107

FEATURES
STORIES
POETRY
$5

overland

Frank Moorhouse: EX-WIFE RE-WED
Victor Ye: CHINESE LITERATURE NOW
Walter Crocker: RICHARD CASEY
Elizabeth Jolley ON PETER COWAN

Registered by Australia Post—publication no. VBP1440

JACK HALL OF EBOR – SEE JOHN MEREDITH'S "FRANK THE POET"

COMPETITION

FROM THE COLLECTED VERSE OF R. J. L. HAWKE.

What an opportunity lost! You've blown it, readers. If ever there was a moment calling for political satire, the sharp knife and the belly laugh surely it's now. But, so settled is your Great Australian Depression that we get little energy and less wit. A number of entries: the prize to Rohan Cahill, with a commendation to Stephen James and also to Michael Cook, of Belconnen A.C.T., for his liveliness and invention. Michael is aged nine.

IDENTITY CRISIS?

I thought about it
pretty hard
and came up with
the ID card . . . ahhh . . .
a way that's sure,
I reckon it ought,
to cut out fiddles
and . . . ahhh . . . tax rot.
Of threats to civil
liberties I . . . ahhh . . .
make light;
that sort of talk
I expect
from . . . ahhh . . .
the New Right.
Okay. Righto.
Forget about spectres
of Hitler and ~~Joh~~ Joe;
the ID card
is the way to
. . . ahhh . . . go.

ROWAN CAHILL

UP THERE WITH KAZHAWKIE

Fellow sportsmen & women of Australia:
I call upon you all, in this,
the Century of The Common man, to rally
around your very common cheer leader:
The game will be hard & very tough,
the fight dirty & bloody rough.
But have courage. Be strong of will,
their new-right ruckman is just beer-swill.
Weak & watery, fraudulent, a sham,
oozing with sugar, like Elder's IXL jam.
Yield no quarter. Let not your spirit sag.
To them, the behinds: For us — goals & flag.
That future generations with pride will say:
They flew high with the mighty Hawkes,
upon that victorious Grand Final day.

STEPHEN JAMES

IN RESPECT OF . . .

In respect of our welfare
Sir Joh gave me quite a scare
People chanted "Joh for PM"
Thank God they can't vote
When I turn around a corner and hear people cheer
I go around the block again and listen to it go to my ear
And this is what I think

```
BBB  OOO  BBB        PPP  MM     MM
B B  O O  B B        P P  M  MM  M
BBB  O O  BBB        PPP  M  MM
B B  O O  B B        P    M      M
BBB  OOO  BBB  FOR   P    M      M
```

MICHAEL COOK

OUR NEW COMPETITION. We ask for post-election new words, needed by the English language, but which it does not yet possess. Examples are *encumbrant* and *long-swerving*. Entries should consist of three such words, each illustrated in a separate sentence. Usual prizes, closes 30 August.

stories EX-WIFE RE-WED *Frank Moorhouse* 2
MASTERPIECE *Kevin Brophy* 17
KUALA LUMPUR STORY *Beth Yarp* 59

features FINDING LIGHT *Richard Falk* 10
SWAG *Stephen Murray-Smith* 21
CREMORNE: PENINSULA OF GENTILITY *Alexander Buzo* 28
SPRING IN THE STEP *Victor Ye* 31
WRITING STARTS WITH A CHOCOLATE BAR *David Martin* 37
RICHARD CASEY *Walter Crocker* 41
FRANK THE POET *John Meredith* 62
DEATH OF AN UNFAMOUS MAN *John Herouvim* 67
ATMOSPHERIC CHANGES *John Kerr* 68
LONDON LETTER *Katherine Gallagher* 69
BOOKS *Michael Costigan* 71, *Hanne Bock* 71, *Elizabeth Riddell* 76, *John Sendy* 77, *Kevin Hart* 80, *Kenneth Hince* 81, *Baiba Berzins* 82, *Michael Dugan* 83, *Ken Buckley* 84, *Eric Beach* 85, *Eric Rolls* 87.

poetry *Margaret Bradstock* 23, *Dorothy Porter* 23, *Gwen Hopkins* 23, *Rod Moran* 24, *Jan Nelson* 24, *Myron Lysenko* 24, *Andrew Lansdown* 25, *Jennifer Strauss* 25, *Graham Rowlands* 25, *Barbara Giles* 25, *John A. Scott* 26, *Rae Desmond Jones* 27, *Katherine Gallagher* 27, *Timoshenko Aslanides* 53, *Mike Greenacre* 54, *Hilary Cohen* 54, *Kate Lilley* 55, *Lyndon Walker* 56, *Robert Drummond* 57, *Rudi Kraussmann* 58, *Alex Selenitsch* 66.

graphics Cover design and layout, Vane Lindesay. Cover photo, Jack Hall of Ebor, by Chris Sullivan. Back cover, Michael Sharkey. Drawings by Rick Amor 3, 18, 29, 30, 68; by Ding Zhao-chen, 35.

Temper democratic, bias Australian

overland

107

June 1987

Printing: Currency Productions Pty Ltd, Fitzroy

Overland is a quarterly literary magazine.
The subscription rate is twenty dollars a year (four issues); for students and pensioners the subscription rate is ten dollars. Life subscriptions are available for $100 each. Bankcard subscriptions and renewals are accepted (quote number). Manuscripts, are welcomed, but a self-addressed envelope is 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, Robert Harris, Nancy Keesing, Vane Lindesay, Stuart Macintyre, John McLaren, Leonie Sandercock.

Contributing Editors: Dorothy Hewett (Sydney), Donald Grant (Perth), Gwen Harwood (Hobart), Martin Duwell (Brisbane), Katherine Gallagher (London), Tim Thorne (Launceston).

ISSN 0030-7416

FRANK MOORHOUSE

Ex-Wife Re-Wed

She did not tell him herself, Louise told him with that status of voice used for information or gossip of profound content – "did you hear about Robyn?"

He noticed that Louise did not use their usual expression "ex-wife". Robyn had not been known as anything else but "ex-wife" since they separated – Jesus Christ – was it really fifteen years ago, divorced, and she remarried. She had become again the person "Robyn" not just the "ex-wife" character in Louise's and his conversation.

"Well? Tell me?"

How would Louise have heard anything of Robyn who now lived in Portugal and who moved in different worlds?

"It's the Big C."

The Big C. Louise's voice was enlivened by her role as the bearer of grim news, by being able to dance death into their lives.

Louise was one of the few of his current friends who had known the "marriage".

"How did you hear?" he wanted to know how she knew and he did not – given that neither of them were any longer in contact with Robyn.

"Purely by chance," Louise said, "I was in Lyon at a trade exhibition when I met her."

"Does she say I gave her the cancer?" It was a joking toughness to block the shock and the pity which were reaching him, "She blamed me for everything else."

Louise managed a small laugh, it was their style of humor not Robyn's style of humor, "how bad is it Louise?"

"Bad. Irreversible."

Next day there was an uninformative overseas call from Robyn on his answering machine. The first contact for years. He did not telephone but wrote a letter which told her he knew about her illness and which like all other exchanges since they'd broken, was another effort to discharge the guilt he felt about their time together. A fading guilt, and an unfairly borne guilt, given they'd married as teenagers. At times of low spirit though, he still felt it was he who'd failed, who'd broken the vows. Sensibly it wasn't like that, but at these low times he felt he should've stayed with the marriage despite the incompatibility which had shown up.

Would he have been any worse off? Maybe he would have been anchored enough to become a writer when he'd mistakenly thought he would need to be unanchored. He was still plagued by how she'd crashed their bright red car on the third day they'd had it and he'd yelled at her, failed to comfort her. It was their first real possession, a materialisation of their relationship. He should've comforted her; instead, he yelled at her. Or was she unconsciously crashing their relationship? As a callow husband he'd attacked her for feeling premenstrual tension. He read to her from a book which said it was "all in the mind". He had forced her to admit that it was "all in the mind" and to pretend she suffered nothing.

His letter to her was short, he said he'd heard she was ill and he was willing her recovery and rooting for her with all his spirit, which he was. Rooting was an odd word for him to have settled on, in their Australian country town school days it had been fucking. He pondered this and then left the word in the letter.

He said that for his part he remembered good times and rich moments from when they'd been young kids going into life together. He said he still suffered too from things he'd handled badly. He mentioned their "farcical reunion" a few years earlier.

She wrote back saying how affected she was to get a letter and she too certainly carried good memories in her heart and had since laughed about their "farcical reunion".

Their daughter whom he'd never known was now at university in the States.

She said she was returning to Australia and hoped he'd be in the country and able to see her and that it would not be a second "farcical" reunion.

After a boozy night with old friends at the Journalists' Club he drove her back to their home town which was no longer a town so much as a suburb of a city.

"We should call it 'the suburb' I suppose, not the 'old town'," she said.

"I guess we still see the *town*."

"*I can still feel the town.*"

She had lost much weight but still seemed agile and he still saw in her the movements of the girlish hockey player. She gave off what he saw as a strained cheeriness and he had not mentioned her cancer and neither had she. He didn't feel he should raise it, sensing it to be perhaps anti-therapeutic to acknowledge it or that cancer was something best handled by hauteur rather than candor.

"The old school is really the *old* school," he said, "old as anything ever gets in this ever-renewing country."

"Yes," she said, "let's go to the school. I'd like to see the old school again."

He felt the unspoken part of her sentence – "before I die."

"Remember planting those trees in the new school when we were prefects?" she said, as they sat in the car looking at the row of eucalyptus trees which they'd planted, now well grown – twenty-five years old. The summer wind gave them a green silver light and the agitation of the main body of leaves seemed to shake, frustratedly, against the unmoving solidity of the trunk and limbs. The trees took him back to before high school to the primary school and hot endless days when she and he had been children in the playground, hot and breathless, aware of each other but unable to express or understand this uncomfortable awareness, only able to express it finally by chasing, hair-pulling, tickling.

"A penny for them."

They had been going so well and now she'd come out with one of these detestable phrases which he remembered once made up so much of her conversation. Her intelligent ordinariness had enraged him back then. During adolescence he'd fought against what he'd seen then as the tyranny of ordinariness and tyranny of convention. He'd used excessive behavior, flamboyance borrowed from literature, self-dramatisation, rule breaking, bohemian posing, all as resistance to, and innoculation against, the ordinariness of his country town life. He'd laid down rules for his friends' conversation at high school – no cliches, no wishing people good luck, no salutations, no greetings. But now even near death he couldn't let her get away with it, out it came.

