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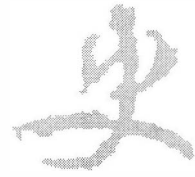
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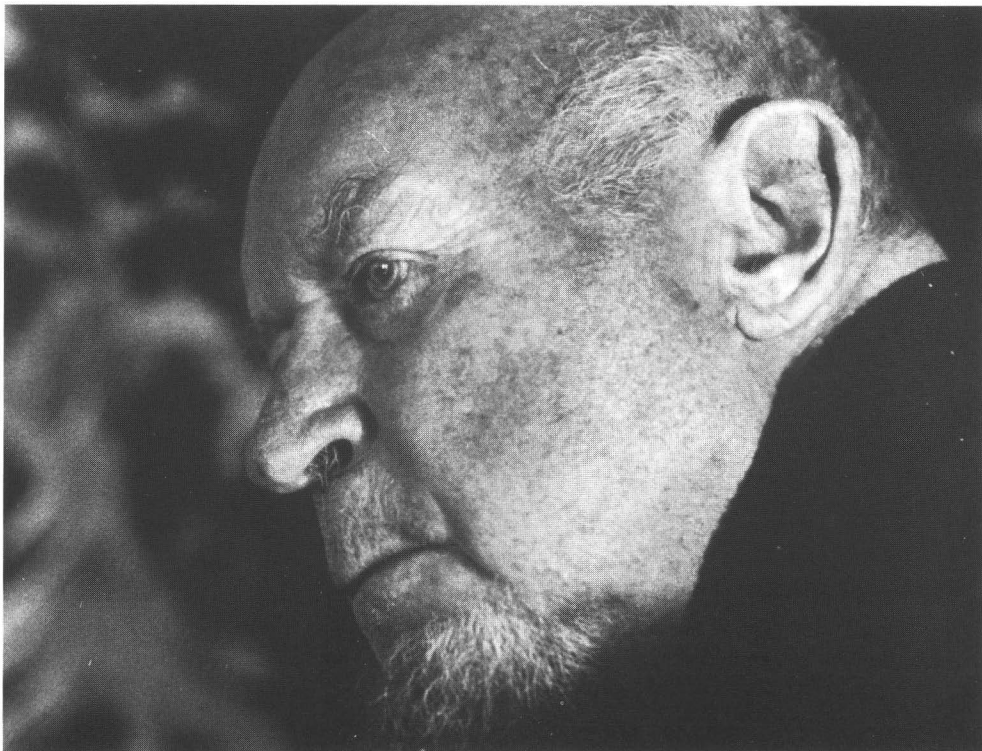
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Charles Patrick FitzGerald
1902–1992



Photograph courtesy Rei Zunde

Foundation Professor of Far Eastern History
Research School of Pacific Studies
Australian National University

Two autograph pages from C. P. Fitzgerald's diary of
February 1928, reproduced with the permission
of his daughters, Mirabel and Anthea

down a inch. Into Canterbury
after lunch. No news.

February 25
Saturday
Temp 50. Sunny & very warm,
the best day so far, quite
extraordinary for February.
The stream down 2
inch. It is very little
over the banks now
only just around the
middle bridge and
greenhouse, and by
the weir bridge.
In the morning we went into
the woods for primroses.
Christopher arrived in
time for dinner.
News. The Kuomintang
have at last held a
plenary session of the
Central Committee, at

hanking, which definitely
sets the stamp of legality
on that government
as opposed to the cliques
in Hankow or Canton.
This is a great political
triumph for Chiang, who
position is thus consolidated.
Teng is reported to be
attacking 大明.
The Ilford bye election
resulted in the Tory
losing 1000, out of 1400
of the previous majority,
almost all of which went
to the Liberal

February 26
Sunday (one day)
Temp 50. Sunny & warm
but a breeze, yet a very
fine day. The stream down
again. In the morning

