

overland

FEATURES

STORIES

POETRY

\$4



This is the first of two centenary issues.

*David Malouf, Patrick White, Manning Clark,
Judith Wright, Barry **100** Jones, A.D. Hope, Geoffrey
Blainey, Frank Dalby Davison, Rosemary
Dobson, Fred Williams, Alan Gould, Lloyd
Robson, Peter Ryan, Serge Liberman,*

stories

- THE BRASS JARDINIÈRE *David Malouf* 2
THE SNIPER *Serge Liberman* 25
AN OVERCOAT FOREVER *James McQueen* 44

features

- TRAMPING THE BATTLEFIELDS *Manning Clark* 6
COMMENT *Jeffrey Grey* 9
REMEMBRANCE OF PALMERS PAST *Marjorie Tipping* 10
FRED WILLIAMS *Michael Davie* 19
SWAG *Stephen Murray-Smith* 30
SCENES FROM A PETIT-BOURGEOIS CHILDHOOD *Barry Jones* 33
JUDAH WATEN *Geoffrey Blainey* 47
NEW DIRECTIONS IN AUSTRALIAN FILM *Graeme Turner* 51
AMONG THE SUNDRIES *Frank Dalby Davison* 57
DESIGN ARTS IN A DISTANT MIRROR *Francis Oeser* 59
BRISBANE IN WARTIME *Judith Wright* 64
GRIT TO THE MILL *Paul Carter* 69
RMB 341 *John Sindy* 76
BOOKS *Sean Regan* 88, *Peter Ryan* 91, *Philip Neilsen* 93, *Graham Rowlands* 94,
Paul Sharrad 96, *Cliff Hanna* 98, *John Sindy* 99, *Gwyneth Dow* 100, *Lloyd Robson* 102

poetry

- by *Patrick White* 36, *Rosemary Dobson* 36, *Elizabeth Riddell* 37, *John Millett* 37,
Terry Harrington 38, *Hilary Cohen* 38, *Max Harris* 39, *Barbara Giles* 39, *Jill Hellyer* 40,
J.S. Harry 40, *Alan Gould* 41, *Chris Wallace-Crabbe* 42, *Robert Harris* 42,
Conal Fitzpatrick 43, *Charles Rimington* 43, *Ruth Cowen* 50, 68, *A. D. Hope* 62,
Dorothy Hewett 74, 75, *Robert D. Fitzgerald* 80, *Frank Kellaway* 80, *Andrew Sant* 81,
Don Maynard 81, *Eric Beach* 82, *Robyn Rowland* 83, *John Croyston* 83,
Anthony Mannix 84, *Shelton Lea* 85, *Barrett Reid* 86.

graphics

Layout and cover design by Vane Lindesay. Cover handwriting by Editor. Cover drawing by Fred Williams. Drawings by Rick Amor and Fred Williams.

Printing: Currency Productions, Fitzroy

Overland is a quarterly literary magazine.

The subscription rate is sixteen dollars a year (four issues); for students and pensioners the subscription is eight dollars. Life subscriptions are available for \$100 each. Bankcard subscriptions and renewals are accepted (quote number). Manuscripts are welcomed but self-addressed envelope required.

Overland receives assistance from the Literature Board of the Australia Council and from the Victorian Ministry for the Arts. We pay minimum rates of forty dollars for a story or feature and fifteen dollars for a poem.

Address all correspondence to:
Editor, *Overland*, PO Box 249, Mount Eliza, Victoria 3930.

Editor: Stephen Murray-Smith.

Assistant Editor: Barrett Reid.

Associate Editors: Ken Gott, Nancy Keesing, Vane Lindesay, Stuart Macintyre, John McLaren, Leonie Sandercock.

Contributing Editors: Dorothy Hewett (Sydney),
Jim Gale (Adelaide), Donald Grant (Perth),
Gwen Harwood (Hobart), Martin Duwell (Brisbane),
Laurence Collinson (London).

ISSN 0030-7416.

Temper democratic, bias Australian

overland

September, 1985

100

DAVID MALOUF

The Brass Jardinière

An extract from a forthcoming novel.

At the end of the Hall, across a wide crossways passage, lies what we call the Piano Room after the big iron-framed instrument that is its major presence. A solid upright of German make, with bronze candleholders and a fretwork swing for the music, it is topped by two splendid jardinières. They are identical but only the one of the left has a name. This is the Brass Jardinière, and it is the focus of such passionate attention on my part that I think of it as shining brighter than the other (as if my thoughts had power just in themselves to burnish by contract), though it is Cassie's duty to see that they get equal attention from her elbow each Monday morning, and equal amounts of Brasso on a chamois cloth.

The Piano Room is my favorite room in the house. It is where we are most often to be found in the long afternoons – we children, my mother, Cassie, and the occasional visitor – since it is shaded by the leaves of an enormous mango and is always cool. It is where we gather each evening to listen to the wireless and hear the news, and where, quietly playing while my mother and Cassie exchange bits and pieces of talk, almost not listening and too young as yet to be sent out of the room, I pick up other news as well, the secrets and half-secrets of the world of women. Soon after this it will be closed to me for ever; and even now sometimes, with a glance in my direction, my mother or Maisie or one of the others will slip into code. But little minds are quick. I am skilled at the art of over-hearing. Besides, I have learned in this room to listen to music. You let it fill your mind; but what you follow, under variations, is the tune.

My mother plays a little; poorly, but enough to provide an accompaniment when there is a sing-song on Sunday nights. That is, when five or six friends, in those innocent days before the war, link arms and harmonize from an illuminated sheet. The picture I have of them is clear in outline but fuzzy with sentiment – not all of it mine. That is why I have used the word 'innocent' of days that were neither more nor less so than any others. I mean it to express feeling rather than fact. For what they are recreating, these people, or so I now see, is some earlier moment when they were all younger. The quality of nostalgia in the image is in them rather than in my memory of them. The image exists in several dimensions of time. These youngish people, now dead, are my parents; they belong, even as they evoke their youth, to another

generation, and they seem old to me (though in fact they are younger than I am now) because they *are* my parents, and because the clothes they are wearing, Fair Isle sweaters and pleated slacks, georgette blouses, strapped shoes, are ones that will be out of date when I grow up. The songs they are singing are out of date already: "Love's Old Sweet Song."

(Our father also plays, but only in octaves and by ear. He plays for us children: soldiers' songs from the Great War.)

I have my first lessons on this piano, practising for half an hour twice a day. But the instrument is too grand and imposing, has locked up in it too much power, for my stiff-fingered stumblings or my parents' bland simplicities. Only when my mother's sister, Aunt Frances comes, does it reveal itself. The result is almost frightening.

Aunt Frances is a "real pianist". Twenty years older than my mother, she learned to play as one of the accomplishments of a middle-class young lady in the nineteenth century. It is a century to which she still belongs.

As a girl, it seems, she was a beauty. My grandfather, a well-to-do fruit merchant, was excessively proud of her. He took her to first nights of all the shows and light operas, "The Quaker Girl", "Les Cloches de Cornville", next day bought her the sheet music, and treated her generally "like a princess in a fairy tale". (This phrase I hear over and over when my mother retells the story. She is evoking a time she never knew.) But the princess fell from grace. She ran off with a cousin, breaking several laws, and became in consequence the first of my mother's people to come to Australia; in the beginning to Lightning Ridge, then to a tent at Mount Morgan. Things went badly in both places, and when her husband, who was too spoiled to find regular work, took to mending clocks and watches, she had to supplement their income by giving lessons in piano, fiddle and mandolin. All this, of course, was years back. When I first knew her she was already sixty, a tiny person with a beehive of silver hair, not at all the sort of woman, you might have thought, to break even one law – till you heard her play. Very gentle but easily offended, she had notions of austere gentility that awed my father (though he was very fond of her) and must have made my mother feel at times that she had failed her parents and all of us by not keeping up. She did

keep up, of course, but was it by English standards enough?

My mother was the baby of her family by many years. When she came to Australia she was thirteen, just the age perhaps when it is most difficult to make a change. She clung to what she had left or lost and was more English than any of her brothers, who had all been grown men when they migrated and who prided themselves now on being local boys. English for my mother was right. She reproduced in our childhoods what she remembered (minus a few housemaids) of her own life in Edwardian London. We ate the same food, heard the same little tags and sayings ("Hark at the boy!" my mother would say; or scornfully, of one of my father's no-hoper friends: "He's not got tuppence to jingle on a tombstone"), and were given the same old-fashioned remedies against winter ills. Forbidden to use local slang, or to speak or act 'Austrian', we grew up as in a foreign land, where everything local, everything outside the house that was closest and most ordinary, had about it the glow of the exotic. The effect on me was just the opposite of what my mother must have hoped. "Gimme," I would snarl when my sister and I were out of earshot – playing Australian and tough; or "I'm goin' t' th' dunny"; or, with shocking self-consciousness, "Him and me done it this arvo. I betcha we did." My ideal was one of those freckled, red-headed kids who burned at the beach and got blisters and had to wear a shirt into the water. (I liked the look of the shirt when it stuck in some places, showing the pink skin, and bubbled blue in others.) I even longed for the real Australian rubbish in other families' yards: beer cartons, the straw jackets that Fourex bottles came in, the stack of 'dead marines' waiting for the bottle-oh on the back porch. The smell of stale beer, which my mother abominated, was especially authentic.

(Once, when my father is organizing a float for one of the war parades, we have three soldiers in the house who are to appear on the back of one of his lorries with sandbags and unloaded tommy-guns. The youngest is a freckled fellow with wavy red-gold hair, and in the afternoon, when they are lounging about waiting to be called, half-asleep with the heat and the beer they have been given, I climb on to his knee and push my face up to his. The boy must think I am trying to kiss him. Drowsily, to humor me, he responds. But I know nothing of kissing. I am intoxicating myself with his strangeness, the smell of Fourex on his breath.)

"So what is it to be?" says Aunt Frances, "The Battle of the Nations?" As if she had to ask! It is my favorite. Also her own.

The illustrated sheet is colored. It shows the charge of Napoleon's Old Guard, above it the grouped flags of the Allies. And the music itself, full of rumbly cannon fire in the bass, swift cavalry charges, snatches of all the anthems, which clash and tangle, has so entered my imagination by the time I am six or seven years old that I can follow the progress of that momentous affair, reduced as it is to purely musical terms, in all its shifts and changing fortunes and flashes of light through smoky cloud. It never fails to fire me to a pitch of breathless excitement.

"Here comes the Old Guard," Aunt Frances shouts, leaning low over the keyboard as she plunges into "La Marseillaise".

"And here comes Wellington!" I yell at the turn into the climax.

I can read these entries in the music – the legs of the massed horses in waves of semiquavers – almost before I can read a book, and am allowed sometimes to take the music out and follow the battle in my head. I know every note. And even if I didn't, the sheets themselves would excite me. The title has such a powerful effect on my imagination that it creates a music of its own.

How grand it sounds: "The Battle of the Nations". So final. So universal. Like "The Great War". It gives me a shivery feeling and a special view of history – a series of dramatic climaxes and resolutions, all shot through with colored uniforms, patriotic tunes, torn flags; a view that is inherent as well in certain words from the books I like to read, "Age" and "Era", and in such phrases as "the day hung in the balance" or "the field was won". So that I feel a subtle shift of meaning when the real war, our war begins and "the Great War" becomes simply "The Last War"; as if history, that closed book, had suddenly been opened again, or we had been turned right about so that what lay before us wasn't the clear past but an entirely unpredictable future.

I did not mistake the horrors of what was happening in Europe – I had seen too many newsreels for that. But I did not reject "The Battle of the Nations" either. What I saw now was that it belonged to another form than documentary, that its events, as I knew them, had taken place not at Leipzig but at the same place on another planet – which is to say, in a language that can be heard and read, and which the body responds to as immediately as to taste or touch, but which no one has ever spoken on this one. It is a language of the spirit, that comes out of people's fingertips more than their mouths and is locked up as well in furniture. From which it can be beaten or stroked or strummed.

What astonishes me now is not the pictures I see when Aunt Frances strikes up "The Battle of the Nations" – the heroic visions – but the mystery that is involved in my experiencing anything at all: my actual hearing and making sense of this disembodied language, that has to break out of a physical body before it can be expressed, but is contained as well – the cannon fire and carnage of "The Battle of the Nations", but also "Träumerei", "Liebes-traum" and an infinity of other events and states of being – in our suburban upright. The piano is a magic box. But we too are magic boxes. That is the revelation.

Compared with this, that modern miracle the Wireless seems a poor thing, entirely earthbound. I have begun to be interested in the inner workings of things and 'wireless' puzzles me, since it is the fact of its actually *having* wires, all wonderfully stretched and pegged to a frame, that makes the Piano capable of flight. The Wireless is limited to what is actual and mundane: the unpredictable happenings of the nightly News.

Still, as a piece of furniture it is impressive, you can't deny it: three feet high with three kinds of veneer and a speaker whose shape you can feel behind knobby cloth.

The events and voices that come from it owe as much of their significance, surely, to the rich solidity of the thing, its oneness with tables and beds and chairs, as to their own rounded vowels or the importance (for the course of World History depends on it) of what they have to report. Much of what we come to feel about the war, and our own present and precarious fate, might be different if the instrument itself were different. If it were made of some metal alloy, for example, rather than living wood. Or if it were small enough, as now, to be one of the body's light appendages. A degree of gravity, at this moment, is essential. The Wireless has it. We are in the age of certainties. Its three veneers, the baroque curves it shares with wardrobes and sideboards, its bourgeois dignity, are terms we appreciate. It gives a visible presence, a tangible form, to words that might otherwise, in this quiet backwater, have nothing to attach themselves to.

The easy life we have grown up in, white for the most part, British almost entirely, in spirit Protestant, has never been under threat. If there are those among us whose freedom has been lost, who have been dispossessed, we do not see them. They are invisible – like the aborigines, who have not yet established themselves in our consciousness. Or they have not yet arrived, even if they are already living down the road or next door – like the migrants whose sorrows we do not hear because we have not yet opened our ears to receive them.

The Wireless commands attention because it is 'furniture'. We draw our chairs up and attend. And this sitting together in a family group, drawn here by the furniture itself, is part of the message we are to receive.

We do not know it yet but the war is already won.

The other thing we do not know is that all the values it was meant to embody, even in us, are already lost.

On top of the piano, left and right, the jardinières; existing less in their own metal form, for all the bronze glow they give off from constant polishing, than in the volume they displace in my head, which is different in each case, since what they contain is different.

The one on the right contains needles, buttons, button-cards, reels of cotton in various colors, more cards with rows of press-studs and hooks and eyes, and a couple of bobbins. It is my mother's slapdash version of a sewing-basket.

On two or three afternoons a week, when she can't put it off, she and Cassie sit here darning socks, mending zips in our play-clothes and sewing buttons on the flies of my father's work trousers.

My mother is a hopeless seamstress. I see her struggling with the thick flannel, making a botch as usual; tearing threads with her teeth, using her thumb to push down an untidy mound of muddled stitches, sighing, tossing the thing on to the finished pile to take up a sock. Cassie meanwhile will be reading aloud. They take it in turns to read, chapter by chapter, from my mother's favorite books, the ones she read in her youth, and I come to know several novels in this fashion: *David Copperfield*, which has provided me with my name (it isn't family – it comes from literature), *John Halifax, Gentleman*, *The Channings*, *The Manxman*, *Jane Eyre*.

Not every afternoon was spent like this. The weather was mostly good and we were active outdoors children for the most part, eager to play on so long as we could see a ball against the rapidly falling dark, and only reluctantly answering the call to come in and get washed for tea. There were days after school when we mucked about under the house, exploring, testing ourselves against the darkness down there, pushing ourselves to the limits of our young courage in outrageous dares; other days when we picked teams and played Rounders in the yard, or Donkey, branding one another with a bald tennis ball, or if girls were in the majority, Statues, in which we froze, when time stopped, in unbalanced attitudes. But when I think back to that time it is in the Piano Room that I find myself most fully present and absorbed; letting the words fall into my ear that most clearly 'tell me things'.

Time back there has a different consistency; we move through it at a different pace. And nothing brings it back to my senses with such rich immediacy as those long afternoons when a needle drawn back and forth through heavy flannel is the real measure of it, a steady crossing and recrossing – or words out of those voluminous novels, as they fall into the room with the differing voices of those two women, my mother's English voice with its slight London accent, Cassie's Australian one of the farm-girl from Harrisville, crossing and recrossing to give their own texture to things. If time seems different it is because we measure it, back there, by other coefficients, have different images for it, experience it in bodies whose blood is richer (which is why we are susceptible to boils), and sluggish with other and heavier foods. (Or is this a child's view of time, like the child's view of space, in which everything appears larger than it was?) Either way, I think of those afternoons between the end of school and six o'clock teatime as endless, their hours so densely packed with experience and events that time appears viscous. It rolls rather than flows, meeting a perceptible resistance, as those Victorian sentences, in their difficult unfolding, seem always to hold back from conclusion, suspending you, impatient for the end but breathlessly subdued, in the stream of your own attention, so that you grow light-headed and wide-eyed drowsy, as if the mere effort of listening had laid a spell on your limbs. You wake after an hour to find you have passed whole years of someone else's life – in England, in another century. Then abruptly it is half-past five by the Hall clock in this one. Quickly the book is closed and put on top of the Piano, with a thread to mark our place: our father is expected. The sound of his truck is like the arrival of Zeus in a thunderclap. The whole day immediately changes, its light, the pace of things. Needles, cards, cotton-reels – all the paraphernalia of female occupations – are bundled anyhow into the right-hand jardinière, and my mother, released, flies out to meet him. She is utterly transformed.

The other jardinière, the one of the left, is perhaps my favorite object in the house. A deep mystery hovers about it, and if anyone were to remind me that it is in fact indistinguishable from the other I would deny it.

The right-hand jardinière is utterly mundane. Anyone can see that. The left-hand one is transfigured by its

contents. I would know it blindfold. I would be drawn to it infallibly by the heat of my own passionate fingerprints.

It is the place in our house where a thing is put (and searched for) when there is no where else for it to go, a general repository of the half-lost, the half-found, the useless-for-the-time-being-but-not-quite-rejected, and all those bits and pieces, and odd things and marvels that have no formal category.

"Put it in the Brass Jardinière" my mother tells me when I come to her with some small object she has no use for, something indefinable, impossible, but which she doesn't want to disappoint me by refusing.

"Have a look in the Brass Jardinière" she suggests when the impossible is just what I cannot do without.

On rainy afternoons when we have to stay in, or when they want, quite simply, to get rid of me, I am sent off to look in the jardinière for something no one expects me to find there, though I never complain or give up hope.

The Brass Jardinière is the measure of my belief in the world's infinite plenitude, its capacity to reproduce itself in a multitude of forms. It never fails me. It is such a pleasure, such a blossoming of the spirit, just to climb on to the piano seat, reach up and get your arms around the thing, lift it carefully down, and then, in pretty much the same spot where Our Burglar emptied the contents of the cashbox, upend it on the lino; or, better still, to reach in and empty it in promiscuous handfuls "to see what is there".

Everything is there: everything odd. One baby's booty a little rusty with age, the top off a Schaeffer fountain-pen, one cup from a doll's tea-set without the saucer; one grey kid glove without a button, half a *diamanté* clasp,

the slice of mother-of-pearl that is one side of a penknife handle, odd earrings and collar-studs – all things that have been put there over the years in the hope that the other half will turn up and make a pair. The spirit of accidental separation hover over the jardinière, but in so far as it is itself part of a pair, it speaks for completeness, for final restitution.

I lay all the objects out in their kinds and check for the hundredth time that no mistake has been made. It is a game that is never finished, since who knows, next time some change may have occurred? Not in the objects themselves but in the relationship between them. Deeply serious, it is a game that demands all my concentration. I am playing God.

I try to memorize what the jardinière contains, to keep all this rubbish in my head, so that if, in poking about the house, or under it, or out in the backyard, I should come across "the other one", I can restore both objects to use. I refuse to accept that this mortuary of lost couples is really the end. I dedicate myself. I imagine going through life with the jardinière held invisibly before me, a heavy burden; which is why I have begun the long business of committing its content to memory. This is a secret. But the real secret is the source of my commitment. As a smaller child than I am now I had an invisible friend, a lost twin of my own. I cling to the jardinière in the belief that one day we too may be united; that he (or is it I?) will be found.

David Malouf's new novel 12 Edmondstone Street, from which this is an extract, will be published shortly.

OCTOBER



NEW
from
PENGUIN

RUNNING BACKWARDS OVER SAND

Stephanie Dowrick

Set in New Zealand, London and Berlin this ambitious novel of ideas and intense emotions is a striking achievement. *\$16.95



V I K I N G

EVIL ANGELS

John Bryson

Elucidating the intricacies of forensic evidence and the cunning of courtroom and chambers, John Bryson recounts the trial of Lindy Chamberlain in a major literary work of comprehensive accuracy. *\$24.95



V I K I N G

A PAPER PRINCE

George Munster

Tough, thorough and balanced, this biography of Rupert Murdoch tracks the rise of Australia's international media magnate. *\$29.95



P E N G U I N

MANNING CLARK

Tramping the Battlefields

In search of Australia in Belgium and France

My companion and I had come to Europe for different reasons. He wanted to see the areas of rural France which provided the setting for *Swann's Way* in Marcel Proust's *The Remembrance Of Things Past*. I wanted to see the battlefields of the first world war in Belgium and France. I was hoping they might help me to find clues to explain things that puzzled me in the history of Australia since the 1890s – why, for example, the suburbs of Australia had never acquired a soul, and why the horrors experienced by Australia in the Gallipoli campaign and in Flanders and Picardy strengthened conservatism in Australia, prolonged the power of the Australian-Britons, and elevated Anzac Day to the “One Day Of The Year” for so many Australians.

It all began at the Menin Gate. The landlady of the Hotel Continental in Ypres (Ieper) had said to us as soon as we arrived by car from England: “You will want to hear the playing of the Last Post at the Menin Gate at 8 pm. They have sounded the Last Post at 8 pm every night since the King of the Belgians performed the opening ceremony in – I think – July 1927.” So fortified against the cold of early April – the cruellest month of all – with the landlady's excellent soup, served from a huge silver soup-tureen by a beautiful young girl, followed by fish, meat, vegetables, ice cream, cheese and tea (“You will have more – Yes – I know Australians like their food”), we walked along the cobblestones, the footpaths of the ancient city of Ypres reduced almost to rubble between August 1914 and November 1918.

On the way we saw the punks flirting, jostling, laughing and chacking each other in the street. When we got to the Menin Gate the punks were there in force, their uproar reminding me of the cries of the corellas at sunset on Cooper's Creek when they are having their brief squabble about perches for the night in the dead branches of the coolibah trees. While my companion read out some of the names of the men commemorated on the Menin Gate memorial – the men whose remains were never found – I began to think about the role of the punks in our society. We had seen them and heard of them in England. I wondered whether, if Karl Marx were to re-write the Communist Manifesto, he would change the first sentence to read: “A spectre is hanging over Europe, the spectre of punkdom.” But, as so often, my reverie was on the wrong track. The experiences of Ypres were stronger

than punkdom. At 8 pm the traffic through the Gate stopped. The human uproar fell to whispers between the bystanders. The punks were quiet. Two men in uniform, and a woman, and an Englishman stepped into the middle of the road. The Englishman declaimed the words:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning,
We will remember them.

The men and women near my companion and me wept: the faces of the punks briefly expressed awe and wonder. Then the two men and the woman sounded the first note of the Last Post, the middle C which is so difficult to get right when the lips are cold, and the fingers frozen. As it soared upwards to the overhanging arch of the memorial, and was followed by a solemn E, the bodies of those around us shook with some powerful emotion. So it continued all through that middle section of the Last Post, that part where buglers become almost playful in their rendition of the invocation to the cook-house door, followed by the return of the high solemnity, with that top G being quenched in the surrounding air.

Walking back to the hotel my companion and I were silent. The punks had stopped their rowdiness. I wondered why we had all wept, why we had been carried into the high places. Perhaps we were weeping for the dead – but probably no one there knew any of the dead, any of those who had no memorial, no final resting place except their names carved into the stone on the inside walls of the Menin Gate. Perhaps we were weeping for all of us. But then most of us do not like everyone – most do not rise to universal compassion, or the universal embrace. Perhaps the Australians present were weeping for their fellow countrymen caught in such a trap, all those victims of human madness and folly. Perhaps in the twentieth century, with God high up on the list of Missing Persons, such secular ceremonies are all we have left to arouse pity and tenderness in all of us.

The following day, after driving through the Menin Gate along Hell Fire Corner to cross what had once meant death or some terrible injury to the body, and staring vacantly at the green fields where so many Allied and German soldiers had drowned in the mud, they being too

weak to stand up again after falling in that miry sea, we stood for a moment on the mounds of Hill 60 where the Allies and the Germans spent three years trying to burrow their way to victory, but ended so often in knowing only the victory of death.

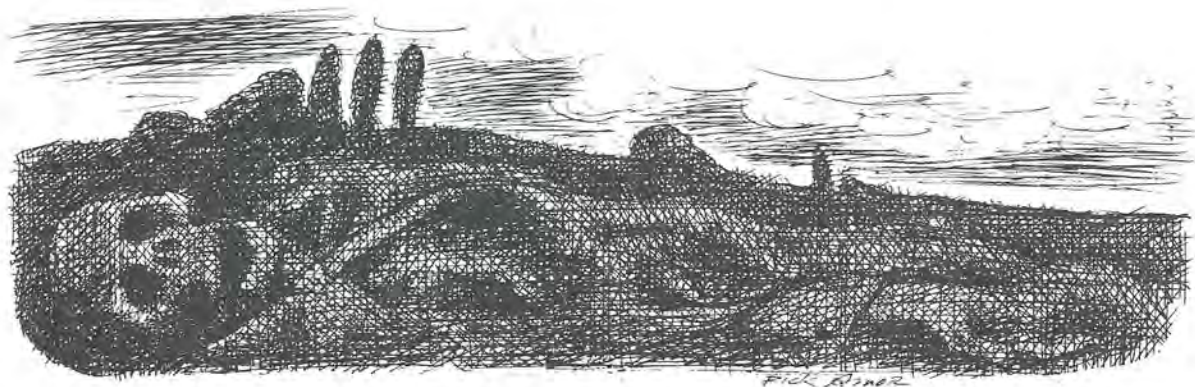
Then we drove to Passchendaele a few kilometres away. I expected to see a hill of the height of Mt Ainslie or Red Hill in Canberra, but saw only the slightest rise, for the occupation of which hundreds of thousands were killed or wounded. I remember the desperate appeals by Haig to Lloyd George late in 1917 to authorize him to start the campaign – Haig still believing that the huge losses of life, as at the Somme, would be justified if the Allies could punch a hole in the German line through which they could march to the destruction of the German lines of communication and so end the war.

It was a cold and windy day. On another rise, perhaps two hundred metres from the mound over which the brave men from the British Isles, Canada, Australia and Germany fought during October and November 1917, the Belgians have built a memorial in stone to Christ the King. Christ looked so sad in the lemon-colored sunlight – I wondered whether He was sad because so few were now answering the church bell's summons to the people of Passchendaele to come to Mass, or whether He was sad because of what had happened there so many years ago. My companion was impatient to see the battlefield. But neither there nor in the nearby Tyne Cot cemetery did I receive any enlightenment on what it was all about. Perhaps what had happened was like the words composed by Rudyard Kipling for the headstones of the soldiers who could not be identified; "Known unto God". No human being would ever know what these men had been through – or why, when the survivors got back to Australia, they should become the backbone of the King and Empire Alliance to suppress and expel all anti-loyalists, all Bolsheviks, Sinn Feiners and 'Wobblies'. I thought, too, of the role of Passchendaele in the Hughes decision to hold a second referendum on conscription, and wondered, as I was to wonder later at Pozières and on the Somme, why Hughes had been so obliging, what had driven him to put his career, the judgement of his colleagues in the Labor government, and the judgement of posterity at risk for the monstrous idea of gaining victory at such a price in human lives.

After two days with my wife's cousin in the village of Booischot, where my companion learned much of what had shaped him in life, he having been till then like a man who had not seen the first act of his own drama, we set off for the battlefields of Picardy. On the way we by-passed Lille, my companion nodding sagely when I tried in vain to interest him in driving through it by telling him the story of how that most lovable man, the correspondent and war historian Charlie Bean, had heard just after 11 am on 11 November 1918 a boy blowing a tin whistle, and knew there must be an armistice. When that failed I told him Lille was featured in the works of Zola, but not even that would shake him. He was making for Pozières where, I had told him, Australian soldiers had fallen more thickly than on any other battlefield of the war.

We walked slowly to the memorial which immortalized the event as skylarks ascended, and sang, and the long stalks of grass waved in the chilly wind. We also stood before the memorial to the first tank which went into action on 15 September 1916, Haig, Lloyd George, Foch, Hughes and others believing the new invention would bring victory swiftly – but they, too, foundered in the mud, and the slaughter went on. We wandered round the cemeteries which house the remains of some of those that fell. We read out to each other the words in which parents, lovers or friends expressed how they felt about their great loss. Some were proud: "Could one die better who was a good son, a loving brother, a true man?" "A soldier and a man – One of Australia's best." "He died for his flag, his country and France. Our hero." Some were hopeful: "A good night my darling but on your brighter dawn good morning." "Tell mother I'll be there in answer to her prayer." "Father In Thy Gracious Keeping. Leave We Now Our Dear Son Sleeping." One was unmistakably Australian: it just said "From Mum and Dad." Hundreds had no name, no inscription save the words "Known Unto God."

At dusk we came to the cemetery at Villers Bretonneux, where thousands of Australians lie in graves lovingly tended by men and women, first of the Imperial and now of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The curator, sensing our interest, kindly offered to re-open the memorial on the crest of the hill in which there was a stairway leading to a balcony from which we could see all



the battlefields of Picardy – the Somme, Pozières, Bullecourt, Villers Bretonneux. He pointed out that the trench line was marked by a change in the color of the grass. I remembered then some of the words of John Masefield when he walked over the battlefields of the Somme: “My God, they lie out on the blasted fields, unvisited by man, and they look like the cities of the plain, and the corpses’ knees and hands and boots stick up out of the mud at one as one goes by, and the rats come and sick over one’s feet.” But now there was only beauty, where once there had been such hideousness.

That night as we lingered over yet another excellent dinner in a French country hotel I wanted to know answers to many things. Why Australians, unlike the English, the French and the Americans, have been relatively inarticulate about the Somme and its significance in the history of humanity – I did not know then some of the comments made by Vance Palmer. Australians were so caught up in the conscription barney that they did not essay the broader view. They were not stirred to discuss the effect of the Somme on belief either in God or in the Enlightenment. Again I wondered why the surviving Australian rank and file provided numbers for reactionary movements, while survivors in Germany, France and Russia became part of a revolutionary movement – why the war chained Australia to her colonial and provincial past.

I wanted to know why the promise of a different Australia had appealed to so few, why all the hopes of 1916 to 1920, the revivalist meetings of the socialists on the Yarra Bank in Melbourne, and in the Sydney Domain, all the baptisms in Socialist Sunday Schools had disappeared like the sun at evening on the Australian desert, leaving us all to the darkness and the vast indifference of that sky.

I hoped then to find the strength to answer some of those questions in volume six of *A History Of Australia*. By the time my companion and I got to the banks of the Somme I was itching to read more about the men who had dreamed the great dream for Australia – about John Curtin, Robert Ross, Frederick Sinclair, Vance and Nettie Palmer, Hugh McCrae; yes, and to read again the hopes of Henry Lawson about the day when Australians would raise a rebel flag, and to read more about why a man of the gifts of Robert Gordon Menzies, like Curtin a country boy, should put his vast talents to the service of conservatism in Australia, why his proudest boast should be “I am British to the bootstraps.”

I wondered about this again the next day when, with the help of a most endearing French village dweller, we were guided to the castle of Valvion, one of the headquarters of Haig before the battles of the Somme and Pozières. The lady of the castle, now in a wheel-chair, showed us the verandah or stone porch on which photographs were taken of Haig, Foch, George V and Poincaré. I wondered whether this was the secret headquarters where Haig persuaded Billy Hughes of the wisdom of the “break-through” tactics – and the numbers Australia would need to send to France to help the Allies gain a numerical superiority over the Germans and the Austrians – and all the consequences that were to flow from that con-

versation.

But first we had to walk around the two great cathedrals at Amiens and Reims, and stand in awe in front of the statue of the Virgin, and then drive down the valley of the Marne to Dormans, where we are not wisely but very well before climbing the steep hill to the chapel which marks the place where Von Kluck’s army was held up in 1914. By then my companion was dropping more and more hints that the time had come to search for the soul of Marcel Proust. So I agreed, provided we could see the Hall of Mirrors and the three virgins of Chartres on the way. He agreed. He had known for at least twenty years that his companion still entertained a shy hope.

So off we went on the freeway in our tiny Renault which often seemed to be standing still as prosperous Frenchmen roared past in their Citroëns, their Fords or their Peugeots. We took the by-pass round the south of Paris and followed the sign posts for Versailles where we arrived just in time to rush up one stairway, and walk briskly through the rooms where the frivolous and the trivializers had danced on despite the warnings of a day of retribution; and on into that Hall of Mirrors where at the end of June 1919 another act of human folly was perpetrated under the gilded chandeliers, and all the other outward and visible signs of conspicuous waste. I tried to see in my mind’s eye the tired face of M. Clemenceau, and the look of outrage and impending disaster on the face of the young Maynard Keynes, and the look of satisfaction on the face of Billy Hughes as the signatories put their names to the Treaty of Versailles. I kept thinking of a remark Clemenceau had made about Billy Hughes to Lloyd George; “Bring in your savages.” Were we really like that in the years before wireless, television and the jet machine ended our material backwardness and our isolation? I thought again of the behaviour of Foch at Compiègne, and remembered a remark in a letter by Nettie Palmer that, after seeing what the French had been through, she saw there was a case even for their singular lack of magnanimity in the forest of Compiègne. Did they and the Australians know what happened at Pozières, Ypres, Passchendaele, Bullecourt, and Villers Bretonneux?

As we drove on in the late afternoon there was still so much to think about. What, for example, went on in the mind of Haig? After the slaughter at the Somme and at Pozières why did he go on believing in the breakthrough? What went on in the mind of Billy Hughes? Why were the Australian soldiers, notorious for their cheek and bounce, so suspicious of all radicals, so uninterested in dreamers and visionaries? Why did the age of progress end with the horrors of the Somme and Passchendaele?

Perhaps that was why the cathedral of Notre Dame at Chartres made such an appeal. I remember I stood a long time in the gathering dusk in front of the Black Madonna, hoping some things would be made plain. My companion walked around the huge cathedral, his mind being by then on Marcel Proust. So off we went across the plains where the grass was green, the sky close and intimate, and the spires in each village a reminder that men once had answers. As darkness descended the waiter in the hotel at

Illiers (Combray in *Swann's Way*) was already bringing us the soup. Out of the corner of my eye, through the steam rising from the hot soup, I could see a reproduction of a portrait of Proust. I wondered then as I had often wondered before whether *The Remembrance Of Things Past* was not simply a magnificent record of a self-discovery, but a tapestry of a doomed world. The man had a painted face. The tormented have both understanding and wisdom – but no one in the New World or the Old had come up with an answer to Verdun and the Somme – to 1917 – that year when Robert Gordon Menzies and John Joseph Ambrose Curtin both saw themselves as men of destiny. But what did they have to say, what did anyone have to say to stifle the memory of what had happened at Ypres, Menin Gate, the Somme and Passchendaele? Have those experiences left the soul of man in the suburbs?

So I wondered as we drove to Quiberon on the French Atlantic coast, from where, in between fruitless attempts to hear what the Bretons had to say about Tristan and Isolde, and love, my companion and I drove on to Tréguier, the birth place of Ernest Renan, the author of the *Vie de Jésus*, a book almost as central as the works of Dostoevsky, Newman and Carlyle for authors who want to portray the life of humanity in a kingdom of nothingness. Then on, ever on, to Montreuil, yet another of Haig's headquarters, where my companion and I walked round the equestrian statue of Haig, and made one last, almost despairing attempt to see whether the artist had penetrated what no historian had succeeded in piercing – had seen what went on in Haig's mind. By then it was time for my companion to face up to working with English doctors. And I must go back to Canberra, back to the blank page, to see whether I now had anything to say.

comment

Jeffrey Grey (ACT) writes:

I should like to raise some points concerning Alex Sheppard's review of Peter Charlton's *The Unnecessary War* and D.M. Horner's *The Commanders in Overland 98*.

Mr Sheppard opened his review with a rather oblique reference to another review in the October 1984 issue of Australian Book Review by Peter Dennis, and fails to render Dennis' view accurately. Your readers might usefully be directed to the extensive correspondence between Sheppard and Dennis concerning this review in the following three issues of ABR, both to judge how accurately the latter's views are rendered by Sheppard and also as a further means of judging the value of the book under discussion, Peter Charlton's *The Unnecessary War*.

My real argument with Mr Sheppard, however, concerns his comments in his review of David Horner's *The Commanders*. I do not dispute the value of the book, nor disagree that it goes some way towards correcting the bias in Australian historical writing which concentrates on the common soldier (no bad thing in itself), and is disinclined to accept the "pernicious notion" that it is generals who win battles. Rather, I would query some of his asides on individual commanders and some of his assumptions.

As Mr Sheppard well knows, but some of your readers may not, there were strong pro- and anti-Blamey factions within the Army, and some of his remarks suggest that Mr Sheppard lines up with the latter. He condemns Blamey's dismissal of Rowell, but has nothing to say about the extremely shabby treatment meted out to Blamey at the end of the war. He characterizes Rowell as "this excellent soldier", but shows little appreciation of Rowell's lack of command experience at that time, or of the part his own personality may have played in his removal. As one of his contemporaries remarked, Rowell expected all around him to behave like saints, not perhaps the best basis for high command in war. I would also

query the value of his autobiography. While important as the only example of a senior Australian general's published memoirs, the informed reader is quickly aware that Rowell can be frustratingly circumspect in his treatment of both events and personalities, especially in the important inter-war and post-1945 periods.

Mr Sheppard's assessment of Robertson would seem to perpetuate a bias held over from the Second World War. Robertson was ambitious, vain and arrogant. Like Blamey, he had many detractors. Those who served under him, however, frequently adored him – the word is not too strong. Robertson's period of command of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan between 1946 and 1951 was outstandingly successful. He forged, and maintained, excellent relations with MacArthur and the Americans had significantly advanced Australia's right to be considered independently of Britain in Pacific affairs. When the Korean War broke out in 1950 he was appointed to the non-operational control of all British Commonwealth forces in the theatre and once again did an outstanding job, despite the attempts of the British Foreign Office to undermine his position as a Dominion Officer in command of British troops. On what basis does Mr Sheppard consider him "useless" in Japan?

Finally, I would doubt the value of the assumption implicit in Mr Sheppard's concluding paragraph, namely that history should be written, and viewed, in mononational terms. This is an approach widely adopted in Australian historical writing, and military history especially, and leads to an excessively narrow and parochial treatment of the subject. It may eventually be seen that the similarities which exist between our military heritage and that of, for example, Canada are more significant than the differences. The only way of proving or disproving such notions lies in approaching the subject from a comparative perspective within an international context. It is in this direction that Australian military history must move if it is to say anything new or interesting.

Remembrance of Palmers Past

MARJORIE TIPPING

Nettie and Vance Palmer were both born in 1885. They were friends to Overland and to generations of Australian writers. Their centenary this year has been marked by many occasions, including the establishment by the Premier of Victoria of annual literary prizes of \$15,000 in each of their names. We salute their living memory.

Nettie Palmer, when telling how she began to write a biography of her uncle, Henry Bournes Higgins, quoted Louis Esson's advice: "Don't leave out important things like the height and weight. And catch your subject as often as possible in slippers."

It made good sense, unfortunately not taken by most of those who wrote appreciations of the Palmers in the special number of *Meanjin* in 1959. I doubt whether Nettie ever owned a pair of slippers and I hope she didn't. She always wore sensible well-worn shoes and dowdy clothes that had seen better days. In height she was probably five feet five inches, about six inches shorter than her husband, and medium in build. She was handsome, in spite of her complete lack of care for her personal appearance. She had dark straight hair when I first knew her, and quizzical eyes that expressed something of her animated personality even before she began to speak. According to my husband's aunt, Martha Tipping, who was her contemporary at both the Presbyterian Ladies' College and the University of Melbourne, she was always the same. She bubbled along with her enthusiasms.

Nettie was much more of an extrovert than Vance, who would shut himself away, absorbed in the work in progress, whether it were a book of major importance or one of the pot-boilers he wrote under the pseudonym "Rann Daley." He was strong and steady, a good-looking man in any company, who had experienced the ravages of war on the Western Front while serving in the AIF during his third visit to Europe. His wounds in the Battle of the Somme were spiritual rather than physical when he wrote the lines:

Will they never fade or pass!
The mud, and the misty figures endlessly coming
In file through the foul morass . . .

He was the farmer, returned from battle, listening to the talk and quiet laughter after the day's work was over, yet still haunted, so that:

. . . all my mind sees
Is a quaking bog in a mist – stark, snapped trees,
And the dark Somme flowing.

In 1914 Vance and Nettie Palmer had married in London, and they were in Brittany when war broke out. Pre-occupation with war, and later fighting for peace and against Fascism, were to deprive them, especially Nettie, of years of creative effort. Few persons have sacrificed so much in the way of a career with such dedication. With Nettie, there could be no compromise. She was wary, ever on the alert, when even charming acquaintances such as Anglea Thirkell came within her ken. Integrity was all that mattered. She instinctively knew that however much she liked Angela she had to go carefully. She was much more at home with Miles Franklin, Flora Eldershaw, the Frank Dalby Davisons, the Essons, Frank Wilmot and other contemporaries of the literary world. She made many friends among people of diverse origins and cultures, especially the Jewish and other refugees from Fascist regimes.

But these and many more friends and colleagues have either passed on, or are out of the mainstream of the literary and artistic world to which the Palmers belonged. There are fewer persons who can envisage them in those well-worn shoes, if not their slippers. As an idealistic young admirer and family friend, I had tucked away many memories, some documented in detail in my own papers.

But in trying to create a portrait of Vance and Nettie I can hardly eliminate the family. My memories will take the form of a conversation piece, perhaps with more accent on Nettie as the family's decision maker and protector. Contrary to popular belief they were not as poor as Nettie made out, and they were much more family-oriented than many in the literary world believed. Separation from their two daughters – "the kiddies", as Nettie fondly called them – on several occasions was not easy, and only possible because Nettie's mother was both an obliging and sensible grandmother.

Nettie and Vance were really very private persons, completely self-sufficient, physically and emotionally very much alive and in love. Their need to be alone together at various periods drove them from the metropolis to the more simple life up north, to the Dandenongs, or to a Mediterranean village. Nettie's verses "Unsung" express more of her love and devotion to

her “mate”, as she called Vance, than a mere observer might note. They cherished those private moments shared occasionally with only simple and unsophisticated persons.

It is wrong therefore to believe their frequent escapes were merely on economic grounds, or even in search of privacy in which to write. Vance could write against a dozen voices and the wireless on in the next room. Nettie made sure she attended to much of his correspondence, and knew well how to keep intruders at arm’s length. It is misleading to believe that the many persons they correspond with were real friends. Many were just acquaintances whom they had hardly, if ever, met in person. Their correspondents were numerous because they didn’t always have a telephone.

I first met the Palmers in 1929 when they came to live in Chrystobel Crescent, Hawthorn, after living in Caloun-



dra for a few years. Prior to that they had lived at Emerald, in the bush, as it was then called. Nettie arrived to enrol her daughters Aileen and Helen at PLC. As Nettie Higgins she had edited and written much for Patchwork, the school magazine. She was then corresponding with one about to become one of PLC’s most famous Old Collegians – Henry Handel Richardson – whose work she, along with the rest of the literary world, had only recently discovered.

Up till that time Ettie Richardson’s name was whispered around the school as one who had been expelled, as a similar rumor had spread a few years before about Nellie Melba. Both girls had been rather rebellious, but neither were expelled. Melba had been in trouble for creeping off during school hours to play the organ at Cairns Memorial Church, and her later unconventional manner of living would have received disapproval from the Presbyterian elders. Richardson had written and published *The Getting of Wisdom* after she had left school. Some believed it was an indictment of the system,

as well as suggestive of certain perversities practised between the girls. The book was not available in the school library.

But there was only adulation for Nettie Palmer, “one of the foremost literary critics in Australia,” as Patchwork proclaimed in May 1929, while recording that she was “almost the first to draw attention to the literary genius of that other Old Collegian, ‘Henry Handel Richardson’, whose recent Australian trilogy, ending with *Ultima Thule*, has been acclaimed a masterpiece by the foremost critics on the other side of the world. We may well feel proud that our own critic’s judgement preceded theirs.” From then on, Richardson’s place in the school’s esteem was secure.