"I don't know what I was thinking but I'm now thinking about how we tried to ban those sorts of expressions when we were here at school."

"What sort of expressions?!"

"Oh, sayings like 'a penny for them'." He felt foolish for having made the point.

"Oh god yes, so you did".

He was trying to be light but somewhere there in him was the adolescent trying to remake the world, to impose his own minor tyrannies. He hoped she didn't sense it. Back then she'd always been praised for her "common sense", for being "down to earth". He'd been striving for an "uncommon sense". His models then were artists, revolutionaries, dreamers – none of which he'd become, becoming instead a servant of an international agency, practising mundane idealism, agenda-ed dreaming, deferred dreaming, the illusions of a negotiated revolution. He turned again to her, recalling that along with the down-to-earthness she had also believed in some non-rational things, the mean-

ing in coincidence, the usefulness of astrology. But what about his own White Knight plague of coincidences which had swept through his life that year? He smiled to himself, unable to reveal it to her. He still had to set an example for her as he had tried to do back in high school as the relentless rationalist. He then wondered fleetingly if she really did have cancer or whether this was a mid-life panic, had she really been diagnosed or was it some sort of intuitive self-diagnosis? She was capable of that.

"Yes," she said, "you didn't want people to say hello or good-bye, it wasted time, we were to speak only if we had something to say worth saying or truly felt. Yes. And everything had to be 'original'. " She snorted.

"I was a bit of a zealot."

"You sure were."

This hurt, he didn't want her to confirm that, he didn't think he'd been a zealot, "did you really think that I was a zealot?"

"Oh yes. There was lots of talk about you. You were always trying to make the school – or our year – into some sort of branch of the Communist Party or a commune or whatever it was you were reading at the time. *Walden*. Maybe not a zealot but a very, very serious boy. Maybe that's why I married you."

He remembered that it was back then that he'd had to confront his first misconception about the world. He'd wanted to believe that his friends at school were true students, his teachers true scholars, all concerned only with inquiry. That all adults respected truth and the weight of evidence. This misconception still caught him out, still took root in his mental garden, and of course, was still the fallacy he had to work by.

"You were pretty queer," she said, "but impressive in your own way." She pushed his arm playfully. "Don't look so worried – we didn't think you were loony. We were more worried that you would think we were dumb. Did you think I was dumb back then?"

"I married you. You got a better pass than I did."

"We know that examinations don't count in the long run. Did you think I wasn't an intellectual? And anyhow men marry women dumber than themselves for security."

"I was sometimes driven up the wall by your common sense. You saw through all the bullshit."

But she never was sure what was really bullshit and she had neither insight nor vision.

He laughed, "I miss it now and then. We need you in Vienna." He didn't believe that.

She asked about schoolfriends, Carl, Sylvia, Friedman, "Do you ever hear from them?"

"No, not at all really. Sylvia's with the Schools' Commission. She's always being written up in those articles on successful feminist women."

"Sounds just like her."

Sounds just like her.

"Let's go into the school."

They got out of the car. It was vacation. The school was empty. Nothing as empty as a vacant school.

"Let's go to Room 14. The Prefects' Room."

He was thinking of another room, where they had almost made love for the first time. Room 17?

"Why not Room 17?"

She turned to him smiling, almost a blushing smile, "Of course, I'd almost forgotten that. I nearly lost my virginity to you on the floor of Room 17. Oh yes."

They walked along the corridors, the smell of chalk, always oranges? or fruit-cake?

Or were these smells in his mind?

They stopped and looked into Room 17, the art room. She took his hand and squeezed it.

"We came very close," she said.

"The Gestetner's been replaced by offset."

They went on to Room 14 where the flirtings, the brushings, the illicit hand holding, the supercharged touchings of pre-courtship, had begun.

The room was crowded with superseded household appliances, jugs, toasters, heaters, snack makers.

"They have more electrical gadgets than we had."

"We had a jug – for instant coffee – they've got a restaurant-style dripolator."

She leaned into him affectionately. "You wrote a story for the school magazine about nuclear war beginning the day you got your examination results – remember? And you end up being involved in all that even now."

"Not quite 'all that', but yes, that's where I ended up."

"Though now you're for using nuclear power aren't you?"

"Only because it's inescapable for the time being."

"But you were aware of the threat before other people."

"Not really."

"You were a peace movement before there was a peace movement," she said.

"What it shows twenty-five years later is that I was politically wrong – the bomb hasn't dropped – maybe it stopped war."

He realised he was slightly disturbed by her holding his hand, irritated with himself he realised that it was a fear of contact with her. Because she had cancer. He was angry with himself and took her other hand against this stupid gut reaction.

"I think I was using it metaphorically – the bomb, back then."

This idea seemed to be unacceptable to her, "How? Why?"

"I think I was really writing about the bomb of puberty dropping on the peace of my childhood."

"I don't think you were. I don't think you were that clever."

He let go of her hands and went to the window to

look across at the playing field. She came up behind him and embraced him from behind, her cheek coming against his. Again he felt a resistance to her but suppressed it.

"You haven't mentioned my cancer," she said. She tried to say it in a comic voice but it threw a shadow of effort. "For godsake, mention my cancer," she laughed, and going to the window, opened it and shouted, "Cancer!" and then closed it. "There, it's mentioned. People won't mention it. I didn't think it would happen with you and me but it has. People won't say the word. But I *have* to talk about it."

The effort at lightness was so colossal and so transparent and courageous he felt tearful.

"You look so well – it hadn't crossed my mind," he said, holding his voice normal, "But OK – how's the cancer going?"

His voice came out far from normal.

She made physical contact with him again, leaning into him, "Oh I have my winning days and my losing days. It's incredible that I can really say at the end of the day – I'm winning or I'm losing. But I'm not strong enough to count the winning days. That's where I'm a sook. But I'm not a defeatist."

She had never been a defeatist. But the word sounded too close to being crushingly, inescapably upon her. She stumbled over saying it.

"Does it hurt a lot?"

"Hellishly in the lower pelvis sometimes."

"I've heard that chemotherapy is rough."

"I've given that up. I didn't believe that anything that makes you feel that bad could be good for you."

"Louise said that you were having cobalt 60 intercavity irradiation."

"Yes, but I gave it up."

"But why Robyn, why?"

She squeezed his hand, "don't feel offended because your magic is being refused."

It wasn't *his* magic – nor was it 'magic'.

"I changed therapies," she said, "as Susan Sontag said, all the medical therapies are like warfare – they bombard, they attack, they search out and destroy."

"But for godsake, Robyn, they *work*."

"Calm down, calm down. So does my way."

Her way.

"I'm meditating and I have a vegan diet which is all I feel like eating anyhow – now hold on – don't be so quick to make a mock of it. It works too you know. I'm doing imagery therapy – the Simonton technique."

"The what!"

"Calm down. I imagine the white cells eating the cancer, as simple as that. I believe in the power of the imagination. But I don't see it as violent act – I imagine it as peaceful. The imagination is a much underused power."

She looked very tired from having to put it into words against her sense of his opposition. She had stated it as a testament of faith. Oh he was still so zealous with her. He angered again against himself. He wanted to take both her hands and kiss them as a supportive gesture and as a way of dissenting from those negative responses his personality was giving to her. But still he could not bring himself to do it.

"You're not looking like an invalid," he forced himself to say, "so something's working, maybe." He tried to bite back the word 'maybe'. "I'm sorry I mocked you – you know me – always the schoolboy rationalist."

"But a rationalist who was sophisticated would accept that there are grey areas in medicine and especially in cancer healing. Strange things do happen."

"Yes. I'm for anything that works for you," he said, feeling happier with that form of words, "but why don't you try everything at once? The cobalt 60, the alternative therapies, the lot."

"But don't you see if you try the medical things you're being passive – you're putting yourself in the hands of other people and saying 'cure me'. With the other therapies you are active – it's me working for my own cure."

But there was nothing in the book that said you shouldn't put yourself in the hands of others when ill. Trustingly, or involving others, might be part of being committed to your life. He didn't want to argue with her. He was afraid of upsetting the balance of her will, in so far as he was granting validity to willpower cures. He suspected though that do-it-yourself cures might be a diseased reaction to disease. We could not depend upon the beneficence of the unconscious. He wouldn't rely on his.

"Remember that last party we had here at the end of fifth year?" she said, "no, of course, you were already in Sydney. We had my old gramophone here," she went over and stood where the gramophone had been, "we drank soft drinks and ate cakes which the girls had baked." She stood in reverie, "gee. . . " She became tearful.

He wanted to go to her but resistance was still there.

They traced their school lives slowly as they wandered about the empty school.

"I was truly deeply shocked that day in Room 17. I mean, I hadn't actually seen a man's. . . a penis before."

"It took you more than a year before you would look again."

"You're lucky I *ever* looked again."

They stood in the grassy fields where twenty-three years earlier they'd made tentative pre-sexual love. If his mother or her mother was not at home they would sometimes go there and pet more until they ached and were almost sick from arousal without release.

As they stood there in the long grass, she said, "I sometimes wonder what gave me the cancer, was it – this is silly I know but I have to say it – could it have been men's penises not being clean enough?"

He tried to joke, "I don't think so, British women would all have cervical cancer." It was a typical idea for her to have, and, who knows, maybe right.

"I don't mean you," she touched him, "you were a good middle-class boy and clean, but well, others. . ." she gave a small guarding smile as if he might even now be upset by mention of other men, "others after you weren't always good middle-class men."

"Did a doctor suggest this?"

"No, it's a private theory, I have lots of private theories these days. Being ill in a serious way gives you a special sense of knowing your body."

They left the school, "I always remember the Head saying something that was very important to me," she said, "remember him saying that school wasn't preparation for life – it was real life, real living. It's true and school is an important part of living."

In the car she suggested she'd like to go to the church where they'd been married.

Outside the church he said how normal their lives had looked then – church, fellowship, Sunday School, confirmation, debutantes, engagements, balls, marriages, births.

"I missed out on confirmation," he said to her, "that was one of my protests."

"But you *were* confirmed," she said, "I was the one who refused to be confirmed and caused all the ruckus."

"No," he said, feeling determinedly sure, "I was the one who refused to be confirmed."

"No, sorry, I was the one who held out, you were forced into it by your mother but you were certainly confirmed."

He flushed, she was right, he'd been rewriting his history. Why? When had he started that legend – lie – and then forgotten to correct it?

