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What does it feel like to be an Australian in 1959? First you try to decide what sort of Australian you are. Are you native born or New Australian? Are you content to live within your national social and cultural boundaries, or do you watch self-consciously every Australian creation, as you would watch your child reciting in public, proud and fearful, glowing inwardly at every small success and yet more painfully conscious of the faults than anyone else? Do you take Australia for granted, accepting the charm of the myths, of mateship, independence and rugged individualism, along with the bad coffee, bad teeth and bad manners; the uninhibited flair of some individuals along with the crass unsubtlety of the uneducated public taste?

There are many kinds of Australian, even inside each of us Australians, and it is of course difficult if not impossible to generalise on their feelings. Yet being an Australian clearly is a different feeling from being an American or an Englishman or even a neighbouring New Zealander. It is, above all, a feeling of advanced national adolescence, with all the self-assurance and yet the corrosive self-doubts of advanced adolescence. If the present writer can find no better words to describe it, perhaps this is because it is not a feeling that can be described in so many matter-of-fact words. It is a mood for artists to capture, in print and drama, on film and stage, in all the media of popular entertainment. And a depressing aspect of Australia today is that artists rarely make attempts to capture it.

The pace of the central stream of physical development has been too fast to allow any delicate seeds of expression to take root and multiply. While the general prosperity rises, the opportunities for artists in the commercialised media are declining. Australia has accepted certain levels of artistic proficiency and sophistication in filmed, printed, recorded form, yet has not the population to support local production at similar standards. Most of the material of popular culture is imported at comparatively low cost and Australian artists find such difficulty in competing with it that they often give up trying. The more talented continue to leave the country to find fortune abroad and the less talented find other work for bread and butter. Composers write background music for radio serials. Painters decorate pots. Writers fill corners of magazines between the syndicated novelettes. Yet there are of course isolated examples of creativity. Two of the most popular books of the last two years, while having no pretensions or claim to literature, indicate that the Australian still does enjoy, better than any importation, seeing himself in the mirror of the lively arts. These books were attempts to capture the present Australian mood in broad satire. "They're a Weird Mob" by Nino Culotta purported to see the Australian working man through the eyes of a New Australian -- an Italian migrant. It pictured Australians with the traditional traits of easy-going toughness and robust cynicism thinly veiling hearts of gold. It represented the self-assured side of Australian adolescence, and it was phenomenally successful. The second book, "So You Want to be an Australian", was commissioned by publishers to

catch the same wave of shallow introspection. It was a trifle tossed off by the prolific writer Cyril Pearl and it pricked masochistically into the more obvious sore points of the more ~~sensitive~~ Australians: the lazy acceptance of discomforts and mediocrity, the vandalism, worship of sport, coyness in the relations between the sexes, prim censorship, and so on. It was a wicked book tearing wildly at Australia's features, yet strangely, between the lines of satire and sarcasm, a basic pride of country was easily read. This little book represented the adolescent doubts of Australia at their most distressing, and it was moderately successful.

In another recent best-seller, 'On The Beach', Neville Shute, the English novelist who chose Melbourne as a home in 1950 to escape English taxation, recorded the insecure pride of Australia in another way. The heroine, an Australian girl, is described showing her American hero the lovely gentle landscape of Berwick, near Melbourne. "It is beautiful?" she asks him. "I mean, is it as beautiful as places in America or England? ... One sort of thinks that everything in England or America must be much better. That this is all right for Australia, but that's not saying much." This is a convincing piece of dialogue. The Australian girl, who has never travelled abroad, is not content even to enjoy her native landscape without questions. Is she admiring a second-best simply because she has never seen the best? Will someone who knows better laugh at her? And finally when the visitor from abroad assures her it is as good as anything else in the world, she is no doubt privately irritated that he did not say it was better than anything else. When a Hollywood company arrived

to film 'On the Beach' in Melbourne, the same question was asked again in countless different ways by reporters and interviewers of the visiting celebrities.

No country can be so anxious to hear well of itself.

Distinguished Americans like Professor Brogan have interpreted the Australians' questions as a desire to be told they are like Americans. John Ely Burchard has noted more perceptively that the key recurrent question is "... is it of world standard?" The Australian questioners have in fact little interest in what the visitor thinks; they are seeking for their own benefit a datum on the world cultural scale. When Australia establishes this datum and can measure her own works from this point, feeling secure in her own judgements and able to drop the "it's all right for Australia" attitude, then she will have reached a major plateau in her cultural development.

There are, at last, signs that she has at least one foot on such a plateau. For the first time Australian creative work is finding acceptance abroad. The success of the artist Sidney Nolan in Europe and the USA plainly injected confidence into his colleagues and contemporaries at home. Each Australian novel that succeeds abroad encourages the underpaid serious writers of Australia. So the standards rise. The fate of the play "Summer of the