Nettie’s two daughters were already advanced in their studies, and especially good at the languages she had taught them. Helen, after a term in a lower class, was transferred to my class. She was just two months younger



than I. We soon became firm friends. This was natural, because even at a young age we had both decided we wanted to become writers. My first verses had already been published, and Helen was writing about Anzac for the school magazine. We read and criticized each other’s work. We had also acquired a mutual, if precocious, interest in the arts, and an enthusiasm for team sports. We were together in the same house, but I only managed to make the house teams in tennis and athletics, while Helen in the course of time represented the school in baseball and hockey.

Nettie’s own background was privileged, as was the background of almost every successful woman in those days. Her father was a minor accountant, but his brother Henry assumed the role of head of the Australian family. Henry Bournes Higgins was a wealthy QC, and later the Justice who established the Arbitration Court.

The Higgins brothers, born in County Down, Ireland, were sons of the Vicarage. Henry had married a sister of

Ernest ("Chinese") Morrison and had radical leanings that disturbed some of his Morrison in-laws, such as the Fancourt-Mitchells. Nevertheless, the extended family would meet up at his beautiful old "Heronwood" mansion on Arthur's Seat, which Henry Higgins filled with young people at holiday time. After Henry's death it had to be sold, in 1932, and Nettie expressed horror when it was rumored that the new owners thought of calling it "Fairy Dell". Most incongruous when one remembers that much of its exotic ornamentation consisted of ceramic tiles, Ming in style if not in fact, that cousin Ernest had sent from China.

One can only speculate on what Nettie might have thought of the conservative and somewhat snobby Mitchell girls, three of whom, Mary, Janet and Nancy, would become writers.

By comparison, Nettie's own little family was less privileged, although Henry Higgins had indulged his niece since the loss of his only child, Mervyn, in World War I. He often contributed financially to the Palmer travels. After his death in 1929 Nettie began to receive a regular income of £48 a quarter from his widow to write his biography, a task which she achieved with some distinction. The amount was then quite a bit above the current basic wage, and would have well covered their move to Melbourne and enrolment of the girls at PLC.

Nettie had complained in earlier years that they were "absurdly poor" but thought her "kiddies" didn't "feel the pinch as much as those whose parents are living up to appearances." (Letter, 1 August 1928, to R.H. Long.)

Nettie continued to harp on their poverty for several years: "We are training the poor little Palmers to believe that poverty is a kind of elegant distinction..." But poverty is relative and the Palmers managed to survive and do what they most wanted to do.

After the crash in Wall Street which had heralded the depression years, some of our school friends mysteriously moved house and went to the State School. Helen and I were already questioning the values of a world in which some still had so much and others so little. I remember long afterwards discussing these years with Helen, who realized her own family must have had more than she had believed. She had always felt perfectly secure, that there was all that was necessary to provide for their family. Education and travel had the highest priorities. By 1935 Vance had made at least six visits to London, and he was twice in the United States. Nettie had visited Europe on three occasions. All their married life they spent many winters in Queensland, mostly at "Tree Tops", their second home at Caloundra.

It was important for Vance's self-esteem that he should be regarded as the breadwinner, the provider. He knew little of money matters, but he knew that he had to work hard, and that his best work would ensure little more than pin-money. Hence those enormous numbers of pot-boilers for pulp magazines which made him shudder when someone referred to him as "Australia's Zane Grey". He also gave regular broadcasts. During the depression he acquired what he called his "slum properties" in South Yarra, from which he was to receive a regular

income over many years. What he and Nettie earned from their serious writing was the jam. Family money and help from the Higginses was the cream. Granny Higgins, who lived in Ridgeway Avenue, Kew, provided a home on many occasions, with Aileen and Helen staying for lengthy periods while the parents were living on Green Island or at Kalorama. After her death, Nettie inherited the house in Kew, not far from where I lived with my family. Helen and I usually caught the tram home together and sometimes swam in the Yarra at McAuley's boat shed at the foot of Molesworth Street.

Such households in those days kept a cook-general, so you were reasonably assured of a meal, consisting of a roast with something like rice pudding and stewed fruit to follow. When Nettie took over, you were lucky to get a meat pie, hunks of bread and cheese, perhaps a salad, apples or plums. Tea flowed freely enough, along with the conversation. She always allocated what money she could for help in the house, but it still remained one of the untidiest I have ever been in. She hated household chores above all else. She also seemed to save enough money for what many would call luxuries. Not only were the girls given an expensive education, but they also received piano and tennis lessons and later, during the family's year in London in 1935, speech classes to try and get rid of their Australian twang. There was always money for theatre tickets, for ballet in particular. Helen's letters to me and my own diary testify how great an influence the performing arts were in those early days.

Returning to Australia at the end of 1935 the Palmers had become friendly with Arnold Haskell, who was on board the *Moldavia*, together with Colonel de Basil's Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo. Continuing interest in ballet as an art form which might well find new expression in Australia sprang from a later friendship with the Borovanskys and their support of Australian musical composition, such as that by Esther Rofe, who had composed for the ballet.

There was always enough money for music, too. My family and the Palmers were regular concert-goers and knew the musical world. The Palmers in particular met celebrities from overseas, especially those with little English and with whom Nettie could converse in French, German or Spanish. Among the dedicated patrons who were their friends in this little world were Dr John Dale, the Reg Ellerys, Margaret Sutherland and Lorna Stirling. Through their languages they extended friendships to many new arrivals, among whom were the Polish Tarczynskas, the Russian Ribushes, the Swiss novelist Esther Landholt, Gino Nibbi and others of non-Anglo-Saxon origins such as Judah Waten and Nina Christesen, the American Hartley Grattan and artist Jorgen Jorgensen.

Vance had advised Dolia Ribush on his production of "The Cherry Orchard", a production never forgotten by those who remember it. No one had ever worked before in Melbourne – nor anyone since – in such a manner to stage theatre such as this. For about a year every person connected with the play had to eat, drink, act, live the part until he or she became that character in the play. Ribush believed that the actor would then be able to interpret the character better than any director could

devise. It was perfection.

And of course there was always money for books. Books everywhere, even in the leaner years. It always hurt the Palmers whenever they moved to go through their library, giving away or selling what they thought they should eliminate, to lighten the burden during a move. They had inherited a lot of books through the Higgins family, and Vance acquired a number for review on his radio session and for other media. Later, many would have arrived as gifts, such as their inscribed copy of Adrian Lawlor's *Arquebus*, which Nettie passed on to me. Helen and I haunted the Book Lover's Library, the Austral Book Shop, Rawson's for the left wing publications and Nibbi's for the art books, while Mrs Ellis Bird and Hanley's received a good share of our spare pocket money. Second-hand Australian books were very cheap in those days.

The Palmers did economize by using public transport. I don't believe either could ever drive a car, let alone own one. When they were in the Dandenongs Helen and her school friends used to visit them by train, hiking up Mt Dandenong from Mooroolbark or Bayswater, a different long stretch each time, bringing our own meat for what we then called a "chop picnic" rather than a barbecue, and stuffing ourselves with potatoes cooked in the coals.

Nettie thought nothing of coming to town for a meeting, several times a week if necessary. She wrote of her return late one night to Croydon from where she generally caught a bus. On this occasion she missed the last one to Kalorama. Loaded with parcels, including a number of heavy books as well as food, she had to trudge up the mountain for some five miles, taking two hours, and cursing books for the first time in her life.

Although Nettie considered cooking a waste of time and energy, she was not averse to spending lots of time eating out. We would meet up with many friends at interesting and cheaper eating places, which included Petrouska and The Blue Danube, as well as the well-favored Chung Wah in Heffernan Lane, Dooley Din, and for special occasions the less seedy Eastern and Oriental cafes where a surreptitious voice calling out something that sounded like "Dah wan" would suddenly produce a bottle of beer. When Gibby's and Johann Quist's began their more respectable establishments, the Palmers added these good coffee houses to their favorite haunts.

Vance had an abiding love of cricket, which Aileen disdained; but Helen, however, accompanied him to the MCG from childhood. I can't remember whether he was a member, but Helen always got in on a lady's ticket. A group of us from PLC would take our lunches to the tests and the Sheffield Shield matches, barracking with a fervor equal to that of the boys. Helen herself, unlike her sister, was good in most sports. Her solid weight behind a ball ensured that she could hit it a great distance.

The Palmers didn't like the cold, yet they were parsimonious when it came to heating a house. Why spend money on a decent heater or even light a fire that caused so much work when you could spend most winters in Queensland? In Melbourne Nettie was usually bustling around, but if she had to sit still and bear with Melbourne's wintry weather she would huddle herself in

a tartan rug that had seen many winters, looking like a Ruth Draper or more accurately Siobhan McKenna – pure Abbey Theatre.

Nettie's Protestant Irish ancestry explains much of the complexities of her vital and mercurial personality, her loves and hates, her nationalism and internationalism, her passion for language, literature and music, her wit and whimsy, and the poetic soul that often had to lie dormant underneath all that intellectualism. Her outpourings in verse, phoenixes far too infrequent, often disguised a hidden meaning, even when they appeared as light as thistle-down. She once sent me a poem written in memory of my childhood visit to Green Island in 1932. There she and Vance were monarchs of all they surveyed.

They had greeted my mother and me warmly. Nettie found that my arrival reminded her of Primavera, but she sighed for our young generation, not fully aware of the anxieties of a world suffering from depression and unemployment. "The wheels are slowing down all over the world, hopes being trodden underfoot, vitality ebbing," she wrote in her diary. She was aware that on Green Island they had escaped to a "lotus-eaters" paradise, where they could begin every day by swimming in the nude.

My mother had taken me to Queensland during a long absence from school. She was ever clothes-conscious, and arrived on Green Island in smart navy-and-white cruise-wear and Panama hat. While I thought the Palmer habitat – a small tent with few comforts – was ideally romantic (they read at night by lantern light), mother was somewhat shocked by the primitive conditions and the Palmers' idyllic enthusiasm for nude bathing. Nettie was at first overcome by our unexpected visit and hurried in to the tent to change her dress, reappearing, much to Mother's amusement, in a similar and equally crumpled version, apologizing because it was not ironed! We took photos of each other, but Vance's didn't come out because he had jammed the camera.

The Palmers gave us shells and seeds collected on the island. They told us wondrous tales of the Thursday Islanders who sailed down in their frail canoes, singing strange melodies that carried for miles across the tranquil waters. Then Judge Beeby arrived to tell of mutual friends. It was certainly open house that day on the island. Nettie was in a state because she could offer nothing more than a pot of tea until deliveries arrived from the vessel that had brought us over. She told a similar tale of when the islanders came in from a lugger and they had a sing-song. She produced hot cocoa and many apologies. "Why?" one had asked her. "You not come here for to keep restaurant!" Another time the natives had put on a most complex corroboree, with rhythmic dancing as well as the hauntingly beautiful sing-song, and stories taking hours in which they recounted their adventures. While we were there, at least one of the native boys was still around. I photographed him climbing a coconut tree, a feat which took him about two seconds, and within minutes he had stripped off the casings and carved us a little container.

The haunting and delicate verses Nettie later sent me might have been written by an Irish poet. But years after-

" a remarkable collection of fun, wit, wisdom,
generosity, anger and spleen." *The Age*

The Dictionary of Australian Quotations

EDITED BY:
STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

The best that has been said or written by Australians, or about them.
From Don Bradman to Barry Humphries, from Captain Cook to Frank
Zappa, and everyone in between.

OVERLAND CENTENARY OFFER

By completing the order form below, you can receive *The Dictionary of Australian Quotations* (normally priced at \$49.95) at the special price of \$35. Offer closes 31 October
Please send me copies of *The Dictionary of Australian Quotations*
at \$35.

Enclosed is my cheque for \$.....

OR

Please charge my Bankcard No.....
a total of \$.....

Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Please return to: **Heinemann Publishers Australia**
PO Box 133, Richmond, Vic, 3121

wards, I thought I detected more in the poem. Perhaps the Palmers' mainland friend, Tinos, the gentle Greek fisherman, had triggered off some remembrances of what we Westerners owe to our Hellenic heritage. There was some Sapphic imagery in those lines, written as she lay awake, watching the clouds, if not the Pleiades. She had in Melbourne already read some of my early literary attempts, and she had encouraged my language studies, which had included Greek. But she was deeply concerned (as both her diary and a letter to her mother indicate) about the serious eye trouble that had thwarted my studies that year. The verses have a sad note, for she knows that Spring, and youth, will have their moments of passion and pain, of interrogation and intensity. These are the lines which she dedicated to me and called "September":

When sleep is light
Or shot with visioning,
When no sleep comes, but all the happy night
You lie to watch the clouds and stars in flight:
See, on the threshold, Spring.

... Her signs are these:
(Ah, these and many more!)
The moon's great ring of rain, the shouting trees,
Wild scents that stab, and quickening melodies
To throb in the heart's core.

Helen and Aileen both inherited their mother's lack of interest in personal appearances. Neither had any sense of style in dress, though Helen was immaculately neat and tidy in contrast to her mother and sister. But Helen was immaculate and precise in everything she undertook. Nettie's diaries reveal a certain pride that comes as quite a shock when she does note certain trivia related to appearance. One such occasion concerned my twenty-first birthday party, when Helen arrived in a blue velvet dress which Nettie noted "suits her so well." And so it did. That night Helen even wore a little lipstick, but it was a much more memorable night in that her present to me was a book that was to have much influence over me — Andre Malraux's *Man's Fate*, a testament to the people's struggle in China and the complexity of the whole human condition. It was to inaugurate a further stage in my own studies of China and the Chinese, another lifelong interest that I shared with Helen and which stemmed back to the Sino-Japanese conflict in 1931, preceding by several years the Fascist and Nazi outrages on the other side of the world.

In our day it was unusual to call one's parents by their first names. Helen, always close to her father, never called him anything other than Vance, and her mother was usually "Natty". She sometimes referred to Nettie as "Nosey", probably because in Nettie's vision of the world the ambitions and achievements of her daughters had a high profile. Her expectations of them *were* high, and her parental pride justifiable. But Helen would harangue her with doggerel or witty remarks, some of which Nettie would put to paper. When she was chiding

the thirteen year-old Helen during meal-time, Helen teased her with "Angel Darling" in a cooing voice. When Nettie upbraided her for name-calling, Helen retorted with "Very well then ... I'll try Hag, Hog — or even Hig!" The latter soubriquet had been Nettie's pet aversion from schooldays.

One of the favorite expressions of our childhood was "pie". Anything that was particularly good was always "pie". When Helen and her dad went for a swim "the day was pie, the baths ditto, and we had ditto for tea," which Nettie noted, reminded her of Anna Livia's remark regarding (J.S.) Mill on Woman and *Ditto on the Floss*!

At their first speech night at PLC Nettie was proud that her girls had each received two prizes but found the speeches, especially that of Principal Gray, "guffy". Helen had enjoyed bouncing across the platform even though she had agonized, a few moments before, that her stockings might fall down or that her dress was crooked.

When Nettie held the Ethel Ewing lectureship at PLC in 1933, she made it possible for the girls to learn something of our national literature through her weekly classes. Having read and re-read Henry Handel Richardson at the age of thirteen, I was hungry to discover other treasures, especially poetry, and soon was writing on Australian literature for the school magazine. Later I was querying "Have we a national literature?" in an article for *Farrago*, for university had opened up the world of D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Dostoevsky and other international authors denied us at school and discouraged at home, where Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, the Brontës and Galsworthy filled the bookshelves, while *Brave New World* hid under mother's pillow.

I was disillusioned at university because of Nettie's enthusiasms. I had expected to find something more than the token Walter Murdoch essays prescribed in the English literature course. When Bill Scott and I became secretaries of the Melbourne University Literature Club, we arranged that writers like Vance Palmer, Frank Dalby Davison and Frank Wilmot came to speak. Nettie at that time was putting all her energies into her Spanish Relief Committee. When I told Russel Ward recently that we had lectures on Australian literature at school, and had pushed for some recognition of it at university in the 1930s, he could hardly believe it. In Adelaide and elsewhere he found it was ignored altogether. He was unaware of the impact of even Banjo Paterson's collection of bush ballads until 1950. But Melbourne had the Palmers, Frank Wilmot was manager of the University Bookroom, and Max Crawford's influence on history teaching was taking shape before World War II.

Helen had an extremely logical mind, precise in details, but able to draw on the *bon mot* when necessary and put anyone in her company at ease. She had great poise, a feeling of security and sense of leadership, yet was extremely modest about her achievements, a model of understatement. Nettie was much more volatile. She was an inspiration to many, but her inclination to collect lost causes would inwardly depress her, while Helen just forged ahead to do what had to be done. I found her very rational, almost devoid of emotion. Even when she was

later expelled from the Communist Party – and I do not really know how she felt in her heart about this – she continued to edit Outlook, which she produced over a number of years in Sydney. Her dedication to what she believed in remained as firm as a rock. One of our school friends, Anna Dane, had years before written of us both in Patchwork, referring to Helen as

Of this earth, earthly, like a rock
That stands, its face all glowing in the sun,
Blown by the winds of life, undaunted,
strong in peace.

Aileen's advent at the university coincided with an increasing growth in membership of the Labor Club. She soon became editor of its journal, Proletariat, which appeared rather irregularly at 7d. a copy. It was full of gutsy articles with a strong left-wing bias. In 1934 it was claiming a circulation of 2,700. Aileen had, by then, joined the Communist Party. She ploughed what money she could afford or raise into the publication, but failed to save it. When the affairs were wound up, she was owed quite a bit of money. I remember until the war years Helen was still organizing an odd function or raffle to raise money to pay back the losses Aileen and others had sustained.

The year 1934, when she had taken out her Arts degree, had been a terrible year for Aileen. It was also Helen's last year at school – a brilliant one in which she far eclipsed Aileen's efforts, collecting first-class honors in English, French and Geography, Ormond and senior government scholarships, and being *proxime accessit* dux of the school. She had also won a Bible prize for an essay on St Paul's vision. She had been assistant editor of Patchwork, a prefect, and member of the basketball and hockey teams. She was writing short stories and verse, often humorous, often in a social context, sometimes about Aboriginals or Chinese. Earlier days in Queensland often inspired the setting for her stories or articles.

As Helen could hold over her scholarship for a year, Vance and Nettie decided that living overseas in 1935 would be beneficial for the girls, especially as most of us, Helen's friends, would be returning to school for another year before going on to university. Nettie often referred to the family as "vagrants" but orderly ones, "at least sober and righteous", and wrote to Dr Charles Souter: "It's a crossroad . . . We've never settled down or grown moss." Nor had they. The next ten years were to see them setting up house in at least as many addresses in England, Spain, Melbourne and Queensland.

Long letters arrived from Helen, her mind maturing as each one arrived. She loved the English countryside and the opportunity to see good theatre, but she was appalled at the divisions in society. She found the Silver Jubilee celebrations of King George V's reign militaristic in nature at a time when she was becoming interested in the Disarmament Conference and the fight for peace.

One wonders exactly when and why Nettie first became involved with Spain. The interest developed long before the tragic days of the mid-thirties, and was certainly apparent at the time the Palmers returned to Melbourne

to place Aileen and Helen at school. Nettie had long before become fluent in French and German. I believe her initial concern was nothing more than a whim to study another language. Few Australians were interested. She even recorded that it was a fey reason when someone agreed it ought to be a useful qualification to Australians who might "have a future with South America". Mary Gilmore had long since been disillusioned.

It was probably her awareness that it was an international language with a rich literature and cultural tradition that urged her on. It was therefore perfectly natural that she and Vance would seek a place in sunny Spain where they might write without interruption for a while, soak up the warm sunshine as they had on Green Island and practise speaking their newly acquired language. Aileen had gone to Germany for further study, and Helen had returned to Melbourne. They were free and alone together again. How little could they read into the future!

They first settled at a small fishing village near Barcelona. They were once more near enough to a beach to begin the day with a swim. The handsome Vance could acquire his customary shade of mahogany, as well as working on a new novel and completing the abridged version of *Such is Life*.

I was as anxious about the fate of the Palmers as anyone when I learned that they had been caught up in the conflict in the summer of 1936. Helen didn't hear from them for ages. My own diary kept mentioning the news as it came to hand: "As long as they come through safely I suppose they will be very pleased to have been eye witnesses and will have much material for writing." I was happy to note the outcome on 4 August, remarking on the anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, that the "world is in a very similar position. Russia is helping the Spanish Loyalists . . . We have just heard that the Palmers are safe . . ."

On their return to Melbourne Vance and Nettie threw themselves into forming the Spanish Relief Committee. Its aim was to try and spread the reality of a situation in which they believed the Spanish people were fighting for the whole world and its democratic institutions. They had seen large numbers of troops which Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy had sent to Spain. They had seen the destruction and misery accompanying the attacks on non-military objectives. During the next four years Nettie in particular would work day and night trying to convince the Australian people of the dangerous situation into which the democratic powers were being hurtled. She inaugurated appeals for milk for Spain and ambulances, using returned members of the International Brigade to speak, organised a widely representative conference and conducted the administration from a shop at 177 Collins Street.

In all, some sixty Australians served in Spain during the civil war on the side of the Republican government. Apart from those who had joined the International Brigade, which, incidentally, included four Australian nurses who were in the forefront of the fighting, several Spanish volunteers, living in Australia, returned to fight. Aileen herself went as an interpreter, and other Australian women were engaged in humanitarian work.

Apart from the political ramifications of a Spain likely to be dominated by a Fascist dictator, Nettie was deeply concerned for the future of a country that, in spite of its bloody history, had also succored Calderon and Cervantes, Velasquez, and Goya and de Falla. She was one with Don Quixote when she believed that for liberty one should risk one's life, and that captivity would be the greatest evil that could befall a human being.

Nettie was in great demand as a speaker and co-opted as representative and influential a group for her committee as she could muster to open her campaign in the Lord Mayor's room. She needed a figurehead and tried to catch up with Lord Gowrie's secretary to entice His Excellency to head the committee. But even the fact that people like the Duchess of Atholl and Lord Robert Cecil were in the forefront of the English campaign did not influence Lord Gowrie. It was, of course, a political hot potato in Australia. Catholic Actionists had seen to that.

During Spanish Week in March 1937 medical student Stan Ingwersen (who once claimed his ancestor was the fourth or fifth Baron von Ingwersen who had killed his man in a duel and had duped the Governor of Tasmania into accommodating him at Government House in Hobart) invaded the rooms of the committee. The secretary, Englishwoman Helen Baillie who, together with her gentle mother, had stayed with us in North Queensland during one of her sojourns among the Aboriginal missions, was truly frightened when Ingwersen and his fellow students baited her.

Nettie was elated, however, with the response to a meeting called at the Princess Theatre to begin the appeal. The Reverend Palmer Phillips was in the chair and £190 collected. Money flowed in during the following months, enough to adopt and care for several orphans, with whom she corresponded during their years of rehabilitation in France.

But the enemy within distressed her greatly, especially when a telegram arrived from the affiliated committee in Perth informing her that the Catholic Record reported that all Spanish Relief Committee funds raised in Australia would be sent to the Communist Party in London. She demanded immediate retraction of the false statement and threatened legal proceedings.

I personally never believed that Nettie or Vance were ever members of the Party. Many references in Nettie's diaries reveal that she had some antipathy to Communists, although her belief, common among many, many people at that time, in collective security meant that, while the Party was legal, it was entitled to a voice. Aileen's membership had nothing to do with her acceptance of some Communists as fellow-workers in the cause against Fascism. She was most upset when someone described Aileen's friend Ella Dunkel — a woman who was one of my fellow officers in Industrial Welfare and Personnel Management during World War II — as not only a Communist, but a former Trotskyite, and denied that she was either. She also referred most disparagingly to the mother of one of our mutual friends as a Bolshevik, and did not care to have anything to do with her.

One of Nettie's shortest diary entries was on 22 March

1937. My own diary for that day is one of the longest. Hers merely noted: "Debate University. Evening. Hottish day: hotter evening."

There were no further entries for two days. Yet I can still see her anguished face of that evening, still hear her say later: "To think this could happen in Australia." She was emotionally wrung-out, as we all were, after one of the most appalling nights in the history of the University of Melbourne.

The occasion was a meeting of the Debating Society and the subject debated "that the government is the ruin of Spain". Kevin Kelly, a later Ambassador for Australia who was to become less fanatical in his later years, Stan Ingwersen and Bob Santamaria took the affirmative. Nettie, Dr Gerald O'Day and Jack Legge (standing in at the last minute for Herbert Burton who was ill) took the negative side. More than a thousand bodies squashed into the Public Lecture Theatre, including many rowdy stooges encouraged to come by members of the Newman Society.

"The debate developed into chaos," I described the proceedings, "in which the fascist supporters made so much noise that it was impossible to hear the negative side. They had some men tramping on the roof, and we saw afterwards the passage flooded by the fire hose . . . the police arrived just in time to prevent some of the fascists from turning the hoses on the whole audience. Professor Scutt, timid and incapable, was chairman and had no idea how to keep order. John D—— annoyed the speakers by coming in drunk and creating a disturbance . . . the debate was unable to be judged . . . a very bigoted Protestant woman grabbed the bags of girls around her and threw them across the theatre. She was put out eventually. But for the knowledge that the police were on the spot, there would probably have been a free fight . . ."

I noted the sad reports in the daily press the next day. "What will the world think we are coming to? I have suddenly realized how difficult a task it would be to convert a bigoted Catholic or an enthusiastic Fascist to one's way of thinking." I blamed the heated Irish and those with Mediterranean blood, obviously meaning Santamaria, who was then beginning to spread his political wings. I remember in those passionate days he referred all the time to the Spaniards as "my people". Of course, there were many other Catholics who were ashamed of their behavior and fanaticism. Yet the hatreds engendered by that debate are visible even today.

Vance, although supportive of Nettie, had kept in the background and continued his own writing while Nettie's writing of that period was confined to the Spanish question. This war left more scars on Nettie, scars that would never entirely heal. She would think of those dreadful days for the rest of her life. She would need all the stoicism she could muster to return to some sort of normality as she watched the slow mental deterioration of Aileen, whose dedication had even outpaced her own. They were sad years which took their toll on the whole family.

Helen and I were studying some of the same subjects together at University, including a series of lectures which the Palmers had arranged with MacMahon Ball to insert

in his course, Modern Political Institutions. These were delivered by the American Hartley Grattan on "American Government", and were noteworthy in recognizing that Australians needed to know at least as much about the United States as about British or European political systems.

During the pre-World War II years there were several other committees on which Helen and I worked together, mainly concerned with literature and peace. We were part of a junior group that Nettie could call on from time to time to help out with the chores concerning her own activities. Helen and I were secretaries in separate years of the University Peace Group and University Literature Club, and I followed Helen as editor of the Melbourne University Magazine. We worked for the International Peace Campaign and the Australian Youth Council. Helen joined the Communist Party about this time. I stayed in the Labor Club.

Early in 1939 we were all deeply concerned for Helen at the time of the Friday 13th bushfires. We knew she was in the Warburton area with Ray and Jessie MacLeod. Vance and Nettie, accompanied by Dr John Dale and others set out to search for them, believing they would not find them alive. It was a remarkable experience in that the three survived a fierce crown fire, an almost unknown feat. They returned to join the Red Cross Bushfire Relief Appeal.

This was the year that war broke out. We felt even more devastated, as though our world had really come to an end. Dr Ethel McLennan invited Nettie to become part of the Women of the University Patriotic Fund. When it was decided that the university's efforts would help the Polish women, Nettie forcefully pointed towards the need to continue helping the women and child *evacuados* from Spain, some of whom she was corresponding with in France. I chose to work in an area closer to home, and organized a campaign to send bandages to China.

In spite of our busy wartime activities I saw a lot of Helen and a little of Vance and Nettie during the 1940s. Helen's path often crossed my husband's when they were both in the Air Force. Helen was a flight officer in the education service and used to drop in when we lived in Queen's Road, not far from the barracks and not far from where her parents were living in St Kilda Road. Dr Lloyd Ross, then Director of Public Relations of the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, was also a neighbor and frequent visitor. Nettie was never too sure of him. She had found during the Spanish campaign that he was "solid and alive. I'd enjoy him less if I disagreed with his findings."

Flora Eldershaw stayed with the Palmers when she came to Melbourne in 1944 to join the Department of Labour and National Service. She was virtually my boss. The Department had trained me as an industrial welfare and personnel officer. She was always good company and a great conversationalist, much more so than Marjorie Barnard, who would also visit. I believe they had much to do with encouraging Helen to write her early books on Australia's history, in collaboration with Jessie MacLeod. Flora was a friend in need when I had to resign from my work during a difficult pregnancy.

The later years of the Palmers and their influence on the literary life of Melbourne have been well documented. I saw less of Vance and Nettie during my mothering years and absence in the United States. While visiting Sydney I always saw Helen. We would roam around the historic areas and drink in her favorite little pub or meet up with other literary characters. She was dedicated to her teaching job at Fort Street, and to her editing of Outlook and the causes it pursued. Her expulsion from the Party to which she had given so many years of her life was probably a greater shock than she would admit. Her premature death from cancer in 1979 devastated her many friends. But Helen's is another story, for this is largely a portrait of her parents.

The Palmers were willing advisers in 1959 when I organized a large week-long Australian Festival to celebrate the opening of the newly built Wilson Hall. They lent some of their treasures for the exhibition, including Colin Colahan's portrait in oils of Vance, as well as manuscripts of their work.

Nettie's public image was probably that she always took herself a bit too seriously. This was not always so. Privately she could be fun, warm and quick-witted. She enjoyed a little joke and was ready to share the odd witticism with others, as in the postscript of a letter I received from her, quoting a piece of fun from George Gordon McCrae when he wrote returning a book on Gluck that she had lent him:

Dear Nettie,

This book from my shelf to your shelf.

She was lovable and dedicated, passionate and impulsive, at times absent-minded, even eccentric, a woman whose enthusiasms for people and causes would increase the flow of adrenalin in others. It was she who encouraged me to write regularly in a daily diary, which I kept for many years, as she had herself. But it is worth noting that there is a great deal of difference in her original diaries and what she published from them. She was first and foremost an artist, and *Fourteen Years* makes a good case for revising and polishing the hasty and cruder jottings of day-to-day.

In trying to convey a picture of the Palmers as I knew them, especially of those years when few persons now living did, I hope that I shan't add too much to a legend they both would have hated. Australians tend to cut down their tall poppies, to crucify them. It would be almost unjust to make cult figures of them, to deify them. Others will assess their work, which in my opinion was less important than their influence on and help to other practising writers. They were in many ways still pioneers of a national literature and thankfully were adventurous enough to explore the unknown, although not always successfully. As I saw them, they never wavered from their support for young people and their ideals. I know that in my case and with all humility, I owe them much.

Marjorie Tipping, historian and art consultant, lives in Melbourne.

MICHAEL DAVIE

Fred Williams

When Fred Williams died in 1982 the sense of loss, both personal and national, was so great that my wife and I, and many around Overland, were dumbfounded. This went, of course, far beyond the fact that Fred Williams was a friend of this magazine and contributed to it. In the desolation of Fred's loss, and our sympathy for his family, and the magnitude of the task assessing the man, we could find little to say at the time but that "It may be possible, eventually, and in Overland, to try to assemble a tribute to Fred Williams." As part of our tribute which can never be adequately paid, and because we wished to have Fred Williams represented in our centenary issues – as he would have wished – we have asked Michael Davie to write on Fred Williams and his recent exhibition in London. Lyn Williams has generously allowed us to print with this some examples of Williams' unpublished work. This includes the splendid cover drawing, which we hope represents this magazine's spirit and future.

– Stephen Murray-Smith.

The Hayward Gallery, on the south bank of the Thames, is as grim as an Aztec fortress: brutalist architecture at its most brutal – angular and aggressive. Nobody likes the place now; and on wet days it can induce deep gloom in anyone who approaches its forbidding, concrete exterior across the rainswept ramps from Waterloo Station.

Yet the Hayward can attract crowds. Queues for a Renoir exhibition stretched almost back to Waterloo. In May, Renoir was dismantled and replaced by the "Hayward Annual", the seventh. The show contained, as well as works by Francis Bacon, Henry Moore and Bridger Riley, a series of gouaches by Fred Williams.

The inside of the Hayward is better than the outside. The ten gouaches were hung on one long wall, all the same size. To see these vivid paintings after the London rain was like being instantly transported to Australia in January from a northern winter. The gouaches belong to the Pilbara series of 1979, three years before Williams died. Nigel Greenwood says in the catalog that the series ought to be in the Tate Gallery alongside their "natural progenitor, J.M.W. Turner." The pictures do not strike the amateur as at all Turner-esque, however: Williams is here engaged in a head-on encounter with the landscape, the terrain itself, and unconcerned by the atmosphere between painter and subject: the sky, where visible, is a uniform hard shade of blue. Australia here appears as very different from the "great brown country" referred to by Geoffrey Smart, it is polychromatic, almost as if the Pilbara is a southern hemisphere Provence.

The contrast between the usual visual image of the continent and the Williams pictures in front of them struck the Hayward visitor. "Australia?" said a puzzled middle-aged lady, peering at the labels, tugging at her

companion's sleeve. "Hm," he said. "That's odd." Two people's view of a continent was being changed.

Yet Fred Williams was not a proselytizer. In 1959 the group who called themselves the Antipodeans – Bernard Smith, Arthur and David Boyd, Robert Dickenson, John Perceval, John Brack, Charles Blackman and Clifton Pugh – 'rejected' Williams on the ground that he was not figurative enough. What did that mean? Perhaps it only meant that he was a painter, and a man, who was not cut out to be part of a group seeking to strike attitudes. Did he ever sign a manifesto? He avoided opportunities to explain himself in public. An exhibition of his work was put on in Launceston in 1980. He himself helped to pay for it. A seminar was arranged to discuss the work and he was billed as a participant. But when the time came for him to appear, the chairman announced to the frustrated audience that he had returned to the mainland – and I noticed that none of his friends present, who knew him better than I did, were much surprised.

Yet there was nothing secretive about Fred Williams' attitude to his work. His house was full of it, on display.

In the evenings after dinner, he would quite often ask the company if they would like to see some recent paintings. No general introduction to the work was offered; Fred simply took out the gouaches one after the other and laid them on the floor, walking between them as if he scarcely cared whether he trod on them or not. He was not seeking any reaction from the spectators; none of us felt any pressure to make flattering remarks; his demeanor and attitude was that of a man showing his holiday snaps.

He was at the same time confident yet, it seemed to me, innocently modest about his work. Flying over Australia,

he once looked out of the window and said, in tones of surprise, that the land below looked exactly like one of his paintings. This was a point that had already occurred to everyone except him. He never behaved in a way that suggested he wanted to be thought of as belonging to a special category of human beings called "artists". His dress, enclosing a rotund figure, was wholly conventional, even old fashioned; one could not imagine him in a bow tie or velvet jacket. He owned no 'leisure wear'; a favorite color for the Melbourne winter was a hard-wearing dark green and brown. A stranger could have spent a long time with him before guessing his trade.

His interests were wide. He readily agreed to join the board of the *Age Monthly Review* when it started, and used to have ideas for all kinds of subjects, from science to military history. At the same time, he knew a lot about art history. He bought and read art books, and assembled shelves full of gallery catalogs. What his politics were, I never quite discovered – liberal-left, I suppose. He read newspapers closely, liking to know what was going on. Rules football and cricket he followed in detail; his portly figure on the cricket field when he captained the artists in an annual match against the writers was one of the sights of the Melbourne summer. He liked to win, but his grasp of the tactics required to achieve this aim was rudimentary. I once mentioned a cricket picture by *Pisarro*; he knew exactly where it was painted and when (I checked up later). He himself painted only one cricket picture, the head of an unnamed cricketer who was, I believe, *Bill Lawry*, the Australian captain.

He, like *Lawry*, had a streak of stubbornness about him; he was a man who kept going. One proof of it was his extraordinary diary. He would pull out a ledger-sized volume occasionally and read an extract. As anyone knows who has tried to keep a detailed diary, the endeavour requires self-discipline or self-absorption. Fred's diary, so far as I learned, was the daily record sort, not the introspective sort (the two are rarely combined). Those are the hardest to keep up. But Fred, apparently, rarely missed a day. When the diary is eventually published, even if fifty years ahead, it might turn out to be a prime source of Australian social and art history.

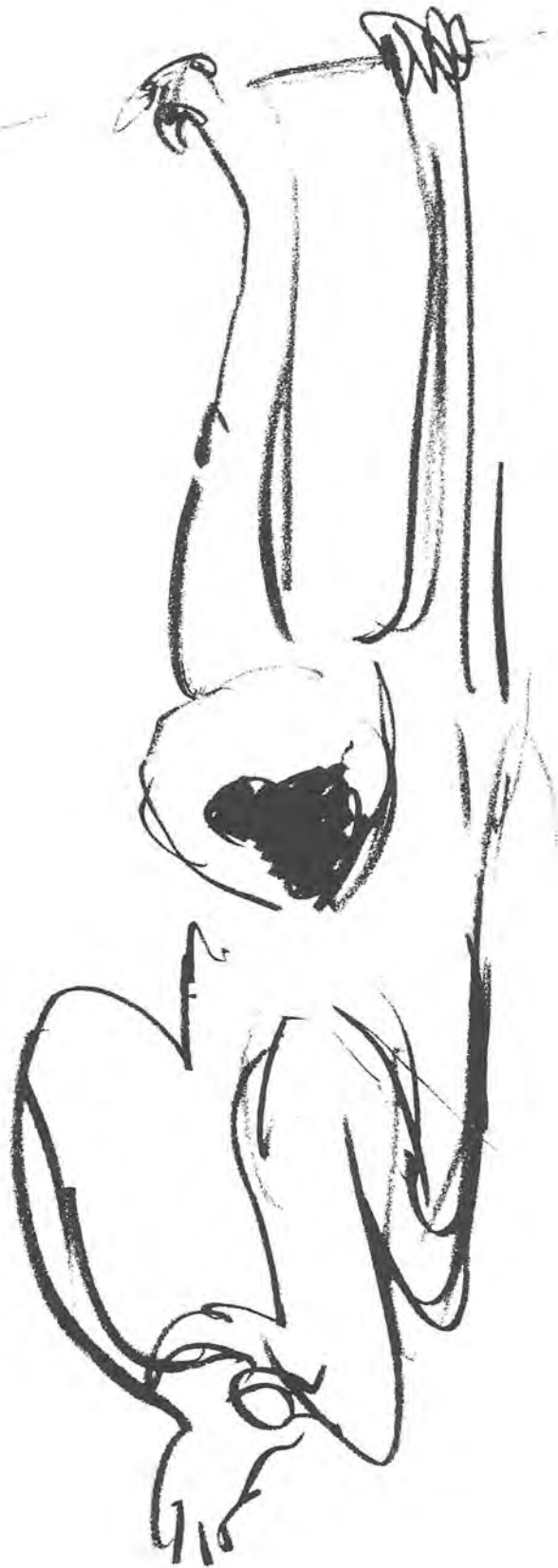
At home, Fred Williams was a *paterfamilias*, greatly relying on *Lyn*, his wife, and sometimes adopting an air of mock incomprehension towards the activities of their three daughters. He knew how to protect himself to ensure that he had time to work, but his nature was

gregarious and he enjoyed playing the part of the host, carving great slices off a joint and bustling off to his cellar to produce another bottle from a copious supply of extra-special wine. On these occasions he could get entangled in argument; he was not wholly bonhomous and benevolent. He could say sharp things about art administrators – he used to become especially indignant about poor standards of conservation and the philistinism of over-enthusiastic cleaners of paintings – and he could be still sharper about politicians, especially when he detected that they were using art to advance their careers; he knew what he was talking about in this field, as a board member of the National Gallery in Canberra. He could become indignant, too, about the foibles of his established contemporaries, though not for long. One sensed unhealed wounds. I never heard him say a harsh word, however, about any artist struggling to make his way; he did not forget his own difficult early years.

He was a shrewd judge of people, and amused by their view of themselves. Towards the end of his life he painted a portrait of *Rupert Murdoch*, a friend and patron. Mr Murdoch, according to Fred, asked how he should stand. "Look like a success," said Fred. Mr Murdoch at once jingled the coins in his pocket. This incident became a favorite Fred story.

He greeted the approach of death with stoicism and ironic humor. Anne, my wife, said he should read *Humphrey Carpenter's* biography of *W.H. Auden*. "I hope it's not too long," he said. Our final meeting was round the Williams pool, with *Lyn* and the girls, and Fred in his everyday white shirt opening grander and grander bottles of wine, his unspoken assumption being that these prizes could not be left alone any longer, in case he missed out. He looked as he always had; it was hard to believe that he was a dying man. When we left, knowing that it was the last time we would see him, he stood at the door of his home, not smiling, his eyes gazing both at us and through. In London, a Williams gouache hangs over our mantelpiece and, though we try not to be sentimental, we can scarcely look at it without receiving the strongest impression of Fred as well as of Australia. The man and the continent have become inseparable in our minds, which must be a common experience among those lucky enough to have known both the work and its painter.

Michael Davie, former Editor of the Melbourne Age, lives in London and writes for the Observer.



"Ape" (London



"Music Hall Audience"
(London 1954)



"Music Hall Entertainers"
(London 1954)



"The Bluff, Mornington"
(Pen and ink, 1968)

David Williams



"Cove, Mornington"
(Pen and ink, 1968)

David Williams

The Sniper

What I've achieved so far is, as the expression goes, chicken-feed, or, to cite the title of a recent Malouf novella – terrorism its theme – child's play.¹ A dozen aims, a dozen shots, a dozen successes. In the parlance of ten-pin bowling, a dozen strikes. The actual score might in fact be thirteen or fifteen or eighteen by now, but I have lost count. No notches have I scratched on my rifle, I am not so vain. Nor are they, the underlings of the world, truly the prize I am after. Prime ministers are worthier fare. Besides, numbers, mere numbers have lost their spell. To put the matter into a certain perspective, though at the risk of intrusion – after the first few times, do you keep count how often you've made it with your wife/husband/de facto/lover/Pandar's Cressidas?² You see? – the original interest, the original stirrings, these remain, along with the exhilaration experienced in repeating or even improving upon the performance, in your case in the gratification of your libido, in mine in the collection of a bull's-eye. But tallies, overall scores, become quite irrelevant, in my sport no less than in yours, especially in an age when, think of it, think of say, South East Asia, the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, the Central Americas, life is so disposably cheap.³ We, homo sapiens, through rituals and codes consecrate our existences to worth, and through ordinances and injunctions, conventions and commandments⁴ exalt ourselves to the rank of highest and most sacrosanct in the living realm. And yet, reduce the human body to the basic structures of blood, collagen, fats, calcium, starches, whatever, and only the untutored will insist that it is, *in essence*, different from that of the dog, or the weasel, or a mole.⁵ I acknowledge, let there be no inference to the contrary, that we are also possessed of minds and, to defer to our men of the cloth, of souls. But then, hath not a dog a mind, doth not a weasel think, doth not the mole reason and respond, albeit – this, too, I shall grant – at a different level? And as for soul, who is so wholly ready to assert, on the life of his mother, that such endowment is denied the bee, say, or the butterfly, or the snake that slinks furtively and, picture it, so gracefully in the grass?

So, it's not worth particularly much, the body. Boil it down to its components, extract its minerals, its oils, reconstitute it in different forms, and sell them. The soap that can be made from it, or the lampshades,⁶ would scarcely dent even a poor man's budget. While as fertilizer, here, too, large numbers of dried, denatured

and dessicated carcasses are needed to cover the smallest viable lettuce patch, and fertilizer is, as is known, generally – pardon the pun – dirt-cheap. When you consider against this the price of mink, or a pound of veal, or a jar of caviar . . . When you consider that one gold tooth was not so long ago worth destroying breath, mind and soul for . . . When you consider that taxi-drivers, grocers and service-station attendants have been done away with for less . . . Why, for one tribe to be circumcised – or, conversely, for another, to remain uncircumcised – sufficed; for others still, to be born now with a cleft, now with a little frankfurt between the legs, was reason sufficient for a watery obliteration. And as for a hare-lip, a club-foot, or a strawberry mark – ha! these scarcely warrant mention.

None of this – let me say outright – is called forth to justify my actions. I feel no compelling need, let alone obligation, to justify. I am here merely stating the obvious and I have, I believe, made my point. It has to do with equality, equality before the law, the ultimate law – let me be explicit, the biological law, albeit an equality predicated on a common worthlessness, or, better still, expendability. A kilo of Skid Row soot is worth little. But, in material terms, a kilo of prime minister is not worth more. His breath, sweat, urine, shit – pardon the language – is the same as that of the sozzled boozer though his flesh warms that of the Mrs between the clean white sheets of Big Wig Grotto while his opposite number graces/disgraces (take your pick) the benches of Slubberdagulian Station, the Albatross Highway underpass or the Gardens of Sheol.⁸ But go shoot a prime minister and shoot a derelict. In which is the greater notoriety to be had, and with notoriety, fame? Yes, fame of a sort, fame – one's face in every newspaper, on every radio, every television screen through the world; a line, permanence in Professor Ivor E. Towers' revised *History of New Macadamia: the Later Years*; a chapter in some journalist's *The Hundred and Eighty-Eight Days of John T.T. Creighton-Smith, PM*⁹ and an in-depth study in some Ph.D. student's "Tall Poppies and Bared Necks, the Price of Leadership and Assassination of Public Figures as Temptation and Sport – From Lincoln to Creighton-Smith."