"You talked about doing it," she said, "you talked of rebellion but your mother put great pressure on you. My mother oddly enough was a bit against it for some reason. Low church – found it too popish."

He was embarrassed, he must have made up the story when he was a teenager in Sydney as part of the picture of rebellious adolescence in a country town.

"Are you honestly confused?" she asked.

"What does it matter now," he said, "yes you were the one."

They went into the dim church and walked up the aisle where they'd walked as nineteen year old bride and groom, "Is this the altar?" he asked her. "I never quite knew where the altar began."

"Yes, but Rev. Benson called it the communion table."

"The altar was where they once sacrificed animals."

"Not in this old town," she said, "here we sacrificed kids. Kids like us."

She turned to him then with tears and came to him, "hold me."

She held on to him.

"It's OK," he said, solicitously, "you're OK, Robyn."

"I'm dying," she said, "I know it."

"You're fighting it – you'll win, you were always a winner."

"We will at least know all the answers then," she said.

Towards what end?

She looked up at him hopelessly, "Marry me again – just for today – let's marry for the day. We may never see each other again anyhow, whatever happens."

He strove to get her meaning.

By "marry" he assumed she meant they should pledge to each other some vow of affection.

"We were little children together," she said, "and we went through all that stuff of adolescence, and we were each other's first love, and I did bear your child – even if you never claimed her."

He had lived as if this child did not exist. He had decided years back that he could not be a father for the child because of the circumstances, his alienation from Robyn, his emotional deficiency. But he'd also made the decision to protect himself from the pain of being held away from the child. If he had once permitted his fatherly feelings free they would have tormented him forever. He had still to keep then unreleased. He had explained it to Robyn on a number of occasions but she had never accepted it. He wouldn't try again.

He knew then for the first time, or faced for the first time, the fact that parenthood had passed him by.

He'd passed through another of the doorways.

He felt no deep affection for her. He felt a sympathetic bond of, probably, a unique kind. He didn't feel caught up in a rush of new affection or restored affections. Perhaps he felt sentimental. What he felt most was recoil from her disease. This continued to make him angry with himself.

"You do still feel something for me?" she asked.

"Yes, a lot."

"Do you feel some love for me?"

"Of course, I do," he lied, softly, searching for some validation of this in whatever fudged and twisted way, yes, there was a unique place for her in his personal history, "Yes, you are in a special place in my heart."

Why not lie? He was frightened that a lie would be detected by the antennae of her unconscious and hurt her more.

"Do you take me," she whispered, "as your spiritual wife for this day and for all the days until we die, from this day forth?"

All he could react to was her extension of the make believe vows from one day to "until death". She was taking pleasure from the pseudo-ecclesiastical wording of it too.

"Yes."

"No," she said with insistence, "say it to me, say the words."

"I take you as my spiritual wife for this day," he wanted to conclude it there.

" . . . 'and for all the days until I die, from this day forth', " she instructed him.

At first he noted that she changed the wording to refer to her death, but when he said it, it made it *his* death, " . . . and for all the days until I die, from this day forth."

"Now ask me."

He was acutely uncomfortable, worried that someone might come into the church and come across them doing this.

"Come on," she said, sensing his reluctance, "do it for me."

"Do you take me as your spiritual husband for this day and for all days until I die, from this day forth?"

"Yes, yes I take you, as my spiritual husband from this day and for all days until I die, from this day forth," she said with a forceful sincerity.

"You may now kiss the bride," she said, smiling and he was ashamed that he could not give himself to the kiss with a wholehearted spirit, instead he changed the kiss into a brotherly kiss but it was enough of a personal kiss for her to believe it to be, for it to suit the prescribed kind of love and the vows of the occasion. He sincerely hoped she would accept it as the kiss she wanted.

Maybe if he'd been able to give her that kiss passionately without withholding, maybe if he had been able to make love to her on that visit to the home town – or at least give her physical embraces of a wholehearted kind, she would have stayed alive. Maybe with her method those gestures by him would have been enough to tip the balance. Maybe she died because of people like him in the world. Maybe he was a negative cell. Or maybe this was egocentric thinking and placed him too unrealistically large and too unrealistically close in her personal galaxy.

He was in the bar at the UN City in Vienna drinking alone when he heard of her death from Mark Madden, an American chemist with the NEA, who had been her lover for some time after the marriage.

Madden and he had also been close for a few months when he'd come to Australia as a young student dropout. They'd remet on the IAEA circuit at times. Despite these close links and their respective distances from their homelands, he and Madden now usually avoided each other in the bar. This night Madden had come across to him and said, "Robyn died this morning, I thought you mightn't have heard."

Why would Madden think that? But, yes, he hadn't heard.

"God," he said, "that's rotten."

He felt a real sadness and a regret for her now permanent absence from his life, or to be precise, the "absent presence" she'd been in his life since they'd separated.

"She was a sweet, sweet person, a very special sort of human being," Madden said, as they had a drink together. That sort of talk, he thought, was why he didn't drink with Madden.

"I knew her as a giggling hockey-playing schoolgirl," he said to Madden, "that is my enduring memory." It was a way of asserting the superiority of his knowing of her over Madden's knowing of her. Two male egos still clashing like stags over her dead body.

"She was essentially a poetic person."

"Poetic? I never saw her as poetic. I didn't see that side of her." Nor did he believe it.

"It wasn't a 'side of her' it was the whole damned person."

"I'm not doubting you Mark, just that I knew a much different Robyn. How do you mean poetic anyhow?"

"I mean, man, that she wrote poetry."

He and Madden had once been really close and now it was nearly all animal antipathy.

"Robyn wrote poetry?"

"She had poems in magazines. Yes."

He was surprised by this and resented Madden knowing and his not knowing.

Privately he still felt his relationship to Robyn to be superior to whatever she'd had with Madden, but he was finding it impossibly disorienting to believe that this self-important, unnaturally fit, tomato juice drinking chemist in the tartan check trousers and black jacket, could have been a lover of a girl he had once been married to and shared innocence with. He noted alcoholically that he was now released from his secret vow to her in the hometown church. Not that the vow carried any obligations but it had from time to time, invaded his consciousness in an ill-defined way, suggesting obligations which he could not discover.

Nor could he match this guy Madden with the guitar-playing gentle American youth he'd known in those years before. It seemed wasteful of nature to have put all that growing into that guitar-playing youth only for it to come out as the NEA chemist, Madden.

"When was it that you had an affair with her?" He thought he might as well drop niceties and delve into matters he'd always left unexamined. Or maybe it was information he'd once had and which his mind had not held.

"Robyn and I did not have an 'affair'. "

"I didn't mean to demean it."

He did wish to demean it.

"As you know it was after you two had split. I had two periods of loving Robyn – in New York years ago in the old peace movement days with SANE and then again much later in Lisbon when she was stringing for

the Herald-Tribune. We were very close then in Lisbon."

We-were-very-close-in-Lisbon.

"And I became very fond of your daughter Chris."

"She hardly qualifies as my daughter."

"Hell man – face up to yourself – she's your daughter. She's living with some guy old enough to be her father – if you're in anyways interested – out in the midwest somewhere."

"Robyn said she was OK." He didn't want to know about the child. People shouldn't tell him about the child. He could not afford to know about the child.

"Hell she is."

They sat there in their own silences.

He tried to remain sociable. He had no bond with his biological daughter. They'd had nothing to do with each other since her birth. He maybe would come to regret this but now he felt nothing for her state, no inclination to try to make a bond with her. Impossible. Would she come seeking her 'real' father one day and go away bewildered and disappointed that he was not a mythical father but simply a crumbling, solitary international civil servant who'd failed to become a writer, who drank too much? A man of too little feeling. That wasn't true. He wept weekly. But for what did he weep? He was perhaps, though, someone who did not know how to live properly, he would tell her.

"I told her to try everything – she said she'd given up chemotherapy. I told her to have conventional therapy and alternative therapy at the same time."

"That was bad advice, friend. She wanted faith not smartarsed advice. The last thing she needed was to be steered back to invasive therapy."

He should have known that Madden would have been that sort of person. He did hope though that he strengthened Robyn's will. Or was that wrong? Should he have instead argued more strongly against the hocus pocus? Maybe that was his true offence against her. Not challenging her irrationality strongly enough.

Madden went on, "She had to go for it, health and disease, the whole caboodle. Wasn't it Mann who said that disease is simply love transformed. She had to turn the disease back into love."

"I thought that maybe self-help was the disease disguised. Disease disguised as therapy. Neurosis pretending to be the doctor?"

"She was trying self-love – I don't see that as disease."

"Well we know now she was either on the wrong therapy or she didn't have enough self-love."

"Or she began too late after being screwed about with cobalt 60."

"I thought you were a man of science."

"I am a scientist and that's why I'm open to new strategies. I know we don't know it all, Sean."

Madden was one of the few people in his life who still called him Sean. A left-over part of their former intimacy, Madden had forgotten that Sean was not the name he went by.

"Did you encourage her to try the other therapies?"

"Yes, I did. I put her on to the Simonton technique."

"You filled her full of crap in other words."

"Don't call it crap when you know fuck-all about it."

"It is crap and she's dead to prove it."

Alcohol was making him reckless.

"I take strong exception to that remark."

"Do what you bloody well like with it."

Again they lapsed into their own silences, but both with increased pulse rates and broken breathing.

He then recalled something from his marriage and felt sickened by the recall. He had not thought about it since that time. It had not come to him during their reunion in the home town.

It was in the collapsing days of the marriage or just before when they had been trying to restore its zest. Or maybe he'd really given up and hadn't cared what happened. He'd intimidated or inveigled her into sexual games including an episode with a whip. Now that he looked back on it, knowing also more about himself, he had wanted to be the whipped one but had in fact whipped her. She'd gone along with it all and responded to it as sex play but it hadn't helped the relationship. Probably because they'd got it back to front – that is, if she really had any such inclinations residing in her personality and had wanted to whip him. She was happier though with things close to the orthodox. He wasn't sure how much the games had been created out of frustration, rage, about their blocked and dulled relationship. But the thought which pushed itself into his mind now there in the UN bar in Vienna was a remark she'd made after one of those nights. She'd said apologetically that she wished she were "better at it", but that she'd been frightened of being whipped on the breasts because she feared that it could give her cancer. He'd denied this possibility – on no knowledge whatsoever. He now knew that a blow can cause cancer. Not that they'd been exchanging 'blows' or really striking each other with any force. At the time he'd laughed at her for equating sexual deviance with sickness and cancer as the punishment for dabbling with evil. He wished he'd sought her forgiveness about this before she died.

