

THE NEW LIFE

MARY GAGE



“THE NEW LIFE”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MARY GAGE was born in England and has a Masters Degree in Arts from Cambridge University. She worked for a time as a journalist, first on the staff of ‘The Times’ and then freelance. She has had short stories published in ‘Argosy’ and broadcast on the BBC.

In 1971 she travelled overland to Australia in a van with her architect husband and their two children. They spent a year on the way and settled in Darlington near Perth, Western Australia.

“The New Life” was her first play, and was performed in Perth and Sydney in 1974. Two other plays followed in 1975 and 1976.

ABOUT THE PLAY

The unprepared for emotional stress caused to those who seek better life in new surroundings is the subject of this study.

In “The New Life”, Betty, the timid, inexperienced daughter of a large urban English family, responds to her new surroundings in an Australian suburb with terror and homesickness, finding her consolation in the illusory friendliness of a radio disc jockey.

Separated from Australians by a common Language and strange traditions, the British are often the loneliest and most maladjusted group of migrants to Australia.

Mary Gage, herself a happily assimilated British migrant, writes with gentle understanding of a woman’s loneliness.

APPLICATION FOR PERFORMANCE

M. & L. Casting Consultants
Liverpool Lane
DARLINGHURST NSW 2010

SETTING

The action of the play takes place in William and Betty’s house in Perth. The year is 1974.

The family room of an ordinary suburban house. There is another illusory area behind this, containing a radio announcer — disc jockey, broadcasting booth.

CHARACTERS

Johnnie	Stratford Ward
Betty	Audrey Gilchrist
William	Keith Walker
Sylvia	Brenda Davies

A number of voices, both male and female, are heard over the radio.

PRODUCTION TEAM

Direction and Set Design by Lou Rochelli
Lighting and Sound by Gillian Hawke
Special Sound Effects by Stratford Ward
Backstage — Trina Ash — Kay Doyle.

AN INSIGHT INTO THE PROBLEMS OF THE BRITISH MIGRANT DEPICTED IN THE PLAY.

THE HOMESICK HOUSEWIFE

“For the adult British migrant in Australia”, writes Professor Alan Richardson, himself a sometime English immigrant, “it is obvious that no amount of reshaping, even under the most favourable conditions, will turn him or her into an Australian. Though he (or she) may become like an Australian in many ways, the new attitudes, beliefs and behaviour that he acquires will always be set within the context of a basically English, Scottish, Irish or Welsh national character. On the day that he arrives in Australia the typical immigrant shares few of the common stock of memories, social traditions and sensory experiences that bind together most of his Australilan born contemporaries. This fact alone must always set him apart to some extent, if not for others, then at least for himself.

Among the British immigrants involved in a survey, significantly more of the married women than of their husbands reported experiences of homesickness. The occurrence of homesickness is difficult to predict because it is dependent upon the interaction of so many personal and situational factors. However, the absence of a future time perspective, from whatever cause, is probably of special importance. It is likely to precipitate a longing for some familiar, and therefore more predictable, aspect of one’s homeland. When an immigrant becomes acutely aware of the foreign element in his new environment, his conviction that the future will be under his control, and filled with the kind of events that he plans, is temporarily undermined. A host of pleasant memories may flood his consciousness and a general tendency to idealise the old community may occur as part of this nostalgic reaction.

The British immigrant may begin to daydream of pleasant walks down country lanes, of the warm cosiness of his local pub, of the long twilights and the lush green of the countryside — and thoughts of returning to his homeland may increase in frequency. If he begins to compare Australia unfavourably with Britain and to express his feelings in public he may also find himself faced with the problem of what I have called reactive non-acceptance.

In analysing the information obtained from the wives in (another) study, it became clear that their commitment to Australia was often less strongly based than that of their husbands. The wife was less often the primary instigator of migration to Australia, and less often had plans to build or buy a house after arrival, so it is not surprising to find that she more often reported feelings of homesickness than her husband and was at a significantly lower level of assimilation.

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