This is whom I have within my sights then. Metaphorically speaking that is, though for the moment only.

Metaphor shall yet assume the garb of literalness when I am fully prepared to execute my purpose. (Forgive me, once again, my play with words. I do enjoy the occasional pun.) The time shall come, I swear, as surely as Adam is now dust fused with crud in some sodden subterranean shaly stratum, it shall come. When he emerges from the Grotto precincts in his limousine, say, or opens some new gas-works or civic centre, or walks out on public parade, something for which he, my quarry, John Thomas Titterton Creighton-Smith who professes to be a man of the people and for whom the people have a decided weakness, this actually being balm to his stupendous vanity by uncommon popularity fed. To the whole adventure, that very popularity adds tantalizingly heady spice. When I contemplate the effects of its consummation upon the public ... No chef by his concoction could be more transported. But first I shall need to penetrate the tiers of bodyguards around him, of course, breach an opening, however slight, in their defences, and do a Booth or a Guiteau, a Czolgoz or an Oswald¹⁰ – a perfect hit, a strike that earns in full that dark and silent purgatory to which I shall – need I doubt it? – be eternally consigned. Near-misses, like near-hits, are the preserve of the inept, and the stigma of ineptitude is more ignominious than death itself. For just as the unexamined life is not worth living,¹¹ nor is the unachieved life worth the candle, and if I am to leave this earth – as biology dictates I must – then, not having scaled the heights in business or industry, in scholarship or the arts, at least it shall not be without this one accomplishment, this singular, grand, momentous, history-changing, riveting, all-mesmerising act.

There is, however, work to be done. Practice. That is above all the name of the present game. Practice. And this is where I return to my hobo. One of these was my first. From two hundred metres away, from a patio in the centre of the Deliverance Gardens¹² at five in the morning when the dew was rising as was the pearly light. But the sensation was, I must confess, that of shooting at a sack of potatoes. (This is not at all metaphorical; I *have* shot at a sack of potatoes.) I heard the thud; it reached me through the still, cool, glassy ambience. But my tramp did not move. He might indeed already have been dead, frozen and locked in rigor mortis. The preliminary exhilaration over, the matter proved a joyless anti-climax.

Less so the escapade that followed. A static target is scarcely a challenge. I could, of course, have spent an afternoon at the Jolly Nimrod firing blanks at mobile mechanized plastic ducks; or, out in the lanes plucking off cats, dogs, and pigeons, or sparrows in flight. But the one are too regular, too predictable in their revolving circuit and, after a while, quite boring; while the other, really, the other they're small fry against the bigger more newsworthy game to be had. So, radio listeners and television viewers will have heard of or seen filmed shots of a station-wagon overturned along the Bonebreak Highway just north of the township Tartarus, the vehicle having skidded off the road, rolled, and struck a tree, killing instantly its occupants – a man of sixty (so it was announced), his wife, and the sister of one of them. The mishap happened on a weekend when a further twelve people met their *Gotterdämmerung* on the State's roads;

the listener/viewer will therefore be excused if he does not recall the specific episode. Not known, however, and not suspected was the fact that, before that wagon veered into its terminal skid, a single fired pellet had rammed into the left front tyre causing instant puncture and deflation, the laws of physics, so highly consistent and reliable, seeing to the rest.¹³ There was cunning in that – even I, normally quite fastidious and unimpressible – had to admit. I had successfully bull's-eyed a moving target; I had collected, numerically speaking, a fine prize; and had done so without arousing the least suspicion. After my deliverance of that park bench layabout from his mortal coil, a brief eight-line newspaper item appeared which referred to police investigations into suspicious circumstances. I guessed, however, that the law would not become overly excited over an instance which represented the removal of one more imposition upon the State's welfare resources. But here, with regard to the simulated accident along the highway, only a chance observation by an exceptionally astute observer, only a fluke, would render anyone aware of play that might have touched at all on the foul. I must say that the whisky I downed that evening as I watched the scene on the late news had an exceptionally exquisite and piquant taste. Pity was that, on the Monday, I could not tell my colleagues in the office about it other than to say, deliberately off-handedly, "Old Mephistopheles certainly had a picnic this weekend collecting souls, didn't he?" They, however, preferred to talk about Mick Forward's eight goals for the Bloodred Arsenals and the spectacular high-flying marks of "Hawkeye" Eagle. Yes, "spectacular" was their word, but not for me was it to redefine for them its usage. How tediously, then, did the day pass as, abstractedly, I continued to scan the ever-coming taxation returns.

No virtue is there in elaborating separately on all my meagre operations. Quite early on, I had the police wonderfully mystified. Why should anyone wish to do in a gas-man on his rounds, for instance, they asked, or a bag-swinging school-boy running with a class-mate home from school? Reasonable questions, to be sure. Discern the motive, uncover the villain. Or an electrician fixing wires at the summit of a light-pole, or a cooing clucking young woman wheeling a pram? The papers began to tell of a madman terrorizing the streets, of a psychopath on the loose; the television news-readers conveyed the law's regret that no composite picture of the culprit had yet been assembled, and appealed to the public to report anything untoward; while the public itself was becoming somewhat restive. Psychopath! I rather liked that. I still do. Not so much the label itself – I am, in my faculties, as sane as the next man; it is only that I dare perform what others merely strait-jacket in dream – but rather, what I prize is the fact that by being endowed with a label, I would even call it a title. I have acquired a distinct identity, I am already singled out from the rest of mortality, though I swear the last place our officers of the law would consider looking would be in a government taxation-office where that "psychopath" is in a sense faceless among forty to fifty others. They find it hard to

accept, this too I swear, that even a mass, a man can be truly unique.

One strike that gave me especial delight – the delight I would guess of that little tailor who got seven with one blow¹⁴ – was that tally of four I bagged with a single bullet cutting clean through a scaffold support outside the twelfth-floor window of an office-block in the process



of construction. One moment they were scraping, plastering, painting, whatever, one of them had to all appearances probably told a joke for they were also laughing, the next they were spinning and careering like squawking hens down the face of the building. An added bonus to the expected thud, bounce and spreadeagling of those bodies abruptly become corpses on the bitumen below was the impaling of one of them on a steel upright, where he flailed about for a full ten seconds I'm sure as the blood coursed from his innards down the length of the pole. What I relished still more, though, was the irony of an ambulance, of all things, sirening in haste towards Azrael Hospital with a victim of a genuine accident careering crash-bang into a tram which, in halting abruptly, pre-

cipitated a magnificent concertina-ing of three vehicles into its rear, the whole – mangled steel, shattered glass, excoriated flesh, bone exposed, teeth dispersed – caused by one live coil penetrating the ear of the ambulance-driver just as he was beginning to turn into Leveller Avenue that runs direct towards the entrance to the hospital. The television news that night was certainly worth watching. All the more so as, in one of the panning shots, I caught a glimpse of myself, spectator beside a tree, none suspecting what it was I truly carried in my clarinet-case.

With a gin in my hand, I indulged in a nice little giggle then as I watched the television news and felt close, nearly ready to tackle the big game, for me the biggest game of all. At the moment, he is probably sleeping, my John T.T. Creighton-Smith, PM, who knows but that he may be making it with his wife – or, having heard of the peccadillo ways of politicians, I suspect, possibly with one of his panting glazed-eyed secretaries by his charisma and eminence charmed. Ah, the animal nature of man! And of woman, for that matter! Such pleasures, however, *any* pleasures he shan't know for much longer. Sheol is waiting for him, for as I said before I have him within my sights. I am a mere hair's-breadth short of perfection in my aim. A little more practice, a more total sense of being wholly at one with my rifle, the need to steel myself utterly against the possible quivering of hands at the crucial moment, the need above all to be secure in the knowledge that my quarry, however fast he may be moving, and in whatever direction he may turn his head, is, from the moment my aim is trained upon him, irrevocably doomed. The power, the power! Whether from a rooftop, behind a garbage can, behind bushes, from my car, the rim of a headland, beside a highway, perched between the branches of a tree – there is no place from which I cannot now home in on my prey. For all that you, dear reader, good reader, Mr/Mrs Everyman, may know, as you next head for the golf-course, the tennis-club, supermarket, concert-hall, will you have any certainty that you shall to your haven hearth and home return? Look well at it whenever you leave, fondly, ruefully, nostalgically, however you will, for who knows but that as you pass by, say, Huntsman's Hill or Marksman's Pass or even Tony Delilah's Il Paradiso Pizza Bar, I might be somewhere close, a head rising a jot above a hedge or balustrade, releasing from there a shell that may deliver you faster to your El Dorado than your vehicle at its swiftest ever could. As you sit now and rummage through your mail or play with your children or instruct your broker to purchase more bonds, may you give thought that tomorrow the moment you step across the threshold of your castle/temple/home-sweet-home might well be your last. You do, after all, read the newspapers, don't you? And surely, you must by now be impressed by the randomness, that utter unpredictability with which that supposed madman-psychopath's innocent lambs have fallen.

This is one of those delightful bonuses that make the whole exercise so intriguing – the basic unpredictability of it all. Neither I, nor my prospective booty, know one

another, and yet, tomorrow, we shall, in a sense, cross each other's life trajectory. The thought that it could be anyone, someone at the moment scratching at a mole, or flushing a toilet or picking his/her teeth, is a notion exquisitely piquant indeed. My babe's happy obliviousness to his/her fate moves me to headiness, while no less affecting is the fact that my catch I do not have to choose but is, in truth, already chosen. Yes; chosen. His fate is, to use philosophical jargon, determined.¹⁵ There is something of the Sophoclean/Aeschylean Greek about it. The Delphic oracle has spoken. My Orestes/Oedipus/Electra is caught irretrievably in the spider's mesh. Were he to know, he might kick and tug and thrash about in the silken warp of that filamentous web, but fulminate as he may, by this time tomorrow, my butterfly shall lie congealing behind steel doors in the city morgue. A haunting thought, perhaps, if by notions of death and inevitability the reader is haunted. But more haunting still is another thought – the meditation that to this end should the man, as child, be born; the reflection that man in his growth should study, work, love, laugh, play, agonize in his time over cosmic mysteries and private woes, marry perhaps, and perhaps divorce, do good, do evil, requited, unrequited, attain to notoriety, attain to fame, and engage in all that tellurian earthlings are given to do, only to be cut short in a milli-second of time by the dead-on flight of a mini-cylinder of metal. Epic writers endow their heroes with the strength of steel. But, truly, ah how fragile the flesh, how flimsy! Powdered talc is scarcely as brittle. So he is already chosen, my prize, already caught, as I have said, in the spider's web. He cannot escape, simply cannot. The choices he shall make, the decisions he shall act upon will, simply because he shall have made no other, lead him to his Calvary. Acting as he will, his fate is even now rubber-stamped and sealed because tomorrow – I have already selected the site – I shall be crouching in the vicinity of Consignment Bay where he, in the enactment of his decisions, shall be passing. Of course, were he to take other decisions, were I to select another site, not he then but another should be the fruit I bag. But the truth of what I have here written shall remain no less true; it shall merely be transferred to that "other" whose fate would then accordingly be indelibly writ. I could also choose to abandon altogether my poacher's game, in which case my ferret's rendezvous with the Reaper should be to some later time and circumstance not of my making be deferred. But were I to do so, I should render wholly void of meaning the extinction of my many and separate Jonahs who through their unwitting unanticipated martyrdoms¹⁶ have at least paved my way to John T.T. Creighton-Smith, PM, and that would be – my conscience could not bear it – damnably unconscionable.

The perceptive reader will note a shift in gear towards those favorite playthings of our sophists. How much of my quarry's actions and his forthcoming denouement is determined, how much of these is freely willed? In other words, to what extent, if his end is beyond repeal, is he locked into a system which has directed and continues to direct towards this consummation his every step; to what extent is he truly free, given the myriad variables that act upon him and are acted upon in turn, to choose and to

follow the logic of his every choice?¹⁷ What formerly fell into the province of pure philosophers has now claimed mathematicians, logicians, statisticians and a newly-cloned breed of calculating animal called probability theorists. These last I harbor strong affinity for, for they add to the whole operation, already fascinating in its Heisenbergian elusiveness, the recognition – which I have long maintained – of a third dimension, the more untamed, haphazard, by guess and by God, workings of chance. In this cosmic, multiplex, multifarious scheme of things, by Aristotle, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and Einstein explained – though some Nostradamuses would attribute all to the stars – may I beg leave to intrude my humble two cents' worth? When my prey shall expire under the impact of my aim, why will it have to be he and not another? Of the thousands, the millions all around, why is it that it is we, he and I, who shall be brought by our separate paths to that common crossroads for that one swift, demolishing, obliterating milli-second of time? To extend my sights: when baby brother Uriel died of sepsis why was it he and not another, as Mother kept asking? Or when Cousin Stella slipped under a bus, again, why she and not another? Had she in that moment not been there; had the bus come early, come late; had the sky poured sunshine rather than rain; and had not nervous Aunt Mary called her back to fetch her raincoat . . . All these little "hads" and "had nots". Go, deny the machinations of that rollicking jester Chance¹⁸ that leads couples to meet and to marry, fortunes to be made, fortunes to be lost, miners in shafts to be crushed, airliners to collide, buffoons to hoop the hoop on the peel of bananas. The whole thing is so tantalizingly intermeshed. I can't help but reel at the thought, in anticipation of tomorrow, and more intoxicatingly of the day Prime Minister John T.T. Creighton-Smith shall fall, that what for me shall be an action willed, for them my prizes shall be determined, by all that has preceded ordained in a fateful – call it fatal, if you wish – ineluctable confluence through chance.¹⁹

I have him within my sights then, Prime Minister John Thomas Titterham Creighton-Smith. But no hurry is there. The day will come. The day will come when through an act of choice, an act of unfettered will discharged at the time of my choosing, I shall alter the course of history of the nation, change it categorically – so is it ordained, if not by anyone foreseen – and in so far as waves and ripples reach out from shore to shore across Neptune's seven seas and other waters, so shall I touch upon the course of other nations, on all the nations, as well. Ah, the effects! The effects! – foreign policy, defence, stock markets and currency exchange, migration, trade, hot war, cold war, United Nations numbers games, none of them escaping, none, if only because with the liquidation of one helmsman another is there to offer his neck in filling the void, that "other" of necessity possessed of views, perceptions, doctrines, and temperaments, endowments, style different from the *primus inter pares* and master of the deck I will have plucked off.

It's nice, it's nice in a world willy-nilly tossed and rocked on "the ever-whirling wheel of Change"²⁰ to

exert an influence, to press upon this universe a thumbprint, to know that one will not have lived wholly in vain and passed through this all-deracinating cosmos unnoted and unremarked, a thingummy Monsieur un Tel, a Richard Roe and What-Have-You, when immortality is so easy, so absurdly, swimmingly, exquisitely easy to attain. But there is no hurry, there is no rush; the headsman's terrestrial dusk and millennial dawn will come, until which time, from rooftop, window, embankment, ridge and underpass I shall wing and snuff my earthly pigeons, now one, now another, at play with singleton and nation in the way that up there, somewhere, in the heavens, in the spheres, another sits and plucks off, another angles and snares his spoil, another scythes and reaps and harvests, a revered worshipped Moloch gathering unto himself each man/woman/infant on the Clapham omnibus in exulting, self-exalting, exuberant and lively, clandestine, merry sport.

NOTES

- 1 David Malouf: *Child's Play* (Chatto and Windus, 1982, Penguin Books, 1983).
- 2 A play on the name Pandarus who, according to mediaeval legend, procured Cressida for Troilus.
- 3 The examples cited could as readily have been substituted with South America, Africa, the Middle East, India and Pakistan. Any issue of the weekly Time Magazine, the Year Books of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* or of the *World Book Encyclopaedia* or the annual reports of Amnesty International will attest to the validity of the assertions made.
- 4 The reader may prefer "Commandments" to "commandments".
- 5 The reader is referred to any standard text on comparative biology.
- 6 Students of recent history will recognize that none of this is either hypothetical or fanciful.
- 7 The merest intelligent perusal of the daily newspaper will vouchsafe the truth of all that is stated here.
- 8 As the reader will have guessed, the narrator has, in this instance, elected to substitute fictitious names for more identifiable stigmatizing landmarks.
- 9 Here, the name is real, however inflated.
- 10 The list is confined to despatchers of American Presidents – Lincoln, of course, Garfield, McKinley and Kennedy, the date of the latter's dispatch falling, by odd circumstance, on the day when, turning twenty-one, I celebrated my accession to responsible manhood. Numerous other instances may be cited, though none so notable and consequential in our time as that of Gavrilo Princip's wiping

out of "fat churchy" Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, an event which unfailingly evokes that hilarious opening of Jaroslav Hasek's *The Good Soldier Schweik*.

- 11 Attributed to Socrates in Plato's "Apology".
- 12 See Note 8.
- 13 I refer here to Galileo's dictum – some attribute it to Newton – that an unimpeded body, moving on a smooth horizontal plane, moves with uniform velocity in a straight line. The corollary is, of course, that with impendence, that body shall depart from its course. Precise calculation of displacement – which must consider forward motion, sideways deflection, vertical roll, the force of impact with the ground with each turning and other variables – then enters the realm of higher sophisticated mathematics, a not-impossible task for those with nothing better to amuse them in this computer age.
- 14 Fairy tales are well behind me, but I believe the story is told by the Brothers Grimm, Jakob and Wilhelm. Actually, I prefer their Rumpelstiltskin, especially when he goes through the floor.
- 15 The ensuing reference to Electra notwithstanding, I shall in deference to convention revert to the masculine gender, this in no way, however, excluding from my remarks the purportedly fairer, weaker, more delicate daughters of Eve.
- 16 I employ the word "martyr" only in echo of the mounting press hysteria which is now referring to my spoil as "martyrs of some unhinged dement". It's nice to have an identity. Others talk of a modern incarnation of Jack the Ripper, Dracula, and inevitably, Frankenstein. In the wake of the rising panic, several mistaken arrests have taken place. The police are beleaguered by a flurry of hoax calls along with calls from such who genuinely believe that they are being hounded and swear to being next on the hit-list.
- 17 A complete list of variables would be beyond the scope of this *oeuvre*, but I shall offer a number of them at random: the city of one's birth, the neighborhood in which one's been reared, one's parentage, genetic endowment, influence of teachers/peers/spouse/inamorata/sibs, and then one's reading, work, education, skills, one's health, skin color, language, faith or lack thereof, standards or lack thereof, and so on. Name but one contingency and that, too, cannot be ignored.
- 18 Readers may be reminded of Chance the Gardener (or Chauncey Gardiner) in Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There*.
- 19 Having looked into mathematics texts to help my vernaly-flowering niece Angela, whom I must admit I love, albeit in a platonic-paternal way – if, as the public says, I am a maniac, I am nonetheless capable of love; I would kill to protect her every hair – I have alighted on the Venn diagram which might best pictorially describe that quickening bewitching triumvirate – determinism, free will and chance – the influence of each to every circumstance conceivable related to the degree of separateness of space or overlap.
- 20 Edmund Spenser: "The Faerie Queen", book VII, ch. VI, i.

I don't want to write an editorial on the hundredth issue of *Overland*, for on the whole, and very wisely I feel, *Overland* has eschewed editorials. Eschewed them, I think, very largely because it does not behove a magazine as closely linked with its readers as this one seems to be – sometimes I am puzzled by the affection we seem to engender – to tell those readers what they should think. Nor is *Overland* itself always sure of what it thinks, and perhaps that is the point. Certainly we have established ourselves somewhere on the Left/liberal/Labor/socialist/humanist side of the social and political spectrum. Readers, I suppose, take that for granted. And certainly we hold to the view that there is nothing in human affairs, including literary and cultural affairs, that should not be accessible to that odd, hypothetical being called the 'intelligent general reader'. That too, has, I hope, emerged from our first hundred issues. Beyond those stances, however, it has been our job – and perhaps we should have done it better – to place before readers fiction and poetry, reviews and articles, opinions and rebutters, which will assist them to shape their own responses for themselves. We are interested in the past because it is part of the present. We are interested in the 'modern', the committed and even sometimes what seems like the perverse because we want to be not only a magazine of assessment but also one of exploration. We do not subscribe to the contemporary heresy that 'politics' and 'political life' is self-nourishing and complete within itself, but rather to the view that it is our lives that have shaped, and will shape, politics. Thus what people have made of themselves is of particular interest to us, something that comes out, almost accidentally, in these two celebratory issues of *Overland*. It is not a sign of retreat, but a sign of advance, that many of those who have helped significantly to make Australia in the last forty years should be looking at their experience and assessing its worth.

Our financial statements for the 1984/1985 financial year have recently been completed, and we find that in that time we have lost some \$9,000. A lot of money, some will say, for a magazine with a turnover somewhere in the \$50,000s, but not something we are greatly concerned with at the moment. Apart from the inflationary creep, the loss, for a start, is almost entirely accounted for by the increased fees – up by over a hundred percent – we are

paying our writers, plus the costs of the current advertising campaign, which has brought, and is bringing, us many new readers. Thus the loss can, in a sense, be written off to building expenses, to investments we trust mark a new and dynamic thrust in the affairs of *Overland*, a thrust which will in due course benefit us financially and in other ways.

The loss, however, does remind me and my colleagues to mention the most important aspect of *Overland*'s hundred issues, the strength of the moral and economic support we have received from readers over the whole period since 1954. The magazine would never have survived its more difficult days, and would not survive today, without this. And the moral side is more important than it may seem. Editors come to hate their magazines. They see their life's energies drained away in the service of writers and readers. The minutiae of their life, from proof-reading to chasing up subscribers' queries, often blinds them to what they in theory believe when it suits them to do so, that editing itself is a creative task. Unless reminded, as *Overland* is so often reminded, that what they are doing is bigger than the sum of the parts, they can lose that spark of delight at the appearance of each new issue that keeps them going. So – thanks for those letters and notes, comments and criticisms, that you so often send in!

I have mentioned the readers, but next come the writers – and sometimes the artists. Our writers have been enormously generous to *Overland*, as these two issues make clear. I don't know if, in these multicultural days, one is allowed to quote it, but the English used to say, apropos international trade, that:

In matters of commerce the fault of the Dutch
Is offering too little and asking too much.

A nice tribute to Dutch acumen, actually. But editors, or at least this editor, have traditionally adopted, have had to adopt, a very Dutch-like attitude to Australian writers. We *have* offered too little to them, and asked too much of them, especially in earlier days. I have no memory of any writer, however famous, refusing *Overland* a piece because of the small, sometimes virtually token, payments we could afford. On the contrary, writers have silently

accepted the argument of the magazines that they are not commercial institutions, that they have a meaning beyond their meaning, that they represent some kind of flame, even if sometimes it is a guttering one. To generations of such writers we say "Thank you". We shall do our best not to trade on your support.

I also think, on the occasion of this centenary, of the support this magazine has had over the years from the Commonwealth Literary Fund and, in more recent years, from the Literature Board of the Australia Council. It is necessary, and inevitable, that our relations are sometimes on the gruff side, for as we all know it is easier to give than to receive. But I should like to place on the record that we have been treated with great decency and consideration by the Literature Board and its officers; they have made it clear that they understand what we are trying to do; and they have done their best to keep off our backs. Beyond the Literature Board and the Australia Council are the taxpayers of Australia. To remember them is to remind ourselves that we have an ultimate accountability, and not just in financial terms.

Lastly, a word for those on the editorial board, and otherwise close to *Overland*, who accept a special responsibility for *Overland* and discharge it in many ways, including a friendly critical overview. First among equals here is certainly Barrett Reid, who has a most demanding task as poetry editor, who maintains a voluminous correspondence and stays closely in touch with scores of poets, young and old, male and female, established and new. Barrie gets less 'exposure' for this dedicated work than I do as editor, but he carries on a closer and more intimate dialogue with writers than I find it possible to do, and he has done so for many years now while in the throes of a sometimes disabling illness. The full story of his contribution to the cultural affairs of our time will, I hope, some day be told. His inspired work as a professional librarian and promoter of libraries, for instance, means that probably half the time anyone in Victoria picks up a book to read they are in direct debt to him. Barrie was also the initiator of the recent \$50,000 Premier's literary awards in Victoria. We hope to print in our second centenary issue an interview with Barrie in which he discusses the philosophy of his poetry editing for *Overland*.

But in mentioning Barrie especially I do not want to overlook the contribution of other members of the editorial board in the support of *Overland*. Vane Lindesay, for instance, who in art work, lay-out and design has given us what must now be many months of full-time work free, despite the fact that this area is his professional career. His friendship and advice has been as important as his labors have been, and I'd like to break my rule about editorializing to say that *Overland* wishes him every happiness on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday in October. And I think too of John and Shirley McLaren, who have always stepped into the breach to help keep the magazine running when others are absent; of Gwen

McDowall, who has valiantly acted as poetry amanuensis; of Rick Amor, whose illustrations for the magazine have added much to it in recent years, and who has always lent his personal support (it is pleasing to say that his recent exhibition in Melbourne was a sell-out); of Tess Baster and her colleagues of Currency Productions, our printers, with whom the old *Overland* tradition, firmly established during our happy days with Bob Cugley, of fraternalism on the technical side has been maintained; and not least of my own family, but for whom the magazine would sometimes have appeared earlier, but without whom it would not have appeared at all.

I should like to make it quite clear that, because of the richness of the response we have had to our centenary, there are two centenary issues, numbers 100 and 101. They are equal in importance and content, and but for technical reasons could well have been published as one issue. They are to be viewed together as our way of marking this occasion: no bouquets or toasts or revisiting old ground, but an attempt to mark an anniversary in the life of a literary magazine the way it may best be marked – by putting together the most distinguished writing it has been possible for us to assemble.

It sometimes seems to me that in matters of civil liberties the Left in Australia is more uncomfortable than the Right. This stems, I suspect from the Left tradition, not only of physical intervention to promote and accelerate change, but of the felt need to find ideological argument to justify this intervention and – by an easy slide from this – to the belief, secretly or subliminally held by many on the Left, that people aren't really to be trusted with the vote. This, of course, lies behind some of the contemporary theories of 'hegemony': that the attitudes of ordinary people have been so twisted and distorted by various cultural and ideological interests that the said ordinary people don't in fact really understand what is good for them. To this I say "Nuts!"

I am horrified, for instance, that the Labor Party and the Labor movement remember so little of their own traditions that they believe that identity cards will make this a better country to live in. If one of the marks of a free man in the past was to bear a sword, so today the mark of a free man or woman should be the ability to refuse to carry legitimization for their own existence. This may be hard for Europeans and others, used to bureaucratic harassment, to understand – it is an offence to be rude to a public servant in Italy, illegal to whistle the national anthem on a tram in Prague, and likewise illegal I understand in France to call your daughter Gaylene or your son Wayne – but it is at the heart of what still remains of our freedoms. Few in government seem to care, including those who proudly support our various civil liberties organizations.

And now I notice that seemingly all politicians, and perhaps a goodly number of their electors, seem to think it would be a good idea to have laws preventing jurors discussing their experiences in public *after* a trial is over.

What a lovely idea, what a splendid way to protect the institution of the law and of politics, and the practitioners of the law and of politics, from public examination and correction! This fits in very well with another belief of mine, that societies like ours are run by intermeshing and mutually-supporting groups of organized interests, prepared to defend each other's closed ranks against those excluded from any participation at all in an interest group. Thus the professions and the trade unions, for instance, have more in common with each other than they have with those totally excluded from group-protection; and hence the plight of the fringe-dwellers of Australian society in an otherwise lucky country.

Two stalwart biographies have crossed our editorial desk lately, Don Baker's *Days of Wrath*, the life of John Dunmore Lang, and John Mulvaney's and J.H. Calaby's *'So Much That Is New'*, the life of Baldwin Spencer. Quite splendid works, I have no doubt, and we shall be reviewing them. But I do note with both a phenomenon that I have noted with a number of major biographies published in this country in recent years. Our historians seem to believe that when their subjects are lowered into the grave the book should end. I always wonder where the final chapter is – the chapter that tells us what the author really thinks about the person he or she has spent so many years living with, what lessons they think may be drawn from the life, or even what valid observations may be made, whereabouts in the spangled heaven of Australian existences this particular star may be placed. Of course these biographers will say that this kind of thing emerges implicitly and explicitly in the course of the book's narrative, but I suspect this is a cop-out. I also suspect that we have another example here of Australian uncertainty, diffidence, lack of confidence and desire to hedge bets. I am saddened because to me the very point of so much work is the conclusion which we are denied. As I have often said, another aspect of this is the inability of Australians – a very few exceptions now emerging – to write convincingly about *themselves* after adolescence.

One exceptional minor biography, however, has also recently landed on my desk. David Bennett was the grandson of Sir John Monash. He was an honest, embattled, stubborn, humane man, and he spent his life, until it was recently and tragically cut short, on thinking about and working for other Australians, especially in the educational area. He helped to build up the influential Fabian Society in Victoria, he took a leading part in the desperately-needed reconstruction of the Victorian ALP in 1970, he was the foundation principal of the innovative ERA school in Melbourne, he worked for many years on an educational policy for a Labor Party which had traditionally not been interested in educational policies, and from 1972 until 1977, as a member of the Commonwealth Schools Commission, he played a major part in changing the face of Australia. The story of David Bennett and his times has been told elegantly and incisively by his friend Race Mathews, Victorian Minister for Police

and the Arts, in the booklet *David Bennett: A Memoir* (Fabian Society, GPO Box 2707X, Melbourne 3001, \$4 posted). This I believe to be very much a document of our day, which amongst other things triumphantly demonstrates that social democrats need not be political jellyfish, but can have a very full and mature understanding of what they do and why they are doing it.

It was a great pleasure to attend a luncheon in honor of R.D. FitzGerald, on the occasion of the award to him of the degree of Doctor of Letters by the University of Melbourne. One of the most modest figures in Australian writing, Bob FitzGerald was a working surveyor all his life. He lives, with his wife Marjorie, in Hunters Hill, Sydney, and is eighty-three years old. The citation on the occasion of the conferring referred to FitzGerald's "peculiar combination of craggy individuality with moral integrity", the fact that "No Australian poet has been more resistant to the slick, the flashy and the merely fashionable", and to his wisdom, "which is so often said to come with age and is less often seen to do so". Bob FitzGerald has sent us a poem for our centenary Overlands.

We record with sorrow the death in Perth in July of F.B. Vickers at the age of eighty-two. Bert Vickers might almost be called the archetypal 'independent Australian Briton'. A Midlands boy, he migrated to Australia in his early manhood and was a rural worker for many years. He was a supporter of, and associated with, Overland from its inception. In *The Mirage* (1955) he wrote movingly of Aboriginal life, as he did in his fourth novel, *No Man Is Himself*. Other novels dealt with the migrant experience and cold-war politics. For me his finest works, and very good books indeed, are his autobiographies *Without Map or Compass* and *A Stranger No Longer*. Don Grant wrote of him in the *West Australian* that "Vickers was the most unpretentious of people. He was also a simple man, if simple means honest, straight, kind, generous and forgiving."

We would like to thank the magazine *Cinema Papers*, and Anna Weis, for the generous loan of film stills used in Graeme Turner's article.

We enclose with this issue of Overland a subscription leaflet. The purpose of this is to enable our readers and subscribers to make an appropriate centenary gift to Overland, by handing the leaflet to a friend. Existing subscribers miffed by not being offered a copy of Ian Turner's *Room for Manoeuvre* (which we offer as a free gift to new subscribers) can obtain a copy from us for \$6 post free, a substantial concession on the published price of \$15.95. May I also remind readers of our centenary offer, mentioned in Overland 99, of back issues at the non-repeatable price of 50¢ a copy, post free. Issues 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 12, 13, 25, 55, 59, 76/77 and 94/95 are not available.

BARRY JONES

Scenes from a Petit-Bourgeois Childhood

Ever since finishing Proust, I have been thinking about the recurrent images, colors, sounds, tastes and smells of early childhood. The most vivid recollections are often inconsequential and there are huge gaps in my recall: I don't remember any identifiable music (although surrounded by it at Geelong) or painting until I was nine or ten.

But the Jesuits were right: before the age of seven my personality, intellectual and emotional strengths/weaknesses were largely set. My enemies may say that they have not developed since 1938.

I was born in Geelong in October 1932. Two years later my parents moved to Melbourne, hoping that my father would have better job prospects.

We lived in an upstairs flat at "Liverpool", 36 Princes Street, St Kilda, a towered Victorian building at the corner of Barkly Street, opposite the Presbyterian Church and 'Oberwyl'.

The first memory that I can date is the death of King George V in January 1936. My mother heard the news on the wireless and sent me to tell Mrs Ellingworth, an old lady in the adjoining flat. I passed on the message without knowing what it meant to be dead. I don't remember Mrs Ellingworth's face or how she reacted, only the carpet on the landing, mushroom or pale cocoa-colored, with a faint floral pattern.

My next memory is also visual. I liked to walk down Barkly Street after tea with my father to look at the "Atlantic Lady", a huge neon sign with streaming yellow hair, blue eyes and flashing red-and-white arrows, above the St Kilda Junction Auto Service at the end of St Kilda Road, a site now obliterated by road widening.

It was at Princes Street that I first understood how to read. I used to torment my parents and any stray visitors into reading to me, interminably, making them underline each word with the index finger as they spoke it. I soon picked up that there was a linkage between the shapes of letters and their sounds, and before the age of four I could work it out for myself.

I was aware that there was something around called the "Depression". My parents had friends who were very poor, my father had only casual work as a salesman and we were supported, in part, by my mother's family in Geelong. I remember the squalor of squatters at Dudley Flats.

At one time the family split up and my father lived in digs alone, while I went with my mother by train to Stawell and then by car to Pomonal, where her sister and brother-in-law were growing tobacco. I am not sure when this fits in sequence but my clear memory of the long train ride probably precedes the royal demise.

In June and July 1936 I lived at Tawonga near Mt Bogong, with the family of my great Uncle George Potter, with Auntie May and Cousin Gwen. I retain vivid, almost sensual impressions of strong cups of cocoa, riding cows, the novel smell of a petrol engine in the country air and driving in imagination at the wheel of "Tiger" brand cheese packages. I made an enemy of Pat Ballard, a boy who called me a "blatherskite". Perhaps I was.

My mother and I spent a great deal of time at Geelong, divided between two households. My grandmother Ruth Black, formerly Potter, was a singing teacher who had learnt from Melba, achieved some recognition as a contralto, and then threw a career away by marrying my unscrupulous grandfather Alex Black, who fathered three daughters and disappeared. I regret that photographs show I resemble him more than anyone else in the family. When I tracked down his death certificate years later, I found his marriage to my grandmother was not even recorded.

The second household, only a few hundreds metres away, was dominated by my masterful great-aunt Edith Potter. She was tough where my grandmother was sweetly accommodating. Auntie Edie had suffered from a tubercular hip following a fall, around 1905, when she was 26, had an atrocious operation and wore a very high boot. She never married. Both Nana and Auntie Edie were devoted Bible scholars. Auntie Edie was a hardline Puritan, an orthodox Calvinist, quick to rebuke sin or impiety. She was furious when I pronounced in favor of Darwin after reading Hendrik van Loon's *The Story of Mankind*, and said that I must pray to God for forgiveness because her own father, who knew about these things, had expressly repudiated evolution. But she was practical and determined and I can see now that she kept the family together.

I loved my grandmother dearly. She was dreamy and incapable of harshness. The strongest words I ever heard her utter were of Hitler: "What a scamp he is!" She was a distinctly unorthodox Christian with a deep commitment

to the teachings of the British-Israel World Federation. When she taught singing, I was allowed to hide, reading, in a big club armchair turned away from the piano.

She was an excellent teacher and John Brownlee became her star pupil. (Years later I met him with her when he returned to Melbourne singing the lead in "Don Giovanni" and he told her how much he owed to her.) My mother, a very good pianist, although she put little effort into it, had been Brownlee's first accompanist until he left Geelong for further studies in Melbourne, and later, London.

My grandmother was notoriously forgetful. On one occasion she invited the ladies of the bowling club home for supper, excused herself and then went to bed. Her kindness made her an easy touch. She allowed a local gypsy called Rogerty Buck to store sacks of produce in her back yard. She noticed that one of the sacks appeared to be letting off steam early one morning, prodded it with a stick and found it was Rogerty asleep.

Spending so much time with old ladies, I soon came to feel a creature of the Edwardian, if not Victorian era myself. Aunt Edie's constant retelling of the deaths of Uncle Hughie and Uncle Willie, as she held my shoulder in a vise-like grip, as the sun went in and her fingers drummed on chair arms worn shiny, while I pleaded to turn the lights on, took me back to 1908, regularly each Sunday.

A monument outside St Andrews' Presbyterian Church where I was christened commemorated its first Minister, the Rev. Andrew Love, born in 1799, and I felt a direct link with the 18th Century.

It was at Geelong that my father's young sister Martha introduced me to "crinkly babies", my favorite sweet, white spun-sugar encased in a milk chocolate mould. Why is this memory so intense, fifty years later? Why aren't they still on sale? Ice-cream, in those primitive days, was only available in the warmer months, and I waited impatiently for spring each year.

Between 1936 and 1938 we had three moves, first to "Wilbourne Court" at the corner of Brighton Road and Alfriston Street, Elwood, then to Lawrence Street, Brighton, then to Manor Grove, North Caulfield, where I lived for twenty-three years and my mother for more than forty. (We never owned any real estate or a car.)

Until I went to school there was little contact with children of my own age, except at Lawrence Street, and it hurt to leave there. Living in rented premises meant no pets and usually no back-yard or garden. When I went out it was invariably with an adult.

I was an eager filmgoer from the age of five, mostly at a Brighton cinema (presumably in Dendy Street), and always in the daytime. My greatest enthusiasms were for Popeye cartoons, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (1937) which excited and terrified me, and "The Wizard of Oz" (1939), my first visit to a city theatre and my first feature in color, other than cartoons.

I rarely went anywhere with my father, but in March 1937 he took me to the Melbourne Cricket Ground to see Bradman play in the last Test in Australia before the war. My only clear memory of this day is of my first bottle of Coca Cola. My father loved drinking, smoking and

gambling and I was often taken to bars, which I always loathed, while he had a "spot". My obsession with the arrow of time began as we dallied at various watering holes. I see now how remote I was from my father and his interests. I remember the excitement of the crowds watching Bradman, but it failed to arouse me. I never shared my father's sources of pleasure, and my mother didn't seem to have any.

About this time my father taught me boxing (he had been the Navy's welterweight champion) and it may have encouraged a certain natural aggression. Later, in my Red Indian phase, I was obsessed with wrestling.

I was remote from my mother, or *vice versa* with very little physical expression of affection, although I recall the smell of her hair vividly. She often used the word "precocious" pejoratively, and constantly warned that prodigies almost invariably came to a bad end.

My greatest enthusiasm at this time was for Jean Batten the New Zealand pioneer aviatrix, now 76 and living in England.

In May 1938 we moved to North Caulfield, to "Ontario" flats opposite the ornate baroque mansion "Labassa" built in 1890 for William Alexander Robertson by John Augustus Bernard Koch.

Two celebrities lived in our street.

Louise Lovely (originally Carbasse) was an Australian beauty who made her film debut in 1911, worked in Hollywood for a decade (1914-23) then came back to form her own production company. She married Bert Cowen, who managed the Victory Theatre, St Kilda, and they lived in the just-completed "Willas" flats which had been built in the grounds of "Labassa".

They were both very taken with me, to the irritation of my mother who rarely expressed much enthusiasm for anything, although she had once written a fan letter to Marie Dressler. I remember Louise Lovely's elaborate toilet gear, her furs and her chocolates, and being taken to the cinema. The Cowens soon moved to Hobart and my life lost this touch of glamor. (Louise Lovely died there in 1980 at the age of 85.)

Norman McCance was a journalist and broadcaster whose daughter Valerie was my closest friend for years. We used to wrestle a lot. McCance used to work at home, an idea which seemed contrary to nature, and he did daily broadcasts from his study. He was a bird fanatic who kept peacocks and guinea fowl in an elaborate aviary in the back. Occasionally I was taken up to the McCances' farm at Emerald.

The year 1938 was most notable for my entry to school. I attended "Strathfield College", a kind of dame school in Inkerman Road run by Miss Dora Miller. (Val went to another dame school, Miss Mair's "Homebush" in Balaclava Road.) I made my first complaint on the first morning, feeling a sense of outrage that the little kids had to sit at tiny green tables, instead of at proper desks as the Bruin Boys did in my favorite *Rambow* comic. I was told this had to wait.

There must have been an economic turn-up in the family for me to be sent to a fee-paying school, however modest the cost. My father had been working at Treadways department store in the city later, for a year or so, he

ran his own furniture store in High Street, Northcote. Perhaps Nana paid the school fees.

Miss Miller's establishment was overwhelmingly female, as most things were in my childhood. Our classes were very small, only six or so, and the teachers seemed to be elderly dependants of Miss Miller. Miss Bishop, the oldest of them, taught me. There was a wide range of activity. We were encouraged to read and learn crafts: knitting, marbling endpapers in old books, weaving with raffia and sculpting with plaster of paris. I was very proud of my plaster duck, with bright blue painted around the water line. When we assembled each morning, as Miss Miller recited the Lord's Prayer, June Levy got up and led several other small children into the cloakroom where they shut the door. I found this mystifying.

I learnt the arts of political manipulation at Strathfield. At lunchtime and playtime we broke up into gangs. Mine was the smaller one but it invariably won whatever was being fought for, generally possession of a dry vantage spot under the big plane tree. There was a Smike-like boy called David Catran, who suffered from cerebral palsy with a shuffling gait and perpetual dribble. The girls had such horror of being touched by David, let alone dribbled on, that to have him on your side meant an automatic capitulation by the other gang. David loved Violet Crumbles and I was the only person who could bear to touch him. I used to hold his wrist between thumb and forefinger, offer him my Violet Crumble, secure his allegiance and win another victory. I recall this with shame.

Several other events are tied to 1938. My Aunt Tui (my mother's youngest sister) returned from England, the first member of my family to visit 'home'. Twenty years later I was the second. My first words to her as she stepped from

the gangway were, "What is your opinion of the foreign policies of Mr Cordell Hull?" I don't recall if this was spontaneous or planned on my part. I followed the Munich crisis anxiously.

This was the year my mother had all her teeth out, an event which distressed me because she took days to recover. In that era it was common for people to let their teeth go and have them all out at once. This was often a frequent pre-wedding ritual for girls.

In 1938 I started going to the Ontario Street Methodist Sunday School where I remained for many years in various roles. This must have been to please Nana and Auntie Edie because my parents were not churchgoers. However I shamed my mother into joining the church where she soon became organist.

I close on a high note, in October 1938, my sixth birthday and Geelong's one-hundredth, in the national sesqui-centenary year, with a huge procession and fireworks at night seen from the upper story of Uncle Stan's grocery store in Moorabool Street.

I was never traumatized as a child, but certain patterns emerge – remoteness from my parents and their generation, affinity with Victorian relics, a certain isolation, reliance on my own resources (but without boredom), a love of reading and eating, indifference to sport, a feeling for the numinous, and preference for female company. I was old before my time.

Five decades later, the electronic revolution has abolished silence, isolation and self-generated activity: television is the third parent (often the second) for today's children, plugged into a world of repetition, violence, jagged rhythms, desensitization, time killing, and – in many cases – premature zombiedom.

inprint the short story in print – NOW!

Serge Liberman – repines for love under the big top
Frank Moorhouse – searches for a randy Grandmother
Marion Halligan – is seduced by the delights of good food
Bruce Elder – puts the short story on disc

Australian contemporary writers in a short prose context. The first two of the planned trilogy cover East Coast writing, the last: Western Australia.

This issue – \$5 posted. Special multiple copies rates for community writing groups, FAWs, and institutions. Bill Turner 810 2819 (02).

P.O. Box 666, Broadway, 2007.

DEFENDING THE RIGHT TO OFFEND

I offended a certain poet for life
by saying you can knock up a poem
on the lavatory after breakfast
unlike a novel which takes
months even years of straining
swelling of bronchial tubes
an attack of pleurisy perhaps pneumonia
not to mention cases of vodka
and thoughts of self-inflicted death

I did not mean to offend the poet
I envy and depend on him
between one nightmare and the next
during the hours of darkness
the same words warming
a diffident soul faced with morning
sunlight drenching the dunny
is not enough for diffident souls
to overcome the smell of ash
which haunts their days

PATRICK WHITE

THE ALMOND-TREE IN THE KING JAMES VERSION

White, yes, pale with the pallor of old timbers,
Thistle-stalks, shells, the extreme pallor of starlight —

It is the almond-tree flourishing,
An image of Age in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Premonitions, like visitors turning the door-handle,
Cry out, "It's us. It's only us."