"God I loved that woman," Madden said, with an even more emphatic American sincerity, fuelled probably by the tequilla that he was now drinking, having switched from tomato juice. Having drunk down the tequilla and ordered another immediately, as if the speed of this drinking publicly proved his grief. Then he said, "And she was damned bright – one of the brightest women I've met." This was said in an affirmative way, as if Madden was 'pulling' himself up out of the grief.

He wished Madden would piss off and leave him free to dwell on her death in his own maudlin way. And

he didn't want to be in the UN bar. It was too brightly lit, too much a bar of publicly acceptable behavior, a bar to be in after-work not after after-work. Madden was the wrong person to be with.

"Oh come on Madden whatever she was she was many good things but she wasn't bright in that sense. She was a very good journalist but she was not intellectual. At times I found her painfully banal."

"You callous bastard – I ought to sock you."

Sock you. High school language.

Sock you.

He wouldn't mind a fist fight with Madden there in the 'school' bar. Turbulence and disorder would discharge his frustrated urge to be maudlin.

But no, the institutionalised setting had them both in its command.

He stood up, grunted a goodbye to Madden, put down a pocket full of schillings and left to go back into Vienna. To an old bar. To the grand bar of the Imperial where he might be grandly maudlin. As he walked out in the night air to the train station he said to Robyn out there in the cosmos, "you were a bright burning flame of a girl Robyn and you were for a time my passion but oh why did you go out with guys like Madden?"

Or guys like him. But she hadn't gone with him when he was a 'guy', she had gone with him when he was a boy.

The train took him across the Danube.

He had another thought, "She went with guys like Madden therefore I am a guy like Madden."

Ah, the time of self-laceration. If he couldn't be maudlin he could be self-lacerating.

No, she would not have been involved with him if she'd met him as an adult. Or would she? What was the difference between Madden and him – both solitary men adrift in an international community – community?

He had great personal power as a youth in that small town, a student prince, his imitation of flamboyance, his curious, neurotic energy. Now something of a drunk, a failed writer, a 'co-ordinator' of reports.

At the first drink in the Imperial he observed that he was not a "guy like Madden". He was a guy who could perceive the possibility that he was a guy like Madden and fear it. He was therefore not a guy like Madden. Madden was not sitting in the UN bar fearing that he was like him. Madden had no doubts about his nature.

Sometime during the evening back at his hotel he tried to call his ex-girlfriend in London but a rough male street-voice, maybe West Indian, answered and hung up. That relationship was hopelessly corrupted by fantasy and beyond his comprehension for the time. He rang Belle back in Australia but she was not able to participate in his maudlin mourning of his ex-wife and suggested he go to sleep.

He went to bed wishing that he had never known his ex-wife, only his wife. He wished he'd known only the hockey-playing girl who was to become his wife.

CHRISTOPHER

by Kris Hemensley

A story (the little boy's classroom debut within a story (the other community) within a story (his mother's magic tales)): a dreamlike autobiographical construction for both writer & artist.

This book is published in a limited edition of 500 from which 50 are signed with three original prints and all are numbered.
A: 1 to 50 = @ $75, B: 51 to 500 = @ $15
from: SWAMP, 14 Flemington St., Flemington 3031, Vic. (03) 376 0621

illustrated by Jiri Tibor Novak

RICHARD FALK

Finding Light

If politics recaptures hope

John Friedmann's "The Politics of Belief", published in Overland 104, aroused the widest interest and discussion, not only in Australia but as far away as Japan. We have received permission to print, for the first time, further contributions to this discussion. Richard Falk is Professor of International Relations at Princeton University, New Jersey USA.

1. *Steps*

I never enjoyed schooling until I wanted to change the world, and then I wanted to learn how to do it. Soon I discovered that no one knew, and that most knowledge associated with formal education was not directly helpful to our prime struggle for survival, for some kind of overall political environment within which life, liberty, and happiness could finally be secured.

As a child in New York City I wanted more than anything to be an athlete. Between the ages of nine and fourteen I experienced World War II, but gently, at a distance, never in doubt about the outcome, only vaguely aware of why it was important for our side to win, and with no comprehension of the suffering that went with the heroic exploits described nightly on the radio. I knew no one during pre-adolescent years who was killed or wounded by the war. Its horrors never invaded American society as a whole. Even the atomic attacks at the end of the war seemed more like one more confirmation of our potency, of little significance beyond their assurance that we in the United States were permanent victors. In retrospect, my absence of compassion, or even concern, for the victims of this devastating war seems more striking, and difficult to explain.

My father was a lawyer, with a passion for naval history. His best experience was associated with service as a naval officer in World War I on the staff of an admiral who headed the Atlantic Fleet. Later, he sought in many small ways to remain connected to those glory years. He would visit his shipmates, and not only gave the name "Anderson" to honor his naval superior, but succeeded in having a destroyer named after him early in the 1940s. Beyond this my father grasped the significance of the rise of Japanese sea power, predicting a Japanese attack literally hours before it occurred on 7 December 1941. I remember this preoccupation vividly, and with it, his rather intense concern with the subversive menace posed by communists. I grew up in an atmosphere of hostility to the social experiments of the New Deal, and a real conviction that a welfare state was a step onto a slippery, steep trail that would lead to socialism, and then to some kind of Red-tinged alien takeover.

Deep into adolescence I worried about only my private circle of concerns: sports, girls, friends, finding some way to have a career. Midway through college I decided that learning could be enjoyable, and that I could do more than expected by teachers almost as easily as when earlier I had crammed desperately for exams with the sole objective of scraping by. Yet I had no agenda beyond trying to find some wider faith to live by. Without a real sense of direction, without the world or struggle as a context, I went to law school hoping to defer as long as possible any serious life choice. While there, the impractical lured me most, a resistance against a vocational future, and I studied international law and legal philosophy, along with Indian legal traditions and even took on the related challenge of Sanskrit for a couple of years.

But still, the course of global developments did not perturb or interest me greatly. I was aware of films and science fiction tales about the end of the world, but I never lay awake worrying that human survival was

seriously threatened. How that sense of danger entered my consciousness I cannot recall. At some point, I began to feel that the only thing worth doing with my life was to join with those who insisted on changing the way the world was organised politically. Of course, such an ambition was and is ludicrously grandiose, recalling childhood fantasies of great orations delivered to huge and responsive audiences massed in grand urban plazas. I suppose that it is necessary to be slightly deluded to take on large public issues, although I have softened the sense of absurdity, at least for myself, by also taking an active part in immediate political controversies that were alive in the America of the 1950s, and subsequently: especially, resisting anti-Communist zeal associated with McCarthyism and lending aid and comfort to the emergent civil rights movement.

But for me the Vietnam War was the formative political experience. By professional accident – or fated incident – my first invited academic paper was on the topic of foreign intervention. I was thrilled to deliver the paper at Brussels, at a sort of academic sideshow during the world fair, but startled to be attacked by a Hungarian participant who denounced me because I had criticized the Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956, and as such, was acting as a US propagandist. I pointed out in response that most of the paper was devoted to a criticism of the American intervention in Lebanon which had occured only months earlier in 1958. After the session my Hungarian critic came and apologized, informing me sheepishly that he had been instructed to denounce the paper back in Budapest where his superiors evidently assumed from the title that any American discussing foreign intervention in the late 1950s would surely be delivering an anti-Soviet tirade.

Opposing US intervention in Vietnam came naturally. Somehow, the American ideals of self-determination and anti-colonialism had become real for me. I identified with the underdog in America and overseas, although without at the same time being drawn to any of the obvious solutions, and intuitively believed that the world would neither be safe nor pleasant until the causes of misery associated with oppression and exploitation were removed. The lies told by "the best and the brightest" to keep the war in Vietnam going made me convinced that the problem was less one of foreign policy than world order and that, at any rate, liberals had little more than conservatives to offer on these matters of underlying importance.

So long as powerful states waged war at their discretion it would be difficult to secure the peace. Further, more and more governments, also, turned in various ways against their own peoples. The fiction of 'national interests' seemed a cruel deception. It even became evident that powerful governments were not serving their own peoples' well-being when they built up huge armaments, intervened in distant lands, ignored human rights at home and abroad, insisted that large non-accountable intelligence agencies were essential for national security, and generally distanced themselves from their own citizenry.

It took years for me to realize that the kind of outlook that fed the arms race and the militarization of the world was deeply embedded in the pattern of special interests that controlled the modern state. So deeply embedded, indeed, that normal democratic methods to achieve change were becoming outmoded in the war/peace area. The rituals of elections remain important, but political parties and representative institutions (legislature) have become creatures of the state, largely unresponsive to shifts in popular mood. As a consequence, liberal beliefs in gradual change, in the persuasive force of reason and education, and in the problem-solving capacities of democratic process have lost much of their credibility in the face of statist encroachment upon civil society.

But the mood of disillusionment rests on additional factors, as well. As corporate growth proceeds it promotes the ideology of technological inevitability, and exerts its influence on the state apparatus to this end. Despite declining security arising from military modernization ever since 1945, the logic of modernization strengthens its hold on the political imagination. Not only weaponry, but social existence as well, falls beneath the sway of this veil of technological determinism. Uncritical enthusiasm affirms robots, computers, video education without ever pausing to consider the dystopian consequences, or acting to prevent them. We cheerfully spend billions on space exploration while our cities and their inhabitants rot away.

What is more, the traditional liberating energies of the political Left have evidently been spent. Socialism as a creed remains attractive, but as an orientation toward the acquisition and exercise of power it has generally not delivered. Either the violence relied upon to prevail in a struggle for power has carried over into the governing process to reproduce oppression in some new form, as in the Soviet Union and its East European protegé states, or it has introduced its radical vision of social justice while playing the constitutional game, and rendered its movement vulnerable to a bloody backlash, as happened most conspicuously in the transition from Allende to Pinochet in Chile of the 1970s.

Neither reliance on violence, nor its disavowal, seems convincingly sustainable in the pursuit of a just and peaceful society, and by extension, a just and peaceful world. This immobilizing dilemma is also evident in liberation struggles. Albert Camus shared his anguish over this dilemma by withdrawing from participation in the Algerian war of independence. But withdrawing from history is no solution either, although in specific situations it may at least spare an individu-

al complicity in immorality.

With such knowledge, then, how can we participate in a manner that is at once constructive and effective? My emphasis is increasingly upon the revitalization of democracy by embodying values and visions in the relationships, commitments, and enactments of everyday life.

