

CAMILLA: C. H. WEDGWOOD 1901–1955, A LIFE

D. Wetherell & C. Carr-Gregg (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1990; 242 pp.)

'She was the first truly emancipated person of her sex I had encountered. . . . Forthright, unconventional and completely fearless.' So recalled a former student of Camilla Wedgwood, the Englishwoman who became lecturer in anthropology at the University of Sydney in 1928 and was, from 1935 to her resignation in 1944, principal of its Women's College. During her tenure as principal she used the authority arising from her personality and her office to lobby the Australian Government on behalf of refugees from Nazism, and she was also a staunch advocate of the Zionist cause.

In this book we encounter the academic and public Camilla, the woman of spirit and achievement, from the egalitarian schooling she enjoyed at Bedales to her studies at Cambridge and the London School of Economics, from her early career as an anthropologist to her appointment in Sydney and her field work in Melanesia. Then, her wartime work as a lieutenant-colonel in the Australian Women's Army Service in Papua New Guinea, her subsequent lecturership at Duntroon, and her appointment at the Australian School of Pacific Administration in Canberra, in the restless post-demobilisation years preceding her death at the age of fifty-four. We learn little about the private Camilla, a spinster whose life was presumably, since we are not told otherwise, stoically and subliminally sexless. But in any case, there is a specific aspect of her life which concerns us here: her championship of the refugees and of Jewish Palestine.

Camilla was a member of the celebrated English pottery family, whose commitment to humanitarian causes spanned several generations. 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother?' was the motto rimming a cameo produced by Wedgwood in the 1780s to protest the slave trade. 'God is on the side of the big battalions, but Wedgwoods stand by those who are down', explained Camilla's father, Colonel Josiah Wedgwood (1872–1943). Colonel Wedgwood, a member of the British House of Commons from 1906 until his elevation to the peerage in the year before his death, sat first in the Liberal interest but in 1919 defected — as the book fails to grasp — to the Labour Party. He was a convinced Zionist who hoped that Palestine might become a British Dominion. He also spoke forcibly and frequently in and outside the House on the plight of German Jewry, crusaded on behalf of refugees and 'enemy aliens', vehemently opposed the White Paper of 1939 which severely restricted Jewish immigration into Palestine, and deplored appeasement.

His daughter shared his views. She was a pacifist, a member of the Society of Friends, but the unfolding saga of Nazi aggression and bestiality sorely tested her Quaker ideals. She railed against appeasement, left the Quakers and became an Anglican. Her close association with Bishops C. V. Pilcher (with whom she shared a love of Icelandic) and E. H. Burgmann doubtless influenced her choice. Pilcher and Burgmann were also at the forefront of the refugee cause in Australia and their paths and hers crossed often.

An entire chapter of this book is devoted to Camilla's work on behalf of refugees and Zionism, written by Dr. Charlotte Carr-Gregg. Camilla's fieldwork in Melanesia had yielded several fine articles but not the seminal volume her colleagues expected. Dr. Carr-Gregg believes that her 'subsequent refugee work . . . extinguished her hopes of recapturing her research momentum', so wholeheartedly did she apply herself to the cause. Her most significant contribution was made

through her involvement in the German Emergency Fellowship Committee, a Quaker-inspired organisation of which she was Sydney chairman, and whose work on behalf of 'non-Aryan Christians', those refugees who had Jewishness thrust upon them by the Nuremberg Laws, has been described by Dr. Carr-Gregg in an essay in *Jews in the Sixth Continent* (edited by W. D. Rubinstein, published in 1987 by Allen & Unwin). The organisation subsequently became the European Emergency Committee and Camilla generously donated much of her own money to it.

She personally lobbied John McEwen, Minister for the Interior, on behalf of refugees seeking asylum in Australia, and was emotionally involved in the cause to the extent that her nerves and passion were discernible to friends, so concerned was she to sell the justness of her argument. She frequently became overwhelmed and despondent but, true to herself, she soldiered on in the conviction that while she felt 'like a mouse nibbling at a mountain . . . every human being saved is one to the good'. There is a photograph of her serenely mending clothes for refugees outside the laundry of the Friends' School, Hobart, in 1940. She eloquently protested the *Struma* tragedy, which made her feel, she told a public meeting, like both 'prisoner at the Bar and Counsel for the prosecution', and she condemned British policy in Palestine as 'stupid . . . cruel . . . unjust'. She was appalled by the plight of the *Dunera* internees, and, armed with her information, her father asked awkward questions in the House. She had supported her father's pro-Zionist stance since the 1920s, holding that Jews required 'protection from brute usage and opportunities to build up their national existence'. In 1939 she became Treasurer of the Australia-Palestine Committee, formed to lobby against the White Paper, and she did much to promote the Zionist cause among Australians at large.

For all this, I do not think that Camilla Wedgwood can be *truly* termed 'philo-Semitic'. She wrote privately that while 'not anti-Semitic' she preferred 'the non-Aryan Christian refugee to the Jewish, and am convinced that the artisans and professional men . . . are an infinitely preferable type as a whole to the businessmen — or at least a more adaptable type'. And I have a sneaking suspicion that, were she alive today, her championship of the perceived underdog would put her on the side of the Palestinians.

Dr. Hilary L. Rubinstein

REBELS AND PRECURSORS: THE REVOLUTIONARY YEARS OF AUSTRALIAN ART

Richard Haese (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 2nd ed., 1988)

The republication of Richard Haese's trail-blazing study in a small-format, relatively inexpensive paperback edition can only be welcomed. Although much of the illustrative material of the original large-format edition is lost, the ready availability of the new edition more than compensates. Richard Haese's work not only traces the development of modernist art in Australia in the 1930s and 1940s, it deals with far broader themes relating to the development of cultural history in Australia during these years. Haese traces the transition of Australian modernist art from its emergence in the late 1930s and early 1940s as a relatively cohesive movement of artists whose work challenges established pastoral and