And I, opening the door from the other side, reply
"Of course. You are expected."

To memory I say: "You must be disciplined."
To hands: "Do not tremble. Be still."
To bones: "Do not ache. Remain flexible."
To ears: "Do not be affrighted,
It is only the voice of the bird."

To eyes I say: "Be faithful. Stay with me.
Do not, looking out of the window, be darkened."

Yes, it is as I have always been led to believe:
Premonitions, recognitions, the need for acceptance.

*The almond-tree shall flourish, and the grass-hopper shall
be a burden.*
It is all in the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes.

ROSEMARY DOBSON

THE POET AND THE WORD PROCESSOR

I had been reading of poets dying –
the walk into the river,
the knife slipped between the ribs,
the rattle in the consumptive breast.
One jumped from a bridge into the icy bay
dead of a final shiver
and one in a hotel room
howling from a pain around the heart
and with blood in his mouth.

And one with smiles from a doctor who wore (she said)
his top hat to Bayswater lodgings, an improbable tale.
He sent his housekeeper wearing a cap
with ribbons flying bearing soup
for the lady poet. What a fantasy.
Whoever saw a medical top hat in nineteen thirty-five?
This poet imagined she was a Victorian. She pouted
through her golden years, then died.

How poets die is of no consequence, nor how they live.

Tonight the sunset thrusts against plate glass,
the building seems to sway, the poet stands
admiring the rectangular mystery
of steel and wire, his heavenly new lyre
for instant song.
His voice is low, unnaturally calm, a tremor at the edge.

Across the city the lights go on
and fountains darken to indigo and black.

The poet, tall and hairy, looks the part:
red head, red beard, the stuff of seminars
and trotting off to conferences, doing his bit
to win all to Aus.Lit.

He is not awed by unexpected glimpses, phrases
overheard,
or happenings he can't explain
like butterflies that hurl themselves against
the Iguasso Falls,
or long silences, or a face
framed by a café window, between candles and a rose.
He notes these variables, but gets no thrill.
But ah the word processor, the maker of words,
the salesman of words, the memoriser and the dealer,
this kindles him.

"You can take it anywhere," he says.
To the rock, to the river, to the lava bed?
"Of course" he says, "I like to make my poems as
I move."

And packs the thing inside its box, and goes.

ELIZABETH RIDDELL

THE HATCH

Today old Marcus Callaghan
fishes the Deep Pool
waiting for rainbow trout
to fall to hook's possession
a triangle in sun

river
man
line's hypotenuse
taught to fall lure first
on turquoise water
to whatever law calls
from valleys where trout hang
slow as willow branches

When the hatch begins
fish rise into light
part the labia of the river
follow a sinew's pull
feel steel at their throat
set fire to
a whole vocabulary of suns

The world is as it is
sky spins over river
river catches sky
Line straight as pine
holds a feral will
a barb straighter than thought
argument old as bone
older than rough male solitude

JOHN MILLETT

SWOOPERS

mating on the hot tips of an electricity pole
when the earth moved above them
the biter : bit
frosty beaks sizzled on the hot wire

opening the circuit

the last orgasmic flurry of wings
my old spring-friends
scalpers : scalped
black eye beads unmoving

unsprung

they would never gobble my grubs of advice
but give them elastic pizza
old chops : chopped
divining on the high wire

holding onto death's fingertips

their gape of squawklings high in the messmates
clacking beaks like the first words
of a new poem on an old typewriter
the circle of our waking is closed

I am stunned by love's electrocution

TERRY HARRINGTON

SINGING SHELLS

For Jane

"It's never the same wave twice"¹

. . . yet the cold line marches
The soldier sameness
Blue-linen mothers piped
With white hopes
My mother sat alone
Brood eyes clinging at the sea
Casting out to catch me
I was away over the desert
In my body, in my mind
Always hearing her lament
Like a shell's song dim and fierce
Full of mystery and clear as tide-pound
On our flesh-of-my-flesh shore

She gazed a beach out with
Other stony-still fragments
Until the fair wind sailed me to her
Our quick feet eager in the sand
Marked out for each other's spirit
Cunningly-secreted fears and those
Homing, iridescent dreams
No words can patter out so clearly
As do our eyes, hands, feet!

I am in the wave way, gazing
Piped and crisped up
A wave questing, a taut line
Thrown for my little fish
Hauling my daughter to our dancing beach
Through a jagged sea

But already the years sag down like sodden leaves:
Before I can cast my baited spirit
Pranced with joy
To greet her on the shaken beach
She will (when I blink a moment)
Be a taut line fishing
For her gone child. Her own
Daughter never quite eluding
The lamenting shell-song, dim and fierce
Being beckoned by her yearning . . .

HILARY COHEN

DANCING FRUIT

I

Love is the ripe fruit of an old tree
Death is the ripe fruit of an old tree.
They should ever dance together, these two
Around the Autumn bonfire in the brain.
Love and death are your sole fruit. In due
Course they fall. The word 'pain'
Is reserved for the feel of the fallen fruit
That we see each in the other's eye.
They should ever dance together, these two
Around the Autumn bonfire in the brain.

II

Not out of Surrey season. At the leaf-fall
Phase precisely. I see the apples dance
Through my window. In the light. They all
Fall before my eyes. A surreptitious glance
And I see love and death as the ripe fruit
Of the old tree. They should ever dance
Together, these two, because they suit
Each other, circling that word 'pain'
Which lights the Autumn bonfire in the brain.

MAX HARRIS

THE ONE-LEGGED GIRL ON CRUTCHES IN HORST'S RESTAURANT

With pride and anger she crutched her way,
Victim of some yesterday,
Fierce of eye as she passed the chairs,
The munching faces at lunch-time play
Selling their stock of ego shares,
A lower Ahab in the verbal spray.

There is not much anger, no terror, no joy
In the string-dancing of the human toy.
Fierce of eye and one leg short
She left like a Helen leaving Troy,
And I too felt a limb was caught,
A man-mind mangled as a boy

Who once lost leg of love, and arm
Of grace in childhood harm,
Now crippling up the stairs of hell
In search of walnut trees of calm.
My two minds wished her one leg well
As she clipped her clots. I thank you Ma'am.

MAX HARRIS

MADRIGAL ON SQUARED PAPER

"The graph of my life," she said, "is a straight line."
Not quite, perhaps. It gives about as much
as does a tightrope when the dancer forks it,
rebounding to a leap, quivering to quiet,
firm enough to hang a hope on. No hope of mine.
I've given up hopes, they give me heart-burn.
Let other folks hang theirs, they'll drop off fast enough,
when fingers cramp. They'll soon find out.

There's a wind getting up, making the wires sing
a melancholy Valse Triste. Phony, they were,
both the love and the leaving. Wasted time
and zeroed self-regard. What did Miss write
in a child's book – To thine own self be true – and why
not tell me what I was, I didn't have a clue.

My mother said, 'People won't like you . . .
if you do this, or that. 'Oh, but they do. Lovesuckers,
there's no juice left. I've done with adolescence
since I passed menopause. The graph
of my days is a straight line now,' she said.

BARBARA GILES

TRAVELLER'S TALE

Wherever the city, she's toured it. She speaks in a ritual
spilling of memory bleached patchily by our summers
yet mystical still: if my days are earthbound, hers
soar in a flourish of byways I've longed to travel.

Trains straight out of Tolstoi scream through the
afternoon;
St Basil burns in the air with its blazoned domes
(though not like onions so much, I think, as cones.)
Enchanted I ask: "Then you've seen Lenin's tomb?"

(In my Red youth how I would wonder and dream . . .
the sombre queue . . . the solemn resting place . . .)
I rummage for the elusive answer in her face
while she stands angled in an unusual calm

till at last I nudge at her thoughts, urge and persist,
"When you saw Lenin, though, how did you feel?"
A flip toss of the head. "Nothing at all."
(Yet she'd been there . . . the Square . . . is it dismissed?)

Haven't her trains thundered through Prague and Venice
while my destinations are endlessly named St Leonards?
She's alighted at Minsk, Vladivostok . . . and my paths so
pedestrian.)

Then it seems she glimpses the image to which I cling,
and turns. "So what did you *feel*?" I plead.
"Nothing."
"After all," she reminds, "he was only a little man."

JILL HELLYER

THE GULF OF BOTHNIA

in the gulf of bothnia near the top the
salinity's between
four to six parts per thousand
flounder & pike live
in the same 'sea'
also seaweed & freshwater plants sit
side by side
as grandmother & grandfather
on the veranda
in their rockers might have done
could they've lived
in the gulf of bothnia
near the top
the land is rising at one hundred millimetres
per metre per hundred years – out of the sea –
boat houses sit in cow paddocks
falling green on their knees into grass
waiting for the sea to come back
& the boats to visit –
much as grandfather & grandmother
might've waited for 'life' to come back
to visit them
on the old-age farm – had they lived
by the gulf of bothnia near the top –
& reindeer step down the bogs
delicately
lowering one after the other
soft
reindeer's mouths
into the rich bog plants

cows drink the sea in the gulf of bothnia
near the top
fresher water on the surface
salt-er lower down

we are unable to breathe
in the gulf of bothnia

though have often dreamed

of visiting our imaginary relatives
the seaweeds & the freshwater plants

beside those ancient farms

J.S. HARRY

LETTER TO LES MURRAY

Outlining our unpresent, it's earning our crusts,
yet how it shies from outline, like a language.
I mean, Les, the imagination, that noun

which, like soul and ego, cannot be bottled.
Call it a treaty house, as Kant envisaged,
where the unruly intake from the senses

meet the vacant forms of intellect,
surrendering their contents in exchange
for discipline. Call it the Twofold Place,

the prompt enabler that simultaneously
has us here and now and there and then –
a lodestone for our willed and unwilled courses.

Whatever, it finds in us, doesn't it,
the Universe and all its variations.
But does it also, I wonder, choose for each

a partial milieu by which we're recognized
and recognize ourselves? I am recalling
our night drive south from Kempsey. Towns were
stringing

out of the dark like necklaces, bearing
names that with each flung-off mile took us
closer to your engaging homeland, that sanctum

that goes on all your journeys and your journey.
Eastward were welling forests: further an ocean
which for some few, has also been a homeland.

Your father slept in the back and we talked shop.
You'd broached a notion of fiction freed from heroes,
narrative like a tableau, Breughelesque,

treating each thing with unrelegating love,
be it the stone with its introverted life,
or brilliant talker with his masks and sadness.

Your thesis was that prominence corrupts
no less because in fiction. It made good sense
not least because endemic to *your* world,

explaining it, that entelechy
of hills and cousins, creeks and orchards, where
for the partial observer, each thing gestures

subtly to each thing. Surely this
is what we mean by home, a hearkening
for that landscape, both constant and various

where imagination can do what the self is,
absenting us briefly from our literal places,
the brain in its sump, or the books that watch us

from our study walls like a crowd at a stadium.
For all that it may be the wild card
of character, it will be always played

in character, whether the player is
a Boeotian in his glade, naming his lineage
and their legends, or an Athenian

noting from his window above an agora
the outlandish dramas of the throng below.
Faculty which, the more it travels, the more

it makes a home, we hope what comes of it
others will come for, making themselves at home
in what is ours most strangely and most closely.

ALAN GOULD

TAMBAROORA REMEMBERS

For Henry Lawson

The wind blew him south, on a day like this,
here to the Come-and-find-it Flats
"with Ballarat Adolphus and a mate of Ballarat's."

It shook me when the shades who passed
laid down a dusty quid.
The timber-getter's hands which worked on
while he slept. I've met men who had
round shoulders from starting work at thirteen,
humping sacks in a granary,
who've had nervous breakdowns building Fords.
It's part of the job in Completely-Knocked-Down
an initiation that comes back in
lessening cycles.
These reasons can find their triumphant redress,
a skill at golf,
a clutch of good-looking daughters,
or resolve will sparkle into a word like *musician*
for some orange peeling nine year-old.
To cry onto laminex out of fatigue
at fifteen is wrong, but it may help forty
to shift a fridge more nimbly.
There are imageries as there are silences
too ready to honor these subjects,
I live and I am glad to live
where the cartons hold either milk or ammunition,
where the rites of indignation
or origin as a bygone amniosis
suffice no internal *émigré*. Also
there's half a lifetime or more
in the secular and classless state
of a certain response, a tinge of expectation
like the mad little smile that poets see
from time to time. Did Lawson
see it? Inevitably.
He spoke for the truly dumb
Those meenisters had chased away
or towns surrendered on a whim.
He well knew how push comes down to shove
and hung upon the keenest pegs of feeling
ungainly human love.

Tonight a vanished town has rejoiced
though I was alone here, reading.
Carved lamb, brought logs, put out her best
just to recall the episode,
A day the weather was in the west
and the wind's feet in the north,
then in the cold dusk, three fellows,
One was tallest.

ROBERT HARRIS

CAPTAIN MELBOURNE

I have always thought
how enormous are his feet,
let his legs be hairy
for he walks on planets
crumbling syntax crumbling slowly under his
way-way-weight,

he is one or many
brightcoloured circus performers
and the ladies, god bless them, claim
his hobbies are not less than
persiflage and bricolage;
he smokes like a fireplace,
has fingers like an ironmonger
for the skin is required to reply;
out at sea his piss freezes
to form Antarctica
and he knows most Victorians by name,
them and the scungy gods.
His eyes are

his arms are
his heart is

My perceptions fail me,
I have always thought.

How magnificent are his thighs
as he canters along astride
the final Tasmanian tiger,
chewing on great gobbets of brown coal,
chilblains like a footballer
and his eyes are green
as County Tyrone
or the swelling flag of language
on a winter breeze.
Or so
I have always thought.

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

LITANY

City of wind-blasts
I raise no standards.

City of blankets
I burn in Babylon.

City of depressions
I look to the glass for highs.

City of fears
I parade the saints.

*

City of shifts
I order my chains.

City of steel
I search for a soft centre.

City of oxygen
I am green in my element.

Company City
I shadow the damned.

*

City of platitudes
I endure my commission.

City of despisers
I beat my brows past B.H.P.

Cockroach City
I scream after midnight.

City of hammers
I roll with the blows and slur my words in company.

*

City of the monster
I move through evil

City of the monster coming
grim for salvation

City of the monster coming white with wings
I chant the rhythms but get no joy

City of the monster coming white with wings and demons
I have learnt to exist in the blood and the marrow.

CONAL FITZPATRICK

OPEN CONFESSION from INSIDE

At fifteen got it easy,
pinched jewellery
had the gold melted down;

Graduated to warehouses,
loads of tyres
semi-trailers of cigarettes;

Tickled a few banks,
then
into drugs,

pushing them was a soda,
but couldn't take to those
who dropped their pants for it,

With women,
I was never gentle,

Yet here,
with my boy,

I'm always considerate . . .

CHARLES RIMINGTON

A girl trotting down the street, high-heeled, buttocks twitching perkily, carrying a sewing machine: that's what brought it back, after all these years. She looked a bit like Annie had done, too; big bust, long legs, long auburn hair with a nice swirl to it. I couldn't help but remember the day that Annie had trotted off down Rosebank Street, turned left at the Post Office and out of sight in William Street, off to pop her machine. I'd been quite broke, and she'd needed ten pounds for an abortion. That was the going rate for Brougham Street backyarders in those days. Nice girl, Annie, and nothing but good memories. But once I'd thought of her, it was only a step to Strowger, and a short one at that.

Strowger. Five feet nothing, dark and greasy, bald on top. I met him first down at the George, near Darling Harbor, both of us hanging around the skirts and out-skirts of *The Push* in the last days of Harry Hooton. In a drunken moment I offered him a job – well, I offered to try and get him a job – in the biscuit factory where I worked. Within a week he was firmly entrenched, in an office just along the corridor from mine. And that was when I finally began to find out – too late – about the beast called Strowger.

He lived all the way over at Greenwich, in the house of someone who was off overseas for a year and who had – incomprehensively – left the key with Strowger. His lady – at once the ugliest and the most depraved woman in the world – was there too, with her angelic five year-old daughter. I was once invited there to a party, the meanest and most miserable party I've ever been to, and we spent the whole evening clustered round a five-hundred watt radiator rolling bumpers and drinking flagon muscatel. Magnificent house, but no food. Magnificent hi-fi, but the music all locked away. Wall-to-wall Axminster, and Strowger in plastic sandals. I think that I began finally to go off Strowger that evening when I found him in one of the bedrooms playing games with his lady's daughter.

At work he wasn't really so bad. In the beginning, anyway. To be just, he had a certain flair for advertising. There was even a rumor that he'd once been a producer with the ABC. But he tended to carry our private affairs into the office, and after the business of Annie he'd barely talk to me.

It all began innocently enough. He had a suitcase full of blank railway vouchers from the days when he'd been a

kind of caretaker at Central Railway, living in the clock-tower. He would issue these vouchers to his mates for quick trips interstate, or use them himself. The favorite was a jaunt to Melbourne for the weekend. The only snag was that you had to get off at Craigieburn so that the narks at Spencer Street never got a sight of the shonky tickets. So, one Saturday night at the pub he decided to go south for the weekend. Annie was there, and let herself be persuaded into going with him. I was a bit put out, as I had plans for Annie myself that weekend, and they didn't include either Melbourne or Strowger . . .

But in the end I thought, oh what the hell, and went along with half a dozen others to see them off. By the time the train was ready to go Annie had changed her mind, and Strowger was furious. The last I saw of him he was huddled in a corner of the carriage sulking, a lone bottle of red ned for the long night's company. And after that he had never a good word for me. At work we spoke only when absolutely necessary. Once or twice I caught him whispering to the office girls in quiet corners. They would shut up when I appeared. I never did find out what he told them, but after that they began to look at me in a very curious fashion, and to edge their way round me when we met in the corridor.

I didn't realize it at the time, but I think Strowger must have been going through the last stages of his personality disintegration. But I didn't see too much more of it. Because the boss had a complaint from our advertising agency. It seemed that Strowger had been nobbled for making various "obscene and perverted suggestions", as they put it, to their typists and layout girls. He got the sack, and was out of the building that night.

Before he went we had one final dialogue, when he insisted that I had been conspiring with the powers-that-be to get rid of him. All because of Annie. I'd had enough and left him in his little cubicle of an office, an office the door of which was blazoned, redundantly now, with his name.

I came to work in the morning to find that rather than surrender that manifestation of his persona he'd taken it with him. The whole door was gone, a pair of blank hinges left dangling forlornly from the jamb.

He also knocked off my overcoat from the rack in the mens' room.

As I said, personality disintegration.

Coming apart, the old Strowger.

I lost sight of him then. Not that I didn't try to find him. I wanted my overcoat back.

It wasn't anything special. No frills to it. Not even new – bought second-hand in a William Street pawnshop. A plain tan raglan raincoat that never kept the water out for more than five minutes. It's only distinction was a tiny silver chain instead of the usual tab inside the collar. Little bit of class, eh? Anyway, I was attached to it.

I soon found out that Strowger was wearing it all the time, dragging all round the city in it, the Push pub, the cheap caffs, the dirty parties that used to break out like sudden boils. I even caught sight of him a few times, but he always managed to slip away before I could catch him, looking as if he ran on casters – he was so short that the skirts of my coat hid everything but his sandals.

I spread the word, and my friends began to track him, tried to get it back for me; tried to take him unawares, crept into his house at night, harried him through countless backstreets and dingy bars. But they couldn't part him from the coat. He seemed never to step outside it. Even in the beginnings of summer, his last summer, he wheeled through the corridors of his tiny walled city within a city, his balding head greasy as a pricked sausage above the sweated darkening gabardine of my coat. I think that by that time the coat had become his last tenuous link with normality and light.

Then he died, quietly and mysteriously, maybe of the Queen's Evil or some such, and my overcoat seemed gone forever. I had no proof of ownership, and so my coat became a significant part of his meagre estate. And I learned that as a last act of spite – or desperation – he had left instructions that he was to be buried in it.

For some reason he was to be planted out at Rookwood, star-distances from his usual orbit – and from mine. Still, I went all the way out there, just the same, on the appointed day, to say goodbye to my overcoat.

But Strowger had run true to form to the last. Died at the start of a grave-diggers' strike.

I talked to a couple of them in the picket line, while hot winds rattled in the straggling trees and rank grasses.

– Would you do it for sixteen quid a week? asked one.

– It's the seepage, said another. And the smell from the graves next door gets you down a bit . . .

– And the kids, digging those little kiddies' graves really turns me up. Unnatural . . .

– Try eating your crib with that lot up your nostrils . . .

Meanwhile Strowger waited patiently in some anonymous deep-freeze, ticketed, filed, but unfindable; and wrapped in my rigid overcoat.

I lost interest then. After all, you can carry a thing just so far. I forgot even to read the newspapers, and I never did find out when the strike ended. But someone told me a while later that they finally buried him. I decided that one day I'd go back to Rookwood, find my overcoat's grave, take a last look.

But I never did.

Oh, a cunning bastard, Strowger.

Like Housman's Dick: made of earth and sea his overcoat forever, and wears the turning globe . . .

Over my overcoat.



BOOKS

OF DISTINCTION... OF LASTING WORTH...

SO MUCH THAT IS NEW: BALDWIN SPENCER 1860-1929
by D. J. Mulvaney and J. H. Calaby

Professor, art patron, anthropologist, VFL president—a
marvellous read about a wonderful character. \$33.50

MONASH AS MILITARY COMMANDER
by P. A. Pedersen (foreword: Geoffrey Serle)

A close military study of the work of Australia's
greatest General. \$29.90

DAYS OF WRATH: A LIFE OF JOHN DUNMORE LANG
by D. W. A. Baker

The stormy and eventful story of Australia's
most turbulent priest. \$35.00

WHY CHINA? RECOLLECTIONS OF CHINA 1923-1950
by C. P. FitzGerald

Anyone interested in China today asks 'What was it like
before?' This uniquely qualified veteran tells us. \$26.50

at all good booksellers



MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY PRESS

**prices recommended only*

GEOFFREY BLAINEY

Judah Waten

Geoffrey Blainey made this speech at Judah Waten's funeral, attended by several hundred at the Melbourne Arts Centre, on 1 August 1985.

Judah Waten had perhaps the most unusual background of the Australian writers of his generation.

He was born in the Russian port of Odessa on 29 July 1911 and emigrated, in his mother's arms, when he was a few weeks old. After a period in Palestine the Watens came to Western Australia on the eve of the First World War. The father was mostly a hawker or bottle-o, travelling always with horse and cart. The mother, felt lost here and longed to return to Europe. As her son recalled in one of his short stories "This was no country for us. She saw nothing but sorrow ahead. We should lose everything we possessed; our customs, our traditions; we should be swallowed up in this strange, foreign land." And yet her son so understood this strange, foreign land and its people that it is now, because of his writings, less strange, less foreign to many newcomers.

The first literary influence on the young Judah was the Yiddish writer, Sholem Aleichem. In Judah's own words: "My mother loved Sholem Aleichem, whom she had once heard read his stories in Odessa. My father also recalled that in 1907 or 1908 he had bought a paperback collection of Sholem Aleichem's stories on the Kiev railway station." So Judah recalled.

When Judah was aged five and living at Midland Junction near Perth he first heard the funny stories of this Yiddish writer. They were read aloud in the Waten's house by an old Jewish neighbor, Chaim Frankel, who used different voices for each character and even acted out the stories as best he could. "What is a man without reading," Chaim Frankel used to say. It's still true.

We can still glimpse the scene in the Waten's small house; the poorish Jewish people of the neighborhood all arriving; the excitement that a new story by their favorite author had just come by slow sea mail from New York; and the elderly Reader-aloud clearing his throat and calling for the chatter to cease. And there in the crowded room was the five year-old Judah, taking it all in with his almost photographic power of absorption.

As few of the listeners spoke more than the most broken of English, the chance to hear their favorite author in their own language must have been a precious occasion. Soon after, there came the news that the author had died in New York. And in the Waten's house in 1916 there was mourning – almost as if one of the family had died. But as the old Reader-aloud reminded everyone in the Waten's house: "Our lives would be much sadder without him, but we would still have his work which would console us." And that is exactly how many of us feel this afternoon.

The Waten's household was conscious that it was cut off from its cultural roots. Its affections and its heroes lay far across the oceans. There was no radio, no international telephone, and in those years of the First World War there was very little movement of Jewish people from one land to another. Accordingly the few tangible links were cherished. Thus his mother vividly remembered seeing Chekhov, the famous writer, walking on the Maritime Parade in Odessa: one of her magic memories.

Judah was intensely conscious of the power, in his childhood, of what the New Testament refers to as "touching the hem of the garment". He recalled how, years later, when they lived in Carlton, "one of our neighbors, a Mrs Fiegel Stern, was always spoken of as 'the cultured Mrs Stern', as she had been in the vast crowd outside the cemetery in Warsaw, when that other great Yiddish writer, Isaac Leib Peretz, was being buried." It is fair to say that for the Jews in Australia, these memories of distant heroes were more than memories: they were precious icons. Judah never forgot those icons.

From this unusual childhood – economically deprived but rich in culture – Judah gained a deep respect for the written and spoken word and a deep respect for the arts. He also gained a feeling that he was in part a citizen of the world. I doubt whether any writer of fiction in Australia

has had the knowledge of international literature, not only European, that Judah Waten ultimately possessed.

As a child of five or six he eagerly began to absorb the literature of his adopted land. "I took to reading like a bird to flight and before I was seven I joined the Carnegie Library in our town and went there regularly on my own." He read the normal children's books about cowboys and schoolboys but he also learned poetry, word-perfect. He recited his new Australian poems to the Jewish people who called at his parent's house, and even if they didn't understand a word they gave him encouragement. Soon, Judah could recite Adam Lindsay Gordon's "The Sick Stockrider" and Paterson's "The Man from Snowy River", as well as "I love a Sunburnt Country" and Henry Lawson's "Faces in the Street".

Judah eventually went to the Christian Brothers College in Perth and, when the family moved to Melbourne, to the University High School. Even in his teens he took to street politics and he once showed me an old news clipping from the Melbourne Herald of April 1928. The headline ran:

RED HANDKERCHIEFS IN COURT

The news item began as follows:

Judah Waten, a young curly-headed Russian, and Ernest Smith, also a youth, appeared in the City Court today on a charge of having distributed Communistic pamphlets during the Anzac Day celebrations yesterday . . . Red handkerchiefs were aggressively displayed in the breast pockets of sympathizers of Waten and Smith.

Judah was then aged sixteen, and already his political views and sympathies were firm. Hoping to combine politics and literature he wrote the draft of a novel called *Hunger*, and at the age of twenty sailed for England "in search of publication and fame". He gained neither but he did gain experience, joining a leftist writer's group led by C. Day Lewis, and taking part in street demonstrations, one of which led to a term of imprisonment in Wormwood Scrubs. He returned to Australia more intent on political activity than literature; and it was not until the 1940s that he seriously took up writing again. By then he had acquired and digested the rich, diverse experiences that are the basis of most of his books, and acquired also his knowledge of people.

He became a writer when the short story was still intensely popular here – a branch of English literature in which many Australians excelled. Judah's short stories were published in the *Bulletin*, in Clem Christesen's *Meanjin* and in that fine annual called *Coast to Coast* before his first collection of stories appeared in book form. It was published in 1952 as *Alien Son*, and its compassion, its humor and its power of observation stood out. It is one of the greatest of all Australian books and will be read, I think, a century hence.

More and more of his books appeared: seven novels. *The Unbending*, *Shared in Murder*, *Time of Conflict*, *Distant Land*, *Season of Youth*, *So Far No Further*, and

lastly his *Scenes of Revolutionary Life*. There were other books – a second collection of short stories (entitled *Love and Rebellion*), a charming children's book called *Bottle-O*, a slice of Australian history on the depression years, and one of the most illuminating of all our travel books, *From Odessa to Odessa* – the story of his voyage in an East German cargo ship in the mid 1960s from Goa to the Baltic and so overland to his birthplace.

His first book, *Alien Son*, has now reached a wider audience of Australians than any other volume of short stories except those of Henry Lawson. His writings have been translated into German, Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish, Latvian, Dutch and other languages. I was once in China, negotiating the possibility of the government translating and publishing Australian books; and I suggested *Alien Son*. The Chinese official replied that it had long ago been translated into Chinese though, for ideological reasons, it was now out of print.

Judah did not see himself as primarily an international writer. The overseas market was merely an additional bonus, a pleasant windfall. He wrote for Australians. I have heard him say that a writer of fiction should first reach his own people; and if he did that well, perhaps he would reach others.

You can see why he reached others. Listen to these sentences from one of his short-stories – strongly autobiographical – telling of a journey in a horse-drawn wagon to a small town in Western Australia where they all were to live:

We arrived at our new home long after the sun had sunk beneath the hills, which had become mysteriously black with odd lights that blinked forlornly as if signalling messages of distress.

In the dying light Mother stood gazing at the dingy, brown wooden cottage and while she stood she seemed to age and her narrow shoulders to grow more stooped. Her sad eyes wandered hopelessly over the broken picket fence and the neglected fruit trees with their naked limbs outstretched.

Suddenly Mother was startled out of her deep musing by a merry clamor that sprang around us like a wind springing up from nowhere. The street which had been deserted was now alive. Men in shirt-sleeves and women in aprons stood behind fences and from open doorways flickered the yellow light of kerosene lamps. Children appeared from all the dark corners of the street, clustering round the wagon, chattering in a language of which we understood not a word.

That segment of the story is not only an arresting picture of a small country town nearly seventy years ago: it is also a pointer to the measure of his achievement as a writer, for English was not his first language.

He was not a quick writer, somebody who with ease "tossed off" a piece. He was frequently correcting and rewriting. That he produced so many serious books was remarkable because for most of his life he could not be a full-time writer or even a part-time writer in the normal

sense of that phrase. He gave an enormous amount of time to the Communist Party; he was for years the energetic executive of the Jewish Council to combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism; he spent a period in the Taxation Department which he regarded, in those days, as a peaceful haven; and he was in the 1950s the driving force behind the Australasian Book Society.

In the Age, for Stuart Sayers, and in the Sydney Morning Herald, for Margaret Jones, he was a frequent reviewer of serious books; and this week in both papers these two literary editors wrote obituaries that did justice to one who was that Australian rarity, a man of letters.

Unlike many successful writers he enjoyed the company of other writers – there were limits of course – and he gave a large piece of his time in the last four decades to writers' organizations. He was president here of the Fellowship of Australian Writers at a time when the Victorian branch was far and away the largest and most active writers' organization in the Commonwealth. He was president of the Victorian branch of PEN, and many will remember those fine dinner meetings he presided over at the end of the long dining table at the Melbourne University Union in the late 1970s. On the first Literature Board of the Australia Council he was an outstanding member; and he was also acting chairman of that group which became the Australia Council's Community Arts Board, as well as a member of the Council committee which fashioned the initial Public Lending Right scheme for authors and publishers.

He had a special affection for those small up-country groups which in their own way respected literature. There was a group at Cunnamulla in Queensland which caught his fancy – their name escapes me – and he had a warm word for the annual Dahlia and Literary Festival at Eaglehawk, where one year he presented the award for the best short story.

He gave his time – always unpaid – to speak to schools, especially schools which had never been visited by a writer, let alone one as celebrated as he was. As for book launchings and literary pie nights, he must have attended a thousand, as Chris Wallace-Crabbe observed in the poem he wrote for Judah.

As we grind into the worst decade
for three or four, I swing around and see
your bulky, suited, Russian form push through
this or that minor bookish jamboree
smiling, and think of old hostility,
those years when I watched you hard for
Stalinism's
cloven hoof and you (I'm sure) marked me
as bourgeois formalist. Time burns the isms.

The poem gave Judah pleasure.

Judah's knowledge of Australian writers and what they wrote was – the only word is "vast". He was especially knowledgeable about those writers who were prominent when he was young – not only the celebrated but those whose names are less mentioned today: Bernard O'Dowd, Dowell O'Reilly, Marie Pitt, Edward Dyson and those almost forgotten Western Australians of the

goldfields era, "Dryblower" Murphy and "Crosscut" Wilson. If you showed Judah an old Australian book of essays or short stories, even the faded dust-jacket seemed instantly recognizable to him, and he would give a shout of pleasure and always a reminiscence. His memory was a kind of national archive of Australian writers; and there were many writers whom he and Hyrell knew closely, knowing what they were working on or thing about each year – Alan Marshall, John Morrison, Frank Dalby Davison, Vance Palmer, Nettie Palmer, the historians Brian Fitzpatrick and Manning Clark, the list is too long to recite.

It was at a writers' gathering that I first met Judah. He was one of the hosts at a small evening party arranged in 1957 to welcome the distinguished Australian-born archaologist, Professor Gordon Childe, and my wife Ann and I were invited. Soon after, I joined the committee of the Fellowship of Australian Writers, and went to monthly meetings at Arthur Phillips' house in Upper Hawthorn, where Judah and Stephen Murray-Smith and several others usually gathered. Before long, Ann and I were meeting the Watens occasionally at the farmhouse of Frank Dalby Davison, just at the time when his wife Maree was typing that mammoth manuscript of *The White Thorn*. We used to visit the Watens too, but the friendship reached a new level when Judah and I were on the first Literature Board of the Australia Council: being the only Victorians we travelled everywhere together. It did not seem to matter that the political viewpoints of the Watens and the Blainys were so different. His warmth and personal tolerance coped easily with such differences. The last time I saw him alive he was unconscious; and yet somehow one still felt, in the silence of it all, his personal exuberance and warmth of heart.

Peter Simon, the Secretary General of the Socialist Party of Australia, who has come from Sydney to join us, will say something on that vital facet of Judah's life, his politics. I offer these thoughts as supplement. Long ago Noel Counihan painted a masterly portrait of his friend of many travels, Judah. If I had to give a title to that portrait, I think I would simply call it "Strength". Judah was one of the most courteous and charming of men. He also had the strength of iron.

He once told me how, in his early days in the Communist Party, there was an emphasis on self education; and one of the many books he was encouraged to read was Thomas Carlyle's classic of the 1830s, *The French Revolution*. In that book is a passage on the death of that mighty Frenchman, Mirabeau; and Carlyle concludes with these words: "Honour to the strong man, in these ages, who has shaken himself loose of shams, and is something."

Judah was something. In honoring him we are conscious that a vital part of his strength came from Hyrell. They were strong together. Moreover, it is probably fair to assume that her work as a teacher and school principal provided the household's main income in many years – literature was not a gold mine, even for a Judah Waten. She was also his literary critic, and was and will remain the quietest but loyalest supporter of his writing. She

shared in his political activities as an equal, and she along with Judah made that house in Byron Street, Box Hill, one of the most warm-hearted, welcoming homes that one could ever hope to visit.

Anyone who rang up the Watens knew that music was part of their life. As soon as Judah lifted up the telephone, the classical music from his living room poured down the line, so that at times Ann and I have had the impression that a music shop had been dialled by mistake. Hadn't Judah's paternal grandfather, infatuated with music, risen from his deathbed and gone to the opera house in Odessa in order to see a new production of "Aida"? Did not Judah's mother love serious music, and her children imbibed that love (record shops in Perth?). Hyrell and Judah were proud when their daughter Alice, studying in Moscow, began to fulfill all her promise as a violinist. So it is fitting that the memorial service should be held here, for Judah – as much as anybody I know – saw all the arts as linked. Whereas Henry Lawson wished – and his wish was granted – that a brass band should play at his funeral, Judah has been given, thanks to George Fairfax and his trustees, a whole performing arts centre. He would have felt *humble* – in the triumphant meaning of that word – had he known that his funeral would be held here, and that so many people, from so many cities and so many

stages of his life had come to remember him.

We earlier honored him at a public dinner held at the University of Melbourne, for his seventieth birthday. He said then that he was an optimist, that the ideology he believed in had brought to humanity a great measure of good. The future therefore did not alarm him. "After fifty years as a writer and a politically involved person I have no feeling of disillusion," he said at that celebration. In his own way he repeated in a very different language what had been proclaimed to his ancestors, generation after generation of them, when they turned in hope to the Old Testament.

I read now from the English Old Testament, written in a language that Judah's mother and father on their wedding day had not dreamed that their son would ever read, let alone master in order to reach a large readership. I read that passage in the Song of Solomon which stresses the perpetual cycle of renewal in life.

'For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone'
The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of the singing of birds is come
And the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our
land.



LOVELAWN



UNMOWN LOVE

GRAEME TURNER

New Directions in Australian Film

Arguments about the aesthetic quality and commercial future of the Australian film industry are perennial components of Australian film culture; problems of 'internationalism', of government funding, of the threat from the Australian Film Commission's growing involvement in television production, of the 'brain drain' of directors moving to Hollywood, are staple fare in trade journals and academic discussion of Australian films. The tenth anniversary issue of *Cinema Papers*¹ included a compendium of the various approaches and critical positions – from Phillip Adam's defence of the national voice, to Tony Ginnane's invocation of the commercial factors which make 'international' films inevitable, to Bob Ellis's gloomy prognosis that the next ten years in Australian film will be much worse than the ten just completed.

A great deal of the concern about the future of Australian film derives from its apparent lack of development, its formal monotony, its conservative resistance to highly individualized narratives, its continual recycling of the past. Importantly, the radical or even critical potential of the feature film is not usually seen to have been an important part of the industry's productions and so, although the restrictive effect of both government and private funding tends to be blamed for this, those who would look for progressive, political developments in our films are usually disappointed.

Many of the diagnoses of the ailing condition of the industry, now that the adrenalin of the revival has stopped pumping, are provoked by the perception that the body of Australian films made since the start of the seventies has not developed much beyond the parameters set by films as "Picnic at Hanging Rock", "Breaker Morant", "My Brilliant Career", or "Gallipoli" – films which simplistically exploit traditional myths and images of the Australian past, admittedly with high production values. Essentially art-house movies, they are seen as films of limited commercial potential, or as films which fail to present a point of view, and thus make minimal contributions to contemporary culture.

Even while admitting the need for the recovery of the past in order to understand the present, the preoccupation of the films of the 1970s with the Australia of the nineteenth century was extraordinarily thorough. This dominance of period drama seems to justify gloomy predictions, of the future of the industry lying either in the

production of 'more of the same', with diminishing impact and relevance, or in the surrender to the commercial imperatives of the internationalists, thus losing any hope of Australian film providing us with an authentic national voice.

These seem not to be the only options open, however. To look back over the last five years of film production is to see some important changes. There are the obvious commercial and industrial ones, such as the advertisers' exploitation of the current wave of nationalism and the first attempts to promote the 'blockbuster' – "Gallipoli", "The Man From Snowy River", "Careful He Might Hear You" – in the fashion of Hollywood. There are other changes, however, in the character of films being made in Australia which leave some room for optimism. A survey of the last years in particular reveals that oppositional, critical stances in Australian film have both fluctuated and accelerated. We have seen a decline in the dominance of the realistic representation of the past, and a corresponding increase in the number of films which focus on social, urban, and political subjects, with a greater variety of narrative forms.

Treatment of bush subjects dominated the film industry of the 1920s and 1930s, and the subsequent movement into more contemporary urban dramas that accompanied the Australian industry's attempt to make more Hollywood-style, international movies in order to survive, committed the examination of Australian contemporary life to a level of superficiality. Thus we do not have a strong tradition of films that deal seriously with contemporary realities.

The use of history, the construction of contemporary Australian life through the representation of the past, is dominant in our film tradition, and it is becoming dominant in the current examples of the television mini-series. Marxist critiques of this use of history maintain that its function is to naturalize existing conditions within the society – depicting them as inevitable, progressive developments of time and nature, rather than the motivated actions of men and women. Representations of Australian history propose a direct continuity between the conditions of the past and those of the present, so that the struggles of the past can be seen to have borne fruit in the present. Present social conditions are not directly in-

vestigated, but are implicitly 'legitimated' by being shown as the inevitable result of disinterested and even-handed history. We are encouraged to see historical development as 'complete', as a 'process which finds its accomplishment in the present':

Historical development is here conceived as a cumulative process which has delivered the nation into the present as its manifest accomplishment. Both celebratory and complacent, it produces a sense that "we" are the achievement of history . . .²

Taken with the nationalist and 'consensual' rhetoric which is so pervasive at present, the combination of the realist mode in cinema with its historical emphasis adds up to a most uncritical, unanalytical acceptance of Australian society today.

During the revival of the seventies, there was only a handful of films which concerned themselves with contemporary urban life on a level which could be called critical or analytic. With the significant exception of Bert Deling's "Pure S." and perhaps Esben Storm's "27A", neither of which gained widespread release, we would

have to look to the ocker comedies such as "Stork", or the quartet of scripts by literary writers, "Libido", for this kind of film. The release of Michael Thornhill's "The F J Holden" in 1977, and John Duigan's "Mouth to Mouth" in 1978, stand out as rare examples of attempts to deal with the problems of contemporary urban and suburban existence in Australia.

Thornhill's film was not generally well received, although it documents the rituals of teenage life in Sydney's western suburbs with accuracy and affection, allowing its world to retain a sense of authenticity while revealing its essential deprivation. Susan Dermody's Cinema Papers review recorded her elation at the film's "use of its material", while noting the critical nature of its depiction of suburban life:

. . . the lives we look at are teeming with details and impulses; yet they are resoundingly empty, uninhabited spaces, unaware of the possibility of conscious action altering the pattern of existence.³

It is a familiar theme, and Rod Bishop and Fiona Mackie also refer to it by discussing "F J Holden" as a film which projects the image of the battler, struggling



Sonia Peat and Kim Krejus in "Mouth to Mouth"

against "oppressive environments".⁴ The film does, to some extent, celebrate the life it documents, as its reception indicates; it did not do well in city theatres but was extremely successful in the drive-ins, doing ninety per cent of its business there.⁵ However, it does not simply naturalize its subject. The emotional construction of the characters, the poverty of communication between them, stand out as images of oppression and the diminution of possibility; despite the humor and vitality of the film these images linger. It is not, however, as committed an attack on Australian society as Thornhill's earlier period drama, "Between Wars", where similar principles of conservatism come in for more political analysis.

"Mouth to Mouth" is a more critical film. Although it occasionally romanticises the predicament of the unemployed – notably in the film's last shots of Carrie walking past the dream-filled windows of city stores with the romantic song lyrics underlying her personal problem, love – the film is still a genuine stylistic departure from the norms set in Australian cinema to that point. Unlike, for instance, Donald Crombie's lyrical treatment of the urban slums of the depression in "Caddie", John Duigan's depiction of the world of the four young unemployed characters in contemporary Melbourne is anything but affectionate. "Mouth to Mouth" is shot by Tom Cowan, whose camera work in "Pure S" is largely responsible for the savage effect it had on its audience. Although less confrontational, and less unpleasant to watch, "Mouth to Mouth" also presents us with a world which is filled with wreckage – building sites, litter-filled tenement backyards, neglected houses, abandoned buildings, railroad yards with rusting rolling stock, shattered families, and the aspirations of the main characters. The lighting is insistently dim, the few daylight exteriors offering much needed relief from the claustrophobic effect of the rest of the film. The world of the unemployed is seen as separate from that of the normal middle-class Australian, even though it is ruled by the same images of success. The attempt to gain entry into this world dominates the four characters' lives and their dependance on its definition of a useful life is underlines in various ways: Carrie's efforts are stimulated by her envy for the surroundings enjoyed by her clients, and her need for a romantic relationship with Tony; Tim and Serge's attempts to find work punctuate the film as regular reminders of the cycle of hope and frustration which dominates their lives.

Duigan presents the promise of Australia as an ironic, impossible joke for these young people; a sign over Jeanie's bed in the abandoned warehouse (if that is what it is; significantly, its previous function is never made clear) promises "satisfaction as big as our land" – referring to her emotional generosity but also emphasising the improbability of any other form of satisfaction ever being allowed them – while underlining the characters' progressive marginalization within a society that has no place for the unemployed it creates. Even liberal principles are seen as a luxury, the demonstration outside their squat made a family picnic. The callousness with which society can treat its victims is established in the gratuitous murder of the old man, Fred, who has cared for Carrie when she

needed help, and in whom she recognizes her own possible fate. There is little romantic about the film; visually grainy and dark, thematically grim, its characters' relationships are born out of desperation, the need for companionship in times of stress. The picture it presents is not as anarchic or aggressive as "Pure S", but it is more aware of the politics of its characters' lives.

On its release, its departure from the existing precedents was noted; Jack Clancy wrote in *Cinema Papers* "we have not seen anything like this in Australian films", and commended its "combination of compassionate observation, social concern and behavioural truth".⁶ As the first of its kind, it suggested the usefulness of documentary realism (although its enclosure within this convention is qualified by such factors as the rapid cutting pattern) when applied to excluded forms of Australian life, those aspects of existence which are not part of the consensual view of the Australian way. The disconnection of the mode of documentary realism from the representation of the past is the significant achievement of "Mouth to Mouth".