2. *Forebodings*

When we consider to whom the future belongs there are a variety of sensible answers, each of which seems compelling without being comprehensive. Our Western sensibilities tend to be reductionist (seeking always the single leverage-point for the moment, as Marx insisted class ownership of the means of production to be, or Freud claimed for the suppression of desire on behalf of the rational ordering compulsions of civilization), and resist the understanding that flows from plural truths. Our either/or Occidental knowledge needs to be enriched by the appreciation that many, but not all, interpretations of what is happening can be simultaneously true.

A Sufi tale expresses this type of wisdom. Two persons cannot settle an argument, and approach the village mullah, venerated for his judgement and fairness. He listens to the first party express his grievance and responds, "Yes, I have heard you, and you are right." The second party is then invited to state his position, after which the mullah responds as before, "Having heard you, I am persuaded, you are right also." The mullah's wife placed by the culture in the background asserts herself at this stage to cut through an apparent Gordian Knot of confusion: "You fool, how can they both be right." The mullah responds quietly, not displaced from his serenity by this challenge, "Don't worry, dear one, you too are right!" To live with this lack of closure requires that we acknowledge contradictory features in the complexity that composes the reality we confront. Yet to intervene at all with the power of an interpretation entailing action is to deny complexity the possibility of overwhelming us with uncertainty and formlessness.

Surveying the implications of the present tendencies now shaping our political existence, discloses some dark visions. Let us consider these as establishing a setting for more positive action. Without this, positive visions seem mere expressions of desire, without relevance, lacking in realism.

The Future Belongs to the Technocrats. There is a strong disposition to give up on the world, but to rely on technology to do the hard work of the civilization. As matters get worse on the planet, technocrats shed their scientific pretensions, and claim for their solutions a kind of transcendence that fills the normative vacuum left by the death of mainstream religion. Ronald Reagan's espousal of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, or "Star Wars") is a chilling illustration of this hold that technocrats have achieved over the political imagination of the culture.

What is remarkable here is not the fantastic claim on resources for a new line of innovational weaponry in space, but the receptivity of society to a utopian approach to the challenge of nuclear war. Without any sensible expectation that a defensive shield can ever protect society from the threat of such weapons, the adoption of SDI as national policy has proceeded with relatively little resistance.

What does this tell about ourselves? That we cannot find an acceptable rational solution to the problem of peace in the nuclear age. But more than this, that to propose an escape must assume a specific form. To espouse total disarmament, as have the more rational Russians in the Gorbachev era, is to appear propagandistic. To call for world government is to invite derision as naive. Yet to propose SDI is to embark on an exciting voyage to the future that offers hope, or so we are led to believe.

Ronald Reagan, with his charismatic capacity to express the unconscious strivings of American society, has packaged a utopia in saleable form. He has drawn upon the technocratic idolatry that suggests that anything can be done if the resources are put at the disposal of the makers of things and the manipulators of information.

What is more, the power structure is receptive. Militarists welcome SDI because it provides a way to build up enough defence capabilities to increase the disposition by leaders in the United States to threaten or use nuclear weapons, whether in a time of crisis or when dealing with any source of challenge other than that coming from Moscow. And the research establishment is generally overjoyed, finding ample mandate for proceeding fully funded in a variety of directions of inquiry for years and years.

SDI takes on a great significance when we consider that it revives the whole 'faith' of the Enlightenment that science and technology would eventually deliver human society from the torments of scarcity and even mortality. Genetic engineering holds out the promise of abundance of resources and even of everlasting life. And so while we confront the possibility of Armageddon (often a dark vision that co-exists, as with Reagan, with such technocratic delusions of emancipation as that of SDI), we also suppose that perseverance on the path of modernization can produce the sort of miracles for humankind that were rejected as mere superstition in the early modern period centuries ago. Another variant of aberrant technological imagination is the literal supposition that the crowding of the planet can be handled by mass migrations to space colonies established in orbit beneath earth and sun.

Even sensitive students of human evolution can subscribe to this sort of technocratic ideology. The anthro-

pologist, Peter Farb, grounds his optimism about the future in such faith. He writes that "The sweep of hominid history provides a basis for believing that modernized humans will invent new techniques to meet new needs, as they always have in the past."[1] And even more declaratively, "If we can survive a few great hazards that face us in the coming decades, then I forecast the ushering in of a new era expressive as never before of the human potential."[2]

Such faith in modernization is mainly encountered in the West, or with those who are closely aligned to the West. It corresponds with the quest for new forms of imperial order to overcome the threats and losses of control and resources associated with the collapse of colonialism in the decades after World War II. More profoundly, this faith is a continuation of that grave mistake of supposing that human society can successfully separate itself from nature and sacred power. If the future belongs to the technologists, we face a permanent prospect of regimentation and catastrophic adjustment – that is, if all goes well!

The Future Belongs to the Traditionalists. In defiance to the modernizing energies of the West, are disruptive reactions that see chaos as our planetary destiny, "the Beirutisation of the world". There is thus a great surge of fundamentalist claims to restore human society to a simple clear path of traditional virtue, sanctified by revealed truth. In this conception, perhaps most vividly exemplified in the Islamic Republic of Ayatollah Khomeini, technology and modernism in all its forms is repudiated as authority (although selectively relied upon for tactical purposes) and blamed for corruption of the spirit and exploitation of the body.

Fundamentalism summons the latent energies of society to throw off alien forms of rule and behavior. The Iranian results are quite spectacular on this level. Without weapons or assistance, the fundamentalists banished foreigners and toppled a thousand years of dynastic rule. These achievements build credibility among those dispossessed throughout the Third World, especially where Islam is strong. There is a fundamentalist resonance visible in many different settings, even in the belly of the modernist monster. The success of the Rev. Moon's Unification Church, Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, or even such Eastern cults as those associated with Hare Krishna or Rajneesh, display the many vulnerabilities and cravings that create openings for fundamentalist politics.

To return to such constraining, pre-modern visions of social order with this vehemence inevitably involves a revival of the inquisitorial methods of the past. Those who hold out for greater freedom and a more plural view of human destiny are branded infidels, and rendered fit for an exterminating crusade. Violence is put at the service of dogmatic truth, and human society is imprisoned in traditionalist chains.

The Future Belongs to the Terrorists. Closely connected with both technocrats and traditionalists are those who would gain their ends of order or chaos by means of violence directed at the innocent. Because the West controls information technology, there is a disposition to reserve the opprobrium of terrorism for the weak who strike with viciousness at the rich and strong, most symbolically at such cathedrals of technocracy as modern jetports.

Deep confusions beset our understanding of terrorism. While we castigate Gadaffi and Palestinian groups for their endorsement of terroristic methods, leaders in the West adopt nuclear strategies that could eventuate in total destruction of civilization. On a lesser scale, governments under the cover of 'intelligence' hire and train terrorists to carry out secret missions that have all the features of a terrorist enterprise denounced by the same officials for its barbarism. Consider the willingness of the French Government to send trained agents to blow up the Greenpeace vessel *Rainbow Warrior* because it was obstructing the conduct of atmospheric testing of nuclear devices, by now established scientifically as a source of several forms of radiation sickness throughout the planet. Or consider the efforts by President Reagan to mobilize counter-terrorist righteous indignation while simultaneously calling on Congress to send millions of dollars to the Contras to enable them to go on terrorizing the Nicaraguan countryside at great loss of peasant life.

The spread of terrorism is very dangerous to the spirit of compromise and diversity that makes politics amid conflict tolerable. It lends credibility to violence, to denials of normal freedom, and to the vesting of still more authority in the militarized portions of governments. As we proceed into a world of encounter between technocrats and traditionalists, the political dialogue *on both sides* becomes dominated by the outlook and methods of terrorism. Nothing else seems to get headlines, results.

As a consequence, political actors free themselves to varying degrees from the limiting influence of moral or legal norms. There is a kind of unconditional quality about political struggle that includes the collapse of authority systems. Lebanon since 1975 is as much a warning about the kind of future the world can anticipate if it persists in an unreformed condition as was Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And again, this is a double warning, not only about the surge of violence on the part of the disenfranchised, but also about violence unleashed from modern aircraft and naval vessels raining down bombs, rockets and artillery shells on refugee camps and residential urban areas.

It is worth pondering the degree to which variants of claims to be a chosen people validate recourse to terroristic methods to handle enemies. It is worth considering the correlation in the early 1980s between the use by Americans of 30-35 per cent of the annual con-

sumption of world resources and their providing targets for 30 per cent of the incidents labeled as terrorism. Could there not be important connections between taking more than our share of resources and being prime targets for those who are desperate about their circumstances of poverty and denial?

The Future Belongs to the Ecological Fanatics. It is not only the technocrats, traditionalists, and terrorists that cast their shadow across the future. It is also those who in one way or another believe that it is essential to get rid of the human surplus now consuming resources and occupying space on the planet. Such a disposition, whether filtered through a belief in the invisible hand of the market, the wisdom of Malthus and Darwin, or the ecological implications of "the tragedy of the commons" tends toward the same kinds of relentless social policies that justifies coldness toward the misery and suffering of the poor.

The most articulate advocate of ecological adjustment at the expense of the poor is Garrett Hardin, a biologist with an unflinching willingness to follow through on what is implied by a human population that cannot be contained within the carrying capacity of the earth. While explicitly resisting a clear endorsement of a human liquidation program (not for intrinsic reasons but because it might prove "infectious and addictive", and thereby "bring into existence a positive feedback system that... can destabilize society, bringing on a new Dark Age") Hardin does call for a posture of "attrition."[3] Attrition is meant to encourage a clear-headed realization that letting famines and disease take their course is in the overall human interest.

Hardin, accordingly, repudiates the view that this strain in carrying capacity can be corrected by aid or a more egalitarian approach to resource use. He believes that aid only defers coming to terms with ecological limits and is counterproductive, while asking the rich to reduce their consumption patterns only results in making everyone poor without addressing the issue of surpluses directly. In effect, this kind of ecological fanaticism is both a rationalization for the existing hierarchy and for hardheartedness toward the most helpless victims of current societal and international arrangements. Hardin's "ecolate view" is convinced that the planet would be far better off if it could shed its non-productive poor and, in the process, achieve diminished fertility rates. In practical terms this implies a gigantic race war, including resistance by the poor through whatever weapons are at their disposal. Once again, terrorism beckons.