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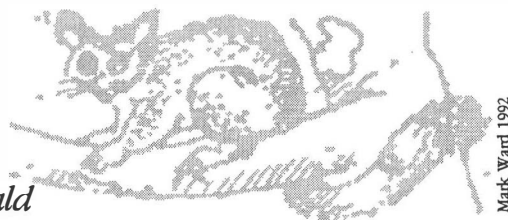
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Cover calligraphy Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover photograph Rubbing of a bas-relief, Hsin-ching, Szechuan Province
(C. P. FitzGerald, *Barbarian Beds* [London: Cresset Press, 1965])

C. P. FITZGERALD : A MEMOIR

 *Mirabel FitzGerald Ward and Anthea FitzGerald*



Mark Ward 1992

Patrick FitzGerald's public achievements are well documented in the many obituaries following his death in 1992, and his experiences in China are recorded in his last book, *Why China*.¹

The difficulty of writing a tribute to one so close is that we know so much about him, and yet we consult sources—letters, biographical profiles, memoirs, diaries—as though it may be possible to distil an essence.

Charles Patrick FitzGerald was born in London on 5 March 1902, and brought up in England and Europe. As a schoolboy in 1917 he read an article in *The Times* written by G. E. Morrison which stimulated his curiosity about China. His search for historical background to the events described led him to the discovery that there existed no general history of China in the English language.

He did not go to university, having passed the Oxford entrance examination, because of financial difficulties, but instead enrolled in 1922 in the School of Oriental and African Studies in London to learn Chinese. In 1923 he embarked for China on the first of four extended visits (1923–27, 1930–38, 1946–50), with two later visits in 1956 and 1978.

His first book, *Son of Heaven*, published in 1933, established his reputation.² In 1935 this was followed by *China: A Short Cultural History*, which is his best known book.³

He returned to England on the eve of the Second World War. When war broke out he was placed in the Intelligence Section of the Foreign Office at Bletchley Park, Hertfordshire, where his sinological skills were put to use. There he met Pamela Sara Knollys, who was also working in Intelligence as a linguist. They married in 1941. They had three daughters, Nicola, born in London in 1943, Mirabel, also born in London, in 1945, and Anthea, born in Peking in 1948.

¹ *Why China? : recollections of China, 1923–1950* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1985).

² *Son of Heaven: a biography of Li Shih-min, founder of the Tang dynasty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933).

³ *China: a short cultural history* (London: Cresset Press, 1935).

Figure 1

Patrick FitzGerald in China, 1920s



Patrick returned to China with the family in 1946 as British Council representative. It was in 1949 that Sir Douglas Copland, the first Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University, invited him to make a lecture tour of Australia. This tour led to the invitation to found a Department of Oriental Studies at the ANU in 1951. He became Professor of the Department of Far Eastern History, a position he held until 1967. In 1968 the ANU conferred on him his first degree, an Honorary Doctorate of Letters, and in the same year he was appointed Visiting Fellow in the Department of International Relations for two years. This was followed by a visiting fellowship at Melbourne University from 1971 to 1972. He was also a founding member of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Figure 2

Ink and wash drawing of Patrick in China by Sara FitzGerald, 1940s (original 17.5 x 28 cm)



Although there had been a period of separation and a divorce, the next decade was spent with Sara in Italy and England. In Piedmont Sara had bought a farmhouse, and in this beautiful part of the country they spent many happy years where they collaborated on his last book, *Why China?*. It was there, at Odalengo Piccolo, that Sara died in May 1980. After her death Patrick lived at different times with his three daughters and their families: first with Nicola in Italy until her death in November 1982, and subsequently with Mirabel and Anthea in Sydney, where he died shortly after his ninetieth birthday on 13 April 1992.

Figure 3

Patrick and Sara, Odalengo Piccolo, 1970s



Central to Patrick and Sara's life in Australia was Guerella, land they bought on the New South Wales South Coast. They created there something which was a significant part of our growing up, for our friends and now for our children. At Guerella Patrick's absorption in nature was fulfilled as he observed the tides, the weather, goannas and possums.

Recording the variables of nature alongside political events was a life-long habit, clearly expressed in this example from his diary of Saturday, 25 February 1928:

Temp. 50, sunny and warm, the best day so far, quite extraordinary for February.