Critiques of realism argue that it is a form which favors one organizing view, a view which the reader adopts in order to make sense of the narrative. Thus it is a form which is incapable of expressing criticism – of producing a contradiction which, remaining unresolved, would oblige the viewers to think for themselves. The position has been argued, for example, in relation to the political progressiveness of the BBC's leftist reconstruction of labor politics in the television series "Days of Hope".⁷ Such a position might qualify our sense of "Mouth to Mouth's" progressiveness. But, while realism may be a more bourgeois, 'naturalising' form than the 'interrogative text' which questions reality, there is still real doubt as to how legitimately we can 'read off' the ideology of a film, or any text, from its choice of form.⁸ If realism is able to 'privilege' its view of history, does it not then have the potential to provide an oppositional or alternative view of history in the same form? "Mouth to Mouth" seems to serve this kind of purpose. The extent to which "Mouth to Mouth" applies realism to contemporary Australian cinema is the extent to which it puts realism to oppositional use. "Mouth to Mouth" recognizes the existence of a form of life which is produced by basic divisions within Australian society, but which is denied by that society.

As a progressive influence of Australian film, "Mouth to Mouth" has been significant in suggesting new uses for the dominant convention of realism, thus opening out new areas of subject matter. This is happening. There are, however, a number of other areas of development in current Australian film production: we can see new possibilities in the wave of youth films such as "Street Hero" and "Fast Talking"; the confident use of Hollywood conventions and genres in the "Mad Max" movies and "Starstruck"; the political satire of "Goodbye Paradise"; the reconstruction of contemporary Australian history in "The Killing of Angel Street" and, in a less realistic mode, "Heatwave"; and the unusually sharp focus on the individual which draws most of "Mouth to Mouth's" innovations, and which becomes increasingly evident as we



Chris Haywood and Doug Tremlett in "The Clinic"

enter the 1980s, is the increasing number of films dealing with contemporary urban Australia and its margins. Migrant experiences occupy Paul Cox's "Kostas" and Michael Pattinson's "Moving Out"; the obsessive relationships of the subcultures of Carlton and Fitzroy dominate the film version of Helen Garner's "Monkey Grip"; the gap between the worlds of the middle class and the streets is again John Duigan's subject in "Winter of Our Dreams"; the structures of oppression and exploitation link the worlds of the small-time criminal and the aspiring model in Don McLennan's "Hard Knocks"; David Pattinson's documentary style provides a case study of a day in the life of a VD clinic in "The Clinic"; Hayden Kennan mines the urban subcultures for fantasy as well as documentary in "Going Down".

The films listed above – and there are many others one could name – are not radical, but surprisingly popular, films. They suggest a new way of looking at Australia by their preference for new, potentially oppositional, class and gender positions. They are not looking for consensus, but at the highlighting of differences. "The Clinic" is remarkable for depicting the central character as normal, well-balanced, admirable *and* homosexual; Chris Haywood's character is the educator in a film which

explicitly advocates greater tolerance and understanding for a wide range of different, curious, but legitimate ways of life. The young medical student (Simon Burke) whose reactions to the clinic's work would be that of most of us, is revealed as intolerant, ignorant and prejudiced. Although advertized in a way that recalled sexploitation films in the "Percy" mould, "The Clinic" is actually an intelligent and witty film with an active social conscience.

"Hard Knocks", too, takes on a sub-cultural perspective; Sam's attempts to transcend her criminal background and her gender are uncompromisingly critical of the society in which most of us live. In "Monkey Grip" realism acts as a device for toughening up the film's point of view. The 'true romance' voice-over threatens to send the film into the most mawkish of modes, despite its trendy setting, but it is rescued by a visual acceptance of the grimmer aspects of the life it examines.

Although the dominant convention in such films is still that of realism, it is often put to uses which challenge the viewer's comfortable expectations and demand questioning rather than a 'knowing'. "Hard Knocks" fractured chronology breaks with its realist form. It sets up expectations of a 'rags to riches' story, of the reformed criminal who becomes the successful model, but these expecta-

tions are eventually revealed to be naive. The end of the film has Sam under attack from those who wish to exploit her in the modelling world, her friends from the prison who resent her attempt to break out of her criminal context, and the police who refuse to see her as anything but a criminal. We are encouraged to identify with Sam in her entrapment, more than we are with Lou in "Winter of Our Dreams", for instance, and the emotions aroused by the film are those of frustration and anger.

The argument about the progressive, critical and oppositional potential of realism (which is by no means over) requires a special application to the history of Australian film. Given the established realist conventions here, the realist depiction of non-consensual, critical view of life may well be renovatory and progressive.

The value of dislodging the viewer from a comfortable 'knowing' position, and the expansion of the ability to shock and confront which results, is apparent in Hayden Keenan's "Going Down". Initially reminiscent of "Pure S", its realist form gradually evolves into comic fantasy, an exhilarating riot of invention. Its style is aggressive, confrontational (when on its first run in Sydney, those passing by the cinema were harangued by a man who warned them not to see the film: "It will damage your mind") and in some scenes shocking, but its omnivorous appetite for the life it represents is irresistible. Its originality is a milestone. The film begins with two lengthy hand-

held shots which take us through the rooms of a seedy communal house, recording the ephemera of the characters' world. As the film develops, the documentary use of the camera diminished, the tempo of the cutting increases, the range of images and content widens, and any residually realist conventions are finally exploded in the high comedy of the journey to the airport. The level of intention and artifice is gradually revved up through this film, emphasising its display and celebration of the medium of its ability to transform, rather than reflect, the real.

Anne B. Hutton has complained, in a 1980 article on nationalism in Australia film, of the lack of a "personal stamp", the "mark of the film-maker's consciousness" on most of the productions of the Australian film industry.⁹ As she says, Australian film-makers seem "unable to define what Australia is", and so content themselves with "restating the myths of what it has been".¹⁰ this pattern seems to be breaking down now. "Going Down" is nothing but an assertion of the film-maker's consciousness, confident and idiosyncratic. The more commercial 'youth' films are remorselessly contemporary and observant, distancing themselves from the past in order to construct a world that is dominated by fashion. "Goodbye Paradise" is unashamedly playful and self-regarding, challenging the viewer to make sense of the narrative through the combination of broad contempor-

Scene from "Pure S"



ary satire and intertextual references to other films – such as Ray Barrett's 1940's-styled private eye, and the burlesque of "Apocalypse Now" in the cataclysmic battle at the commune. The viewer enjoys this as a fiction, rather than as a transparent reflection of the real world. Paul Cox's film the film-maker becomes part of the visual texture of the film. They deal with close personal subjects, and the reaction they normally provoke is to see them as somehow autobiographical – as indeed the childhood sequences in "Man of Flowers" are.

Such greater uses of the film-maker's 'personal stamp' may derive partly from changes in the funding structure of the film industry. Once film was seen as the cultural flagship, and the various film commissions devoted their resources to film rather than television. This is no longer the case. Increasingly, we notice acknowledgement of Film Commission support in the credits of television features and mini-series. Also noticeable is the fact that series like "All the Rivers Run", "Against the Wind", "A Town Like Alice", even "Bodyline", possess similar formal characteristics and cultural functions to the period dramas and 'fine' films of the 1970s, which were the chief recipients of the film commission funding at that time. It is not difficult to see the funding structure of the industry during the 1970s limiting the kinds of films that were made, and the nature of the representation of Australia in those films. Now, part of the mainstream market has been recovered for television, and the film industry's formerly undisputed role as the cultural flagship is under attack. While some see this as the beginning of the end for the industry, it can also be seen to have led to the production of films which are more diverse in form and content, which are more personal and idiosyncratic, and which are more actively involved in the discussion of contemporary Australia.

The films referred to in this discussion do fall into such categories. They do not, of course, constitute a radical revision of the nature of Australian film production. The meanings behind many of these apparently critical and progressive films are often the same as those which preceded them: Paul Cox's films teach lessons of acceptance and endurance that are definitely social, and the predominantly pessimistic cast of Australian narrative in film and fiction is not going to be broken by the changes

proposed here. The modesty of expectation, the sense of political dislocation and impotence that marks so much of our narrative generally, and film in particular, is still there in "Mouth to Mouth" and "Goodbye Paradise".

These departures from the dominant modes and the dominant treatment of Australian subjects indicate, however, at the very least, possibilities for change, and for change that has the potential to be progressive. It is not necessary to see the future of the Australian film industry as one solely determined by cynical money-spinners and television mini-series. Not only is there room for Australians to make entertaining, exciting spectacles such as *Mad Max II* on overseas models, but it is also possible for Australian films to construct more critical attitudes to our present-day life.

NOTES

- 1 Nos. 44-45, April (1984).
- 2 Patrick Wright, "A Blue Plaque for the Labour Movement? Some Political Meanings of the National Past", in *Formations of Nations and People* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) p. 52.
- 3 No. 13 (1977), p. 77.
- 4 Scott Murray (ed.): *The New Australian Cinema* (Melbourne, 1980), p. 161.
- 5 David Stratton: *The Last New Wave* (Sydney: 1980), p. 90.
- 6 No. 16 (1978), p. 356.
- 7 For a convenient collection of the key articles in this debate, see Tony Bennett et al (eds.): *Popular Television and Film*, (London, 1981).
- 8 The "interrogative text" is Catherine Belsey's term in *Critical Practice* (London, 1980) for the alternative to the classic realist text, and it invites the readers to "produce answers to the questions it implicitly or explicitly raises" (91). For a critique of this view of the realist text, see Terry Lovell: *Picture of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure* (London, 1983), pp. 84-87.
- 9 "Nationalism in Australian Cinema", *Cinema Papers*, no. 26 (1980), p. 100.
- 10 Ibid. p. 98.

Graeme Turner teaches in the School of English at the Queensland Institute of Technology.

Among the Sundries

We acquired Sheila almost by accident. We had arrived early at Mernda market with a view of buying a litter of eight little pigs for feeding and fattening, and were filling in time looking over the Sundries. The Sundries were spread out on a patch of grass in front of the auctioneer's office, and comprized of all sorts of things for which someone had no further use but which somebody else might wish to buy; a couple of crates of moulting hens, an old chest-of-drawers, some lengths of water piping, a set of dray harness, an oil painting of less than dubious artistic worth, a bundle of used galvanized iron sheeting, a box of mixed bolts and nuts, an old armchair, a couple of partly-worn tractor tyres, two ducks in a fruit case covered with a piece of wire-netting, and an old-fashioned marble-topped wash-stand, complete with appropriate chinaware, an engine-driven water pump to which the owner had attached a hand-written ticket stating, "In Perfect Order".

Over against the auctioneer's office a riding saddle was lying on the grass, and between it and the wall were three puppies about six weeks old, two black ones, and the other reddish brown with glints of gold in its wavy coat. The black ones were asleep but the brown was alert to everything happening around it. At first sight of the pup Marie went towards it with the same look in her eyes that I have seen when, in passing along a city street, she has glimpsed in a shop window a piece of really nice dress material for which she could instantly see a possible

future as part of her wardrobe. The pup as she approached it, scrambled eagerly up the seat of the saddle as if it has been anxiously waiting her appearance. She picked it up, nursed it to her cheek, and looked at me with soft eyes, while the pup wriggled ecstatically, wagged its tail and, to her obvious delight licked her face. I could see that this was a case of love at first sight, on both sides. She had spoken earlier of having a dog on the farm. I had been against it for the reason that a dog is a very dependent animal. If you go away for a few days between milking seasons a cat, being a hunter, can be left to tend for itself, at any rate, in the country, but a dog is a tie wherever you live.

When the auctioneer approached, Marie behaved with very conscious correctitude. She returned the golden-brown pup to its place with its mates and drew back to the inner edge of the ring of buyers and curiosity-seekers – though I noticed that her eyes remained on the pup fixedly during the procedure of selling. I had stipulated that if ever we did buy a dog it would have to be male, purebred, and sleep on a bag in one of the sheds. The three on the mat were female, crossbred and, instinct forewarned me, if the one Marie was watching passed into our possession, it would sleep indoors.

"Three little bitches," cried the auctioneer, and hopefully tried to start the bidding off at a pound each. There was no response. He tried ten shillings. The silence was sustained. "Nobody want the sheilas!" he commented



with a grin and was shortly reduced to trying to obtain two shillings for the three.

"Give you five bob for the ginger one," said I.

The hammer came down smartly. "Five bob for the ginger one to Frank Davison," and he moved on to the second-hand tractor tyres.

Marie shot me a melting glance, and promptly went off toward the utility with a pup in her arms and heaven in her eyes. It is not given us very often to have what we want at the height of desire.

She told me later that she passed an aged man making his way with the aid of a stick, between the yards and the adjacent pub. As she went by he paused and croaked emphatically, "It's a lucky little dog that gets a new home!"

When I had bought the young pigs we had come for, and were driving home, Marie, who was nursing the pup, asked, "What shall we call her?"

"Sheila," said I, remembering the auctioneer's complaint.

Marie accepted the suggestion.

A little further along the road I said, "Of course, if she turns out no good as a working dog she'll have to go."

Sheila was close to seventeen and obviously failing. She had become rather deaf and dim-sighted. Following a day in which she was obviously experiencing severe internal pain we sent for the vet, a very good man. Septic metritis! She was well when he saw her but, he said, after an

examination, that she had at most three months to live, that the periods of acute pain would increase in frequency, and that the possibility of arranging a painless death would decrease as her heart weakened. We took a day to think it over and then sent for him again. She was well that day and had been down with me for the mail. He did the job in the kitchen; just sat her on her tail a moment and gave her a needle in the belly. She wagged her tail as soon as he released her and sniffed at his trouser legs, then lay down in her usual place on the mat in the corner by my chair. Marie kissed her head and I patted it, she curled up and went to sleep. After ten minutes the vet left.

We buried her out in the paddocks where her work had been done; under a box-tree near the hay barn. Marie dug the hole. She insisted on this. I filled it in and fetched a large block of basalt to mark the spot. It was a strange little funeral party that went out along the track from the house; Marie and I in the utility and the dog that used always to sit between us lying on her mat at the back. The cows a sort of cortege as they gathered round the burial place to see what was happening. Burial was not the end of Sheila. Home and paddock are haunted by her. She and Folding Hills seemed to have become part of each other. When I get up to go outside I have to remember that I need no longer hold the door open for her to pass through ahead of me.

Frank Dalby Davison's ashes were spread, by his wish, around the box-tree where Sheila lay buried.

1987 Churchill Fellowships for overseas study

The Churchill Trust invites applications from Australians, of 18 years and over from all walks of life who wish to be considered for a Churchill Fellowship to undertake, during 1987, an overseas study project that will enhance their usefulness to the Australian community.

No prescribed qualifications are required, merit being the primary test whether based on past achievements or demonstrated ability for future achievement.

Fellowships are awarded annually to those who have already established themselves in their calling. They are not awarded to students or for basic study, nor for the purpose of obtaining higher academic or formal qualifications.

Details may be obtained by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to:—

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust
GPO Box 478, ACT 2601

Completed application forms and reports from three referees must be submitted by Friday 28 February 1986.



FRANCIS OESER

Design Arts in a Distant Mirror

In Overland 98 reference was made to the case of the distinguished architect and designer, Francis Oeser. Oeser, an Australian living and practising in London, replied in January 1984 to an Australia Council advertisement calling for applications for the position of first director of the Design Arts Board of the Australia Council. He was invited to Sydney in April 1984 for interview, and appointed to the position in May. The decision to appoint him was a unanimous one, except for the vote of the chairman of the recently-designated Design Arts Board, who wished to appoint another candidate. In November 1984, four weeks before Oeser was due to leave London, and after he had closed down his professional activities in London, he was telephoned by the General Manager of the Australia Council, Diana Yerbury, and advised not to come to Australia. This advice was taken. Overland has asked Francis Oeser to comment on the affair.

A beloved friend copied out and gave me Cavafy's poem "Ithaca" as a token, for the flight to Melbourne, Christmas 1983 – fare for preoccupied travellers, special ticket to a real world. I have carried it ever since, illuminating many journeys.

My odyssey was the inversion of Odysseus's. In 1966 retreating abroad, I left Sydney and the Opera House war, defeated by my colleagues' jealousy of Utzon, their greed over such a rewarding job, their disquiet about the rare and creative way Utzon was making the building; also defeated by the lack of imagination and lack of belief in an architecture that was emerging on Bennelong Point. This defeat was tainted by the historic friction between city and country – this 'city' project doomed by the Country Party recently in power in New South Wales; defeated too, by the undemocratic way decisions were taken about the worth of the Opera House, and its future.

There were visionary champions for design, architecture and for democratic debate. In Sydney, for instance, Harry Seidler, Michael Nicholson, Bill Lucas, Don Gazdard, Duck-Cohen. Helen Palmer rearranged Outlook to squeeze in my piece about the affair. Other voices were raised, but Utzon's opera house, gunned down, was hard to save.

So we lost a chance to allow something splendid to take root here; something which, if properly completed, would have been manna to design; something unique and Australian. Few acknowledged the team of Australians working on it, the tons of native products making it, or its

effect. All were dazzled by the chap in charge – his foreign name and origin. The opportunity was destroyed by the paucity of shared ideals. Utzon was not a power-maker but an imaginative building-maker. Lacking our brand of brutal 'individualistic' toughness, he was overrun.

This return to the sixties is not an avoidance of recent pain. For, again, I have failed to influence Australia, and little changes. Reflecting on the grubby facts of my recent dismissal in Homer's "distant mirror" (tribute to Barbara Tuchman) produces some insights, more useful than a diary reports.

On my arrival in Ithaca last year, I felt someone was expected. Athena was unsure whether they wanted king or beggar. In the market place it was 'king'. But in the palace, beggars are preferred. My Argus dog-friends, unconcerned about such trivia, blessed me. They had grown old, but brightened at my coming, softly telling of those now over Lethe: Oscar and Drury, Retin Boyd, Helen Palmer, Carl Plate, George Bladessin, Kiffy Rubbo. In tears, hope grew. Here was our chance – start of another era of order and skill in the palace, of well-being on the island.

But all was not well: the tapestry, finished, sprawled gawdy, intrusive on the floor. It was used by the suitors for games of mockery and malice, as pleasing pawns, brutal bishops, castrating castles, nepotistic knights; few yet played king. "But you cannot dance on that rigidly-proportioned simplistic base," Mentor said. Few noticed what a travesty this game of the arts had become. For the

PROSE ANTHOLOGY REVIVED

As part of the celebration of its centenary in 1986, Angus & Robertson Publishers announces the revival of its traditional prose anthology series, *Coast to Coast*, which last appeared in 1973.

The 1986 edition will be edited by Kerry Goldsworthy of Melbourne University's English Department. Goldsworthy also edited the 1983 anthology *Australian Short Stories* published by Dent.

The first *Coast to Coast* was issued in 1941. Distinguished editors during its 30-year run included Hal Porter, Thea Astley, Frank Dalby Davison, Leonie Kramer and Beatrice Davis.

The last *Coast to Coast*, published in 1973, was edited by Frank Moorhouse who included other contemporary prose writings besides short stories, and revitalised the physical appearance.

The new *Coast to Coast* will focus on short stories written in 1984 and 1985, but will not restrict itself rigidly to these years or to the short story form.

Submissions for inclusion in *Coast to Coast 1986* may be made to the editor via Angus & Robertson Publishers,
PO Box 290, North Ryde, NSW 2113.



fun in the palace tempted, dazzled; individual, flamboyant strutting obscured the lack of choreography, belligerently upset any attempt at discussion/direction.

However, the suitors were wary. The great bow was banished to the market place, many old household swords drowned in the muddy dam. Oh yes! they feared a clear fight with bright word-weapons, sharpening sense, slicing ideas out of confusion and prejudice. They spurned the play of the mind, its ideology and overseas links. They believed they would be cut down by such weapons, lose their bright cult-clothes (suitors without suits are more incontinent than kings). Without their power games they were lost. Knowing this, they defended the status quo. In league with the pliant queen, the palace was a stronghold against the stranger. The land too, was a kept secret behind its Pacific/Indian moat with its polaris-protection of plastic sharks.

"Tell us," they asked. So I talked of a national debate and national action about design. Since we all inhabit our environment, we should all have a say in its evolution; we should all help make it ours (see *Design World*, number 6, 1984). No longer can we accept this as a job only for professionals, institutions or governments. These are serious matters of work and service which challenge accepted ways of designing and of taking decisions. Australia can advance in new ways, not controlled by the elite in power, in professions, but in a much richer, participatory way. Certainly this is full of anxieties. For instance, one does not start with an obliterating arts policy, but with a belief, that through discussion and trial, an Australian way *will* emerge. this is a different sort of leadership. If management of this process is committed and skilful, its end will be ours. Such management has been well developed since its definition by W.R. Bion over forty years ago. Just as a family must make its house to inhabit it, so a people must make their country in order to inhabit it and to become a nation. These are issues for everyone. In these times we can have the skills to achieve them.

These word-swords, the great bow flashing arrows through the dark arrayed axeheads: the idea and the means to achieve it. This is change. This is life, lived creatively. The palace wanted lesser things. Athena wept; with lack of kinsmen I was impotent in Ithaca, burned by its dead heart, its snivelling perimeter, poor-fellow-my-country. There was no homecoming, but the beginning of another voyage, another landfall . . .

. . . Keep Ithaca always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you're destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,

so you are old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaca to make you rich.

Ithaca gave you the marvellous journey.
Without her you wouldn't have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca won't have fooled
you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you'll have understood by then what these Ithacas
mean.

(C.P. Cavafy)

For an odyssean homecoming, there must be a milieu committed to supporting the newcomer. It is not riches he needs, but support. 'New Australian' of the fifties demonstrated the alternative to materialism, a freedom from greed, the way of making a nation. They fashioned many aspects of our urban culture, despite our lack of interest. Like the Bush we exploited, we say this culture is ours. This is shallow support. Marred by tradition, the Australia Council seems neither willing nor able to provide effective support. The design arts issues I represented are viewed with scepticism. Ways of outfacing such scepticism must be found if the aims underlying the Labor Party arts manifesto are ever to be realized, and if Australians are to find a way out of the impasse of their history.

In February 1985 the candidate who was rejected for the position of director of the Design Board when I was appointed was appointed in my stead.

Poseidon retched, and looked away to Ithaca.

[Diana Yerbury, General Manager of the Australia Council, has written to us to say that my interpretation of the events relating to Francis Oeser's withdrawal from the position of Director of the Design Arts Board of the Australia Council (*Overland* 98) is "misleading", though the facts themselves are apparently not in dispute. She also states that "this was the first mention of it to me outside Council." Professor Yerbury adds that her personal relations with Francis Oeser have been friendly and helpful, and that compensation for Oeser is being negotiated. *Overland* would like to make it clear that Diana Yerbury herself, so far as we are aware, played no immediate and direct role in the unseating of Francis Oeser, apart from her necessary executive duties as General Manager of the Australia Council. *Overland* however believes that the whole incident, whatever way it is looked at, reflects no credit on the Australia Council. - Editor.]

ON THE NIGHT SHIFT

One who knows does not speak; one who speaks does not know.

TAO TE CHING LI

In bed at last, the light turned off, the chorus
Of daylight voices dies and in profound
Silence I sense the singing in my ears,
A ghostly sibilance, an immense susurrus
Filling the whole house with its wraith of sound.
Then drifting towards the pit of sleep, one hears

A call "Sign off now!" quiet voices say.
"Your last job was to put the body to bed;
The Night Shift will take over when you've gone.
We expect you're ready: it's been quite a day".
The circulation slows and in the head
The oceanic rhythm of sleep draws on.

Although quite ready to go, I wonder what
The Night Shift is, since all controls are set
On automatic, brain idling, will shut down,
Breathing long-slow, heart at a quiet trot . . .
Cleaners perhaps, night-watchmen is my bet
Or maintenance to service my sleeping town.

Last night I learned I could not be more wrong.
Those humble processes take place indeed;
But when I go from the controls, it seems
My brain is taken over by a throng
Of revellers and roisterers who proceed
To invent whole theatres of improbable dreams.

My back-room boys exulting to make over
Scenarios of the scripts I write by day
To season them with melodrama or farce,
Reveal the coward I just keep under cover,
The Greedy Boy I struggle to keep at bay,
The envious Doubles who haunt my looking glass

And some, more sinister members of the cast,
All anxious in my absence for a romp,
Each longing to display what he can do,
Freed from my finger in his pie at last,
Onto the empty, waiting stage they tramp
Jostling for parts and snatching at a cue.

There they act out dream sequences galore
Which visit me in helpless sleep all night,
Long parodies of worries of the day,
Nightmares that grind till I can bear no more
And wake unable to shake off my fright,
Journeys of sheer frustration and delay.

But there are other actors who employ
Their talents to bring me pleasure too, who show
Marvellous landscapes, prospects of sky and sea,
Reminders that living is an act of joy
Dreams full of color and light that change and glow
And unfulfilled love now made up to me.

Some hoping for my praise too, scribble verse
Give lectures, plan whole novels, cook up plays
In which if I miss cues, forget my lines
Or fail the whole performance, which is worse,
I still know, though they tease in all these ways,
To shame me is no part of their designs

But to exalt their own parts, give me powers
That in real life I lack and much deplore,
As on those rare occasions when I stand
Conducting a great symphony which soars
Composed impromptu and whose only score
The players read from motions of my hand.

And if, on waking, it seems wretched stuff
I cannot laugh at them for I recall
These are my helpers on whom I depend,
Providers of fresh images in the rough.
Insights I'm not capable of at all
And words not mine that lead me to my end.

These are my fellow workers every day
In that weird business of composing verse.
Without them my part falters flat and tame;
Without me in their wild surreal play
Formless inconsequence would prove their curse
In kindling from dull fuel a soaring flame.

Was it another dream last night when I
Resolved to join the Night Shift, climbed the stair?
The door was locked, a sign announced "Stage Door
Keep Out!" I knocked but there was no reply.
I wondered, can it be there's no one there
Although I heard them from my lower floor.

I knocked again. A voice! The door flew wide.
There stood a person I had never seen
Who barred the way and asked me "Who are you?"
I told her who I was, but she replied,
"Look, we're in the middle of a scene
You say you work here: what is it you do?"

There's no one works here answering to *that* name.
"I'm just a poet who runs the show", I said,
"Oh, Management!" she said, "They're all downstairs.
Come back tomorrow, if it's all the same . . .
There's only one man there, he's gone to bed
A long, long time ago and said his prayers."

With that she pushed the door to in my face
And left me standing in the dark alone;
But I had seen the Night Shift . . . Now I knew
The secret all oneiromantics chase:
The cause of dreaming, hitherto unknown
To the whole psychoanalytic crew,

As to their predecessors, shamans, scribes,
Diviners, mages, witches, and old wives.
The Future was not theirs to know and most
Messengers from beyond this world prove liars.
Dreams are the simple means a poet contrives
To tap creative energy from a host

Of clues he is forbidden to meet below
Levels of consciousness he is master of.
On the Night unhampered they work free,
And I in sleep am quite content to know
They are engaged then in a labor of love
Unquestioning, and unquestioned too by me.

I offer this insight to the critics too,
Bright chaps at best who mostly guess awry
Since ignorant of the way that poems begin.
It's an odd business best left to the few
Who practice it, and of their lot am I.
Interviews with poets may be Original Sin.

Since half the process by which poems grow
Is something not even their authors understand
Inevitably they give themselves away.
What part the Night Shift plays they never know
But talk as though they had the whole thing planned
And it was theirs alone to call the play.

"Tell me," some questioner asks, notebook in fist
Or pushing a microphone into my face,
"How you get inspiration, analyse
Your sources of creative energy, list
The writers who have influenced you and trace
The deeper drives on which each poem relies."

I mumble and fiddle. He takes the nonsense down
And seems content as if with holy writ.
The Night Shift listens in; they laugh and crow
And slap their sides "Help! Listen to the clown!
That babble will soon be printed, every bit."

And sure enough, half drivel and half guess,
It all sees print, is solemnly studied. Profound
Conclusions pin my literary drift.
And I too laugh to watch my critics assess
A poem, as their game goes round and round,
My game of blind-man's buff with the Night Shift.

A.D. HOPE

JUDITH WRIGHT

Brisbane in Wartime

A draft extract from an autobiography in progress.

From early in 1942 to the spring of 1943, I was in New England. Both my brothers were in the Army. My father, short-handed since most men in the district were in the services too, had his hands full trying to manage his own station and that of my brother nearby; but he had not accepted my offer to come back and help as best I could, until some time after Pearl Harbor. Then he was given a civil defence job, as chief ranger for the northern New England district, and at last felt it was worthwhile calling me back from my Sydney job in the so-called Air Raids Precaution centre into which I had been pitchforked a few months earlier. His job was if possible more farcical than mine had been.

With the raids on Darwin and the north, all the coastal ports and towns went in terror of a Japanese invasion. Coffs Harbor was thought to be a likely area for this, and my father and one or two others were directed to organize the coastal evacuation if the Japanese seemed to threaten a landing. The operation was to be a 'scorched-earth' campaign, in which the farmers of the coast were to burn crops, destroy stores of hay and grain, and muster all their livestock to drive them to the New England plateau. Since all roads from the coast to the tableland were to be mined and defended by the military services, there would be no route for this exodus except up the steep and trackless spurs of the Dividing Range. It was doubtful if even the Army had convinced itself that this enormous conglomeration of cattle, pigs, sheep, horses, and for all I remember, fowls and ducks and geese as well, would ever reach the 5000-foot high plateau through that wild and tangled rainforest and up those spurs; the farmers, with practical knowledge of the ways and feelings of their livestock, knew it wouldn't. After a few meetings with the outraged farmers, my father was thankful when the invasion scare began to fade and the Army ceased to press the scheme.

By the spring of 1943, with American forces arriving in Australia in increasing numbers, with the Coral Sea battle over and the Japanese forces immobilized in New Guinea, his job was nearly finished and he could manage the stations with what help he had. I felt it was time for me to look for another job myself. Deafness blocked my application to join the clerical side of the women's forces. I did not want to go back to Sydney where so many of those I had known were now overseas in the forces, or in prison

camps, or mutilated, or dead. I applied for a clerkship with the Universities Commission in Brisbane.

I asked for the Brisbane job for the overweening reason that by the August of 1943 I was cold, bitterly cold, to-the-bone cold. The winter of 1942 had been, or perhaps had merely seemed to be, the most chill and wind-driven and frosty winter ever. With drought as well, the winter of 1943 seemed even worse. During my time in New England, my little grandfather died with the paddocks outside his house heavy with snow, week after week. Its drifts blocked the road so that it was hard to bring in enough wood to cook meals and keep his bedroom fire burning. One early morning I found a beloved little dog dead and frozen rigid. It was actual pain to get out of bed before sunrise and struggle out in boots as hard as wood to bring in the milking cows. In my father's mostly fireless office my fingers stumbled on the old Remington and refused to hold the pen. A job in Brisbane, after those winters, beckoned like indecent luxury.

In my spare time, I had begun to write again. A struggle with a novel which would never get beyond the sixth draft of the second chapter discouraged me (who would publish the thing anyway?) but I was starting to send poems to such magazines as survived, and a couple of guineas from the Bulletin and some poems printed elsewhere made me feel hopeful. The little Brisbane magazine Meanjin Papers took two or three; its editor Clem Christesen wrote me complaining of his difficulties with finance and his lack of help. When I knew the Brisbane job was mine, I volunteered to help with the magazine in my spare time.

I took the train north from Armidale with a couple of pre-war suitcases of pre-war clothes and books, and with my ticket and credentials. Brisbane was a hub in the Pacific-side scheme of war. General MacArthur had taken over a building in Edward Street as his headquarters; US forces were landed there for assignment to the big Army camps up and down the Queensland coast, or came in on leave from the north. All these movements and plans were highly secret, and the State border was a barrier uncrossable without the required documents and permits.

At Wallangarra, where the change of rail gauges signified the difference between Queensland's Cinderella

status and the wealthier south (and moved the American forces to incredulous oaths), military guards patrolled the platforms and endless lines of railway trucks shunted and groaned. Most were loaded with supplies and guns, vehicles and ammunition. When at last I was allowed to climb into the carriage waiting on the farther side of the border, I felt I had entered a foreign land.

Indeed, in some ways, it was. The long descent from New England's cold heights to the Darling Downs, and from the Downs to the coast, took the train through zone after zone of increasing warmth to a sleepy stickiness of golden air. The suburbs of Ipswich and Brisbane trailed by the windows like a neglected wooden toy-town, their cottages half hidden in brightly-colored overgrowths of shrubs and trees and vines, palm-fronds and crotons. Galvanized-iron roofs showed patches of rust, picket fences reeled gap-toothed, no paint had been obtainable for years. Many of the verandahs of the houses, once gracefully open through wooden and iron-lace railings, had been closed in with fibro sheets and louvres to make more living space, giving them a half-blinded and muffled air. The city itself was crowded with servicemen stationed there or passing through, with women and girls in bright lipstick and bare or nylon-clad legs (nylons were obtainable only from Americans), and with other entrepreneurs catering to the needs of the foreign peaceful invasion.

Demographic change had shaken the inhabitants of Brisbane. In the days of panic, when Darwin, Broome and Townsville were attacked, rumors that the whole of the North was to be abandoned as far south as the Brisbane line had sent many flying. Whole schools and other institutions had packed and gone inland to country homesteads; rural relatives were inundated with town families and children. Houses in Brisbane had been abandoned or sold for what small sum a buyer might suggest. Even when I arrived, few of the refugees had come back; for by then it was nearly impossible to rent or buy living space among the crowds of new arrivals. That whole substructure of camp-followers, black marketeers, and supplies of goods and services legitimate and illegitimate now flourished, while the town itself, more or less deprived of luxuries like street-sweepers and cleaning services, grew shabby and rakish. The well-filled olive-and-blue uniforms of the US Army and Airforce and the doughboy caps and skittish sailor-collars of the Navy, seemed the only signs of wealth. Beside their sleekly-fitted opulence, the sloppy and worn khaki of the comparatively few Australian soldiers not fighting the wars in New Guinea looked a bit like Brisbane itself.

With many people living in garages or tar-paper shelters under houses I was lucky that the Christeses had found me a room to rent. Dorothy Auchterlonie had been working with the ABC as a radio journalist, but was now leaving Brisbane. (She and I had been contemporary at the University of Sydney years before.) I was able to take over the room she had rented in a New Farm house. Its owners were Ada Ward and her husband John, and Ada's daughter Joy Randolph-Bedford was then living there and studying medicine. I could get a breakfast tray, and a

cafe a few blocks uphill towards Fortitude Valley would do for my other meals.

It was a narrow and windowless room, with a stretcher, a table and chair and cupboard and little else, but it was luxury compared with what I might have found for myself. The tram to and from the city ran beside the house, clanging and clashing blue sparks on its way across the points towards the river at the end of Sydney Street. Over the road, New Farm Park with its rows of crimson-flowering poinciana trees and its palms and rose-garden stretched to the river. It contained a tumbledown dunny with unclean buckets and with a variety of graffiti on the ladies' side, offering advice to girls about pregnancy and the Yanks, probably not taken by the struggling forms I passed on my evening walks.

I took the tram to George Street and introduced myself to the University of Queensland, on my first day of work.

If the tasks of the Universities Commission were in any way important, I have forgotten everything about them. My desk, rather grudgingly provided by an overcrowded little university, was in a shed-like 'temporary' annexe, otherwise housing the Examinations Section, which consisted of three or four typists and the Examinations Clerk. Val Ward was a cheerful heavily-built young man who disclaimed any connection with the Universities Commission and professed no interest in what it did. I suppose he must have been my nominal boss insofar as I had one, and when I had nothing else to do I wandered into his room and took over some of the work of his typists.

Poor Val, he was to die suddenly and dramatically, a year or so later, on his way home from work in the tram, toppling over with an embolism on the day after his medical examiner had pronounced him fit for another eighty years.

The university itself was still based in Old Government House and its graceful and pleasant facade looked out over lawns to the Botanical Gardens. Elsewhere, temporary buildings like the one where I worked blocked off most of the view across the Domain on the river-bank to the long meander of the brown-snake Brisbane River. An incredibly dirty kiosk in the Gardens provided sandwiches and milkshakes for the imprudent. Once I discovered at the bottom of a milkshake a trail of filthy dishmop cotton with a cockroach entangled in it. My complaints were treated with the scorn they deserved.

Food was rationed and adequate, but poor except for the US forces which lived royally by comparison with the residents of Brisbane. The restaurant menus were short and plain and their soup I soon learned to avoid. Tips were needed for good service. This form of bribery was new to Brisbane and a result of the fat paypackets of the US forces, but there were still some waiters and taxi-drivers who proudly refused them. There was at any rate plenty of rum and whisky for those who could afford it, appalling wine served in friendly wine-bars, and a flourishing and obvious blackmarket in most of the rationed goods.

I ate with friends whenever I could, since the rumors of conditions in cafe and restaurant kitchens seemed all too likely to be true. Brisbane was a town of huge rats and enormous cockroaches, insecticides were of course all

directed to the Forces, and every kind of insect flourished in those pre-DDT days. Even mango trees, those heavy-leaved nourishing fruits which seemed to grow in every garden, launched at evening hundreds of sheltered cockroach inhabitants which flew in at windows and crawled through cracks. Friends of mine – an Army sergeant with a wife and baby son who had managed to rent a room and kitchenette in Paddington – sat up most of the night taking turns in keeping rats and roaches out of the baby's cradle. The Lady-across-the-Street in New Farm candidly complained that they were eating the armpits out of her dresses and the crotches out of her husband's trousers. (Soap was scarce too.)

But I was a long way from complaining. Brisbane, if corrupt was cheerful, if dirty was warm. It was disposed to enjoy life, and its flamboyant vegetation and flowers – the electric-blue of morning glories scrambling over unpainted fences, the flaring yellow of cassias and magenta of bougainvillea – and the palms with their languid dirty feather dusters, disguised its sins. The war was moving farther away; it was possible to hope that it might soon be over, and the men in Japanese hands or in unknown hiding-places or in the jungles of New Guinea might some day come back.

Meanwhile, I was well paid for the little work I did and could wander in my lunch hours (which could have lasted all afternoon as far as the Universities Commission would ever know) through the gardens and by the river, and take books out of the university's exiguous library or the School of Arts or the Public Library (all ill-equipped for my purposes), and write. It was as though the New England cold had clamped my hands now the poems began to come through again.

Often I spent evenings at the Christesens' house in Dutton Park, helping to deal with *Meanjin Papers'* correspondence, to read contributions and correct proofs. The little journal was in course of transition. It had shifted direction from a Queensland emphasis and was moving, under Clem Christesen's ambition, towards being nationally representative. The concentration of the US forces in Brisbane had helped; for a little while at least Brisbane had been almost an international centre, and US servicemen who were inquisitive and of a literary turn had taken up Australian literature and were reading and commenting on it – an entirely new phenomenon in our lowly history.

A few of them came to the Christesens' house – Harry Roskolenko, Robert Peel, Karl Shapiro, some ex-academics and ex-critics herded into the forces and yearning for literary talk. The young and hopeful Barjai group of writers and painters, who published their journal also with the patronage of James Duhig who was then subsidizing the financial costs of *Meanjin Papers*, were sometimes in and out to borrow books or talk. There were Barrie Reid, Charles Osborne, Laurie Collinson, Barbara Patterson, Thea Astley, and occasional visitors from southern states such as John Philip. Their journal might be easily dismissed as a product of youthful egos, but they were in touch too with the new movements in the south and talked of John and Sunday Reed as patrons extra-

ordinaire, of Max Harris as poet and prophet and Angry Penguins as his tablets of the new commandments.

Not much seemed to have come either of Barjai or Angry Penguins in literary terms as yet, though Barrie Reid's poems were often impressive; but there were artists too, now beginning to wander poverty-stricken to warmer places as I had done – Laurence Hope, Charles Blackman – who talked of the youthful Sid Nolan and dropped names like Hester and Vassiliev. If the end of the war was not too far-off, they implied, a new wave of art and literature might cross the continent and sweep before it all the old conventions and imitations of European nineteenth-century writing and Georgian shibboleths.

It was all part of the kind of hope and confusion which attended Australia as it looked towards the nearly unimaginable vistas of peace and postwar reconciliations. The New Order could not, by definition, include or take its reference from the Old which had culminated in this lossful and destructive war. What form the New might take was as inchoate as a larva in a chrysalis but it was certainly not going to be acceptable to the Old. Any kind of New might therefore hold a key to the necessary change, and even little Australia might (so the US contacts seemed to suggest) get some attention in quarters which had never noticed Australia before.

The British stranglehold was – after 1942 – no longer so crushing. There was a feeling of new hope abroad. The world's old enmities were sliding about and changing shape too; with Russia now an ally instead of a detested enemy, with China on new roads and the countries of the near North emerging from the Japanese grip. Who could tell who would end up in whose arms?

Meanwhile, 1944 saw the war receding to the islands and northward and Brisbane gradually emptying of its load of servicemen, con-men, and camp-followers. Shortages of everything from petrol to soap, to clothing, to paper, seemed worse rather than better, and Clem was always in search of enough paper for the next issue, but *Meanjin Papers* (now *Meanjin Quarterly*) was (as its Queensland contributors bitterly said) getting too big for its Queensland boots. Its relationships with rivals, as well as past friends, were not very warm; open breaches seemed to loom, especially in financial matters. Past splits, personal and political, creaked and groaned in the background.

As an editor, Clem was catholic but volatile; he could nearly always tell a good poem from a bad, but he was highly sensitive about his lack of academic and even journalistic qualifications and he sometimes overrated those who had them. This made him a difficult and self-contradictory judge. But at least an editor uncertain of the worth of the new ideas and the new European philosophies now floating everywhere as people looked towards war's end was unlikely to become a pundit or an exclusivist. During my year and a half as editorial help, nearly every issue of the magazine had at least some memorable feature. The great Ern Malley controversy hit during that time; Clem wasn't sure whose side to take or what to do about it all, but at least the pages were open to the battle. Meanwhile, Ern at least helped in one way: it was easier, since everyone was taking modern literature

so-called with such extreme seriousness on one side or the other, to drop quietly some of the earlier contributors of the magazine's Queensland-oriented days and attract in those with more southern prestige and influence.

In fact, apart from Clem, I met only one of the original four whose footprints marked the covers of the early Meanjin Papers. James Picot had vanished long before my arrival, into the Japanese prison-camp from which he never came back. Brian Vrepon (Troubridge) and Clem had broken off relations. Paul Grano, stalking the streets of Brisbane still, cynically guilt-ridden, I did meet, but he was almost at the end of his writing years, and little work of his reached Meanjin Papers in my time.

The other Queensland writers who had contributed were troubled and confused over the new developments. Jim Devaney, that courteous and gentle man whose love for John Shaw Neilson and his poetry brought Neilson briefly to live in Brisbane while I was there, was wholly intolerant of Modernity in Verse and tried to persuade Clem and others that it was a mere outbreak of oddity fostered by wartime uprootings. Endearing little Ernie Briggs, whose vague and inflated poems Clem published in one of Meanjin Press's less successful early testings of the waters, was not well regarded by Clem's new mentors in the south and dropped from view to type his own poems and produce them in wallpaper-covered private editions.

For the rest, the sole group of elders in literature in Queensland, the Authors and Artists Association, presided over by the dowager Emily Bulcock (Vance Palmer's sister and therefore revered), was puzzled and distressed by the magazine to which the QAAA had made some financial contributions but which now published practically nothing of the results of its members' industry. On one occasion – my first venture into Public Speaking – the QAAA (cruelly known as the Arthurs and Marthas), invited me and members of the Barjai Group to talk on Modern Verse. I don't know which of us had the advantage in the end, but I am sure neither side was convinced by the other.

The incomprehensible quarrels, arguments, and iconoclasm of the far-off south were increasingly brought into a Queensland context in which there was nobody to listen or reply, and it was clear that a Queensland base no longer served Meanjin's future.

By that time, Clem was intent on keeping the magazine as his foothold in larger ambitions to influence the course of literature in Australia. He could hardly achieve that from a Brisbane from which life and interest were departing with the ebbing US services. MacArthur's move to Hollandia in August further depleted the importance of Brisbane, and there were now few of those officers and wistful literary servicemen to encourage the local scene and provide new references and American-published paperbacks to be absorbed by an editor eager to be up with the New. Brisbane would clearly soon revert to its old status as a shabby minor State capital ruled by the rural ascendancy and happy otherwise to idle in the sun.

Forseeing this, Clem had already begun early in 1944

to look round for a new base in one of the southern cities, with the magazine as his credential. As it happened, MacArthur's departure more or less coincided with an offer from the University of Melbourne's Extension Board of a niche from which the journal could be published. It was a remarkably wide and generous offer, though it was vague as to its terms, and Clem was probably right in regarding it as a confirmation of his hopes and of his editorial capacities. All the talk of a New Order, of a resurgence of large-minded reconciliations and mutual generousities in a post-war world, made Clem long for a hand in the making of the new national and international cultural renaissance which he believed was on the way. This could give him the vantage-point he was after, as well as removing the financial problems that had plagued Meanjin after his break with Duhig.