No longer can the poor and weak be counted upon to be meek, awaiting deliverance in the afterlife or through the cycle of rebirth. While 11,000 French police and troops could subdue the Vietnamese during the colonial period, more than 500,000 American troops backed by over a million South Vietnamese soldiers and by a vast array of modern weaponry were defeated by the mobilized resistance of the Vietnamese populace in the 1970s. Hardin acknowledges that his outlook is likely to give rise to a massive increase in "terrorism and sabotage". To remove the causes of terrorism is for Hardin futile and fatuous. He is convinced that any accommodation of demands will lead victims to escalate their demands without pause, until the old oppressors are reduced to victimhood and themselves resort to terrorism in a "reversal of roles". The ecologist joins forces with the most extreme apologists for state power as Hardin italicizes his final solution – "*the only rational response to terrorism is police action*: it is not perfect but it is the best there is."[4]

As with other modes of coping, this ecolate view rests on undirected violence, and on a racially charged structure of conflict between the white enclaves of post-industrial development and the rest of the world. Even the supposed beneficiaries cannot hopefully contemplate such a future. It is, in my view, a perversion of the ecolate outlook, failing to take values and spiritual identity into account as vital elements of any acceptable human ecology. There is an ecological challenge, of course, but it can be met, if at all, by enlarging our sense of human community and by all of us living within its limits on *some* sustainable basis, not one that is necessarily austere or rigidly egalitarian.

3. *Finding Light*

There are various responses to such grim images of the future. One is to interpret the ascendency of dark tendencies as inevitably culminating in collective disaster, throwing the force of one's imagination into the work of surviving in some post-apocalyptic world of survivors. Among the artistic instances of such post-apocalyptic imagining are Denis Johnson's *Fiskadoro*, the Mad Max series of films, several works of Karlheinz Stockhausen's music, and some of Doris Lessing's late fiction, including *Shikasta* and *Memoirs of a Survivor*.

The citizen pilgrim is unwilling to relinquish the future, and also unwilling to escape the pain of the present by some form of mind/spirit killing expedient, whether drugs, materialist excess, or some form of withdrawal. Instead the citizen pilgrim in diverse ways commits his/her mind/spirit to the imagining and realizing of a desirable future. Yet not as a fantasy, but as a project that can be achieved eventually in space/time. As such it must, at least, seem consistent with the apparent boundaries of human nature, seem grounded in some careful rendering of historical tendencies, and take seriously emergent social forces that might act as bearers of new values and innovative political possibilities.[5]

From many different sources, a citizen pilgrim can take bearings for the journey into the future from the

double tendency in the recent past to discover both the unity of the planet and the grassroots and local opportunities for action (often of resistance) on behalf of humane possibilities. Whether it is a matter of the reflections of earth from space, or the growing effort to construct a variety of planetary information technologies, there is a serious realization now that the destiny of life on earth is shared across boundaries of race, class, nation and sex. Such a cumulative experience establishes the ground for the strengthening of a global unity. This is reinforced by scientific support for the 'Gaia Hypothesis', the sense of earth as a resilient and adaptive living system that has extraordinary built-in adjustment capabilities.

The refusal of many of the most extreme victims of existing structures to accept as fate their misery, creates an array of concrete possibilities for action, both locally and transnationally. Whether it be a matter of rock musicians raising 'live aid' to relieve famine in Ethiopia, or Japanese Buddhists beating their peace drums at the courthouses of America when nuclear resisters are put on trial, there is an evolving series of peace networks that dramatize various types of transnational and local bonding. These connections sustained by dynamic activity gradually *recentre* our understanding and experience of political loyalty and patriotism. The citizen pilgrim, above all else, gives allegiance to a country in the future whose contours can only be barely discerned upon the horizons of his/her imagination. This country has no *physical* presence in the world of today, yet it already enjoys a powerful psychological status that shapes and satisfies.

To grasp these possibilities more firmly some specific sources of inspiration can be identified, and explored.

There is awaiting our attention a rich tapestry of experience and wisdom contained in the torments and fulfilments associated with the many narrative histories of indigenous peoples all over the planet. These peoples have been swept aside and generally brutalized to make way for 'civilization' and 'progress', their forms of knowledge scorned and disregarded, their remnants assigned to concentration camps called reservations and their public image sustained as something quaint or, at most, as an origin that has been superceded.

Only recently have we discovered that the ecological sensitivity of indigenous peoples was a kind of wisdom lost and abandoned during the century and a half of industrialism that has recently brought the human experience to the brink of its own destruction. Post-industrial survival and positive development depends on recovering, if in transmuted form, pre-industrial capabilities for the generally harmonious co-evolution of the human and natural environment. Chief Seattle in 1854, already sensing the doomed destiny of his people, expressed the ecological imperative with striking, assured clarity: "This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the children of the earth. We did not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves."

In our infatuation with materialist and technological conceptions of progress, with their linear imagery, we lost the more fundamental cyclical understanding of recurrence that is associated with sustaining life on the planet. Preserving even now what remains of indigenous peoples, and restoring their position as legitimate presences on earth, is one way of creating post-industrial ecological awareness, as well as sustaining the kind of diversity that adds to the strength of the earth as an ecosystem seeking the forms and practices that will assure survival and positive development.

A further source of orienting wisdom arises from the complex realization that the torments of our present circumstance may express above all else a loss of balance between masculine and feminine energies as embodied in societal forms.[6] The secular expression of this new cultural rearrangement is a movement by women for various types of equality and dignity, and there is no doubt that masculine ascendency entailed cruel and varied types of oppression directed at women. Yet for our purposes, more significant than the redressing of past wrongs, is the potentiality implicit in this realization that women, as prime bearers and guardians of the feminine, can help enlarge our sense of political possibility, especially with respect to the achievement of order, the exertion of authority, and the handling of conflict.

It should not be supposed that these explorations are only taking place in the West. Not long ago the President of Iran, while on a state visit to Zimbabwe, insisted that no women be seated at the head of the table during an official dinner. The leader of Zimbabwe, recalling the heroic role of women during the country's liberation struggle, sent the Iranian visitor home rather than accede to such fundamentalist demands. And in the Philippines, the aged dictator Fernando Marcos insisted that his female opponent in the 1986 presidential elections was not a proper rival for political leadership because "a woman's place is in the bedroom". (Note that such regressive patriarchy does not even give the woman the freedom of the home, but confines her figuratively, at least, to the bedroom.) It is worth observing that these recent incidents reveal the linkage between the patriarchal view of order and regressive responses to the present challenges by way of traditionalism and statist oppression.

A third, more problematic, source of inspiration for the citizen pilgrim arises from the gropings of religious institutions and traditions for a renewal of their spiritual authority. Above all else, this move toward renewal involves an entry on to the terrain of human struggle on the side of victims of the present arrangements of

power and authority. As such, it breaks those culturally diverse relationships of partnership that had been built up between church and state in recent centuries. Whether it is liberation theology in Latin America, the underpinnings of *Solidarnse* in Poland, providing 'illegal' sanctuary to Central American immigrants in US churches, or the drafting and dissemination of pastoral letters on nuclear weapons and poverty, there is evident a sense that the integrity of the religious path increasingly depends on directly challenging statism and secularism, even if this means entering into arenas of turmoil and struggle.

In this regard, the efforts by the Sandinistas to bring Marxism and progressive Christianity together in a new type of socialist polity was a daring experiment, although one that seems largely spoiled by the United States' effort to destroy such a threatening type of politics, an effort that has required the Nicaraguan government to defend its right to exist by shifting resources and energies from economic and cultural to military activities. A resulting dynamic of militarization has for the present, at least, blurred the revolutionary achivements of the Sandinistas. It is to be expected, of course, that resistance will work both ways, and that the custodians of the old order will use the means at their disposal, often violent and destructive, to eliminate any impression that it is possible to build a different kind of future, especially a future that rejects their primacy.

The citizen pilgrim is not easily diverted, nor is he/she impatient. We cannot know how close to the horizon of desire we now find ourselves, but we do realize that the self-vindicating possibilities for acting in deference to that future exist in the here-and-now. The more we take seriously our own patriotism to the future we aspire to achieve, the more likely it is to happen, and sooner, possibly sooner than we can now believe credible. To what extent the cultures of the world have been incubating such possibilities of positive adjustment is almost impossible to assess as a factor. We do have considerable evidence that revolutionary possibilities beyond the wildest expectations of spectators often lie latent within a given constellation of social forces. William Irwin Thompson locates our situation in the dynamics of transition more cautiously, yet confidently: ". . . I can see that we seem a long way off from a new political Enlightenment. It would appear we are more in a period like the Renaissance than like the eighteenth century; a period of new intuitions in poetry, art, and philosophy more than a period of consolidation into political form."[7]

Perhaps a leader with a particular feeling for these concealed possibilities, or some illuminating incident that discloses the oppressive and vulnerable character of the dominant forms, will emerge to confound those who suppose the future is determined by the dominant trend-lines of the present. It might be helpful to consider such lives as that of Buddha or Jesus, of Gandhi or Martin Luther King, or social movements that succeeded against the perceived odds of the day, whether the movement to abolish slavery or to challenge royal prerogatives or to overthrow the colonial order or to rid the scene of oppressive political and economic arrangements.

The citizen pilgrim finds hope by considering the past as well as by peering ahead. But even more so, the exhiliration of acting in solidarity with others, on behalf of a future that unifies and preserves on all levels of our being, validates and vindicates his/her questing.

ENDNOTES

1. *Humankind*, p. 442.
2. Ibid. p. 443.
3. "An Ecolate View of the Human Predicament", Alternatives, VII: 242-262, at 253-54.
4. Ibid. p. 260.
5. One recent imaginative statement of a citizen pilgrim is William Irwin Thompson's *Pacific Shift* (1986).
6. Cf. Edward Whitmont, *The Return of the Goddess.*
7. Thompson, *Pacific Shift*, p. 181.

FORTHCOMING IN OVERLAND

Elizabeth Jolley on the writing of Peter Cowan.
Michael Keon on Sidney Nolan at Seventy.
Desmond O'Grady on Gino Nibbi.
Howard Daniel on his meetings with Egon Kisch.
Hank Nelson on a New Guinea village.
Jeffrey Grey on History and the Vietnam War.
Bob Burns on Xavier Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country.*
Graeme Kinross Smith on Bruce Dawe.
Jack Hodgins: A Canadian in Australia

KEVIN BROPHY

Masterpiece

I

I come home with pieces of Picasso under my fingernails. I scrape the paint out carefully and drop it in a jar labelled PICASSO, WOMAN WITH HEAD. Art is one of the passions of my life. Art is our time's last real connection with beauty and mystery. And it doesn't matter, really, that Picasso couldn't paint fingers properly to save his life.