The stream down a half inch. It is very little over the banks now, only just around the middle bridge and greenhouse, and by the weir bridge.

In the morning we went into the woods for primroses. Christopher arrived in time for dinner.

News. The Kuomintang have at last held a plenary session of the Central Committee, at Nanking, which definitely sets the stamp of legality on that government as opposed to the cliques in Hankow or Canton. This is a great political triumph for Chiang, who[se] position is thus consolidated. Feng is reported to be attacking 大明.

The Ilford bye election resulted in the Tory losing 1000, out of 1400 of the previous majority, almost all of which went to the Liberal.

Patrick's parents were fairly unusual. His father, Hans Sauer, had a colourful life, and despite the impression that he was a rather remote, even awesome figure to his five children, he clearly also had a strong sense of humour and was a great story-teller. Hans was born in the Orange Free State probably around 1850 and left Africa in 1876 to study medicine in Edinburgh. After taking his degrees in 1881 he returned to the Cape. Hans' adventurous life in that period is recorded in his own book *Ex Africa*, first published in 1937, but now out of print.⁴ Patrick obviously inherited much from Hans, and the similarity in their lucid style of writing is striking. Although Hans had been in many ways a difficult father and, as he grew older, an increasingly eccentric man, Patrick relished retelling his colourful stories and admired his eccentricity.

Patrick's mother, Josephine Cecilia FitzPatrick, was Irish, her mother a FitzGerald. Her father, who had in Ireland been Parnell's Secretary, later moved to Africa as a Judge in the Colonial Service. Josephine, or 'Do' as we knew her, was an intelligent woman and a very positive influence on Patrick's life. As she died at the grand age of ninety-six in 1956, she must have been forty-two when Patrick was born (the second youngest of five children) in 1902. Patrick inherited her physical strength and longevity, and other qualities such as immense patience and a strong sense of family.

Figure 4

At Guerella—lino-cut by grandson Roban Ward, aged twelve, from the invitation to Patrick's ninetieth birthday party, March 1992



⁴ Hans Sauer, *Ex Africa* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1937).

⁵ *Why China?*, p.6.

In 1927 Patrick and his brother Nicholas changed their surname to FitzGerald, bestowed on them by a childless maternal uncle. As Patrick recounts in *Why China?*, their lack of attachment to the name Sauer is explained as follows: his great-grandfather, on arriving in South Africa about the end of the eighteenth century, “would not tell anyone his real name, but said he would be known as Sauer from the ‘river which flows through my homeland’.”⁵

As his children, we remember him best for his humour, patience, and his ability to tell wonderful stories. He was extraordinarily secure in himself, and this quality, mixed with his sense of humour, generally meant people felt very comfortable in his company; it also left him quite unruffled by those who were critical of him, particularly when he was publicly at odds with the Australian government over his views on China and Vietnam in the 1950s and 1960s.

Intellectually he was fearless, and remained unscathed when he was denigrated by the Menzies government or followed by ASIO. He dismissed it all with jokes and appeared oblivious to harrassments and frustrations. Domestically, this could be infuriating for others who were subject to normal anxieties, and we must give credit to Sara, his wife, for also bearing his share of these. We benefited from his clear thinking and peace of mind, as it left him free to observe the minutiae of daily life, the weather, wildlife and political events, all with equal fascination. His observations of natural history and knowledge of human history, combined with wicked humour, were

woven into fables, poems and morality tales of his own making to entertain us on long journeys. It was not until we were much older that we had to separate some of this fantasy, which we had absorbed as gospel truth, from reality.

One example is the legend surrounding the ferry crossing we used to make over the Clyde River on our journeys from Canberra to the South Coast. Looking over the rails of the ferry, we could clearly see the large translucent jelly-fish with huge white crosses on their backs. These crosses, we were told, were in effect the footprints of the Irish saint, St Eam Packet (pronounced by the Celts ‘St Eampakt’) who had called upon the jelly-fish to form stepping stones for him to walk across the river in order to convert the people on the other side—the Nelligentry and the Araloonies. There, sure enough, was a pub on the opposite bank with the same saint’s name painted on its roof—the ‘St’, then the chimney, and then ‘Eampacket’. There, also, was the township of Nelligen and the Araluen Valley, named after the peoples the saint had converted. We loved even more

Figure 5

Patrick and three daughters at Guerella, 1966
l. to r.: Mirabel, Anthea and Nicola



his irreverent morality tales, the 'ill-nature' stories which he wrote for us where the anti-hero—the man-eating tiger or the meanest wasp—always won.