One of the promises in the final agreement negotiated with the Extension Board was for paid secretarial assistance to the magazine. Since I had been in effect unpaid secretary over the past year, the Christesens suggested I go to Melbourne with them and take the job on.

It was far from my ideas of what I wanted. I had found Brisbane an easy place to work in, free from the kinds of pressures and political line-ups of the Sydney years, and I had hopes of finally saving enough money to take time off to write more intensively. I had not forgotten my own disabilities. My deafness would increase, I too had no official academic credentials, I was a female in a world which would soon probably be overwhelmed with returning servicemen in need of jobs for which I wasn't especially qualified. I might well be stranded in yet another unknown city if Clem and the journal came into disfavor again, and I had enough experience of Clem by this time to feel that that was entirely possible.

Moreover, I was not as sure as Clem and Nina were of Melbourne University's real commitment to Meanjin's future. Reservations, changes in the terms of agreement, the idea of Clem's submitting to the direction of an editorial board over what his beloved journal might or might not print, made the future look insecure.

Moreover, I now had, by the end of 1944, other prospects of an interesting job with the University of Queensland as the Universities Commission work faded. Already there were discharged or soon-to-be-discharged servicemen demanding access to the university education they had missed. The Army education services would soon take over most of the Commission work I had done, and the trickle would rise so high before long that the university would be unable to stay in its cramped ageing government-house and its wooden shacks. The new land at St Lucia bequeathed for university purposes would have to be built on as soon as money was available; the university would need plans and forecasts; I had already been sounded out on whether I would help with the statistical forecasts. (This was laughable enough for someone who had virtually no qualifications as a statistician – but neither had anyone else who was available, and in the days of boredom I had taken on the job of making pretty graphs of past and present Examination Section figures, and projections of what might happen as the services' demand for places rose.) It would be something

of a score, I felt, to be given the title of University Statistician.

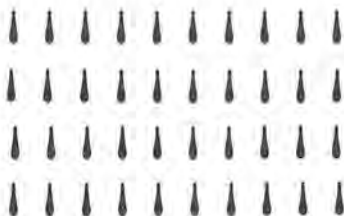
In any event, I was not going to Melbourne. Much as I loved Nina Christesen, and interesting as the year and a half had been, I had problems in maintaining good relations with Clem, whose unpredictable mixtures of self-esteem and self-distrust seemed likely to worsen in the new conditions. Melbourne's reputation for climatic discomfort reminded me of my days of ice and frost in New England.

As for mental stimulus, of which Brisbane wasn't likely to offer much in the days to come, I now had friends who

could provide it. Jack McKinney, the most exciting mind I had yet come across, was one such, and I was feeding him with the books and library references which, living on a miniscule war pension, he had not been able to find for his work. That work intrigued me, and I thought it more radical and more likely to lead in a fruitful direction than the political in-fighting and confrontation of Left and Right of my Sydney days.

The Christesens finally left for Melbourne at the beginning of 1945. I don't know that I was ever quite forgiven for deciding to stay in Queensland.

tears



candles

BIRTHDAY

PAUL CARTER

Grit to the Mill

Reviewing and the Mind Industry

Xavier Pons: *Out of Eden. Henry Lawson's Life and Works – A Psychoanalytic View* (Sirius, \$12.95).

Colin Roderick: *Henry Lawson: Commentaries on his Prose Writings* (Angus & Robertson, \$24.95).

Much of our reviewing deservedly enjoys a low reputation. The reviewers are not wholly to blame for this. An economic nexus which makes their activity dependent on publication dates and editorial patronage means that what the reviewer writes is inevitably reactive. Even the most critical review is promotional: it is contributing to the turnover of what the German poet and critic, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, calls the "mind industry". The reviewer who adopts a dispassionate stance, who aims to discuss the book on its own merits, cannot escape this. To be critical, to express reservations, to welcome, to deplore – the whole gamut of rhetorical gestures the reviewer employs – are what the genre demands and the reader expects. Truly critical writing in this situation is almost unthinkable. The reviewer who affects a judicious neutrality merely uses a particular figure (drawn from the law courts) to promote a product with greater authority.

Enzensberger coined the term "mind industry" in relation to the mass media. It would be nice to think that academic books and reviewers were above such things. Unfortunately, it is not so. Academics, too, although cushioned from the commercial world of publishing, are also in the "information-recycling industry". They, too, are under pressure to develop curricula, establish research interests, fight for funding: they, too, have to attract students. And, while it would be reassuring to think that good salaries could buy disinterestedness, it is not the case.

Much of what passes for academic publishing in this country – and academic reviewing – cannot be taken seriously, except as a manifestation of what Enzensberger calls the "industrialization of the mind". Much of what passes for academic 'commitment' and 'discussion' often seems informed by no higher goal than a wish to promote the institutional claims of a certain field of knowledge, regardless of scholarly standards or critical value. Much academic publishing (and its academic reception) frequently suggests no higher motive than a commitment to self-perpetuation and self-aggrandizement.

A recent case in point is this psychoanalytical study of

Henry Lawson by Xavier Pons. Given its subject matter and the burgeoning academic interest in Australian literary studies, the book needed little promotion here. As a matter of course it has found its way into the institutional libraries. Even reviewers who found the book uneven generously welcomed it as a "contribution" to Lawson studies. "In my view," one (academic) reviewer wrote, "the book is essential reading for anyone with a serious interest in Lawson; scrupulously argued and carefully documented ..."

Certainly, Pons' book hit its academic target. Since Pons' book came out, Roderick, the doyen of Lawson studies, has published his commentaries on Lawson's prose writings. And the aim of Pons and Roderick is remarkably similar. The purpose of his book, writes Roderick, is "to trace the nature and the course of development of the creative mind." "It is," Roderick claims, "a study in the psychology of literary creation as displayed in Lawson's best works," and he warns that, as "outline chapters for an inner biography of Lawson," "they are a first course for the biographer who feels a compulsion to tell the poet's story." Xavier Pons couldn't wait for the 430 page *hors d'oeuvre*, but his biographical study shares Roderick's ambition. "There is an undeniable relationship between Lawson's emotional and psychological predicament and his writings," says Pons, "and a study of his psychological substructure allows one to gain a better insight into his works."

Both writers are anxious to dispel the popular image of Lawson as "craggy bushman turning out reams of verse in praise of the 'bush'" (Roderick). They hope to establish, more or less rigorously, a casual connection between Lawson's writings and his own "torment", his "mental anguish", they want to establish the "odds" against which "Lawson struggled to find artistic fulfilment" (Pons). They want to replace the apostle of mateship with a "divided man", whose mind was "moved by feminine sympathy and strengthened by borrowed masculinity" (Roderick), a "neurotic". His "homosexual tendencies," according to Pons, sublimated into "a cult of mateship, his aggressiveness into patriotism, his self-pity

into a desire to make society more just and more humane, or generally his psychological suffering into literary works."

Pons' book exhibits the kind of novelty academics can welcome. Its application of a body of theory to one of Australia's best writers would reinforce the claims of Australian literary studies to represent an authentic field of endeavor. It is "challenging", which is to say it has a future in the footnotes of other books. A future assured, one might add, not least because of Roderick's own labors. Roderick's commentary, with its exhaustive account of variant texts, possible literary and biographical sources, not to mention its generous admixture of critical and personal asides, certainly adds up to a substantial body of notes towards a literary biography. But its robustly affectionate, even avuncular, tone makes no pretensions to theoretical coherence. Indeed, its material invites intelligent interpretation – my own view is that the literary evidence Roderick brings to light, particularly regarding editorial changes made to Lawson's stories, suggests the place to locate their appeal is not so much in the depths of Lawson's psyche, much more in the cutting room. But a psychoanalytical reading might show otherwise.

The problem with Pons' book is simply that it promotes these academic interests at the expense of regard for literary and critical standards. It shows an indifference to the critical function of theory; an unawareness of reading and writing as critical practices; and insensitivity to the limits of literary interpretation. In this context, the generally favorable response academics have given Pons' book cannot help but raise questions about the real function of literary studies. At the very least, it suggests that in some quarters criticism has ceased to be a worthwhile form of learning.

In a footnote to the introduction, Pons undertakes to defend a psychoanalytical approach to literature. It is a good example of his pseudo-critical method. "Some essential elements of the psychoanalytical situation, such as transference and free associations, are inevitably missing," Pons admits but, he goes on, this does not matter since the critic, unlike the analyst, does not seek to cure his patient: "The critic . . . is interested in the interpretative aspect only, and can in many cases obtain sufficient information about his 'patient' to accomplish this task."

This is, to put it mildly, a statement which bristles with difficulties. As Freud himself pointed out, it was precisely the supposition that free association was not "free" which prevented the analyst from foisting unfounded interpretations of his own on the patient's dream material. It was the logic of the dream he sought to interpret and he sought to interpret it just because, on the surface, it had no meaning. The analyst-critic who transfers this method to the data of consciousness (literary works, for example) is in a different position: the mechanism for unlocking the "meaning" of the material is not available to him. The meaning is already apparent. The information he "obtains" can, in this situation, only confirm his psychoanalytical preconceptions.

In this respect, the analyst-critic makes no advance over the psychological 'decoders' whom Freud explicitly

set out to replace. The characteristic of that school, said Freud, was that "it treats dreams as a kind of cryptography in which sign can be translated into another sign having a known meaning, in accordance with a fixed key." This, incidentally, is Pons' method throughout his book, when the question of Lawson's racism is brought up. Pons has a quotation from Reich to hand. Prominent psychoanalytical theorists like Klein and Laing are naturally there when the matter of Lawson's aliases is raised. No inner logic, no necessary causality informs Pons' interpretation. His method is cryptographic, nothing more than a matching up of biographical data and psychoanalytical translations. As a result, far from "explaining" Lawson, the use Pons makes of his life merely serves to elucidate certain preoccupations of psychoanalysts . . . but let me pause here.

It will have occurred to the reader by now that, despite its hostile fanfares, this has now settled down to a regular 'review'. The kind of remarks contained in the last two paragraphs are the 'stuff' of the longer review. They take the book 'on its own terms', as a cultural object in the public space which has claims on our attention. They assume that the book is, in some sense, addressed to us, the readers: that it finds its fulfilment in our reading, in our active, critical response. The reviewer's role in all of this is obvious: in inaugurate critical reading and discussion.

But, as emerges from the remainder of the footnote already cited, the truth is that such literary arabesques, such posturings of responsibility in the reviewer, are ridiculous. Perhaps sensing that this defence of psychoanalytical criticism is weak, Pons writes: "Besides, like Diogenes proving the existence of movement to the sophists of walking, a number of critics have proved their point by producing valuable psychoanalytical studies of this or that artist, following the example which Freud himself set. So I will take the theoretical legitimacy of this approach for granted." The stance of seriousness only prevents us from recognizing the real nature of the book – which is not to encourage better understanding of the value of theory as a critical tool, but to neutralize it. In this context, to take seriously what Pons himself does not take seriously is to turn criticism into a tool of promotion.

For the purposes of Pons' book, the legitimacy of his approach doesn't matter. Perhaps what Pons writes is valid, perhaps not. In any case, he intends to write it. In this context, the reviewer who responds to Pons' book dialectically, seeing it as an occasion for discussion and, perhaps, for clearer understanding, has missed the point. The whole of the footnote in question, like the book it accurately emblemizes, is, it would appear, a rhetorical gesture, designed to give the reader the illusion of inclusion in a process where, at the same time, he is allowed no position from which to speak.

The footnote itself is bait for the reviewer, an invitation to catch himself in his own dialectical net. Safely landed and flapping, the reviewer wrestles with himself while the river which turns to the mills of the mind industry flows on. Of course, to react to a footnote in this way may seem excessive. And, it's true, if Pons' book did engage criti-

cally with Lawson's life and works – and not cryptographically – then we could overlook his sleight of hand. After all, Pons had to start somewhere. But the truth is that Pons' appeal to Freud is not merely superfluous: it is actively misleading. For it is an extraordinary fact that, despite his conspicuous reference to Freud, Pons had excluded from his psychoanalytical study all reference to the very body of work which might have given his book a theoretical coherence: I mean, of course, the whole field of psychoanalytical enquiry which takes its inspiration, in the main, from the radical re-reading of Freud undertaken by the French psychoanalyst and teacher, Jacques Lacan.

Lacan's essential point some twenty years ago was that Freud's 'interpretations' were interpretations of texts. Freud was not dealing with dreams as such, but with his patients' verbal accounts of dreams. In this sense, the tools of exegesis which Freud brought to the elucidation of dreams were similar to (but not the same) the strategies which the critic brought to the reading of a poem or novel. In effect, Lacan was making the point that the real object of enquiry in Freudian analysis is not the mind, but language itself, the logic which Freud attributes to the subconscious exists as a function of linguistic activity. One consequence of this argument is to dissolve the notion that, properly interpreted, the dream discourse is a representation of the individual psyche. Another consequence is that it opens up the field of literature to psychoanalytical enquiry on its own, linguistic terms.

Let me stress: in pointing out this gap in Pons' books, I am not simply quibbling about styles of 'interpretation'. Nor is it a question of lusting uncritically after the idols of the new. Pons has simply turned a blind eye to the very field of research which, over the last quarter century, has laid the groundwork for the critical application of psychoanalysis to literature. The assumption he makes of a naive resemblance between Lawson's mind and his writing is precisely the assumption which this body of work has decisively superseded. Why, then, has Pons opted to locate his study in a pre-Lacanian world? Why is his study at least a quarter of a century out of date? We can only speculate that perhaps the requirements of the mind industry have something to do with it. For one thing, the work of writers as diverse as Lacan, Wilden and Ricoeur immensely enrich (and complicate) the picture, and the information-recycling process which this book represents prizes products which are closed, self-contained, self-fulfilling.

It may be, too, that something is being said about local suspicions of 'theory'. Perhaps it is only in the picturesque folklorish guide of classic Freud (the Freud of the Leonardo study) that psychoanalytical theory can be entertained – entertained because, in this form, it is harmless enough, an idea which time has rendered neutral. (It should be said, though, that, despite claiming Freud's essays in artistic interpretation as his model, Pons' method of interpreting Lawson does not respect their method.) Perhaps, more profoundly, it is because the theoretical justification for this book is not its content, but its physical presence, a product which appears to meet consumer requirements. In the name of new

knowledge the history of knowledge is quite simply effaced: a nice paradox.

Here, it may be objected, that what really bothers me is Pons' lack of respect for 'theory'. Certainly, if the function of 'theory' is *not* to preserve the status quo but to forge a critical tool for its analysis, then Pons' use of a theory (psychoanalysis) seems to me a misuse. But the issue here is not theory: it is the exclusion of critical reflexion which disturbs me, the fact that precisely this quality ensures the book's survival as a 'product' of the mind industry. For my own part I could happily dispense with psychoanalytical insights in favor of a close, critical reading of Lawson. By a critical reading, I do not mean a ritualized "interrogation" of the text – as Adorno reminds us, such dialectical enquiries all too easily (especially in academic circles) become parodies of themselves, demonstrating nothing more than the stupendous fact that "there are two sides to everything". I mean, rather, a reflective reading which pays equal attention to the literary work and the biographical circumstances of its writing.

Such a reflective reading – one only has to think of Canetti's wonderful essay on Kafka (an essay peculiarly relevant to the interpretation of Lawson's work) – might be strongly anti-psychoanalytical. But, theoretical stance aside, it would pay attention to the individuality of the writer and the writings. As Canetti writes, referring to the transformation of Kafka's engagement humiliation into *The Trial*, "Nor did he . . . 'repress' it. He stored it in his mind, but was quite conscious of it: he thought of it often; it surfaced so often one would have to call it the very opposite of repression."

But Pons' book, by contrast, despite its alleged aim of focusing on the nexus between Lawson's life and work, shows a complete indifference to the kind of contextual sensitivity, the kind of critical interpretation, which might make his case plausible and, more importantly, illuminating. The psychoanalytical context in which Pons places Lawson's life and works is no 'context' at all. That is, it represents no critical choice. It is, instead, based on the most banal acceptance of the principle of association.

Pons' chapter on "Lawson and Australian Ideology" illustrates the point. Firstly, Pons indicates that Lawson's political beliefs were widely-shared and are not to be taken as highly personal and idiosyncratic. Secondly, Pons is now able to ascribe to Lawson an Australian "ideology". Then thirdly, a nice sleight of hand, he can deny Lawson's political beliefs were genuine. Fourthly, Pons can diagnose the problem. Ideology, you see, conjures up for Pons an immediate psychoanalytical association. It is not Bergeret who points out that ideological conformity produces gratifying narcissistic benefits? Pons' whole ploy, it appears, is to manoeuvre Lawson into a role where a psychoanalytical connection can be made.

It would be naive to ascribe this, as surly reviewers sometimes do, to a 'faulty' logic, even to partisan blindness. Nor would greater biographical knowledge help Pons, as one reviewer has suggested. Such responses imply the author has set out to produce a worthwhile critical

object, and has failed. But *Out Of Eden* does not attempt this. Its object is to recycle, to refurbish, a product already familiar to the mind industry (the psychoanalytical study). As Enzensberger remarks, "The mind industry is monstrous and difficult to understand because it does not, strictly speaking, produce anything." Novelty in this system is the sign of sameness. In this context, indifference to what is different (about a life or a piece of writing) is predictable. The efficiency of this kind of scrupulous research can be measured by its success in short-circuiting the disruptive tendencies of actual reading.

The nature of this essentially uncritical, mind-reproducing activity is well illustrated by Pons' use of quotation. Take this passage: "As Marcel Proust pointed out, 'a book is the product of a different self from the one we display in our habits, in society, in our vices.' Psychoanalysis recognizes this fact, and concentrates precisely on the hidden self, on the unconscious desires or fears which are somehow transmuted into literary expressions."

Confronted with this misrepresentation of Proust's meaning, the scandalized reviewer is tempted to rush in. Proust's distinction here has nothing to do with confessing or concealing a secret life. It is distinction between the world of writing (with its history of style, sound and reference) and the world of living, where so much cannot be said. Proust is referring to what Derrida has described in relation to Rousseau: writing as the action of absence. Proust is anticipated by Goethe, when he writes of certain love letters, "Absence set me free, and my love only came to its full bloom in this exchange of feelings over a distance." Far from regarding writing as therapeutic, Proust revels in writing's otherness, the fact it is not like life.

But such counter-thrusts of quotation are again reviewer's arabesques which presume too much. For Pons uses his quotation, not to illuminate an assertion but, rather, to pacify misgivings. Whether or not the quotation reinforces his case is by the way. What matters is the gesture, the semblance of locating his assertion in the realm of the reader's experience. But, underlying this, is the assumption the reader is not familiar with the passage in question. (Or, if he is familiar, that his grasp of the text is so insecure he will welcome Pons' quotation uncritically as reassurance of some kind.) The function of the quotation is rhetorical: it is the conventional trope of submission. Used as Pons uses it, it invites the reader to be comparably passive.

This levelling-out process, this reduction of significant difference and suppression of the context is not, I think, to be attributed to the author particularly. It is symptomatic, rather, of the mind industry's need to translate every text into a kind of educational argot which can be infinitely recycled. Although *Out Of Eden* wears the appearance of humanistic learning, it belongs to the world of the language laboratory and closed-circuit TV. In reassembling and reordering units of information (quotations, references etc.), it obeys the logic of the computer, where the limiting condition is operational, not semantic or critical.

By a curious irony, this means that, when Pons does

intrude his own value judgements, they are invariably valueless. When he attempts to generalize, his generalizations are inevitably banal, illogical, impertinent. Referring to a quarrel between Lawson and his wife, Pons writes, "This is no staggering revelation – after all there were bound to be a few tiffs in a relationship which endured for nearly two decades. It happens to all couples, whether legitimate or not."

Legitimacy is a significant metaphor for Pons. For his object is not so much to explore the meaning of Lawson's attitudes, behavior and writing, but to legitimate them for academic industry. It is to assimilate the inner biography of the man to a universal scheme, to reduce Lawson's style to a blueprint. In this context, there is a particular irony about the title of Pons' book: *Out Of Eden*. For only by making an extremely illegitimate use of Lawson's phrase, can he legitimate from an academic view of Lawson's life – and his own approach.

"Out of Eden", as Lawson uses the phrase, occurs in a diary-like fragment which Lawson wrote about a visit he made by sea to Mallacoota in 1910. The fragment opens: "Out of Eden: Went below to sew on buttons." The latter part of this fragment is taken up with a profoundly sympathetic, even sentimental description of the difficulties of a newly-married couple he encounters on board. Sea-sickness forces them to disembark at Bermagui "with two ee's":

And so those two little people alone in a wide and careless land in a wide and careless world, vanish from me into darkness and mystery, for ever and ever.

Out of Eden!

I wonder what fruit he ate of . . .

Lawson recalls another unfortunate young couple, and then abruptly concludes:

But – damn it all! There's no fool like an old fool. I said there was to be no sentiment in this sketch. But I can sometimes grin till the tears run down my cheeks.

Out of Eden!

I wonder who was to blame?

The answer, clearly enough, is not Lawson's mother!

So, much of this sketch which *does* matter has been suppressed by taking the final two lines out of context and using them as a self-contained epigraph. Although this is no place to argue it, there is a strong case for seeing Lawson's sketch as a vindication of Manning Clark's view that "Perhaps Lawson ended by doubting . . . whether Australians were capable of creating the conditions under which men could have the cup of life, and have it more abundantly." This, at least, is the drift of his description of Tathra in the same sketch: "Decayed, decaying: and going to decay." But Clark's thesis aside, the origin of this fragment in Lawson's own travels (and not in the Bible) cannot be ignored. It suggests Lawson's peripatetic mode of existence (an Australian phenom-

non of the time) and not, as Pons seems to think, some fatal flaw, connected with Lawson's "inability" to write a novel: the short story, like the yarn, was a travelling genre. It corresponded to the conditions of production.

But, as I say, there is no particular reason to attribute this indifference to the claims of the text particularly to the author. The author may have done little more than bow to the editorial exigencies of one kind of academic publishing industry. The author's remorseless reduction of particularities to banalities, of sense to nonsense, is, at any rate, shared by the proof-readers (were there any?), the editors and publishers. The text abounds with neologisms, misusages, with syntactic gobbledegook. Lawson, in Pons' book, does not invoke Archibald's advice: he "evokes" it. Pons finds it hard to "conciliate" Lawson's racism (Pons calls it "racialism") and his socialism. He describes Lawson as anxious not to "suscite" feelings of guilt. Lawson, we learn, suffered from "perennial dissatisfaction". These 'stand-ins' for words are not proof-reader's errors. They are the jargon of an information-recycling industry which has no regard for its raw material (language) except as the source of productive power. As Pons says, with more accuracy than he realizes, it is all "grit" to the mill.

To speculate that these mistakes originate in Pons' limited grasp of English is to miss the point. It is not his mistranslations which matter – they could have been corrected: it is the mistranslation which the book as a whole represents and the nexus of commercial-educational interests it presumably promotes. In this context, it may be significant that the publishers of *Out Of Eden* also published recently *The Diminishing Paradise*, a book which, as I tried to indicate in my Overland review, is also little short of a travesty of critical and historical seriousness. Neither book in the least sustains the analogy implied in its title. But the titles do mark the books out as Sirius paperbacks. Taken together, they promote a (publisher's) view of Australian literature and culture which is reductive rather than interpretative. They recycle the rhetoric of coffee-table books and TV explorers, which translates everything (texts, places, voices) into a placeless, timeless repetition, a series of trivial variations on an unavoidable, unnegotiable theme (Eden and its loss, England and Australia, Innocence and Experience).

Readers who have taken the trouble to read this far must by now have realized that what they are reading is not,

despite a few lunges, going to break cover and turn into a review. And perhaps the reason why is becoming clear. In the conception of knowledge which Pons' books represents, reviewing (with its notion of engaging new books in some sort of dialogue) has little place. To quote Adorno again, "The total interconnectedness of the culture industry, omitting nothing, is one with total social delusions. Which is why it makes such light work of counter-arguments."

In this situation, denied a dialectical function, the reviewer can only be parasitic on the book under review. To bite the hand that feeds is to assume the pose of the court jester who mocks the king. It is to play a role which is predictable, harmless and ultimately, the review reader assumes, sycophantic. For, in the end, the book remains a product which the mind industry has made desirable. In this context, it would hardly be surprising if my remarks were dismissed as expressing a merely personal view, expressing personal motives. It would be understandable if they were outlawed as not belonging to a review at all.

But not to write a review may be the most pertinent reaction to books which render a reviewing superfluous. The ironies apparent in the writing, editing, publication and promotion of a book like *Out Of Eden* are not peripheral. Its indifference to the cultivation of a critical consciousness – surely central to the practice of literary studies – embody an ambiguity inherent in the mind industry itself, an industry which controls and reduces the very 'human consciousness' it aims to proliferate. In these circumstances, reflection on the function of reviewing becomes unavoidable. And it's not a question of narcissism.

To quote Enzensberger once more, "Criticism of the mind industry that fails to recognize its central ambiguities is either idle or dangerous. It is a measure of their limitations that many media critics never seem to reflect on their own position, just as if their work were not itself a part of what it criticizes. The truth is that, nowadays, no one can express any opinion at all without making use of the industry, or rather, without being used by it." The truth is, I suspect, that it is not only media critics who are sometimes reluctant to reflect on their own position.

Paul Carter, freelance critic and writer, lives in Melbourne.

The following poems by Dorothy Hewett had a section misplaced in Overland 98 and Overland 99, owing to faulty copy.

JACK CATT

Alice recited
ballads on the Domain
Jack Catt heard her
½ an inch taller than Christ
with his sleepy almond eyes
he was almost
expelled from the Party
he went back to his ship
with a ream of typing paper
& decided to be a writer

they lived
in a jarrah & fibro house
on the river
cranes & ibises
fished the shore
pelicans settled
in giant white clouds
on the shallows

she slept with Jack Catt
in an iron bedstead
with one knob missing
her hair grew down to her waist

serving afternoon tea
on bone china
under the paper-barks
she felt like the heroine
in a Chekhov story
the pleasure boats
waved from the river
the boys built rafts
like Huck Finn

& poled to the estuary
her eldest son
walked down the towpath
balancing the river's history
in a tin trunk
on his shoulders
she lit the oil lamp
its pearly shadow
leapt & glowed on the walls
in the dry yard
the madonna lilies
sprung up on fleshy stalks
their undersides trembling

a queen bee
she swelled like a striped pod
the stretch marks
criss-crossed her belly
her water broke
& she had 2 golden daughters

a wild goose
sat on the jetty honking
she could see its moist feathers
if a memory stirred
of an owl or a peregrine falcon
she folded it carefully away
with the camphor balls

the cobblers
with poisoned fangs
lay in the black mud
her retina detached
& the landscape shimmered

DOROTHY HEWETT

From "Days of Violence Days of Rages" in Dorothy Hewett's forthcoming collection Alice in Wormland



BLUEY BLOOD

I.

Alice cut her wrists
& joined the Party
read *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* -
& *Ten Days that Shook the World*
Japan was flattened
white shadows on a wall
shaping the outline of a man
the dead returned
yellow with atabrin
The Burma Road
the fuzzy-wuzzy angels
the Cold War hotted up
3 years the Revolution
the comrades warned her
you'd better cut your hair
her mother raged
& she was disinherited
her father said
I was a redragger at 21
the Jewish Secretary
was a Spanish Brigadier
his leather coat
blazed on the Esplanade
he laid her back on the desk
in the District office
but couldn't get it up
Never apologize he said
I'm old enough to be your father.

II.

she lived in the ranges
full of strontium 90
hitched a ride with the wheat trucks
revving up the hills
sold the *Workers' Star*
at *The Railway Workshops*
when Bluey Blood drove in from *Iron Knob*
his *Humber Snipe* was boiling
he used his boilermaker's shoulders
to storm the Council Chambers
bursting through the Town Hall doors
like anarchists red-headed laughing
she saw him there beside her

they crossed *The Horseshoe Bridge*
to little Italy
shacked up in a single bed
with the light bulb dangling
he said *I'm beginning to smell like a woman*
the Party members sent her to coventry
outside the Chinese cafe
old friends cut her dead
he bought her a hock-shop ring
With this ring I thee wed
in true Communist marriage

the Party Secretary said
We have reason to believe
he works for ASIO.

III.

she walked out
of the Saturday matinees
leaving behind Hepburn
in *The Philadelphia Story*
the ragged coconut palms
the trolley buses sparking
down Riverside Drive
she was Garbo in *Anna Christie*
meeting Garfield & Jean Gabin
on the waterfront
Bluey Blood bought her a ticket
on *The Trans-Continental*
they played pontoon & poker
across the desert

the glass dome of *Central*
swarmed with light
at Mansion House
a metho-drunker raged
with a cut-throat razor
in the Coal Strike
& the coldest Sydney winter
she read *The Poor Man's Orange*
typed up the strike stencils
in *The Henry Lawson Hall*
& lost her baby
the Control Commission told him
She's only a flash in the pan.

IV.

Squatting in Marriott St
the rats behind the icebox
mildew traced varicosed curliques
on the walls
embroidering bibs by the coal fire
the slag exploded
her first born tore her apart
between the pains she read
The Fortunes of Richard Mahony
raw from elbow to wrist
with a breech-birth boy
Bluey walked down the ward
a branch of almond blossom
dropped on the white bed

the Referendum to ban the Party
was lost won lost again
smoke from the illegal literature
darkened the autumn air
at *The Pensioners' Hall*
they sang *The Red Flag*
& danced the tango
the pensioners' piss

rained through the ceiling
the second baby
had infant eczema
(he swore it wasn't his)
at *The Petrov Commission*
Alice was called a spy
the Hungarian Revolution
split the Party
the Revisionists slipped
Krushchev's speech
through the letterbox

pregnant pushing a pram
under the flags & banners
she marched on May Day

two old men by the Moreton Bays
Why don't you go home
& get married?

V.

at night on the back step
he plucks at the ukelele
his heart breaking
the light touches
his red hair
the sun cancers
flake on the backs
of his hands
in bed he sleeps
without touching

women are destroyers
& you don't want
another kid!

warming her fingers
over the gas
she types at the kitchen table
Bluey walks the linoleum
whispering *will I kill her*
tonight or tomorrow?

in the backyard
he is burning her poems
in a cut-down drum
under the choko vine
the children watch
sucking their thumbs
9 years go up in smoke

next morning she leaves
without saying goodbye
remembering how he'd said
One day when things get tough
you'll take the kids
& go back to the bourgeoisie.

DOROTHY HEWETT

Mail time: a few short paces to the front fence for bills, advertising, pension and social security cheques, Christmas and birthday cards, greetings from friends at Ayers Rock, Surfers Paradise, Bali. At least that is what it means to most people. For me, however, mail time is different, special and often exciting.

My mail box is on a dry creek beyond Cootamundra wattles, white ironbarks, paddocks and a line of red gums, a walk of a quarter of a mile. A contractor delivers the mail from a town seven miles away, and brings newspapers, chemist prescriptions, the community news. On the way to my mail box I pass no houses, only trees, birds, animals, occasionally a vehicle, and very rarely a person. The mail boxes next to mine are two hundred yards away on one side and over a mile on the other. Not only will there be papers and letters but sights, sounds and smells; there will be magpie calls, massed exhibitions by garrulous galahs, the tang of eucalyptus, sometimes a white-necked heron rising from the dam to flap off unhurried and majestic.

On the way to my mail box the wattles are usually the first attraction. Wattle is so much a part of the Australian landscape. Bernard O'Dowd likened our wattle blossom to a river a continent wide which "flows in a foaming golden crest ... trickling through every valley ... lapping every mountain side ... and sends back over its course such an echo of its memory, that we long and linger for the promise of the echo, that its rising time will soon return."

I walk through about thirty Cootamundras. In late July they are covered completely with blossom. On the end of each branch some two-dozen little stems two inches in length each carry from one to three dozen flower balls. The number of yellow balls on a large Cootamundra would be astronomical. The scent is powerful and the drone of the bee multitudes gathering pollen in the sunshine reminds one of long childhood days incongruous with today's get-up-and-go world.

In the spring masses of slaty-purple seed-pods replace the blossom. These expand slowly and seem just as attractive. In the summer and autumn the seed pods audibly crack open and gradually drop to the ground.

Bronze wing pigeons love these seeds and can be seen on the way to my mail box throughout most of the year. They peck very deliberately until disturbed. Their take-off, with loud whirl of wings, often startles me.

One day my wife stood talking to a kindly old farmer as a bronze wing fed nearby under the Cootamundras.

"Isn't it lovely," she exclaimed enthusiastically.

"Yes," he answered, "and they make marvellous eating."

Just then the sunlight caught the rainbow colors of the wings.

Mistletoe birds live off the mistletoe which plagues the Cootamundras. These birds, probably the smallest in the country, starkly black, red and white, are certainly among the most beautiful. They eat the fruit of the parasitic mistletoe. However, they cannot digest the seed which passes unharmed through their bodies dozens of times, perhaps hundreds of times, a day. Many of these droppings stick to wattle branches where they germinate. The mistletoe has a devastating effect on Cootamundras and finally chokes them to a dirty-looking, bedraggled old age; but it provides sustenance for an exquisite little bird.

The way to my mail box is dominated by white ironbark eucalypts. Great trees line the fence on either side and many sturdy saplings are growing rapidly.

Ferdinand von Mueller, that indefatigable German who gave himself to Australia and named much of our flora, praised the durability, toughness and strength of white ironbark timber. A pink flowering variety, *Eucalyptus leucoxylon macrocarpa*, has become popular with native-plant enthusiasts.

A bush-wise oldtimer once discussed white ironbark as we tossed a truck load of blocks into the woodshed.

"They call it 'she wood'," he said and waited, deadpan, for my reaction.

"She wood?" I looked puzzled.

"Yeah, she can split it." His weather-beaten face cracked a trifle and his eyes twinkled mischievously.

The young foliage of the white ironbark is red-stemmed. The leaves are five or six inches long and an inch or less wide. Like most eucalypts they shimmer in the sunlight after rain or frost. Creamy white flowers about half an inch wide appear each autumn and hang in clusters of two or three. These leaves and flowers provide nectar and insects for a host of birds.

The high regions of the white ironbarks are the domain of the red wattle birds, so-called because of the fowl-like red ear-wattles decorating each side of its face. These

grey, brown, black and yellow birds are large fierce-looking honeyeaters of swift flight and harsh calls. Their overlordship is challenged by the more numerous but much smaller New Holland honeyeaters.

These little birds are always there on the way to my mail box. Their yellow wings and black-and-white streaked chests and stomachs make them one of the prettiest. Their incredibly swift flight, their aggressiveness and larrikin antics give them a distinctive character. They pester, tease and attack birds much larger than themselves. Their forays after nectar can be picturesque. Frequently they hang upside down to get their curved beaks into the throats of flowers. Of an evening in spring or summer they dart ravenously from posts or low branches to gorge insects snapped up in mid-air. Several insects are taken one after another with machine-gun rapidity while the bird hovers in the air. Then they rest a moment at their base before making another onslaught. On hot summer evenings, when natural water is scarce, as many as two dozen will monopolize our bird bowls to jam together and bathe, noisily spraying water and chattering ecstatically.

Often other varieties of honeyeaters can be sighted too. One of the more spectacular is the yellow-tufted sort with its black-and-yellow head, but being stealthy and shy it usually provides only a glimpse.

Nearly always, there are galahs wheeling noisily at high speeds, chattering quietly at the top of the white ironbarks, or feeding sedately and silently on the ground in the paddock.

Recently a big chap in the general store was being served while I waited. The shop assistant chucked him: "Ah, you cockies are all the same, always grizzling."

"I'm not a cocky," protested his customer. "I might be a bit of a galah, but I'm not a cocky."

Everyone laughed. Afterwards, I puzzled over why "galah" should be a derogatory term used by Australians to describe silly people. The description, "He's a bit of a galah," is used widely, particularly among older folk.

Shooters tell us that galahs demonstrate their stupidity by flocking around, making easy targets, after one of their number is shot, instead of flying off and 'sensibly' deserting the victim.

The galah was thought to be useless, too tough to eat. The old recipe suggested that a stone be put into the pot with a galah. When the stone turned soft the galah would be tender enough.

Yet galahs are one of our national symbols, or should be. They look magnificent, especially in huge flocks when the sun emphasises their pink underparts and glistening silver-grey top coats. They will fly calmly and purposefully, chattering quietly to each other, or go into sudden contortions of wheeling about in alarming and apparently senseless anarchy with wings beating strongly enough to be heard hundreds of feet below.

In his book, *Flying Fox and Drifting Sand*, Francis Ratcliffe described them well:

One moment they will be flying down the light, a cloud of grey ghosts barely visible against the east-

ern sky. Then in a flash they will wheel round towards the sun; and it seems for all the world as if a new flock had suddenly come into being, as though solid bird bodies had been created out of nothing but the thin air and the sunset colours.

One galah on its own is seldom seen, and if so it usually sounds and looks unhappy. They are supposed to mate for life. Once I saw a galah hanging from a power line, head down and lifeless. Its mate hovered about screeching with torment and incomprehension, agonizingly calling on the dead one to respond.

Large numbers used to be taken from the nests and reared to become cage pets, or to be chained by a leg to a metal stand with a perch two or three feet off the ground. They entertained, dancing on their perches. They said "Hello, cocky," or swore with precision. They imitated and mocked their captors. They peered at observers with comical, knowing expressions, head on one side. They made people laugh. Occasionally their wings were clipped and they were allowed to roam back yards. They became clowns.

Hence those among their torturers with similar characteristics were labelled as galahs, too.

Yet the galahs I see on the way to my mail box are strong, beautiful, loyal and free. They are inoffensive, too; whoever saw one attack another bird?

In our own little cages we imitate and gyrate comically, parroting well-worn clichés, conforming to the whims of tradition and the expectations of institutions and neighbors. But why call us galahs?

Sometimes on the way to my mail box a vehicle will pass: a farmer on the way to attend sheep, a goldseeker with his new machine, a townsman out for a load of wood. A utility designates a local farmer. He may stop and the black-and-white sheep dog will cease barking to jump down and sniff in curiosity.

The opening gambit is always skywards. "Think we'll get anything out of it?" you say with an obligatory look at clouds looming uncertainly in the west.

"Nah!" he replies derisively with an inevitable and well-practised pessimism mixed with a trace of superior knowledge. "We'll get nothing out of this."

The pessimism is borne of many disappointments, so often associated with lack of rain. The idea that farmers are always grizzling is widespread, but the fact remains that there is usually plenty for them to complain about: drought, bushfire, frost at inappropriate times, plagues of pests, devastating storms, dry winters, cold snaps which kill new-born lambs.

Once, when dallying on the way to collect the mail, I overheard part of a conversation between the daughters of two neighbors. They were in their early teens; one attended the nearest secondary school, the other went to a private college thirty miles away. I was sitting among the white ironbarks on a log in a hollow dug out by the early miners. The area is pitted with such remnants. I was watching a family of kookaburras when the girls passed slowly some twenty yards away. I should have risen and

made my presence known, but I wasn't to know that they would stop within earshot.

The college girl had a white, long-haired terrier on a lead. The other girl's rusty yellow-eyed kelpie cross closely attended the smaller dog.

"Get away, Blue," said the owner of the terrier in well-modulated tones. "She's coming into season," she explained to her friend.

"Ha, ha! Fancy these two having pups," exclaimed the other with a laugh. "My God! Imagine long-haired white kelpies. Yuk!" She reached down to the little dog on the lead. "You little bugger, trying to lead my Bluey astray, are you?" She continued to abuse the terrier while gently playing with her.

"How is your Dad?" asked the college girl.

"Dad? Oh, he's getting better. You can't keep him down. Reckons a bit of fresh air and a good roast dinner will cure anything and he gets plenty of both." Then looking keenly at her companion she grinned mischievously, "Still a vegetarian?" she asked.

"Of course!" There was a certain haughtiness in the reply.

"Hmm! You intellectuals get me. Watch the ABC, read books, knock off meat." She paused for a moment. "You're looking a bit peaky though, Mary. We had roast pork last night. Yummie!"

"Don't be silly, Susan." Then, changing the subject by indicating a nearby property taken up by a Carlton expatriate, she said, "This new fellow is tearing the place apart. His chain-saw never stops. Neither does his tractor."

"Well, that's progress," retorted Susan carelessly. "He's growing things to sell. Be good for the district. Might bring people in."

"Why would that be good?" asked Mary tartly. "Anyway, half the trees he destroys aren't near his crops. He just likes the noise and the bang and raging up and down on a tractor."

Susan, still patting the little dog, sighed philosophically. "Ah well, give 'em a straw hat and a tractor and they think they're bloody farmers. At least that's what Dad says. Have you seen his dog? A monster of a thing. Up here you can always tell where the city people live. They've got the biggest gates and the savagest dogs." She cackled. "It's true."

As they walked on, Susan continued animatedly, "Did I tell you about that school bus driver? Jesus, he's bossy. We gave up making a row, we even gave up smoking on the bus. And now the bastard's dobbed us in for swearing."

Her outraged tones wafted back through the trees. The neglected kookaburras had disappeared.

On the corner opposite my mail box stands the ruin of an old house built during the gold days over one hundred years ago. Only the fireplace remains, but the fences, yards and part of the garden are still there. Huge sugar gums command the scene, with a smaller lemon-scented gum and a tough, sombre, red ironbark. The inevitable peppercorn tree, very old, is in the background. A distressed bougainvillea survives with some old roses, a few cacti and lonely hollyhocks.



The people who built the original home came in when nuggets were first found nearby. Their descendants stayed until the 1930s, cutting timber and eucalyptus for the eucalyptus stills and keeping a cow, pigs and poultry. The district is dotted with such relics and deserted buildings. Today there is a movement of population back to the countryside: city dwellers trying to escape and adapt to the bush, and others hell-bent on transplanting the city into the countryside.

From my mail box the hills in the distance are smoky blue, the ridges are covered with white and red ironbark, grey box, shrubby wattle, and hosts of subtly colored wild flowers. Yet the view is marred: many red gums have been needlessly slaughtered by chain saws. Piles of rubbish line the creek banks.

From my mail box I can see four houses. Around each lie dumped motor bodies: nine bodies round four houses. Ten years ago there was only one. Such is the scene on farms throughout the countryside. Around one place a few miles away there are thirty car and utility bodies, as well as tons of derelict farm machinery.

In the bush near my mail box many car bodies are dumped illegally. There they will remain. For how long? The problem worsens year by year. Over one hundred years ago the famed British country writer, Richard Jefferies, claimed that the earth had a way of absorbing the things placed upon it. He believed the machinery sent forth to conquer the soil is conquered by it and ends up becoming part of the soil. But Jefferies could not envisage modern developments and foresee the power and strength of the machines to come. How long will it take for the countless modern hulks of iron and steel to disintegrate? How many will be added in the years ahead when machinery becomes even more commonplace?

From my mail box bulldozers and earth movers can be heard gouging and tearing at land, trees and growth, ripping the ground apart in search of gold. Sometimes Councilmen widen the road removing trees and shrubs in the interests of still faster travel. Land sold for homes is frequently cleared entirely of timber. On farms, despite

all warnings and the evidence of salting and lamb losses due to lack of shelter, stands of timber are still thoughtlessly destroyed to ensure more treeless expanses. Sometime the walks to my mail box fill me with despair and anger, but not for long.

City people miss so much about the seasons. In the concrete canyons and in the artificially heated or cooled houses, flats, offices and cars, amid the traffic snarls and smog, it is easy to miss the changes wrought by winter, spring, summer and autumn, so difficult to appreciate sky, stars, weather changes and their effects. On the way to my mail box the heat, cold, rain and frost are very real. Sometimes the sun looks like a pale, semi-transparent moon shrouded in fog and clouds. On such days the trees are still though dripping from leaves which sparkle despite the feeble light. The bird calls are few but very distinct. At other times the heat can be almost unbearable, and there is no water for sprinklers, backyard pools or sometimes even for showers. Yet there is the compensation of the powerful scent of eucalyptus which summer brings forth and those nights with the sky ablaze with stars or moon, and the technicolor sunrises and sunsets.

So I tread back clutching papers and mail. A black and white Restless flycatcher flutters in the air snatching food, grinding out its scissors-like call and wriggling its backside like a wagtail. The cavernous nest of the white-browed babblers in the Cootamundra has become active again with an extended family of curved-beaked, meowing extroverts cavorting about it. On the verandah the swallows feed their big-mouthed young in a turmoil of slavish flights as though not a second can be wasted.

Then there is the mail: news of friends, literature, gardening, politics, copies of journals still struggling nobly to stem the rising tide of mindlessness, commercialism and destruction. Then the papers detail corruption, drugs, bombings, massacre at Daintree, umpires assaulted by players, restoration of "law and order" in Soweto, a President's little jokes about pushing the button. There is a real world out there.

BOUNDARIES

That distant range has been a reef:
the clouds wrecked where its rocks would jut.
This day it becomes a sharp blue knife
which has a pale sky-cloth to cut.