Though my official title here is Security Guard, I like to think of myself as a kind of guide, who can help to break down some of the unrealistic visions people have of art. I have become interested in one particular woman.

I met her first in front of that Monet. I walked up to her and stood beside her, hoping she hadn't noticed the missing parts in the leafy tops of Monet's trees. "Don't mind a bit of Monet myself," I said.

She didn't speak, she just swayed, as though the painting had such force she couldn't stand upright.

"You like this stuff?" I said.

She looked at me then, and said she wouldn't call it 'stuff'.

That was our first conversation. Perhaps I went a little too far too quickly. It's difficult to know how far is too far at first, and this, I suppose, is where the art of life comes in.

The next time I saw her she nodded to me. It was only a week later. People don't usually make weekly visits to the gallery. Even the most enthusiastic art-lovers come only once every six or eight weeks. I was very surprised. She stood in front of that Monet again, and swayed.

"I suppose you wish you were paid to stand here and look at it all day like I am," I said.

She said she didn't think she could bear to be near such perfection for too long.

"You get used to it," I told her. "And, anyway, they're only haystacks."

I think she's too reverential about this Monet. You know, he didn't care about people. There's a couple in the paddock there, but he treated human figures no better than he treated the weeds and the grass in his paintings. But this isn't the most scandalous thing we could say about Monet, oh no. He was a fake. And a liar. He lied for the sake of his reputation – that obsession of artists. You see, once he'd made his name in the art world as *the* painter of light and natural effects, he obscured the fact that the major work on his canvases took place in his studio, under artificial light, at night. This Monet was so concerned with his reputation that he'd even boast to journalists and critics about the extremes of weather he endured in the pursuit of his art so that people have come to believe he'd paint in driving snow. And the more successful he became, the more time he'd spend going over and over his 'impressions' in his cosy studio.

Without taking her eyes from the painting she said, "It has depth, it goes right through what he's painting into a world beyond mere pictures."

Deep? I know how deep the thing is. More than two and a half centimetres at its deepest, and for an oil painting that's quite a few layers. As a matter of fact Monet's probably the easiest of them all to scrape away because he used this 'touch' technique, just touching the painting with his brushes, leaving odd shaped marks of color, building them above each other until the whole scene vibrates like something about to fall apart. Of course, he had his motives for working in this way. HE WANTED TO PREVENT PEOPLE FROM SEEING HOW IT'S DONE. That's the other obsession with artists: Secrecy. Artists don't want their techniques stolen, their inspirations copied, their style clichéd by a thousand amateurs. And in this, I am ultimately Monet's ally. Even though my scrapings will, by imperceptible stages, remove all his studio work and reveal the original hurried outdoor impressions, even those original layers will go into my labelled jars so that one day someone will

look at the bare canvas and wonder what it was Monet did. His methods will become the secrets he wanted them to be.

As I stood next to her I could feel a communication between our bodies right through my uniform.

When I saw her again, a week later, I treated her like an old friend because in a way we had been linked by this painting.

"Oh, you," she said. "Hello."

She looked back at the painting.

"Is it still the same as it was last month?" she asked suddenly.

"What do you mean? Do you think we scribble on them?"

"No. It's a silly question, I know, but up there in that corner near the tops of the trees, there's not so much blue as I remember. It used to flicker when I half closed my eyes. Now it's just yellow. I don't understand."

"It's your memory. Memories love to improve artworks. Look, I've been wanting to ask you to meet me after work, I think you're someone after my own heart. Though I do think you need to hear a few home truths about Monet."

"I think I would like to talk to the curator, or somebody, about that painting."

"Look, this is my sector of the gallery. I've been wandering around here for three years. Yellow was one of his favorite colors. There was never any blue in that corner.

"I know what I saw."

"Yes, yes. It's always like this. World famous critics come here and make the same complaints. Their favorite picture doesn't look the way their memory painted it. Let's face facts, in our minds we're all better painters than Monet. The memory gets carried away, it's not to be trusted. Do you live alone? I really would like to get to know you better."

She looked at me again. Her eye shadow was blue, and her eyes, well her eyes were a match for mine.

"Yes, I do live alone."

"Well, then, let me tell you . . . "

"And I live alone deliberately."

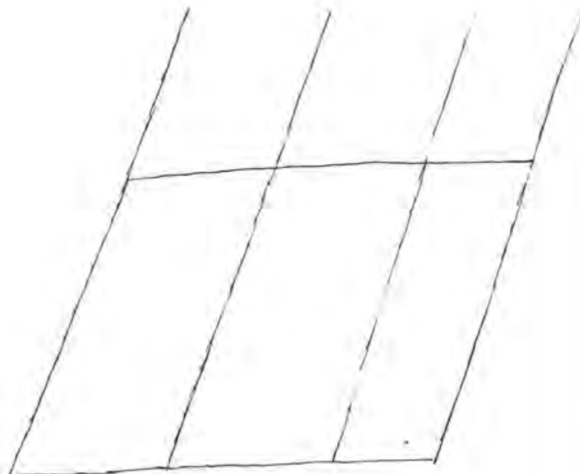
I accepted this. Of course, these days more and more women are discovering the advantages and disadvantages of independence.

"I do too!" I said, to let her know how independent I am, and that we have this in common. "But I like to meet a good mind once in a while. Helps to keep me sane."

"I want to speak to the curator, or the manager, whoever's in charge here."

One day, I wanted to say to her, one day it'll be me who's the curator of these masterpieces.

"Yellow, blue, it won't make any difference to him, he's a businessman. He makes his decisions about art



with the help of a calculator. You'll find him on the next floor, through the door marked Private.''

Later that afternoon the curator did come down to look at his painting. He looked at the Monet carefully and then he looked at me. He was embarrassed, I suppose, to be caught looking at his own art works. He hurried back to his office. So that's the end of that little episode, I thought.

But on the following Monday we were called to a staff meeting where the curator told us we're having all our paintings examined by a group of academics who will make thorough written descriptions of every painting. We were instructed to rope off any areas used by the academics and provide them with a desk in front of each painting they examined. He said that once we have these descriptions filed away it will become much more difficult for anyone to interfere with the paintings without the directors knowing exactly what has been done.

Of course, there were some spectacular arguments when the experts had a good look at the Picasso Woman. Ignoring his lack of drawing skill, they argued over whether the paint was once thicker in the area near her hair. But no one had ever sat down and written an exhaustive description of the painting. Photos were, of course, misleading in the matter of color and paint thickness.

Meticulously each painting was translated into words, centimetre by centimetre. Sometimes an ingenious scribe would strike upon a method for graphing or charting the shifts in color, but these advances seemed to carry with them problems of such magnitude that they threatened to undermine the project. After weeks of argument, realising that their descriptions could only be rough approximations to the real thing, not much more useful than the old method of photography, a lot of early enthusiasm for the work faded, and it became a clerical task, typically endless.

It was discovered, of course, that certain frames had been tampered with so that their glass could be removed at will. This caused a great deal of excitement among those who were of the school of thought that the paintings had been altered somehow. There were those who said extra paint had been added, and the evidence they brought to bear was sometimes overwhelming. I began to suspect there might be another security guard here actually adding to what I was taking away. I watched everyone carefully.

Since most of the paintings with doubtful surfaces were located in my sector I was treated to several interviews with the curator. He asked me if I'd seen anyone visiting the gallery paying special attention to any of these canvases. I told him that there was a young woman I'd been speaking to in front of the Monet haystacks. I had to say this. I'd been observed talking to the woman. It would have looked as though I was trying to protect her if I didn't mention her visits. Of course, I felt rather low about putting suspicion onto her.

Eventually I was told that if I wanted to take my annual leave immediately I was welcome to take twice as long as usual on half pay. Several others were given the same offer, and I suppose they were waiting to see if the imagined interferences would cease when certain of us were absent.

2

As I scrape my plate at the end of the meal and reflect on what a success the night has been, the thought comes to me that she has been angling for this invitation all along because she's been assigned to investigate me as one of the suspects.

''That was quite a meal,'' she said, innnocently enough.

''Yes. And now I suppose it would cap the night off perfectly if I showed you my best pieces.''

''You collect art?''

''Oh yes. In small amounts.''

I want to tell her everything. I am experiencing the almost unbearable tension between the desire for secrecy and the desire for recognition.

''I think I love you,'' I say.

''That's ridiculous. You don't know anything about me.''

''I know how you feel about Monet, and that's enough for me.''

I direct her down the hallway towards my bedroom. As I lead her into my room the thought comes to me that what I have done here is not just to dismantle masterpieces, but to reveal them for what they are in a way no artist or critic or curator has dared.

''You want to see my best pieces, don't you?''

She's not listening to what I say. She sips her glass of wine and looks around my bedroom. She's really too young to appreciate a lot of this. She wears a loose white shirt over tight jeans tonight. I think she's dressed too casually for this occasion. She doesn't seem to understand the strong feelings I have. My collection will break her reserve.

When I unlock the cupboard and switch on the spotlights my jars are displayed in all their carefully arranged confusion. Each jar is in its place with its label displayed, and within each jar are the glittering scraps of color from the chips of paint that go to make up each masterpiece. I admit this method of presentation means a certain loss of form, but it does make the enormous advance of allowing us to see every bit of paint from every side.

And in any case, since Kandinsky broke away from the object, and Rothko took painting beyond form, this

matter of depiction has become an irritation in art. My method of collecting is really the next logical progression.

She picks up a jar and shakes it. She's stunned by this three-dimensional view of the paint.

"Monet's blue," I say.

"Monet's blue!" she says. "You took Monet's blue from the tops of the trees!"

"It's more a matter of revelation than taking."

"I want to ring the police."

"Don't be silly. They're philistines."

"But it's a crime. Surely it's a crime. It's theft. And vandalism."

"Modernism, really."

What can I say to her? The effect is too much. This is what great art can do to the psyche when it's revealed in its true power. She seems hysterical. I might have to lie her down.

"You've taken bits of Picasso too! And Rembrandt!"

"School of Rembrandt. The underpainting isn't really up to the standard of the master."

"You're a mad man."

"Yes, yes. I expected people to say these sort of things."

She's determined to hand me over to some detective whose interest in art probably wouldn't go beyond coloring in identi-kit portraits.

