

“LET ME TELL MY STORY”
CHOOSING ISABEL AND HOW A METAPHOR
MADE HER RIGHT

Joanne Carroll

DCA

2009

Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Production Note:

Signature removed prior to publication.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Debra Adelaide for her assistance in my settling in to Doctoral studies and for her wise comments on the novel. I thank Dr Anthony Macris for his rigour and for challenging me to produce a better exegesis than I otherwise would have. Their supervision has been helpful and spot-on.

I particularly need to acknowledge the detailed research and passionate scholarship of Dr Raymond Evans, whose work on the Red Flag Riots illuminates my novel. I'd also like to thank him personally for walking me around Brisbane on a very hot day as we relived the events. I further acknowledge Dr. Evans' book *The Red Flag Riots* for the imagery Lev used in Chapter Nine about persuasion and the crowd as a canvas upon which the artist works. The words are in fact those of Konstantin Klushin in his undated writing *Parliament and Soviet* (Evans 1988, p. 86 and see note 17, p. 218).

I gratefully acknowledge Stephen Graham's *Undiscovered Russia*, travel writings of the early 20th century from which I drew for Lev's recountings in Chapter Nine of a night spent in the Russia forest. Graham's book is published in full on <http://vologda-oblast.ru/main.aspV?=548>. First publication in London: John Lane; New York: John Lane Company, 1912.

I thank Dr Shirley Walker for her help in referencing a Judith Wright poem.

For history of Tenterfield and environs, I thank Ken Halliday, the Tenterfield Historical Society, the Tenterfield Museum (in the School of Arts) and the Tenterfield Library for their invaluable assistance.

Picture Queensland was a wonderful resource, throwing light on facts. Queensland Library provided much otherwise forgotten material. Queensland Art Gallery permitted use of images of two paintings from their collection.

Thanks to Roseanne Fitzgibbon for her hospitality and for showing me the area where I set "Aberdeen" and the Fergusons' house, and to John and Christine McCaffery for their hospitality and help in researching the Tablelands area.

Thanks to Amanda Carroll for her hospitality and long-distance driving skills and all in all for being an invaluable support to her sister during the writing of this novel and exegesis.

Thanks to Michael Coey and to Mary Morrissy for reading my thesis, to Sr Mary Shiel for proof-reading certain chapters, and to Dr Lorraine Shannon for her help with printing and binding, and for their support in general.

Thanks to Shirley and Bruce Sinclair, mother and step-father, for their interest and help whenever I needed it, offering assistance with research, reading drafts of the novel and endless encouragement.

Table of Contents

Abstract	vii
PART ONE – The Novel	
<i>The Russian and Mrs Greene</i>	2
Author’s Note	3
Prologue	6
<i>War</i>	10
<i>Peace</i>	70
Epilogue	232
PART TWO – The Exegesis	236
“ <i>Let Me Tell My Story</i> ”	237
<i>Choosing Isabel and How a Metaphor Made Her Right</i>	
Introduction	238
Chapter One – “Let Me Tell My Story”	241
<i>Theories of character; concentration on formal properties; the Intentions of the novel; the Red Flag riots of 1919.</i>	
Chapter Two – The Evolutionary Process	
I – The Original Cast	256
<i>Opening scene on plain; early drafts; diagram of characters.</i>	
II – Contamination	261
<i>Fey woman; Marina; Disdain a vital element?</i>	
III – Isabel’s Inner Life	270
<i>Conflict between inner and outer; empathy.</i>	
IV – Enter the Older Woman	273
<i>Prologues; early garden imagery.</i>	
V – The Novel Begins	276
<i>Isabel is chosen; Indications.</i>	
Chapter Three – Dissecting Isabel	279
<i>Disappointment; Inevitability; Ironic gap; limitations of First Person; Valerie Martin; Desire; Walter Benjamin and deciding.</i>	

Chapter Four – Metaphor of the Garden	
I – The Image	296
<i>Theories of metaphor/symbol; Robert Weimann and Shakespearian imagery; W. S. Harvey; Penelope Fitzgerald and ‘Gate of Angels’; language as tool; subliminal message.</i>	
II – The Garden of Eden	304
<i>Primeval image of mankind; Biblical trajectory; Utopia.</i>	
III – Rambling Around the Garden	310
<i>Isabel’s garden imagery; her past; garden not a neutral place; W.B. Yeats; Seamus Heaney.</i>	
IV – Origins of Image	321
<i>Under the jacaranda; Petru Dumitriu; Monday morning.</i>	
V – Transformation	333
<i>Unity; sensation.</i>	
VI – The Snake	341
<i>Riots; Expulsion.</i>	
VII – But Too Much Has Changed	346
<i>The letter.</i>	
VIII – The End of the Garden Story	349
<i>Bleeding participants; underground.</i>	
 Bibliography	 353

Illustrations

Diagram	259
<i>Under the jacaranda</i>	321
<i>Monday morning</i>	332

Abstract

The thesis consists of a novel, *The Russian and Mrs Greene*, and an exegesis concentrating on the “character” problem. How would the story be delivered? After much indecision, the novel was written as if told by the character “Isabel Greene”. Isabel travels from her Tablelands home up to Brisbane where she stays with her wealthy cousin. Her marriage is dry. Through her connection with a working class Irish-Australian family she meets the Russian Bolshevik, Lev. It is 1918, war-time and the young men are fighting overseas while at home political ferment stirs. Isabel falls in love and in spite of her doubts and evasions she begins an affair with Lev. In Russia, the longed-for revolution has arrived and the Bolsheviks stranded in Australia want to go home. As war ends, the soldiers return bringing with them the Spanish ‘Flu. Many of them also bring a loathing of the Reds. Isabel is caught up in the Red Flag Riots of 1919 as ex-soldiers take to the streets, attempting to burn out the Russians. All around her, lives are in turmoil. The Irish family falls apart, both her husband and lover are hurt by Isabel’s withdrawals and society is ravaged by sickness and political struggle. And Lev is arrested.

The bare bones do not hint at the struggle to find “Isabel”. The original intention, precious to the author, was to write about an Irish-Australian family before, during and after the First World War. The Eden-like youth of family members would be shattered by war. Their labour politics would be spotlighted. Instead, the novel did not yield until the lead character was found in Isabel Greene, a middle class lady caught up in her erotic situation.

Fresh historical research had a negative impact on the original intentions. In the exegesis, tracing early drafts shows that other characters might have taken the lead and how assimilation fed into the ultimate figure of Isabel. An analysis of limitations in her first-person narration with its ironic gap and emphasis on Desire seem to make her “wrong”. But is she wrong? The relationship between the author and Isabel is significant in the choice of character, and Isabel “relates” to other characters on the level of theme. In her loss of faith she also represents Us. Most importantly, through metaphor Isabel has lived the meaning of the most precious of the original intentions, the myth of the Garden.