But, as a curtain drawn across
beyonds half guessed-at by near thought,
sky still enfolds without wide loss
worlds that our working lives have brought.

It has been my task, my privilege,
to follow, measure, plot to scale
round to some starting-point, just edge:
the five-wire fence, the post-and-rail;

yet with no claim that could be urged
by rural knowledge on fields between
blazed corners of the mind and merged
with the full meaning of the scene.

So, if this blue raised rim I seize –
mine for this hour – it is to baulk
wardens like Earth's extremities
from pegging my boundaries where I walk.

ROBERT D. FITZGERALD

EROS

When mines were popping Eros kept me sane.
The days at sea shimmered, a ghostly scrim,
behind which I could barely see a sign
of a reality I might call mine.
It was as though I watched men through a pane
of glass, could see but could not hear them scream,
or else could hear them speak, smiling serene
but never guess what words or looks might mean.

Lucky indeed there was no waste of shame;
the flesh of whores was bread and wine to me;
only with them my body came alive.
In bed, though not on deck, I knew my name.
I loved their recklessness, their gaiety,
learned from their desperation to survive.

ii

A sonnet never could contain this girl,
Julie, who worked in Malta's hungry Cut
who sang and pranced like an impulsive gale
*If you open your legs
I give you sausage and eggs
Argentina,*

took all the gaiety that she could get
as well as sailors' pounds and the few pence
the cafe owners gave her for the drinks
bought for her, coloured water served with pints
of beer; sober always among the drunks.

The price arranged she'd give a man her key,
leave him and earn more drinks, bubble and leap,
grabbing another man to whirl and dance
yelling Shake it but don't break it.
She was my girl when I got in from sea
crying Kiss me I'm coming
among bombed buildings, a crumbling rubble-heap,
in that town of shadows, my permanence.

FRANK KELLAWAY

SCARFACE

In the obedient emulsion
of his skin the slash
of a wild knife, its lightning,

down the alley that was damp
with piss, sherry
and cleansing drizzle;

the office-blocks stood as tall
and implacable as opponents
in dark masks: a few late

lights on to let you know
they meant business. Whoever
has seen the popping of a flash-bulb

will know the swiftness of harsh retribution
and avert sly eyes
from the image in his flesh,

the vertical grin stitched
in his cheek. Scarface,
petty swindler, rogue,

his police-file excessively thick
as a novel with collaborating
authors' alternative endings –

and should all possibility finally be handcuffed,
the official inks of poised biros
must slowly congeal like blood.

ANDREW SANT

BIG WIND

Can't you just see it, the difficult spinster's floral dress
wrestling with a chimney as if to master it, haul it over –
every window in the neighbourhood was shut tight

against it,
mine too, but they rattled sympathetically and kept
rattling;

and about this applause we could do nothing. Really,
it seemed, there was spirit in it. I dared not look!

The newspaper that swept across my view contained the
hot scandal

but like most town-gossip it was a momentary distraction.
Now, at the equinox, the big winds, the buckling of

aerials,
the full-on blizzards of television screens,

for the wind will stop at nothing and will have our
complete attention.

But it will have its guests, star quality, in the vast night
auditorium –

they are mercurial, under a cloud one minute, then out,
seemingly uncertain in their lesser heaven. We,

driven to pragmatism, hang onto our seats close to the
action.

Or all that pummelling at doors will have us on our feet,
meekly curious;

here, for instance, I turn the handle, risk it, and see what
outside thrives

in the terrible accelerations of huge wind scythed by
telephone wires.

ANDREW SANT

THE DREAM & LIE OF

condone
is not consent
(morality is
fast flowing)

Picasso comics
commit
no engagements

condoms
(*de meo ligurire libido est*)*
could be re-
solutions

DON MAYNARD

* fragment of Catullus ("you can't beat sucking")

IN TH DESERT YOU REMEMBER

that th world's round, so that th whirl of ants
in th ring road of honey ants dreaming
is perfectly sensible, & th wheel we walk
doesn't bump along a rut of happiness
towards an absurd fence in a fine cemetery
nor are we left with a notion of prayer
dumped out every sunday with th garbage
so good to see someone arriving
knowing they come from a long line of foot-prints
& laughing at mirages of mountain ranges –
'it goes west, a long way, that one'
but th man who believes in th book
lives in a world too crowded for this kind of humour
preaching to th red earth from his green quarter acre
from behind barbed wire with his guard dog & flowers
walking straight ahead, not seeing th sand painting
that boots & hooves destroy, th man unmaking
in uncomfortable clothes in a church made awkward
by stiff corners, collars, & clean thoughts
that won't last out of sight of water
still, a spiritual people must sing
groping in a new dark, & hearing sticks clicking
in th dry places where th old religion
hums to itself, & may be overheard

ERIC BEACH

BRINGING DOWN TH TONE

they ask me not to read th shit poem
they ask me not to be profane
cool in school & meek in prison
& in th nut-house, sane
but some who hear my poetry
are left cold, they moan
"this here's not grammatical
– he's bringing down th tone"

th deputy principal of willie willie primary
wrote th arts council that I was a fool
kids chanting in corridors like monks in a winery
& writing poetry about burning schools
th kid on th camp whose brother was run down by a truck
he brought me th skull of a rabbit, one of a bird
ten of us discussed death, calmly, & with 8 year old pluck
& then th deputy principal burned th words
living poets are too messy
always digging up that bone
don't put him in that apology for an anthology
– he might bring down th tone

& I take sex & drugs out of th soap opera
& I'll never get religion, in a moment of self-disgust
a bit of a pacifist, a bit of a dreamer
too much of an anarchist to take god on as boss

one brother a commo – one brother a priest
& in the middle was an . . . anarchist
my father was in the n.z. census / one relativistic agnostic
& I was confirmed as an atheist
look out god – ah's comin' t git ya
you're father christmas but I'm fully grown
y can't go letting an honest man into heaven
– he might bring down th tone

ERIC BEACH

PERVERSE SERENITY

This cringing
longing for peace
this *disease* of emptiness –
terminal peace

What antidote but angel
pure and sweet as honey
red rich as blood
broken on the rock

Smash this green death
false submission
I am the life and the way
here is the living flame

through love alone
all things live

Love in her tattered cloak
stumbling blinded weather-worn
bludgeoned by robbers
hopeless with yearning for rest

bears more courage, more strength
more radiance
gives gives gives more
than this perverse serenity

ROBYN ROWLAND

AMSTERDAM MORNING

Mist levitates languid from the Heren Canal
a woman stretching herself naked after love
rising from rustle of sheets to step into dawn.
Sun spins through trees budded with promised flower
as I make for the Rijk museum from my narrow bed
in the long room of my tall and ancient hotel
She emerges from the full, wide Marriott Hotel
pacing me out opposite sides of the street,
two women striding into their sense of crisp air
the sensuous dew-licked spring day,
each aware of power in muscle, calf, thigh,
in fleeting touching smiles
thrusting ourselves toward destinations self-designed.
Breaking our sway of symmetry
she struts with ease away into the traffic.
Dress thigh-length pleated heavy from the hip
coloured mauve as hyacinth, belted and ridged with jade
clings and swings in the swanking rhythm of her march.
Her jade bag, fat with the nights' takings is
clutched close with pleasure, her smile
mocking the scorn of early work motorists
jammed into idling.
Proud, she parades from bedwork to the open day.

ROBYN ROWLAND

MRS WHITLAM AT THE HYDE PARK BARRACKS

I saw Mrs Whitlam entering the Hyde Park Barrack
bending beneath the architrave, joining
the cool collection of the Past.
We spoke about the reproductions of the convict
shirt, the original found beneath the boards
during cleaning and renovation, and she said,
"It is the size that interests me . . ."

We went our ways, testing the atmospheres
of this historic place, sensing for arrowed smocks,
chains, corn and rum, red coats, guns and rum,
black gowns and the distillations of justice:
history organized for access in an afternoon.

Looking through the high window over to Hyde Park
where once the Races were, or to the certainties of

St James,
I wondered how much had been lost of Human
Endeavor,
of Personal Experience, of Reconciliations with Life.
How many eyes opened their souls through this window
on these places that now might never have been?
Who wore and lost the model garment for the one
that Mrs Whitlam carries underneath her arm?

inside the rooms the captions select their little stories
for those who stoop to peer. The crowd presses on.
Mrs Whitlam straightens to sunlight and tomorrow.
I see her diminishing in perspective to the gate
and wonder how the captions will reduce her stature
if they are read a hundred years from now.

JOHN CROYSTON

THE CHAMBER OF ANXIOUS ILLUSION

To enter this chamber, one must possess eyesight of acuity and precision, for any sly-of-hand might theoretically be practised . . .

enter

One is led, or rather I should say ushered into this chamber and seated in the first row. The usherette is a strapping young thing attired as would-be a bunny-girl. There is no avenue for entering appropriately as there is being conducted a continuous show and the other occupants of the chamber all give each new entrant a solid visual going-over, as it were. The show is singular: a young girl stands erect on an illuminated stage while a young man rips her rather flimsy and enveiling attire off. She then redresses in similar attire which in turn is ripped off and so on and so forth . . . Each time the girl is stripped, one of the audience stands, makes his way to the stage, stands beside the girl and makes a short oratory, and then exits the chamber. When your turn comes you do similar, you make your way to the stage, mount and begin to speak. However, you are very sharply interrupted by a young man holding a chair leg who asks you what you are doing in his and his wife's private bedroom. You then realize you have been sleep-walking and have entered into the bedroom of the next door neighbors. You give a garbled explanation and apologies and hastily leave.

To exit this chamber, one must have a prodigious faculty for self-deception . . .

exit

It is only when you awake in bed that you realize:

- (1) the entire sequence of events was a dream and
- (2) the confrontation with the young man was part of the theatrical show and because of your rather inept and inappropriate performance you will most probably not be allowed back into that, or a similar dream, again.

ANTHONY MANNIX

DOING TIMES

For Michael Knight and Terry Nolan

1

Hell, it's Christmas
and all these people are still in cells.
None know their recollections
of time spent elsewhere,
other's lips, other spaces where time
has not gone beserk.
The razor wire and the maze are here already.
'We write poems with a hundred foot view,
the bluestone our horizon line'.
Back to the flat at 4
then 16 hours slough*
to think of daughters, sons, wives
and the hectic world out there.

2

To much miming being scared
in the peter at Grafton
waiting for your bash,
trying to see the ocean whose roar
confiscated days and eulogised the nights
in Long Bay.
And 'C' division, its clumsy balustrades awry,
the sorcerer's apprentice march of shit cans
emptied into the gurgle of the cess pool
smack bang in the middle of the yard.
Then 'H' division, that constant threat,
the one that puts falter into your step
and predatory Goulburn
as cold as sleet.
My feet have trod the boards of east coast jails.

3

I have changed,
over the years I have changed,
yet still I can feel the illegal beat of my heart.
My collective
(which is the marrow in my bones)
says to me stay free without cowardice
or its attendants,
breathe blossoms, grasp at the moon
for it is yours.
And I say to you that all is disguise,
our functions quiet things,
our hearts disturbed by a key's surmise.

4

In 'A' Division when Ryan got hung
and there was a splendid silence
for a short while –
because that's all it took to drop the trapdoor –
and then the collective sigh when it was done
and outside a crowd yelling at the universe
of Bolte's curse.
And all the while the poems fled my skull

to take up residence on a page.
From then I thought that all waves felt the same
and that the clouds' division
from the land was made by the wind
blowing its fragile course.

5

I was reminded of your ignominy
just before the New Year
when I was pinched for D and D
but I was only stoned.
All right, I thought, I'll do the 4 hours
then be back on the street by 10.
I get down to St Kilda lock-up
and they find, out of fucking nowhere, an old warrant
from 1973: 100 dollars or 20 days.
There were guys in the van on the way to Pentridge
fined that very day 500 dollars or 5 days.
They were going to cut theirs out.
All very well for them but a 100 dollars or 20 days,
too much when one day is one too many.
I mean, the old adage,
"if you're going to do crime,
be prepared to do time . . ."
is all very well if you're doing crime
(and unless you consider poetry a crime)
I haven't.
Poetry keeps me too occupied,
it allowed me to survive for several years inside
because it altered my point of view.
I managed, by imagining, to find myself in a monastery
and that I was there to learn.
I took some indignities up to a point,
suffering them for the sake of peace,
but if they got too close
I'd play up something shocking,
do some front yard and occasionally the black peter.
Those were the times of contemplation through
desolation.
Through that element that lies at the heart
of every lonely person,
I fashioned poems, the anger giving quiet power to my
words
and I would exorcise my hatred for men with keys
who would turn them in the locks polished as bright
and cold as their eyes.

When they'd call my number and my identity would try to
flee
I'd come to the conclusion that dignity lies in the bones
of self, not in your name and although they could take
your name
from you, they couldn't touch the centre of you.
Don't look for dignity in the reflection from their frozen
eyes:
beware the greed of time.

SHELTON LEA

* slough – prison speech for being locked up.

P. HOBB AT THE MOSQUE OF SHEIK LUTFULLAH

The Ayatollah Khomeini
now keeps our infidel imaginations
from imagination's places:
Byron's road to Oxiana
on which a tribe ever unnamed,
a polis of sorts,
is kept from its ground, from homecomings,
genes split from gene chain.
Civilization has circumstances not rights.

That waik from Australia through Asia
'hippie trail' in muckspeak,
(so often lost, loutloud,
or petering out in hepatitis, penury,
viruses livelier in the foreigner
or seeking a dirty needle in the haystack)
for some yet had its epiphanies.
Such as that my friend, Peter Hobb,
a painter, travelling light, even of information
had at the mosque of Sheik Lutfullah.

The beauty of Isfahan
steals on the mind unawares.
P. Hobb walked under the avenues
of white tree trunks, shining
tents of leaves above him,
past domes turquoise, spring yellow,
against a sky of melted blue
past the river catching in its shoals
sky shards inside its muddy silver.
Walked past arches of toffee brick
tier on tier, piled pavilions,
and before he knew
Isfahan was indelible.

Who of us will see again
(fanatics do not need imaginations,
they are fully imagined)
those poems Shah Abbas made of spaces?
Not that royal Mosque of 1612
at the south west corner of the Maidan
not that blue bulb for the Omar Khayyam freaks
but what Hobb saw, what
generations of the developing 'West'
(of Hobb's polis anyway) saw,
what Abbas made in 1618:
the mosque of Sheik Lutfullah.

Note that young painter
ignorant then, or mainly so,
of the way an art works /
and who is to say
that is the business of another artist? /
What he saw he will see for life.

Does it matter to him
how that huge mosque
obliterated (or, at least,
kept in a proper perspective)
its ornament
by the intentness of its construction? ✓
Form there must be, of course,
in such a mosque
but how it is put together
what supports it
escapes the young painter
as it eludes us all, evading
generations of skilled eyes.
Abbas meant it so.
But from now on Hobb has better aim.

He moves among the parts,
 the inlaid rose tree black and white,
 the glazes, the peacock, the
 writing on the walls – poems? paintings? –
 and the enamelled flowers.
 He sees these have their beauties
 but these are not the reason for epiphany /
 that begins as he moves in the Mosque
 as a line of verse breathes only
 in the whole poem.
 And form, as we talk of it,
 teach it, flog concepts of it
 to boredom and beyond,
 Hobb knows now in his walking bones
 holding his walking ever – watching eyes,
 knows as an instrument only of the spectacle
 as earth to a garden
 simply as worked earth is to a garden.

Each part of the design,
 each plane, repetition,
 each separate branch / blossom
 has its own sombre beauty
 a beauty growing only from the whole
 and the whole comes only as you move.
 Versailles / Schönbrunn /
 Doge's Palace / St Peter's /
 all are rich
 but none so rich.

And Hobb need not / does not
 refer now to Doge's Palace / Schönbrunn /
 Versailles / King's Chapel /
 or even to Utzon's scalloped air.
 Comparison has limits, falls away.
 Walking here he knows art, each act of it,
 is a whole no longer pieces put together
 which knowledge may dismantle.
 You breathe, you walk,
 with art discover art – it does not stop.
 He knows in his walking bones
 information, education – such necessities –
 dare not be present now.
 Built in as ABC he knows
 those great spaces now and how they came to be,
 he has a grammar grammars do not know.

Moving slow as history, fast as light
 (which both fall silent here
 before the whole fact of this Mosque)
 he has found that artist, Abbas, Sheik Lutfullah found.
 P. Hobb knows space now.
 He knows there are none so rich.

BARRETT REID

books

The Judgement of Atrocity

Sean Regan

Don Watson: *Caledonia Australis: Scottish highlanders on the frontier of Australia* (Collins, \$14.95).

James Miller: *Koorii: A Will to Win* (Angus & Robertson, \$14.95).

The great advantage of being a victim of oppression is that it instructs you first hand in the several techniques – and apologetics – that will help you one day become its modest architect. Revenge is sweet but generally impracticable; and in any case sweetness is rather less to the point than esteem. To strike back at those who have humiliated you is, perversely, to continue the humiliation. To strike out at those you have never otherwise known is to steal the shroud of overlord *tout pur*. Even on a dunghill there is room for downward social mobility.

Few in modern time have enjoyed this privilege so easily or empty as the Scottish Highlanders who prayed their way from destitution an age ago to build the *Caledonia Australis* of Dr Watson's title. Regarded by outsiders, especially Sassenachs, as little more than barbarians, the Highlanders had lived for centuries the sort of life it is again fashionable to regard as cute, if not quite noble. Clan ties reached through the language of music and song to the unalterable nature of bloodlines and – not coincidentally – recognized rights in land. The Scottish Gaels were "inveterate legenders and chronically superstitious", their myths and omens giving "an intractable natural world a metaphysical dimension". They were also, we are told, extremely polite to fairies, perhaps to ward off the more familiar guardians of the spirit, like the *gruagach*: "a beast in human form which seduced young girls resting from their labours, then turned into a carnivorous horse and ate them." As Dr Johnson said, they enjoyed "a system of antiquated life" – not far removed from that it was their destiny to destroy.

The opportunity came soon enough. With the defeat of the Jacobite forces at Culloden, traditional Highland society itself was routed, leaving only poverty and a curious tongue, grandly displaced. Filthy lucre was, as usual, to

blame, the Highland chiefs not being slow to appreciate the advantages of the cash-economy, nor over-burdened by guilt when it came to expelling their tacksmen and clans from land now ripe for sheep and rent. Watson here declares his religion: "Put simply, the incorporation of the Highland and Islands into British capitalism *demand*ed the destruction of Highland society, and in so doing it *demand*ed an act of treachery by the lairds against their people."

Equally fatalistic, if more disturbed by fact, were the evangelicals who made themselves champions of the dispossessed and whose fanaticism grimly established the Free Church of Scotland in 1843. Their flocks were readily captured. Cleared from ancestral estates, forced into wage-labor to supplement the meagre produce of their barren crofts, and bitterly enduring a régime of southern landlords and factors, the Highlanders retreated into life and futile attempts at what their masters termed "improvement": the learning, without advantage, of the foreigners' ways. Their inability to do so gave further support to the growing scientific evidence of constitutional inferiority. The earliest Celtic skulls, wrote R.G. Latham in his *Ethnological Aphorisms*, "exhibit a prominent superciliary development, and a flattening of the frontal bones, so as to form a low type of cranial conformation, exhibiting somewhat an approximation to the negro races."

The only serious hope was emigration to a low type of colony, certified by the Free Church as a passageway to Providence. The first contingents went to North America, in the face of considerable opposition from the lairds. But very soon, with the impetus of famine at home and gold abroad, the quest was changed to make "the hills and vales of Australia resound with the wild note of the pibroch and the language of the ancient Gael." In most cases this was also sufficient to turn the lairds' opposition into encouragement, and even personal temptation. And no one of measure in the south could reasonably object to a nominal government subsidy for getting the riff-raff as far away as decently possible. As ever, religious and practical impulses joined in rude diplomacy. The Quarterly Review observed: "It blesses those whom it directly relieves, and it blesses, by its consequential effect, those whom it leaves behind."

For the survivors of this wretched journey there was a choice of career. Vagrancy appealed to some, gold-mining to others, but for the ruck of Highlanders farming was the obvious, Providential choice. Despite the Celtic urge for constant change, many settled permanently in what would become Gippsland, and Watson's account focusses on the fortunes of this region's more famous pioneers: Angus McMillan, "Count" Paul Strzelecki, James Macarthur and various other associates, enemies and traveller-fellows.

The story is a familiar one. Man against himself as much as nature, the steady accumulation of confidence, property and power: the conquering, in short, of failure. There was, of course, also the awkward matter of what to do with the local descendants of Ham, the Kurnai, and it is this which understandably occupies much of the author's attention. Not all colonists were hostile to the native population, or even contemptuous of it (Sir Thomas Mitchell even admitted that his screw propeller "drew on the blacks' mastery of differential calculus"); but few could resist the conceit that at the bottom of the world there lived a race to which even they were unquestionably superior. Providence owed them this and it was their duty to make the most of it. Watson documents with scholarly restraint the rapes, humiliations and massacres the Kurnai endured, at the same time making the important point that traditional Aboriginal disputes played no small part in the eventual outcome. But his conclusion is unequivocal. The settlers committed "acts of genocide, and like other acts of genocide they were occasioned not by reason but by unreason."

All told, the "war" against the Gippsland Aboriginals went on for more than a decade. (Particularly effective was the use of native troops – a trick the Scots had learned from the Sassenachs.) The outcome was the destruction of Kurnai society. Everything repeats itself, or is repeated by others. The primitive tribesmen of Skye and Glencoe, who spoke to the fairies and danced to the moon, had won, without a replay, their New Culloden.

Rape, humiliation and senseless killing also figure prominently in James Miller's account of "the heroic resistance, struggle, survival and triumph of Black Australia". In this book he traces the history of his own family and tribe – the Gringai clan of the Wonnarua in the Hunter River Valley – as the backbone of a more general polemic on white oppression and, tendentially, white history-writing. All is fair in love and perceived historical injustice.

In a peculiar foreword, Professor Russel Ward tells us that the author "mercifully eschews the 'impartial' pose, the lofty air, the judicious phrase and the inexorable dullness of most academic writing." So far, so promising. But then he goes on: "Miller's experience of life has made it forever impossible for him to adopt the calm and disinterested mien. He writes instead with the open resentment and rage of a man whose people ... have been murdered, raped and wronged for the last two centuries, but who is determined that things will be different for the next two."

Let us pause. Does Professor Ward really mean that rage and resentment are the only defensible alternatives to inexorable academic dullness? And – more seriously – can disinterestedness be eschewed in what, however polemical its object, purports to be a history? Manning Clark has decisively shown that an historian can also be a saint, but only because, not in spite of, his qualities as an historian.

Miller apparently doesn't agree. Established evidence about his tribe, he says, was "written by white men," most of whom were racially offside. But even those who were not, or were actually pro-Aboriginal, cannot be trusted because "they interpreted events in their European way of thinking." His objective, therefore, is to "try to interpret history from the point of view of my ancestors", a process that involves "reading between the lines of countless documents written by whites."

Back to Methodology I, or rather ANU Pacific Historiography for Beginners. We cannot (can not?) be disinterested. There are no objective facts. There are only interpretations. The white man cannot write Aboriginal history because he cannot think like an Aboriginal. Thus only an Aboriginal can properly write Aboriginal history.

Suit yourself. But in *English*? And with scholarly tools that – according to Professor Ward – are "handled every bit as well by the average honours student in Arts at any university in the world"?

Miller does seem vaguely aware there is something wrong here, though it rarely appears to trouble him. He refuses, for example, to use the word "Aboriginal", preferring instead *koori*, "a generic term used by my ancestors". And wherever, he can, he substitutes Aboriginal words for English (whites, for instance, become most appropriately *gubbas*). But this is as far as methodological consistency goes. For the rest, he is happy to use the white man's words and the white man's logic, not to mention the white man's conscience. So in what exactly does the "kooriness" of his history consist?

Well, in the first place it means he can play fast and loose with the facts without worrying too much about this silly fetish for historical accuracy (or a supervisor's sleight of mind). "Reading between the lines of countless documents by whites" he can pick what suits his purpose and excommunicate the rest, as in the first chapter where he cheerily admits (in the footnotes) that his accounts of Wonnarua mythology and kinship are totally made up, being drawn from general Aboriginal legends and, yes, a recent white man's anthropology textbook.

Second, he can have double standards. Verbal communication from Europeans is merely "hearsay evidence" while from Aborigines it is authentic "oral history". This is a subject on which the author is anxious to advise: "Interview as many people as possible, because one person remembers something that someone else has forgotten and because different people view the same event in different ways."

Which underwrites the third point: he may gaily assume that *his* interpretation of things is the "authentic" one. Thus the traditional system of arranged marriage between older men and pre-pubescent girls makes life's passage "comfortably predictable" rather than, say,

mercilessly restrictive; while the painful rites of male initiation are not the cruel, wanton acts of terror an ethnocentric white missionary might have thought them, but rather the ceremonials of "an intently spiritual experience."

And finally, far from least: dispensing with considered academic judgement, he can simply trade in invective. A letter to the Sydney Morning Herald is, for example, "racist bullshit": which adjective and noun the author seems particularly fond of.

None of this would matter if the book was only intended as propaganda. But it is also being pushed as serious history and, as such, defeats its own purpose. The fault lies not with Miller himself but that pride of intellectual beachcombers who in recent years have turned Pacific Aboriginal history into a monstrous declaration of *amour propre*.

"Only Frukurs can write Fruk history" is the general rule; but only so far as is compatible with a steady stream of master's and doctoral students to keep the boys and girls in work and sanction the occasional foray into print. The result, of course, is not that Frukurs write Fruk history in Frukese but – what usually happens when beachcombers are around – a petulant half-caste breed emerges: scholarshipwise orthodox to the point of having footnotes, primary sources and that sort of thing, but militantly indifferent to the most fundamental rules of history writing, including critical regard for *all* the relevant evidence.

Miller's book is exemplary. The bibliography should satisfy even the most punctilious authority on Fruk, while the rage and resentment are fierce, and the narrative one-sided enough to prove this is not an *academic*, white man's work, and not therefore likely to threaten the reputation or career prospects of any tenured, caucasian academic.

Which is not to say *Koori* should or can be dismissed; only that in future Miller might be well advised to sieve his sense of history from good as well as bad faith. Leaving all the reservations aside, this account of Aboriginal life in white Australia is singularly moving and compelling (it was no burden to read in a single sitting). Particularly poignant is Miller's indictment of the Aborigines' Protection Board and the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents so they might, like the Highlanders before them, be "improved". His own family, it seems, was more fortunate than most, though this does not make their lives any the less pathetic. One can easily understand the rage and resentment. One can soon approve the tag of "racist bullshit". One can readily spin collective guilt.

But is this what Aboriginal history is for? Both books are essays in moralism, Miller's the more obviously so. Yet what in detail does the moralist in each demand? Watson, at least in this instance, has chosen the most exquisite (and safe) of moral roles: that of ironist. His lyrical portrayal of the pre-Culloden Highlands deliberately evokes the pastoral delusions of much guilty writing about pre-European Australia (with, for authenticity's sake, mention of a few of the more unpleasant facts of Arcadian life). The explicit condemnation of oppression,

by whomever suffered, is consistent, it slightly reduced by his weakness for blaming everything, ultimately, on Capital. Injustice and intolerance belong (in either sense) to no particular tribe or race. We are all capable of everything bad and one or two things good.

Yes, but what – without irony – are we to do? Watson rests his case in the past; his prescriptions for the present are therefore only implicit, and easily denied. Miller is bolder. The exploitation of the Aboriginal people demands redress and that means first and foremost land rights. No more "paternalistic bullshit" (it really is quite catching), no more hand-outs or centrefold equality. Land rights are owed today's Kooris in direct reprisal for what was done to Kooris in the past. It is that simple. Miller calmly draws a parallel with the European Jews, both their persecution and claims to territory. "It is now long overdue for Kooris to determine their own future as a distinct and separate race in a multicultural Australia. A stake in the land of this, our country, must be the main basis for that self-determination."

Since the Jews have been brought into the picture we may as well rehearse the relevant argument:

... the reproach of self-righteousness raised against those who do judge is age-old; but that does not make it any the more valid ... All German Jews unanimously have condemned the wave of co-ordination which passed over the German people in 1933 and from one day to the next turned the Jews into pariahs. Is it conceivable that none of them ever asked himself how many of his own group would have done just the same if only they had been allowed to? But is their condemnation today any the less correct for that reason?

(Hanah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*)

Watson does not hesitate to condemn the Highlanders' treatment of the Kurnai. Their own or their ancestors' suffering is quite irrelevant to the issue. So is the speculation, justified by no end of evidence, that the Kurnai themselves, given half a chance, would have done the same to someone else. Wrong-doing against and by anyone is wrongdoing, deserving moral judgement.

On this most would agree. But we must further ask: what is the point of that judgement, apart from the fact it is deserved? With individuals we might argue it allows them to service a calculus of moral priorities and plot their lives accordingly. Where others are directly concerned we might justify sanctioning punishment or, in rare instances, praise. But what of moral judgement on history? This is a tortured question with serious practical consequences. Yet, though often posed, it is rarely treated with the caution it is due.

The easiest and most common course is to take a moral holiday, which is what (arguably) Watson and (certainly) Miller do. This may take two forms. You may on the one hand keep your moral judgement of the past in the past, dealing with present problems only by default. The English capitalists were bad. The Highland immigrants were

bad. The Aborigines were abominably treated. *Ergo*? We are not about to cast the first stone. Or on the other, more sinister hand, you may claim that the victims of oppression are not bound by the usual rules of moral reasoning (the best and worst of which is Golden) but have the right to make any demand they like of those who, historically (a dangerous word), can be linked with the perpetrators of oppression.

Miller is quite explicit about this. "Many well-to-do Australians are descended from those favored individuals who were enabled to acquire great pastoral empires in the 1830s and 1840s . . . land was taken from Kooris in order that other sections of Australian society could thrive. Land rights today are a form of positive discrimination towards the original inhabitants of this country."

Even the facts do not serve this declamation well. Many poor Australians today are descended from those early blackguards. Many of the rich are not. More of the poor arrived here just a few years ago. In any case, this moral reasoning will not do, and appeals to Israel anything but help. It is also to play straight into the hands of those well-known mandarins of humbug who would deny Aboriginal land claims altogether. No moral case can be made for rights that dismiss the rights of others because of a moral judgement, however sound, against those whose bodies now fertilize the earth. Death duties are an economic, not an ethical show of strength.

Simply, the argument for special Aboriginal *legal* rights in land cannot be sustained through an appeal to *moral* rights. Indeed, talk of "rights" does nothing but confuse the issue. The justification must be political (since, *pace* Israel, it cannot be more straightforwardly settled by force) and argued with a view to accommodating, if not pleasing, all present-day inhabitants. Part of this argument will, of course, involve the historical moral judgement; but, to be at all effective, it will have to be put in context. At the moment we are getting nowhere – and Aboriginal disaffection is growing – because the terms of debate are wrong-headed. Aboriginal activists are relying on a defective moral argument while their *gubba* supporters lend them false comfort by sanctimoniously wallowing in their own self-pity. *De mortuis nil nisi* what makes us smug and holier than Joh. At least the early settlers gave them booze and blankets.

Multiculturalism means, at best, peaceful co-existence and that means working out a deal. It is unfortunate the white man ever came to Australia. It is unfortunate the Jews were kicked out of their holy land, the Palestinians from theirs. It is unfortunate we did not all remain in splendid tribal isolation, talking to the fairies, scratching each other's arse and dreaming of the neverworld. We are, however, here, none of us by choice and most of us afraid to exercise it. As these things go, the question of Aboriginal claims to land is not an intractable one, nor should its solution require a loss of face on any side. But do we have the heart to change our face? Or shall we just continue to compare atrocities, the cheaper to perfume our moral sleep?

Sean Regan teaches political science at the University of New South Wales.

Rum Stuff

Peter Ryan

Stephen R. Graubard (ed.): *Australia: The Daedalus Symposium* (Angus & Robertson, \$9.95).

First a word on the provenance of this decidedly rum book. The journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, called *Daedalus*, decided to devote the whole of one issue to a single country; Australia drew the short straw. Stephen R. Graubard, editor of *Daedalus*, organized an expensive symposium (" . . . the most difficult fundraising effort that *Daedalus* has ever embarked on"). Seventeen contributors from England, America and Oz pooled their knowledge and intuitions about Australia, with the result doubtless expected to be a deep well of wisdom, a fount of understanding of a young nation on the eve of the twenty-first century.

What proportion of the American population reads *Daedalus* each quarter? No matter; those who do will get a package full of facts and subjectivities, together with a fair number of passages which, like Mr Bossom, MP, are neither quite one thing nor the other. That minuscule minority of Americans keenly interested in Australia will undoubtedly find the issue – all in all – to be more interesting and useful than boring or otiose. So much for the American manifestation.

But Angus & Robertson were sufficiently broad-minded and deep-pocketed to publish a separate version as a 'stand-alone' volume in Australia, for Australians. It is this *local* book that is reviewed here.

Stephen Graubard – to judge (one hopes not unfairly) from the spoor he leaves in his urbane Preface – is a cultivated fellow, clearly with no reluctance to brave the ennui of international travel. He is master (as few Australians are) of the art of saying hard things without irreparable offence.

Detached and faintly amused, he sees quite clearly our "affluence based on hazard and greed"; that our "easygoingness" (read "sloth") is both reason and excuse for our economic regression; that we bray about our independence but won't pay the price of our own defence. He stresses the (not wholly startling) proposition that geography and history are potent forces, and that they operate even in Australia.

Then he calls Australia "cozy".* In Australia "candor" is at a discount; those who discuss public policies here don't scratch each other's eyes, they scratch backs. And here Stephen Graubard earns a kick in the pants for he is guilty of having cooked his own experiment. *Of course* it all seemed smug and matey with a field of seventeen such starters selected, if not from the same stable, then certainly from the same bloodline.

It would have been a lot less "cozy" there with Bob Santamaria and Humphrey MacQueen, with Frank Knopfmacher and Norm Gallagher, with Harry van Moorst and Hugh Morgan. The seventeen symposiasts

* So spelt, doubtless to prepare us for "program", "center" and "worshiped".

are not exactly clones, but all shine inside a certain spectrum of liberal thought and discourse; they were all intellectually house-broken by broadly similar rules. "The arrangements at Melbourne University could not have been more agreeable" writes Graubard, and he made sure that none of his guests were the sort of people who might leave blood, skin or hair on the carpets.

Some contributions which may well charm or fascinate American readers can strike Australian eyes only as extended exercises in *déjà vu*. Those of Geoffrey Blainey, Manning Clark, Gordon Jackson, Bruce Williams and Judith Wright are examples. After reading them, an Australian feels like the fishermen of Galilee, who "wrought all night and took nothing." One recalled Oskar Spate's wicked poem of the 1960s:

... he's said it all before;
He's bloody repetitious,
Is that Wild Colonial Bore.

Leonie Kramer squeezes disappointingly little juice from her fruity topic "The Media, Society and Culture", and spends disproportionate space on the "meagerly" funded ABC. Oh God! Again? What American will care?

Ken Inglis – cunning craftsman! – presents a modern sculpture, made by welding bits and pieces together. His elements are various public ceremonies that have taken place in Canberra, beginning with the naming in 1913 and ending, rather cheekily, with the yet-to-happen opening of the new Parliament House in 1988. It all hangs together, keeps its balance, and tells us something. Few of our writers could – to shift the metaphor from studio to kitchen – whip up a soufflé like this, using chiefly (one guesses) ingredients which lay ready to hand.

Zelman Cowen and Michael Davie now live in England, which perhaps gives their articles a different depth of focus, though it does not blur their vision. Maybe we have all had enough of John Kerr, and yet it still bears repeating that the Governor-General who undid Mr Whitlam was not in any real sense appointed by the Queen; he was personally hand-picked by Mr Whitlam himself. Cowen's reading of the temperature of republicanism in Australia is shrewd: there *has* been a growth in republican sentiment, but sensible people are content to leave it on the back burner.

Michael Davie's piece, "The Fraying of the Rope", assesses the weakening of imperial bonds, and suggests that when the British rope snaps, many Australians will be quite content to be moored by a trans-Pacific hawser to the United States. In any case (and here he agrees with the conclusion of Tom Millar's competent piece on Defence) few politicians or voters seem interested even to try to prepare our defences. One question: Davie says that a British serviceman is likely to be more warmly welcomed in a Sydney bar than an American soldier or sailor. How does Michael Davie know? My own conscientious researches in this area suggest just the opposite.

Nicholas Jose writes about "Cultural Identity". It is the longest piece in the book – or perhaps it only seems to be. Jose quotes Frank Moorhouse often and with approval,

and it is a pity that he didn't let the sardonic Frank write the essay. Here is a sample of Jose:

If Australianness is elusive as a center, an essence, a destiny, it is everywhere to be found as a refracting perspective, a melange, a quirk. The baffling circumstances that defeat the search for a center may well prove to be the thing itself, and to think appreciatively in those terms may well be the first step away from mythology to the maturity that can rescue Australians from comic afflatus as well as tragic delusion.

What was that bit again, about comic afflatus?

"Who Rules Australia?" asks Donald Horne, and his answer seems to be that, even if they do not rule in a prescriptive sense, "business" interests usually "prevail" and those businesses are usually run from abroad. Wherever Professor Horne has been, clearly it has not been in business, and perhaps not even in Australia. He writes "Even with Labor governments, unions usually come into consultation only in the narrow range of industrial relations." Is he serious? The 'Accord'? The Tax 'Summit'? The public service union strike that helped to push the Australian dollar over the cliff? Refusal of docking to a British warship? Businessmen would be delighted to have the clout even of the Clerical Officers Association, let alone that of the ACTU, right across the range of social, economic and foreign policy. BHP (continues Horne) is now in effect the agent of foreign companies. He does not mention BHP's acquisition of the US giant Utah.

Hugh Stretton's paper compels re-reading; here an intellect has been hard at work instead of merely coasting in overdrive. This article has *meat*, unlike some others that only have potato under the gravy. His theme is the sad and still sinking quality of Australian leadership. Australians, he points out, do quite well as individuals, whether it be in sporting contests, as artists, or winning Nobel Prizes. As *leaders*, whether in business or government, we are flops.

He savages the general record of Australian business leaders – their timidity, ignorance, poverty of imagination and (above all) their ineptitude in dealing with workers and trade unions. Too, too true. Who among us cannot think of managing directors unfit even for the foreman's job? Business (and senior administration in general) is like the wartime Army was – full of officers who as sergeants would not have lasted a week.

With quietly ferocious scorn, Stretton pillories the greed and amorality of many leaders in medicine and the law, and traces the degeneration of senior public servants into "simple predators".

And all this is true too, but where is Stretton standing as he surveys the dismal scene? The ranging shots which follow probably lob somewhere around his position: radical reformer; welfarist; egalitarian; a 'regulator'; an unashamed 'wet'. (Not one of these terms is offered in derogation.)

The trend of today's political and social thinking are to Stretton an unsavory swing to the Right. On the contrary,

what we really see is Australia trundling (a little shakily, as usual) pretty much along the crown of its rather pot-hole highway. The signal aberration of our times was Whitlam's lurch to the Left, a manoeuvre which today even ministers in that Cabinet concede was neither well-timed nor adroitly done.

Although Stretton seems at one point to lament the loss of the robust, old-style business entrepreneurs, he appears to want yet more regulation and yet more public enterprise, which almost inevitably prove to be dampeners on originality and creative drive. (Perhaps Stretton's own exceptional and honorable record in public housing makes him too generous.)

The outrageous tax swindles of the rich are indefensible crimes, but Stretton thinks their disgusting behaviour is now on the way to "commanding a popular majority". He thinks that, as a people, we are all becoming greedier, hard-hearted, less "caring". He is unfair and he is wrong. The increasing tax-shyness of ordinary Australians springs not from harder hearts but from clearer eyes. They see that more taxes for social welfare will substantially be spent on already well-rewarded social workers; a bigger education vote will pay bigger salaries for teachers whom frequently they regard as incompetent and subversive; hospital employees and doctors alike, by strikes and blackmail, will lick the cream off increased health funds.

I simply do not accept that my fellow men and women are any less of a soft touch than they ever were when it actually comes down to a feed for a hungry child, a hospital bed for someone sick and poor, or help for battlers down on their luck. But at the same time, they are not blind: they see that government services are outrageously costly and inefficient, as well as chillingly impersonal; and they notice that the "caring" professions are all right – for themselves.

The few gleams of hope that Stretton allows upon his storm-tossed horizon look more like wreckers' fires to me. Can he be serious in praising the degraded ABC Radio as "a radical university of the air"? What on earth does he expect from "the charismatic popularity" of Mr Hawke?

His whole paper is informed by an intense and generous moral passion – the only contribution to the whole book that is so warmed. He pleads for the restoration of the moral dimension to university teaching in the humanities and social sciences, and he is right. But for the most part, Hugh Diogenes Stretton is shining his lantern in all the wrong directions.

It would be ungracious to leave this symposium without mention of Richard Walsh, As boss of Angus & Robertson, it is no doubt he who has paid for this Australian version of Daedalus. His own piece is called "Australia Observed", and it swings between his friends on Sydney's North Shore, Bruce and Kaylene (are they real?); his mates in Carlton; his cousin Bob the farmer in the Riverina. It is lightweight, but readable, and shows that Richard's hearing is a hundred times keener than that of half the cloth-eared academics who precede him. As he says, "in embracing real democracy, one simply has to put up with the authentic voice of the people."

Can one sum up so disparate a collection? A few – very

few – high spots enliven the tedium, but on the whole one should pronounce it harmless. High authority nowadays assures us that this sort of thing won't send us blind, or grow hairs on the palms of our hands. Besides, it is an activity that can very conveniently be combined with navel-watching, so why not? Regard it, then, as a modest monument to the perennial capacity of intellectuals to wring the last drop from a foregone conclusion.

But on the other hand ... This "most difficult fund-raising effort" must have cost tens of thousands of dollars, some drawn from businesses, some the gift of (no doubt totally unsuspecting) Australian taxpayers. I should greatly like to look into the steady eye of any participant who, having freshly re-read all these golden Daedalian words, will yet maintain that the money was spent on something more precious than a donation to Oxfam.

Peter Ryan is the Director of Melbourne University Press and the author of Fear Drive My Feet.

Augustan Attitudes

Philip Neilsen

A.D. Hope: *The Age of Reason* (Melbourne University Press, \$12.95).

In the introduction to a selection of Kendall's verse, A.D. Hope attacked the "critical fallacy ... that humorous, satirical, and polemical verse cannot be poetry of the highest order or cannot be poetry at all." His new collection, *The Age of Reason*, supports this assertion, and suggests that verse as a public form has as much to offer contemporary readers as the more fashionable, romantic modes of personal or lyrical outpouring.

It is as public verse that *The Age of Reason* can be related to his earlier *Dunciad Minor*, also written in heroic couplets. While *Dunciad Minor* was quite straightforwardly satirical however, the new collection is much more diverse, in subject and in style. It ranges over a variety of eighteenth-century forms, such as the epistle, fable, dialogue and Newgate narrative, without any strictly formal verse satire. At the same time, there are satirical elements and themes in a number of the eleven poems that comprise the book. In "Tea with the Devil", Satan, having immobilized the preacher John Wesley in body and tongue, argues that the two of them have much in common, or at least are interdependent:

... much we share and more indeed, for we
Have more in common than a taste for tea:
Belief in demons and original sin,
Unfailing zeal and confidence to win;
Lack of a sense of humour, too, we share ...
And may I say, good sir, with great respect,
But that my role is God's Antagonist,
I could subscribe myself a Methodist.

Such moments are arguably among the best in the book, but this collection is not really an extended joke or parody like *Dunciad Minor*, and Hope in his preface is explicit as to why he has written something different. His explanation is that the Augustan Age had distinctive values and ideals, and to a certain extent social characteristics, that he thinks modern society might do well to emulate. The book is then, an attempt to positively reconstruct Augustan virtues – rationality, dignity, decency and so on – to revive the currency of those ideas. This is established forthrightly, as in “The Loves of Ophrys and Andrenus”:

But in full measure each of them possessed
What in their century was counted best
And most contributes to immediate good:
Good Humour, common-sense and fortitude;
Augustan virtues on which all depend
In every age and need most in the end.

There are certain characteristics of the poems that follow from this directly and indirectly Hope’s stated plans that his “narratives” have been “chosen mainly for amusement or irony, mostly related to actual persons and events, but treated with a certain degree of fantasy.” But it is clear that he has also selected characters and episodes that can be treated so as to illuminate those virtues which are relevant to modern society, such as the status of women or the responsibilities of science. Each poem raises a general issue, then treats that issue from the point of view of a person convinced of the validity of the Augustan view.