This playful fun and contempt for authority—"They'll all be dead in a hundred years"—firmly established him on our side as children. His enjoyment of wit, pranks, and adventures conveyed a more impressive morality on our otherwise conventional upbringing as dutiful daughters, and provided an easy-going tolerance that allowed us a large space to grow up in. His view was humourously ironic but not cynical; it was more a compassionate view of the foibles of human weakness and pretension and never a critical disengagement. He was the antithesis of patriarchal authority: we remember, on getting into trouble at boarding school, his 'joke' letter threatening dire treatment. He was vastly amused that we took it seriously and followed with a poem which ended:

From this what lessons may be learned
That punishments are justly earned?
Now, dear delinquent daughters
Study the art of Don't Get Caughters.

His irreverence stemmed from his own suffering at his English public school under "the smug Christianity of my preparatory headmaster, who, combining this piety in chapel with a terrifying cruelty outside it, caused me, at about the age of eleven, to reject his religion totally, and seek, by reading, to learn more about those to which it was opposed; a search which has never led me to belief in any."⁶ He surmised in his eighties that this "was an underlying cause of my attraction to China and the Chinese people. This was the civilisation which had no jealous God, which had, in fact, no formal and universally accepted religion, but rather three options, which were tolerantly defined as 'three ways to one goal'. A goal is an aspiration, not an attainment, and may never be reached. This seemed to me an objective approach to the problems of life, worth examining: it still does."⁷

He brought to Australian public affairs a depth of understanding about China which was for many years not well received here, particularly by government officials. In 1968 he was described as a "prophet without honour"⁸ in relation to his iconoclastic views on Western attitudes to China. He believed that Australia was not a part of Asia but as a Pacific nation was inextricably involved with that continent. These views, now so topical and much debated, were not widely considered important or relevant twenty-five years ago.

Professor Wang Gungwu wrote in his tribute, entitled "In Memoriam":

Two books appeared in 1952 which launched Patrick FitzGerald on a second career as a scholar-commentator on contemporary China: *Revolution in China*⁹ and *Flood Tide in China*.¹⁰ By that time he had joined the Australian National University. No one before him had brought to Australia the depth of feeling and understanding about China and the Chinese that he had. In fact, his was the fresh

⁶ Ibid., p.2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Bruce Juddery, *Canberra Times*, 21 Feb. 1968.

⁹ *Revolution in China* (New York: Praeger, 1952).

¹⁰ *Flood tide in China* (London: Cresset Press, 1958).

¹¹ *The birth of communist China* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books, 1968).

¹² Wang Gungwu, Australian Academy of the Humanities, *Proceedings 1992. Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 29 (Jan.1993), pp.161, 162.

voice that the country vitally needed to hear if it were to lose its deep-rooted fears of the Chinese that had contributed to the tragic White Australia policy. What he had to say about the Chinese revolution was not always what most Australians wanted to hear. Only his colleagues, some journalists and a few diplomats appreciated that he possessed that rare commodity, an authentic and authoritative view. Fortunately, *Revolution in China* (later revised and published by Pelican as *The Birth of Communist China*¹¹) earned him international acclaim, which ensured him, eventually, a more attentive audience throughout Australia ...

... he continued to write about China until the very last years of his life. His love affair with the country was an absorbing one, passionate, sometimes distant and critical, but it led to distinguished writing, characterised by sharp observation and an endearing wisdom.¹²

Figure 6

Patrick by the bookcases made in Hong Kong to house his copy of the twenty-four dynastic histories, in his office in the old Department of Far Eastern History, ANU, 1950s



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