.

JM Couper has argued that 'the towns' in which Elsie resides 'are not communities, to her or to anyone. People exist in them, smoking one cigarette after another. They have no tradition beyond petrol, a grilled steak, an empty glass, and who is doing it, no matter with whom'.<sup>38</sup> But I think we cannot ignore Astley's comments elsewhere, that it is in community that one finds oneself. In that 1986 interview, she says 'I think these last pockets where you're

able to identify yourself with a small community are becoming more and more attractive', and that 'in a small township where people have got to know you and will help if you have an accident or become sick. I feel they're the only centres left'.<sup>39</sup> In reference to Faulkner's work, she has also noted, 'I love small towns because I think that's where living is and matters'.<sup>40</sup> It is then Elsie's 'betrayal' of this logic of the small town, her betrayal of community and its expectation of kindness, as well as her betrayal of the project of Modernist improvement, which comes in for the harshest critique in Astley's first novel. Elsie successfully shrugs off the expectations of Catholic kindness, but in the process she also loses her capacity for Modernist reflection and guidance. It is through Astley's own contribution to the community of world literatures across both time and space, rather than her restriction to the limited expectations of Australian literature at the time, which suggests her own participation in and celebration of such a dialogue. It is a bold move for a young writer, but one which is critical for us to recognise in the development of the key themes of Australian modernism and its Gothic turn.

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<sup>1</sup> Thea Astley cited in Ray Willbanks, 'Thea Astley in America', *Antipodes* 2 (1988), 107-8 (108).

<sup>2</sup> 'I'm a great admirer of American writing. I've always felt that the standard of competence in writing since the war lies in America and not in England at all. Whenever I'm writing a novel I read a lot. I tend to read poetry more than novels, but I would look to American writers for guidance in how they handle the rhythms of their prose, how they handled dialogue, how they handled things generally, rather than to the English. I have, I would say, for the last twenty years, sought my impulse in techniques only from the standard set by American writers' (Astley cited in Norma Jean Richey, 'An Interview with Thea Astley', *South Central Review* 3 (1986), 90-102 [90]).

<sup>3</sup> Susan Sheridan and Paul Genoni, 'Introduction', in Sheridan and Genoni (eds.), *Thea Astley's Fictional Worlds* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), pp. xi-xvii (p. xiv).

<sup>4</sup> Karen Lamb, *Thea Astley: Inventing Her Own Weather* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2015), p. 65.

<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of Astley's Catholicism, see Elaine Lindsay, *Rewriting God: Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Women's Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Lindsay, *Rewriting God*, p. 100.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100; see also Sue Sheridan, *The Fiction of Thea Astley* (New York: Cambria, 2016): 'Astley continues to attend to the human need for redemption from cruelty, despair, and small-mindedness, through the expression of love or kindness or creativity' (p. 19).

<sup>8</sup> Lindsay, *Rewriting God*, p. 105.

<sup>9</sup> Lamb, *Inventing Her Own Weather*, p. 40, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> Lindsay, *Rewriting God*, p. 144; see also Susan Lever, 'Changing Times, Changing Stories', in Susan Sheridan and Paul Genoni (eds.), *Thea Astley's Fictional Worlds* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), pp. 126-34: 'Astley's early work requires diligent reading to uncover any feminist insights' (pp. 129-30).

<sup>11</sup> Sheridan, *Fiction of Thea Astley*, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Lamb, *Inventing Her Own Weather*, p. 39. Lamb also observes that '[a] woman could not live a life like a man, with sexual freedom and freedom from negative social consequences. Her early autobiographical novels ... dramatise her views about this' (p. 83) and similarly argues that Astley wrote *Girl with a Monkey* in order 'to give expression to the battle with herself and with the beliefs she had grown up with' (p. 109).

<sup>13</sup> Lindsay, *Rewriting God*, pp. 100-1.

<sup>14</sup> Sheridan, *Fiction of Thea Astley*, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Kerryn Goldsworthy, 'Thea Astley's Writing: Magnetic North', *Meanjin* 42 (1983), 478-85 (479).

<sup>16</sup> 'There's something almost Gothic about Astley's imagination', Goldsworthy adds, and as I earlier noted, like Astley herself, she compares her work to 'short stories by women writers of the American South' ('Thea Astley's Writing', 480). Astley also readily identifies William Faulkner, Truman Capote and Carson McCullers as literary influences (Richey, 'An Interview with Thea Astley', 91).

<sup>17</sup> Teresa Goddu cited in Susan Castillo Street and Charles L. Crow, 'Introduction: Down at the Crossroads', in Street and Crow (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 1-6 (p. 2).

<sup>18</sup> Thea Astley, 'Being a Queenslander: A Form of Literary and Geographical Conceit', *Southerly* 36 (1976), 252-64 (253).

<sup>19</sup> Astley cited in Richey, 'An Interview with Thea Astley', 92.

<sup>20</sup> Astley cited in Goldsworthy, 'Thea Astley's Writing', 482.

<sup>21</sup> Astley cited in Willbanks, 'Thea Astley in America', 107.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace, 'Introduction: Gothic Modernisms: History, Culture and Aesthetics', in Smith and Wallace (eds.), *Gothic Modernisms* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) pp. 1-10 (p. 2, pp. 3-4).

<sup>23</sup> John Paul Riquelme, 'Modernist American Gothic', in Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 57-70 (pp. 57-58).

<sup>24</sup> Thea Astley, *Girl with a Monkey* (1958; Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2012), p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>26</sup> Riquelme, 'Modernist American Gothic', p. 59.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59. Sue Sheridan adds: 'Astley is one of the rare women writers to have been accorded a place among the literary modernists of the 1960s in Australia. This was in part because of her experimentation with modernist narrative structures and her densely metaphoric diction. It was also because of her subject matter: her focus on sexual and social relations in the small towns and suburbs of post-war Australia, her interest in the alienated and the outcast, and the sardonic eye she cast on the snobberies of class and consumerism. In addition, the fact that she had no apparent interest in nationalist themes aligned her with the literary innovators of the period' ('Thea Astley: A Woman Among the Satirists of Post-War Modernity', *Australian Feminist Studies* 18 [2003], 261-71 [261]).



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<sup>28</sup> Lindsay, *Rewriting God*, p. 33.

<sup>29</sup> Susan Lever, 'The Challenge of the Novel: Australian Fiction since 1950', in Peter Pierce (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 498-516 (p. 501).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 498, p. 502.

<sup>31</sup> Astley, *Girl*, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> 'The third-person narrative stays close to Elsie's perceptions of the world, while at the same time it confirms her self-criticism, showing up her "shallowness of soul" (Sheridan, *Fiction of Thea Astley*, p. 20).

<sup>33</sup> Astley, *Girl*, p. 50.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58, p. 59, pp. 61-62.

<sup>35</sup> Sheridan, 'A Woman Among the Satirists', 263; 'she is not allowed to escape the moral consequences of her actions' (Sheridan, *Fiction of Thea Astley*, p. 20).

<sup>36</sup> Sheridan, 'A Woman Among the Satirists', 270).

<sup>37</sup> Astley, *Girl*, p. 103.

<sup>38</sup> JM Couper, 'The Novels of Thea Astley.' *Meanjin* 26 (1967), 332-37 (332).

<sup>39</sup> Astley cited in Richey, 'An Interview with Thea Astley', 92, 93.

<sup>40</sup> Astley cited in Willbanks, 'Thea Astley in America', 107.