This is not as limiting as one might expect. Hope is well aware that the issue of ‘reason’ was appreciated as a most complex one by the Augustans. Johnson and Burke raised the problem of coming to terms with the basic irrationality of the human mind, when one only has rationality to deal with it. “Tea with the Devil” suggests that an extreme of systematized irrationality is as much a sham as pure rationality is a delusion. Hope defends the middle way, of common sense. He is not preoccupied with mere rationalism, but with an age which recognized and accommodated the inadequacy of reason. Hope keeps returning to the margin between reason and unreason, as in “Sir William Herschel’s Long Year”, “The Bamboo Flute” or “The Kew Stakes”. And in exposing scientific progress as a delusion, Hope turns the mind to contemporary issues such as the nuclear debate – the problem of science out of control.

... science but puts at the command
of greed and fear, powers they don’t understand.

The last poem in the collection, “Botany Bay or The Rights of Woman”, reveals Hope’s awareness of inevitable historicist objections to his project. The poem seems to imply that there are limits to the historical determination of consciousness, and that, therefore, it is possible for an ordinary woman, by taking thought and guidance from a book (Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*), to take charge of her life. The narra-

tive, which Hope adapted from Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor*, is compelling as a tale in itself, quite apart from the feminist issues it raises.

Hope’s claim to appropriate and reapply Augustan virtues to the modern world does not fully explain the nature of the poems. It is still a book of eighteenth-century imitations, often close to quite specific models, with references to specific situations, and ultimately (perhaps inevitably) there is an element of absorption in the ethos for its own sake. For example, Hope seems to delight in talking over some of the sexual attitudes, such as a rollicking rumbustiousness, too uncritically. Though he is frank enough about this in a way, there is still an element of indulgence in the ambience. This emerges in the exalting of sexual vitalism in a poem about Joseph Banks, mocked for “much preferring Botany to Bed.”

In the preface, Hope sums up his style as “the heroic couplet modified to accept the rhythms of contemporary English”, and this is a fair description for verse less like Pope than Byron’s *Don Juan*. It seems an appropriate accommodation of everyday speech, especially given Hope’s underlying argument that illuminating connections abound between the Age of Rationality and the “Age of Rationalization”.

In all, this is a most welcome collection, and not the least because of its brave attempt to re-establish a position of authoritative commentary that is poetic and intellectual.

The poet and anthologist Philip Neilsen teaches at the Queensland Institute of Technology.

Public and Private Poems

Graham Rowlands

R.G. Hay: *Love and the Outer World* (Cleveland Bay New Writing Series, Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, \$4.50).

Dennis Haskell: *Listening at Night* (Angus & Robertson, \$9.95).

Philip Neilsen and Barry O’Donohue: *We’ll all go together* (Queensland Community Press, \$15.00, \$8.00).

Andrew McDonald: *The One True History* (Hale & Iremonger, \$15.95, \$7.95).

Lyndon Walker: *Singers and Winners* (Pariah Press, \$6.95).

Andrew Lansdown: *Windfalls* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, \$8.50).

I’d enjoyed R.G. Hay’s poetry in magazines and newspapers for many years. I’d been looking forward to his first poetry collection for some time. After all, poets half his age had published one or even more books. Surely Hay’s turn was overdue, I’d thought.

Perhaps it’s still overdue. Hasn’t he written more quality poems than appear in *Love and the Outer World*? If

not, couldn't these poems have been organized better? Wouldn't his book have been improved by a few omissions? Or perhaps I'm just irritated by the confusing, amateurish and thoughtless book production. The less said about *that*, the better.

What Hay writes best he writes very well indeed. His country-town narratives that end with the poet's ironic, sardonic or understated viewpoint are superb. He's at ease with the wife-feminist who can fix the semi as well as be the farmer's wife, the death of the returning country boy who made it big, and the dreadful entertainer who nevertheless keeps trying to entertain. He's equally in control of historical poems about Lachlan Macquarie's ironic need to build roads rather than walls, his own distance from Aboriginal culture on visiting the Bora Ring of Judith Wright's poem, and Aboriginals not understanding convictism:

If they had, that first fleet
would never have got ashore.

These and some others are well-made poems in plain and colloquial idioms.

Unfortunately, the grouping at the start tends to exhaust the best of them. Hay's comments on native wildlife are largely banal or precious. His poems on his own poetic process are self-conscious precisely because of their plain language. His love poems are sentimental – except for “Making a Goat of Me” and “Eleven Ways of Looking at a Blonde”. And they cry out for vivid imagery. I wish the book could have ended with stronger poems. The last three are gauche and embarrassing. The last three words of the book being “forever barren strand”. Finally, I wish that there were more successful atypical poems such as the witty “Primum Mobile”:

The point is –
that the point is:
is moving;
is, in moving.

Aesthetically, Haskell's first collection is a boomerang. Just when the reader has decided that the poet has dropped his banal, prosaic, over-generalized *speculative* didacticism it returns. This includes the return of “meaningless” arms, “existence” in nature poetry and “God” again rising from the New Theology and ascending into third person plural discussion. (I think. Therefore I'm not necessarily “our”.) If vivid visual imagery characterizes much of Haskell's poetry, he nevertheless seems unaware of *other* poetic devices needed for his other kinds of poetry. His own witty David Campbell poem would make his own best medicine.

Psychoanalytically, it's no wonder Haskell is so hard on other poets in his print and radio reviews. He's so hard on himself. Like many people who are hard on themselves, however, the assault comes only from particular angles. Haskell seems oblivious of his vulnerability from *other* angles. The tension between his self-irritation and his other revelations make a fascinating dialectic for the *reader*.

Space prevents me from amplification. The example of housework must suffice. In “Depending on Silence” the poet considers himself a bastard because he imposes washing-up on a woman. In the most original poem “Out of Habit”, however, he *becomes* a cleaning rag at the end of a woman's hand! In “A Smell of Rubber” he writes about a woman cleaning things exactly as he writes about himself in other poems. Does the poet, then, ache to become the debased or the debasing woman? Who knows? Finally, the psychoanalytical reader might be forgiven for all sorts of speculation when the poet's young son's cover drawing consists of a well-armed pirate inside a uterus – umbilical cord *et al.*

Neilsen's and O'Donohue's selection of their “Nuclear Poems” assumes a broad interpretation of anti-nuclear. This provides variation and amplitude. Quite appropriate. I don't see why all anti-nuclear art should have to focus on ground zero.

Neilsen isn't an emotionless poet. He writes *about* emotion and emotional situations. Moreover, his thought *controls* all possible emotional expression. His technically flawless poems exist at a tangent to the world. Comment *on* the world, however, is achieved by ironic dramatization and juxtaposition; not through original imagery or moral badgering. Sometimes irony reels into clever comedy, as in his *tour de force* on dingoes. Moral seriousness doesn't have to be solemnity.

O'Donohue's poems are the best selection of his work in print. Why? The social and historical focus? The selection process? Neilsen's influence? I don't know. Whatever the cause or causes, the problems that overwhelmed his earlier books are now minimal in his less successful poems and non-existent in his successful poems. Prose statements, nineteenth-century diction, overwriting and unintelligible metaphysics can be passed over for poems where humans merge with landscape to evoke, convey and dramatize emotions and insights. (I recommend “Summer”, “Summerdusk”, “Armageddon” and “Dream Sequence I”.) Overcoming turgid technical and attitudinal problems, O'Donohue emerges as a poet who can write with an emotional depth that Neilsen would never risk. They make a study in contrasts.

McDonald's attractive second collection is marred by twenty Choruses in Part IV. The styles vary from colloquial to rhetorical. The subjects interpenetrate Australia and overseas, personal, political and religious. The poet is best when he's either witty or wounding – drawing blood dexterously in the Biblical re-interpretations. The blood is *supposed* to turn into green insect juice in Part IV. While this might afford easy protection from morally ardent critics, it also allows banality, pomposity and confusion disguised as relativity. Moreover, there's the perplexing issue of whether or not the blood does change into green insect juice. Despite a few funny lines, it's a disappointing end to a promising *and* achieving book.

Walker's first full-size individual poetry collection contains vivid imagery, particularly metaphors. This poetic technique works as a means to the end in the focused,

well-made insightful poems. It's too vivid to *deliberately* blur the *deliberately* unfocused poems of process and fragmentation. It follows, then, that the unfocused poems come across as tilted and incomplete jigsaws. Some readers will prefer the latter. I'd rest my case with the superiority of the seventh part of "Seven poems about not travelling to America" over the unfocused six. It can be difficult to separate deliberate non-focus from the way the pieces fall out of the jigsaw box.

I don't like many poems in Lansdown's fourth collection. However, I'm surprised I like as many as I do. He's a preaching Christian in both content *and* language. He's always harder on the Left than on the Right – when he's not dismissing all "ists". He dislikes all modes of social relationship but the family. He's patronizing towards his dead brother whose "demon" of youth drove him to share a "rented house" (horror of horrors) with "aimless/deathdazed youths". Although he often writes about Australian landscape, flora and fauna, he ignores Australian *society*. He writes a combination of descriptive and rhetorical poetry that never condescends to be *Australian* English.

I like Lansdown's Christian poems when he addresses his family rather than *me*. I like his fauna poems when he's not absolving animals of sin. I like his flora and landscape poems when he refrains from verbose didacticism. I like his atypical people-in-landscape poems such as "Waking Without Light" and "The Old Japanese Gardener" – without qualifications. Finally, to try to give him his due, I admire and I'm moved by his father-and-son Christian lyric "*Sehnsucht*".

Graham Rowlands lives and writes in Adelaide.

Problems From An Absent God

Paul Sharrad

Geoff Page: *Benton's Conviction* (Angus & Robertson, \$14.95).

C.J. Koch: *The Doubleman* (Chatto & Windus, \$19.95).

At first sight there is little connection between these two novels. One depicts a crisis of conscience in an Anglican vicar during the First World War, and the other is set in the 'swinging sixties'; one is steeped in the placid frictions of ordered New England society, and the other ranges with dark frenzy from a Hobart Catholic boys' school to the entertainment world of Sydney. Moreover, for Geoff Page it is a recent first novel after a lengthy career in poetry; for the author of *The Doubleman*, a fourth novel, already attracting a good deal of publicity.

Nonetheless, there are some significant links. Both Page and Koch raise the issue of religious belief in Australian society, and talk about God and Christ in a refreshingly straightforward manner. We may not always agree

with what is said, but at least it is not couched in symbolic obfuscation. Page perhaps leaves his attitude to the church a bit too undefined, while Koch tends towards the opposite extreme. However, the two writers are clear on the tenuous place organized religion has in our society, they address the problem of finding grounds for moral conduct once faith in an immanent deity evaporates, and they share a vision of the sordid and violent secular world lurking in the shadows that ring an illuminated zone of spiritual truth.

Light in this small circle is shown in both novels to be elusive and subject to distortion. Koch locates it only briefly in the joy of an old man coming away from the altar at mass, and in the charisma of a Franciscan monk (an exotic Italian presence in a post-war antipodean Christian Brother's institution). In Page's book we glimpse only its flickering in the meditations of David Benton as he turns from the official preaching of the church towards a private reading of the Gospels that breeds in him an anti-war conviction. Benton's bishop and Brother Kinsella in *The Doubleman* demonstrate with equal force how the light of truth may be corrupted into the intolerable glare of dogma, whether the cause be unthinking loyalty to an institution or a compensatory release of personal frustrations.

It is interesting that these two works, so different in many ways, should give a significant place in their discussions to gnostic dualism. While ancient heresies do not commonly get an airing in Australian society, they arise from eternal questions such as the presence of evil in a world supposedly created by a benign deity, and, as David Benton suggests, recur whenever lapses in faith give birth to a need for unorthodox explanations. For Benton, this is a matter of curious comfort, faced as he is with the retreat of God the Father and the humanizing of Christ. For Koch, the resurgence of a manichean worldview is instinct with the forces of faustian illusion and evil.

Indeed, if there is conviction to be found in either of these books, it surely appears most clearly in *The Doubleman*. Page's novel suffers from being too reasonably explorative, too low-key. Its strength lies in its depiction of the unravelling of a neatly wound ball of social gradations and institutional religious practice. There is a conflict – mostly well managed, though the recurrence of Watkins, the military chaplain seems a bit too fortuitous – between the slackening of connections in Benton's world and the tightening of the threads of plot in order to reach a dramatic conclusion.

Page runs the gauntlet between sentimentality and didactic exposition. The Reverend Mr Benton's constant recourse to the emotional human link between father and son, husband and wife as touchstone for his intellectual revolt is a valid one, and true-to-life, but occasionally one wishes that Billyjim had been given a less cute name, or that Amy was more prone to 'off days' and fractious doubts. The presentation of the change of heart from formal mouthings of ecclesiastical jingoism to personal struggle with anti-war conviction necessarily involves the author in presenting the arguments for and against, and there is a danger that the life of the narrative is dissipated

in flat slabs of 'position statements' already familiar to most readers. Page emerges at the other end of the gauntlet not entirely unscathed, but certainly not carrying any serious wounds. The achievement is noteworthy.

One reason for this is the excellent choice of the minister as central character. Benton's emotional attachment to his family is credible as the logical reaction of a socially distanced *ex officio* loner who spends a good deal of time bottling up his feelings and working the abstractions of religious belief. Moreover, the nicely delineated workings of parish life (especially the excellent Mrs Giddins) are sufficiently 'gritty' to counteract his sentimental response to the home. Page is a very astute observer of the dynamics of public speaking and the power of the pulpit to lead the private mind on to conclusions initially unforeseen. These, as he so ably demonstrates, tend to become crystallized into parodies of the original impulse once they are voiced to an audience. Benton's uneasy association with unionists, malcontents and fanatical idealists is well depicted, most tellingly perhaps in the clergyman's realization that his own situation is virtually identical to that of Captain Winters, the travelling recruitment officer, a solitary, rather pathetic and increasingly misunderstood adherer to principle. I am reminded of Keneally's *Three Cheers for the Paraclete* and of Maurice Gee's *Plumb*.

Benton's Conviction also acts as a fictional balance to such works as *1915* and *Fly Away Peter*, especially in providing an alternative and more convincing portrait of a clergyman than Roger Macdonald's grotesque parson. Like Malouf, Geoff Page uses his poet's sensitivity to landscape to good effect, cutting in descriptive passages of wind and sky which perfectly match the distanced reflective mood of Benton's inner struggle. This book is a fine first novel whose beautiful presentation is marred only by an annoying misalignment of text on page 52.

By contrast with the muted tones of Fred Williams' painting and the black, white and dove-grey of Page's dust-jacket, the garish, almost childish fairy-figures suspended on the cover of *The Doubleman* proclaim this book as one confident of attracting public notice. At over three hundred pages, and with more flamboyant display of fictional invention, poetic imagery and symbolic structuring, C.J. Koch's novel appears to be much more substantial, and in many ways it is. Benton, for all his conviction, does not leave us caught up in the struggle of his story to the extent that Richard Miller's narrative engages us in restless, often vexed, debate of the moral issues it raises. This is partly because Page sees religion as an institutional back-up for secular social power, whereas Koch locates the power-source within the spiritual world and works inside its enchanted circle to show how that power may be tapped for good or evil ends in modern society.

The Doubleman tells the story of a boy caught between Irish Catholic and German Protestant traditions who grows into a characteristic Australian secular scepticism undercut by diffuse spiritual longings. These take the form of a fascination with the world of idealized make-believe. In adulthood, it results in a career as radio actor and then producer (the appropriate role for one who

recognizes the charm of art but is too reliant on rational self-control to immerse himself completely in its illusory, colorful abandonment). Richard Miller's profession is the outcome of his marginal childhood as a crippled victim of polio (paralysis becomes a central motif in the novel). To match his ambiguous condition of princely exploitation of other's sympathy and aid, plus pathetic submission to a social scale in which his footballer cousin represents the top rung of self-sufficiency, Miller plays court jester for his school-mates, escaping the persecution of a tyrannical Christian Brother, but allying himself tenuously with the victims. Such outward dualities are reflected in an inner attraction to the 'paralysis' of an in-between faery world, ideal and offering some spiritual solace from the cares of this world, but lacking the full joys and responsibilities of a Christianity in which heavenly reward is founded on earthly moral engagement.

Complicated by the marginal beauties of a Tasmanian double-world – a dark mirror of lost European civilization, divorced from the sunny hedonism of mainland Australia – Miller's outlook on life makes him the logical narrator of events that primarily involve his circle of friends. Through his cousin's love for the guitar, Miller is brought into contact with the mysterious music-teacher cum gnostic guru, Clive Broderick, and his protege, Darcy Burr. The boys eventually form a folk-rock group which Miller produces on Sydney TV as a successful local version of Steeleye Span, specializing in faery ballads. Darcy's occultic charisma and musical genius draw Miller's wife into the group as female lead and incorporate – with tragic results – the unstable, indulged stepson of Dierdre Dillon. This character, as an immature mix of fey child and matronly heiress, had held Richard's heart in thrall for many years after a Tasmanian holiday affair when he was completing Matriculation.

The Doubleman communicates its message in part through the poetic patterning of symbolically loaded images. Emotional enslavement connects with fairy spells and images of illness and addiction. Koch is very good at showing the attractions of the mystic circle, whether it take the form of a groupie's longing to remain inside the spell of music, the musician's 'high' as an ideal figure on the stage, the lover's yearning for continual immersion in the magic flood of passion, or a longing for entry into some romanticized period of history (Dierdre's twenties, her stepson's age of the great jazzmen, the idealised pre-war Estonia of Miller's wife, Katrina). All these 'otherworlds' of dream are in some way escapes from the limitations of present and personal reality for which a price must be paid. Koch's characters variously assume moral responsibility through bitter awakenings or they become sad and sinister wraiths sustained by a faery food that "offers no nurture, merely addiction". The magic circle has become a trap, a gloomy cave, a shadowy and static "Barrow world" of occult illusion.

As with Milton and others who would warn us of demonic forces, Koch runs the risk of giving too much weight to the negative side of his vision. (There is – since evil seems to be regarded as a failure of moral will and the narrator is a pretty passive figure – the question of how

Richard Miller is saved and what kind of insight it is that gives him immunity to powers which destroy his friends. The author guards against this to some extent by making Broderick only a shadowy presence and Darcy a sordid one, but then has to convince the sceptical reader of their malign power through recourse to vanishing tricks, ouija boards and drugs. The appeal and menace of an heretical double view of existence is most carefully and successfully established via poetic suggestion and tight structuring. At times Koch seems to be overplaying his hand, making the seven-year patterning and Dierdre's faery role too plain, for example. But there is evident throughout an artistic control that is admirable. The description of polio's attack on young Miller, for instance, blends realistic attention to period detail with the subjective rendering of impressions distorted by pain and terror. Everyday objects take on a malign aspect; the train (a Hornby clockwork, "British and reliable") suggests the 'winding down' of a well-ordered pre-war era, anticipating the disturbing profusion of social options in the sixties post-colonial, post-church youth revolution. The 'altered consciousness' of Richard's illness foreshadows his later 'paralysis' under Darcy Burr's influence and his final appearance, frozen at the end of a dream by the effects of some magic mushroom. Similarly, the neatly arranged interconnections of epigraphs and chapter-headings help to produce the formal order of a folk ballad, the inevitable logic of a ritual; and this enables us to accept the presence of dark forces behind lives otherwise trivially disordered in ways typical of modern pluralist, existentialist society.

It is this literary basis for the novel's vision which perhaps constitutes its success as well as its shortcomings. For there can be little doubt that *The Doubleman* is intended as a sermon on the social ills of hedonist trendy experimentation outside orthodox Christianity. Koch is well aware of the dangers of preaching in fiction, and the positive response to this book has shown that it balances moral instruction with art and entertainment. But its success as a novel underlines the fact that its social thesis rests upon a highly individual view of religious truth and sixties Australia, and that it comes to the reader as an imaginative construct. The fact that Koch's fiction keeps niggling at our consciences long after we have read it, regardless of whether we accept its particular preoccupations or not, is a signal of its impressive achievement.

Paul Sharrad, of Flinders University, edits the Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English Reviews Journal. He has just completed a doctoral thesis at Flinders University on the cultural dynamics of post-colonial fiction and its reception, using the work of C.J. Koch, Raja Rao and Wilson Harris as examples.

Lags and their Legends

Cliff Hanna

Laurie Hergenhan: *"Unnatural Lives"* (University of Queensland Press, \$19.95).

Convictism is the oldest, and in many ways the most neglected, theme in Australian literature. There is the problem of quality, for despite the large output only *His Natural Life*, *Fringe of Leaves* and possibly *Bring Larks and Heroes* have any real claims to greatness. Further, a convict novel is chained to history, and harnessed by the morality inherent in its writer's social context. *Ralph Rashleigh* is interesting not simply as a literary curiosity with some historical importance, but also as a study of a mind trying to break free from what it knows to be an inescapable physical and moral situation. What I regard as the great examples of the convict form move beyond the factual conception of history to both challenge and illuminate prevailing social and moral restrictions by revealing an emotional truth beyond the simple interpretation of historical detail.

Marcus Clarke is a prime example. Some years ago, on a visit to Port Arthur, I was taken to the site of Point Puer, the child's prison, and shown the place where the two little boys, Billy and Tommy in *His Natural Life*, supposedly jumped to their deaths. "So that's where they jumped," I said. "No," replied my guide, "that's where they fell over." In a sense the reason the children reached the bottom of the cliff is secondary to Clarke's intention that they be representatives of a misery without respite. Through a possible distortion of historical fact Clarke created the most powerful reminder of convict child abuse in all Australian literature; the historical truth may be at risk, the emotional truth is not.

In his introduction to *Unnatural Lives*, Laurie Hergenhan asks:

If we agree that a novelist need not be tied down to historical facts, but can draw imaginatively on these, selectively combining them into fiction, the question remains as to what this process serves. What is the "truth" the novelist seeks to create?

In a general sense, *Unnatural Lives* seeks to answer this question. The relation of the text to its context, of the fiction to the fact, is one of the most provocative ingredients in the convict novel. Clarke provided historical sources to substantiate the accuracy of what is, factually, a biased fictional account. White, in *A Fringe of Leaves*, had two versions of the Eliza Fraser story at his disposal, and opted for the least credible one. Hergenhan argues that convict novels should not be chained to their historical contexts since, apart from the emotional and spiritual truth of their interpretations, they also move beyond history to interpret their authors' social and spiritual situations.

In an introduction interesting in itself as an attempt to define both the historical argument about convictism and the critic's position with regard to the convict novel, the

author argues earnestly for a more serious study of the convict form, as it affords insight not just into its historical context but also the socio-historical development of Australia. *Unnatural Lives* is a study of the major novels that occupy the area loosely termed 'convict fiction', beginning with *Ralph Rashleigh* and ending with *A Fringe of Leaves*. So the time-span is from the 1840s to the 1970s. Through the interweaving of the fictional and the factual, the convict novel becomes an important means of understanding the origins and development of Australian society and its legends.

Despite its eternal fascination, and inspiration, which has produced much that is fine, and some things great, in the Australian arts, the convict system is a deadly heritage that has fashioned us to the ideas of guilt, spiritual insecurity, and ultimately non-identity. The image of the wanderer in an alien, godless place has become a tired, insistent cliché throughout the twentieth century; but it was a spiritual reality in the convict mind from the moment Phillip weighed anchor for Botany Bay. The abiding, unresolved, conflict among historians as to whether our transported mothers and fathers were unjustly convicted village hampdens, or,

whores, pimps, and bastards, a large costly crew,
Maintained by the sweat of a labouring few,

has tended to amputate the suffering from its necessary human context. Fiction can remedy this, Laurie Hergenhan suggests, through its imaginative use of historical detail.

As the first published study of the convict theme in fiction, *Unnatural Lives* explores in both a particular and a universal way. Each novel has its own chapter, and individual focus, but the importance of the larger view is always stressed: the qualities of each work are seen through the developing argument about the convict legend. Hergenhan commences with *Ralph Rashleigh*, and the conviction of a fixed human nature with human history as an inflexible, predictable pattern is as true for the hapless Ralph as it is for poor deluded Maida Gwynnham in Caroline Leakey's *The Broad Arrow*, and the rebellious Phelim Halloran in Thomas Keneally's *Bring Larks and Heroes*. Set against this is the Romantic conception of history as a social process, of human nature as a developing consciousness, which finds its most profound statements in Brian Penton's *Landtakers* and *Inheritors*, and more particularly in Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*. Together they represent the opposing attitudes towards convictism that have existed since the time of the Botany Bay songs: that incarceration in a new land will be a curative experience, and the largely upper-class view that once a rogue always a rogue. As the author points out, these two views "correspond to broadly progressive and conservative conceptions of Australian society."

Unnatural Lives is an ambitious study that moves determinedly beyond simple critical analysis to tackle both the quality and the national relevance of each work. To Hergenhan the comparative approach offers "more con-

tinuity of concern, it not evidence of the direct influence of one author on another, ... so that the history of Australian literature may appear less as a broken chain of waterholes." Another value of the study is that it may inspire the resurrection of fine but forgotten novels like *The Broad Arrow*, and that engrossing piece of esotericism, *The Escape of Sir William Heans*, by William Hay.

Finally, I should emphasise that while *Unnatural Lives* describes itself as "Studies in Australian Fiction about the Convicts", it is not simply a collection of critical articles, although some of the chapters have appeared in article form, but a study of the development of the convict theme both as legend and as artistic reality. Clearly one of its aims is to redefine, or at least to clarify, the convict element in the Australian legend.

Cliff Hanna teaches in the Department of English at the University of New South Wales.

Peaceful Coot At War

John Sendy

Lloyd Edmonds: *Letters from Spain*, edited by Amirah Inglis, (George Allen and Unwin, \$9.95).

Many of those who lived through the period claim that the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) aroused Australian feelings just as much as Vietnam did over thirty years later. This seems hard to believe. While thousands of troops were sent to Vietnam by the Australian Government, only about fifty Australians went to Spain, as volunteers for the Republican cause. There were no massive Moratorium marches about Spain, and no television to bring the Spanish war into the living rooms. Yet passionate feelings abounded about Spain, whipped up from pulpit, platform and street corner. Kids argued about it on the way to school. The country divided. One side feared the communist menace, the other believed a Franco victory would herald the second world war. Indeed, for some, like Nettie Palmer, the second world war began in Spain in 1936.

While researching her forthcoming book about the impact of the Spanish war upon Australians, Amirah Inglis had her attention drawn to sixty-four letters held by the Melbourne University Archives and written by Lloyd Edmonds from July 1936 to May 1938. Fortunately, she saw their value as literature and history.

Some volumes of letters are brilliantly fascinating. The six huge volumes of Virginia Wolfe's letters come to mind; ostentatiously full of wit, gossipy detail and bitchiness, and of the great names of English society, government, art and literature, with likely and unlikely stories of alleged misdemeanors, foibles and stupidities.

Lloyd Edmonds did not write such letters. He lacked fame. He had no ambition to write, lead or shine, or if he

did it was camouflaged well. He was a young man of goodness, modesty and ideals who by 1936 had been in turn a bank clerk, school-teacher and university student.

His father ran the Ruskin Press which published much of Melbourne's radical literature early in the century. He sent Lloyd and his other children to the Socialist Sunday School of the Victorian Socialist Party. Lloyd became secretary of the Sandringham ALP branch and a delegate to the Trades Hall Council for the Radical Teachers Union. In 1933 he commenced study at Melbourne University, helped resurrect the defunct Labor Club and became its secretary.

When Maurice Blackburn defied an ALP ban and was expelled from the ALP in 1935 for speaking from a platform of the Victorian Council against War and Fascism, Lloyd Edmonds addressed a public meeting of the same body as an act of solidarity with his hero, and suffered the same expulsion. Then, having got his BA, he sold his car to get the necessary money and embarked for England on the *Hobson's Bay* early in 1936.

According to Dickens' Sam Weller the great art of letter writing is to have readers wishing for more. Lloyd Edmonds has this art. As Amirah Inglis writes in her introduction these letters provide a "fresh, rich, and colloquial account of an odyssey by an honest man who was intensely interested in his fellows and their ways, moulded by a dry and laconic Australian male tradition of understatement and lack of heroics while at the same time doggedly pursuing ideals which were both heroic and romantic."

His shipboard letters contain mischievous and philosophical titbits: "It is a remarkably miscellaneous collection of human beings, many are particularly stupid while others are particularly smart. The half-way between, the ordinary sensible people, are the ones who stay at home."

The England he saw still had around two million unemployed. The hungry still marched to highlight their plight. Mosley Blackshirts were active and demonstrations a daily event in London. He mixed with Australians like his university friend, Sam White, and Eleanor Wren, and heard speeches by John Strachey, Bertrand Russell, Harold Laski and others. He worked for months as a laborer, only to be sacked on Christmas Eve. Early in 1937 he canvassed door-to-door for a newspaper chain in many parts of southern England. Anyone interested in English and Australian life in the 1930s will find color, detail and thoughts aplenty in his letters to his father and others.

Then in May, 1937, helped by Professor Laski, this "most peaceful of coots", as he described himself, went to Paris to join the International Brigade and go to war. To explain to his father he wrote: "I'm really quite inefficient, I find, and rather lazy, so it is me they want in Spain. Chaps who can be spared."

His first letter from Spain details the secretive crossing of the Pyrenees on foot at night:

It took us fifteen hours, climbing. We went to a height of about ten thousand feet.

At about seven o'clock in the morning, I collapsed and two chaps, a Czech and an American, supported me along the plateau over the border. The guide rubbed ether on my chest and gave it to me to breathe.

It was remarkable mountain scenery. We went along the very roof of the Pyrenees for two hours. It was quite difficult too, balancing along precipices—real precipices.

And laconic humor follows to lighten the effect: "In the village we met the Mayor, the citizen with two automatic pistols, one on each side. The ordinary citizens only carried one pistol each."

Most of Lloyd Edmonds' time in Spain was spent driving trucks, transporting food, soldiers, equipment. Bombing and shelling became part of his life, particularly as the Franco forces gained ascendancy. In March 1938, he wrote:

Our trucks have been working continuously. They never stop only the drivers are changed. One result is that they are in terrible condition. Half of them had had their windshields blown or shot out, their bodies are in bits, and most are driving with broken springs . . . The towns round here are wrecks, the streets are strewn with the fallen down walls and the place looks like a scene after an earthquake.

The letters from Spain are not political treatises. Rather they discuss conditions, food, the Spanish people and the International Brigade volunteers, relatives, feelings. Amirah Inglis briefly and unobtrusively inserts connecting comments about the progress of the war and other details which make the letters easily intelligible. People named are identified by apt footnotes.

Early in 1939 Lloyd Edmonds, ill with yellow jaundice, escaped across the border into France, just after Barcelona fell and just a few jumps ahead of the fascist troops.

Amirah Inglis has done a fine job in assembling and presenting these letters. One minor fact is wrong. The Melbourne University Labor Club was not established in 1923 but two years later. And while Ralph Gibson, Brian Fitzpatrick and Lloyd Ross were prominent in founding it, so too were Bob Fraser, Macmahon Ball, Mary Lazarus, Winston Rhodes and others.

Lloyd Edmonds has remained an idealist and a radical. On returning from Spain he joined the Communist Party of Australia. Beneath his mild and pleasant manner lies a steely commitment which has never faltered. He married and resumed teaching. In 1943 he joined the Public Service in which he worked until retirement in 1971.

He has championed many causes: a library for Essendon, the preserving of Wilson's Promontory from hotel development, the Save the Kangaroo Committee of which he was president 1969-1973, a volunteer driver for Meals-on-Wheels. *Letters from Spain* is a fitting tribute to a worthy and caring citizen. It is part of our heritage.

John Sindy, freelance writer, lives at Kingower, Victoria.

The Currency

Gwyneth Dow

Portia Robinson: *The Hatch and Brood of Time. A study of the first generation of native-born white Australians 1788–1828*, volume 1 (Oxford University Press, \$39.50).

Portia Robinson's thesis is that the first Australian-born children of the white settlement – the currency lads and lasses – give an important key to our subsequent history in that they sloughed off the “connotations and associations of the word ‘convict’”, derived from British attitudes, thus establishing fresh standards and attitudes.

This Whiggish pride in our origins goes back a long way, perhaps even further back than to the first visitors who wrote of seeing a new society being created out of the rubble of an old one, and marvelled at the independence and vitality of the currency lasses and lads. It took no profound scholarship to see that the young colony offered opportunities that were unimaginable to those transported from the distant slums that accommodated the massive industrial and rural poor. But some feminist historians have changed this interpretation by concentrating on the oppression of colonial women, who are depicted as the ‘doormats’ of Australian society.

Robinson's title, *The Hatch and Brood of Time*, taken from *Henry IV* Part 2, and quoted at the beginning of the book, signifies that the past contains seeds which help to explain the present – that is to say, for historians who look hard enough, the past reveals its prophetic secrets. She is such an historian. Her Introduction tells us this repeatedly.

But Robinson is correct, if at times too sweeping and tediously didactic, in restoring the older belief. Her great labors have given her an authority previously lacking. It is evident that the first women, “throughout all levels of society”, established family life and, on the whole, made successful parents. Robinson's work also lives up to her claim that there are now new possibilities of studying our origins with a perspective closer to that of the time. These achievements which add to our understanding of our national identity are no doubt in part what Manning Clark had in mind in his preface when he tells us that this is a work which “all future historians will ignore at their peril”.

The Hatch and Brood of Time does for the children of convicts what Lloyd Robson did for the convicts themselves twenty years ago, in his *The Convict Settlers of Australia*. And it is no accident, I imagine, that Monica Perrott's and Annette Sale's recent books (*A Tolerable Good Success* and *Those Outcast Women*, respectively), which were published under Robinson's general editorship, have added a special dimension to feminist historiography.

Robinson has worked from the 1828 Census from which she took the names of 1167 males and 1161 females born in the colony in its first 25 years; she checked records of baptisms; marriage certificates (both very patchy sources, since there were so many *de facto*

relationships and illegitimate births in the period under consideration); burial registers; musters; Colonial Secretary correspondence; Memorials; applications for permission to marry, for tickets of leave, for mitigation of sentences; inquests and depositions of witnesses; advertisements in the Sydney Gazette. A monumental task, and one that justifies Clark's observation that “she has reaped a very rich harvest” in our search for identity.

Her plea, then, in her Epilogue, to be allowed what Bunyan's Pilgrim requested, must be respected – I'll fine the quotation down to the final lies:

What of my dross thou findest there, be bold
To throw away, but yet preserve the gold;
What if my gold be wrapped up in ore?
None throws away the apple for the core.
But if thou shalt cast all away as vain,
I know not but 'twill make me dream again.

So be it.

It is no doubt partly Robinson's influence that has to some extent led to, and certainly confirms, the idea that the early convict women were grossly misrepresented by many contemporary reports, not least of all by Marsden, with his classification of *de facto* wives as concubines. Yet records show a low colonial crime rate, which surely, as Robinson suggests, signifies that the worst criminals in Britain very likely suffered capital punishment, not transportation. Before 1800, less than half the children in the colony had been baptized and it has elsewhere been pointed out that more than half were, in fact illegitimate. Yet, there is evidence of a low incidence of infanticide and a relatively low rate of infant and child mortality. The remarkable record of parenting, under the circumstances, is strengthened by the observation that, even in the 1820s, when official migration was encouraged, the concentration on exporting paupers from Britain did not swell the proportion of ‘better class’ immigrants that added to the convict population. The colonial-born children, it might be noted, accepted rather than rejected their ‘parental example’. That, of course could be taken two ways; but the clear intention is a sense of colonial pride.

What Robinson, perhaps, fails to take sufficiently into account is the effect (or is it cause?) of resistance of early convicts to marriage. Liaisons were common, and often enduring for lengthy enough periods to cast doubt on the early women's reputation for promiscuity. Yet there were many changes of partnership, and case studies show that the children in one family were often the result of varied parentage. It seems that the mother was more likely to be the constant parent, and so the closeness of family ties and the relatively low rate of orphanage (although that is perhaps not yet proven) are all the more remarkable. What is lacking in Robinson's analysis so far is an awareness of extremes of either good or ill fortune or results.

There is no entry under “recidivism” in the commendable indexes, and practically no examination of it. Tasmanian records might throw new light on this question. Robinson's sub-title is utterly misleading in that her

book virtually ignores Van Diemen's Land, despite its settlement from 1803 and its separation from New South Wales as late as 1825. Evidence of recidivism is more easily traced there, perhaps, than in NSW. Be that as it may, Robinson ignores it in her extensive research in volume one, though it is germane to her arguments.

Again, the evidence in this book of the self-made man, and of the success of the first settlers in seeing that the next generation, the currency lads and lasses, were trained and had useful lives to live on the land or as tradesmen, is a valuable corrective. Young women might have had few career options available to them, as Katrina Alford has recently underlined; but they had a degree of independence and a usefulness in the family that would have been denied them had they been born in Britain. On this point Robinson's research is consistent with Patricia Grimshaw's detailed case studies. But, of the families that went under, Robinson has little to say.

Was, for example, the Daniel McKay (mentioned on p.114, not p.144 as the Index B suggests) who had five assigned servants for his 30 acres at Parramatta, the same one who ended up in gaol in 1813 as a debtor to Simeon Lord and Samuel Terry? It would seem so; but his later history, which shows him to have apparently drunk his assets away, puts a very different complexion on his affairs that will perhaps be revealed in later Robinson volumes.

And at the other end of the scale, the policy that enabled successful emancipists and free settlers to be granted and to buy huge properties adds another dimension to Robinson's account of the number of ex-convicts and their children who became farmers. Many, like McKay, went under – floods, droughts, debts and the suitability of outback properties for large pastoral development saw to that, just as they saw to the aggrandisement of land holdings in the hands of the big men. No doubt Robinson is right in tracking down the average grant of 60 acres to the native-born, and 40 to emancipated convicts, but averages are misleading. As she says herself, of 1828, there was "enormous disparity in the acreage of the various properties" (p.260). With mystifyingly ambiguous language she continues, "Among those who had arrived as convicts, parental holdings varied from fourteen to almost 3000 acres." Since she has been talking about the first male native-born sons, I presume the parents there referred to are their parents. An 1828 list of land ownership showed that Simeon Lord held nearly 18,000 acres (p.204) – 15,000 above Robinson's maximum. Strangely, her references to the big men ignore the biggest, Samuel Terry who admitted to owning 22,000 acres in the 1828 Census, but the Land Board's estimation in 1826 was 40–50,000 acres. His sons were only in their teens, but in 1825 they were permitted by Brisbane to purchase 4,000 acres each in the newly-opened up Bathurst region, where the family holdings in that region alone were 18,000 acres, only 2,000 of which had been bought in Samuel's name.

Overlooking the extremes of distress and predatory success is a major weakness in *The Hatch and Brood of Time*, but that must not overshadow what looking for the

mean has produced. It offers a much-needed corrective to some of the sweeping generalisations that have been accepted in recent histories, and it points to what the broad tendencies were. That is where Bunyan's ore is to be found. But, to get policy-making and influential tendencies right, one must also look at the nature and extent of the deviations from the mean – a corrective that we may hope that Portia Robinson's later volumes will make. Many of us will be awaiting eagerly that promised volume of appendices later this year, and in its detail we may hope to find some of the missing characters detected in this and other reviews in sufficiently significant detail. Meanwhile, we are already in the authors debt for a great deal in what must have been an extremely unwieldy and difficult mass of material at her disposal, resulting from her arduous researches.

Gwyneth Dow is Reader in Education at the University of Melbourne.

Ushers at Large

Lloyd Robson

R.J.W. Selleck and Martin Sullivan (eds.): *Not So Eminent Victorians* (Melbourne University Press, \$22.50).

This book offers valuable historical and social insights through case studies of some dozen or so Victorian school teachers and their experiences in the colony. It is a scholarly work by eleven contributors from the field of education and comes equipped with extensive end-notes, illustrations and a glossary of educational terms. This last is particularly useful for the reader unacquainted with the administration of public instruction in the colony. The illustrations are principally photos of the various teachers, posed in pleasingly Victorian conventional style.

The idea of presenting individual case studies was a good one, and the day to day problems of teacher, pupils, parents and the ubiquitous "Department" reveal a great deal. In fact, this book is willy-nilly a very good example of how to combine "Life" and "Times".

The problems of fees to be paid by parents, teachers' salaries and the exploitation of female teachers, advancement in the service, difficulties of accommodation and so on are adumbrated. Not the least of these was discipline of youthful colonists. Was tying a child's hands behind the back classified as a form of corporal punishment? When asked to rule on the point by Eliza Murphy (nee Munro), the Department responded that, what with one thing and another, this form of control was probably not a desirable practice.

When J.F. Glennon sought to unionize teachers, he was

informed from the departmental pulpit in Melbourne that the proposed Institute of Teachers "was not formed with legitimate objects consistent with the position of its members as civil servants . . . the Teachers' Institute has rather the semblance of a political association organized for the purpose of bringing pressure to bear upon the Department."

How did teachers respond when irate parents threatened to take action after offspring were caned or "waled" to an extent where embarrassing evidence appeared in the form of actual wounds being inflicted? The Department pondered and played for time, and cases tended to fizzle out.

Marriage to a fellow teacher could lead to the couple being separated for lengthy periods, as in the case of John Murphy (1855-91) when the Department could not see its way clear to post both husband and wife to the same school or district.

Institutions such as the Training School were very important to rural teachers seeking to go up in the world but could be the scene of distressing incidents. The conduct of

female students in their dormitory, and elsewhere, left a great deal to be desired, and one night the servants concluded they were in fact employed in a disorderly house.

Given its title, this is a surprisingly lively book. These teachers tried their best in a profoundly philistine environment and the wonder is that more did not succumb to the demon drink, for there certainly were round (or very irregular) pegs in square holes. Poor Marmaduke Fisher (b. 1822) would have been much better off as an assistant to John Gould or von Mueller, such was his preoccupation with Natural History, but came to a sad end, enslaved to alcohol.

Hardly any of these teachers were born in Australia, it is not surprising to observe, and they represent very effectively, through their skilful biographers, a component of that wave of immigration which so numerically dominated the colony of Victoria.

Lloyd Robson teaches history at the University of Melbourne. He has recently published the first volume of his A History of Tasmania.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: We once again thank readers for a handsome total, of \$1,286 in donations. You may be interested to know (apropos my comments in Swag on our audited financial statements for last year) that the donations total for 1984/1985 was \$4,098, down a couple of hundred from the previous year, but still a remarkable figure for these difficult times. It would be *impossible* to publish Overland, at least at the level we are trying to maintain, without this extra support from our readers, to whom all thanks. Details: \$320 Anon.; \$200 V.L.; \$150 K.H.; \$84 K.S.; \$50 J.B.; \$25 M.R.L., N.C.; \$24 J.C., J. & D.A.; \$18 E.C.; \$14 I. McL., R.R., D.P., I.P.; \$10 R.C., I.G., I.G., H.L., J. McK., R.F.; \$9 F.V., F.B., G.T., S. McC., P.F., B.D., J.R., R.F., L.C.; \$8 F.W., E.B.; \$5 R.T., S.M., F. McG.; \$4 S.D., D.A., B.W., D.G., J.B., M.B., B.R., W.W., P.S., R.G., R.B., P.G., J.M., C.B., G.S., A.S., M.M., M.F., J.R., R.O., G.L., D. McN., A.L., R.G., L.R., E.G., E.R., A.S., M.D., V.C., P.A., J.B., J.W., N.M.; \$2 D.H.

**Overland Number 101,
Our Second Centenary Issue,
will include:**

Barry Hill's Letter from Queenscliff.

Gwen Harwood's "The Seventh House".

Mary Durack's "Barunga – Man of Two Worlds".

Dorothy Hewett's "Bring Me My Bow", an autobiographical extract.

Louis Nowra's story "The Translator".

Hugh Stretton's "From London, with Love and Hindsight".

John Docker on Antipodean Literature.

Martin Duwell on Peter Carey's *Illywhacker*.

John Herouvim's "My Mum, Sir John Kerr and Other Surprises".

Sean Regan on Multiculturalism.

Morris Lurie "On the Splendor of Fathers".

Jack Lindsay's "Dylan and Philip".

Paul Carter: Interview with Barrett Reid.

Russel Ward: "Geelong and the Centre" – an autobiographical extract.

Kylie Tennant: "Notes from Murder Mountain".

Richard Haese on Albert Tucker.

Poems by Les A. Murray, Vincent Buckley

James McQueen, Elizabeth Riddell, Chin
Wallace-Crabbe, Frank Kellaway, Eric
Beach, Dorothy Hewett, Paul Carter,
Philip Neilsen, Marjorie Tipping, Micha
Davie, Graeme Turner, Francis Oeser,
John Sendy, Robyn Rowland, Shelton
Lea, Barrett Reid, Robert Harris, Sean
Regan, Graham Rowlands, Paul Sharra,
Cliff Hanna, Gwyneth Dow, John Millett,
Terry Hamington, Hilary Cohen, Max Harris
Barbara Giles, Jill Hellyer, J.S. Harry,
Conal Fitzpatrick, Charles Kimington, Ri
Cowen, Robert D. Fitzgerald, Andrew Ja
Don Maynard, John Crompton, Rick Au

Anthony Mannix