"You don't realise," I tell her. "It's not a simple matter to preserve these oil paints. The jars have to be vacuum-sealed and the cupboard temperature controlled. If the police get hold of them they'll melt in some constable's Brownbilt locker, and that'll be the end of it."

I realise suddenly what a mistake I've made. This woman really would turn me over to the authorities.

"Look, I have an idea. If you keep quiet about this, I'll stick all the pieces back onto the Monet."

"You're mad."

"I can do it. I know where the bits go. It'll be slow work and I'll have to be careful, but I can do it. Give me six months and I'll get the Monet back to its original colors. You can be the judge."

"I can't do that. I can't help you."

"It's really the only hope you have of seeing your Monet back in his old state."

3

Of course I had to wait until the experts packed up and left. The curator was thrilled with his new filing cabinet full of descriptions in his office. He was the only one with a key. He'd rush from a painting and look up his wonderful descriptions until he was satisfied his memory was playing tricks on him. I had to wait until this anxiety passed.

She came each week and examined my work. She wasn't happy with the slow progress. She didn't understand the difficulties involved in getting into the new frames, applying the glue, selecting the correct paint chips and handling them accurately.

Though I delayed the progress on Monet as much as I could, one morning the curator stopped in his tracks before that paddock. He looked shocked. He ran to his files. He made phone calls. There were meetings. I took a day off work on sick leave and hid all my jars in a box under the house. I knew they'd deteriorate quickly if I left them there for long, but really I couldn't afford to have them near me now. My life was becoming stressful. The Monet was taken from the wall to be examined with microscopes and computers and calculators and whatever else the curator could dream up.

It must have been at this point that the woman lost her nerve and told the investigators everything she knew.

But nothing was found in my house and nothing was proved beyond the fact that the Monet painting seemed to have come through the experience even more beautiful than ever.

I sold my house and resigned. My jars must now have their labels chewed off, their lids rusted to the glass and their contents reduced to a slime of oil. I understand now that secrecy must take precedence over the desire for recognition. I have some savings, and I am beginning to buy up oil paints from whatever suppliers I can find. In this way I am hoping that I can bring at least the oil painting area of art to a standstill in this city. Artists will not have to suffer for the sake of recognition, and their visions can grow inside them unhindered by the need to tailor them for consumption by the public.

I will be able to say I have all the future masterpieces in my tubes. What a collection it will be.

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

swag

Memo to Marxists: Who said "Art must not only be good, it must be rooted in the people. Art in an absolute sense, as liberal democracy knows it, is not permissible"? Answer at end.

How important is the 'creative mind' to society? I was fascinated by Lionel Esher's recent article (2 January 1987) in the Times Literary Supplement. During 1939 and 1940 a small group of well-connected Englishmen, including Lord Esher, John Betjeman and Kenneth Clark, put together a list of outstanding young men of military age who, because of their great promise, should be removed (unknown to them and to the general public) from front-line service, to serve as a cadre for the future of post-war Britain. The names eventually submitted to the government included Robert Byron, Roy Campbell, Arthur Calder Marshall, William Empson, Louis MacNiece, V.S. Pritchett, Stephen Spender, Dylan Thomas, Evelyn Waugh, John Piper, Graham Sutherland, Benjamin Britten and William Walton. There were 61 names in all.

There were no scientists on the list, or outstanding talents in other fields. Indeed a group of scientists, later hearing of the scheme, wrote to the press pointing out that if Newton had not lived the law of gravitation would have been discovered within a year or two, and that if Edison had not lived Swan would have invented the incandescent lamp, but if Leonardo da Vinci had been killed in the Battle of Anghiari, instead of living to paint it, the Gioconda "would have remained for ever unpainted", and if Shakespeare had been killed in the Armada battles, his plays would have been forever unwritten.

The upshot is piquant. The government very wisely rejected the whole scheme as controversial and unworkable. Of the artists nominated not one was killed in action. The writers and artists who made the greatest contribution to post-war Britain were, with few exceptions, not on the list: they include Kingsley Amis, Cyril Connolly, Gavin Ewart, Roy Fuller, William Golding, Philip Larkin, Anthony Powell, Angus Wilson and Francis Bacon. Sculptors were missing from the list entirely: "nobody could have guessed that this would be Britain's strongest suit after the war." Esher comments: "For the fact is (and strangely not one of the brilliant minds who participated seems to have thought of it) that a great war of the kind they anticipated destroys one culture and creates another, and nobody could have been expected to guess at its nature or its moving spirits, very few of whom had yet been heard of."

The do-it-yourself society extends, I have noticed in recent years, to historians, biographers and literary scholars. I was drawn to reflect on this by noting that, in a recent work of scholarly import, a chapter appears on the peace movement of the 1950s written by someone who clearly did not feel it appropriate to talk to me, although I was national organising secretary of the main peace body in those years; nor, apparently, were the archives of that body referred to. Thinking back, I remember a few recent biographies of distinguished near-contemporary figures which have been written without reference to their friends or family. A recent MA thesis written quite largely on the history of this magazine was accorded high praise by examiners, though no effort was made to contact me or examine the magazine's archives. A recent book on another literary magazine was written with minimal interest shown in the observations of contemporaries. All very odd, but obviously the fashionable way to proceed. How to account for it? The influence of 'texts' and the dreaded Leavis? The desire to get a 'qualification' more important than genuine curiosity? A desire not to have interesting and tidy theories mucked up with facts? A determination not to kow-tow to an older generation?

If the latter, it is certainly not an attitude my generation shared in our time. As a friend said recently, "We gloried in the company of the Palmers and Len Mann and Brian Fitzpatrick and Mac Ball and Arthur Phillips. We felt it a delight and a privilege to talk to them."

Even allowing that my generation does not have the distinction of *that* one, the attitudes seem more than accidental.

Another literary phenomenon I notice is the rapid development of 'academic' writing. Just as poets write rather more for each other than for the general reader, so academics have their eyes more on the next promotion and the awe of their colleagues that they know all the 'in' words (like "problematic" used as a noun, which is academese for "problem"). It's a pity, because often the same academics have something interesting to say. But I returned eight such articles in one week recently, partly because Overland readers would, I hope, horsewhip their editor if I printed them, and partly because I refuse to be party to the disintegration of the English language. The irony is that such writers, who often view themselves as radicals of one kind and another, are here exerting the 'hegemony' they so deplore in others. In other words, they are trying to use words to develop illegitimate power, to bully, to brainwash and to impress for the wrong reasons. I keep on saying "If you're not writing for the hospital matron at Port Hedland you're not writing for Overland." Since I use her example so often, I sometimes wonder if I should send her a free subscription.

The award of the $18,000 Patrick White Prize to John Morrison late last year gave his friends and a great many others a strong pleasure-fix. John, now 83, has been close to Overland from the beginning. It's a great satisfaction to us, as it must be to Clem Christesen of Meanjin, to see John's unsentimental but sensitive brand of realism beginning to be appreciated. Penguin Books have successfully published several collections of his stories lately, and now Bruce Pascoe of Australian Short Stories is to publish a collection of John's non-fiction, including his autobiographical sketches. It will be called *The Happy Warrior* (a reference to Alan Marshall). My own nomination for the best Australian short story of this century would be Morrison's "The Pioneers", first published in this magazine. John lives in St Kilda, Melbourne, but unfortunately for him – and for us – can no longer write or type, owing to hand trouble.

It was fun to see Kylie Tennant invested with the red and pink gown of a Monash University doctor of letters during May. (Monash have a tradition of lateral thinking, not to be expected of a university, in these matters.) Tudor bonnet on the back of her head, above the browned farmer's face from Murder Mountain, Kylie ignored the microphones and spoke vigorously to the new graduates. I picked up a few of her phrases. "I don't charge anything to speak to ordinary people because I am one too"; "There is a poet or novelist

John Morrison

or short-story writer under every bush in the Blue Mountains – you can see their little eyes peering out from under the logs"; "Books are a coral reef of memory"; "If time is real, what shape is it?" Later, over a whisky and soda she gave me another quote, not her own she says but very much Kylie: "If you tell the truth you must have one foot in the stirrup." Dressed in her travelling clothes of cardigan and slacks because she'd let the pants of her 'proper' suit behind, she reminded me that Alfred Deakin once had to attend a London dinner in full evening dress and brown boots. The others there nudged: "See, an Australian."

John Sendy, of RMB 388, Kingower V. 3517, is collecting material for a history of the Communist influence on Australian literature and writers, "for good or bad", as he puts it. He would welcome suggestions, warnings and encouragement.

Proof-reading. Ah, there's the rub! Our proofs are read at least three times: by the printer, by the author, and by someone we pay to do it. Also by the Editor, if he has time. And still the little devils slip through. The most notable lapse in our last issue was in Ken Inglis's article "Behind the Bicentennial", where we refer to the massacre of "up to a million Christian American inhabitants of Turkey." I find it hard to believe that readers did not realise that "Armenian" should be read for "American", but we did get a number of letters on the matter. No, I don't apologise. We take a great deal of care but, as I think Mrs Beeton pointed out, accidents will happen in the best-regulated families.

Answer to our first item: Dr Josef Goebbels. Source: reply to conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler's protest of 7 April 1933 at the removal of Otto Klemperer's name from the program of the forthcoming Berlin Festival. See Times Literary Supplement, 19 December 1986.

WEIGHED & WANTING

(Only the heart in balance
& the erect feather of truth,
the counterpoise, decide.)

Dawn, & the cold clang
of a prison cell,
smell of Asia in their hair & clothes,
no bagman's paradise here,
no ponderous wealth,
lives parcelled up & dealt with.

The bored hangman,
last touch of flesh they'll know,
oils his trapdoor hinges
easy as silk.
Waiting in Pudu jail
Barlow writes letters home;
the triple gallows
remind him, perhaps,
of another scapegoat
& an outraged crowd.

Waking from a serapax dream,
the ordinary citizen
reads the morning papers
over a breakfast cup of coffee,
nods judiciously:
a good death, precise measurement
(of body, not soul) ensures
third vertebrae snapped clean.

For Chambers & Barlow
it's the abyss of words.

MARGARET BRADSTOCK

CARS. LIGHTNING. RAIN.

Cars. Lightning. Rain.
Your cheek on my hair.
Strawberries. White wine.
A mess in the back seat.

I drive you home
and we chat between thunder claps
about the fall of Crete.

A bare-breasted goddess
at ease, insouciant control,
holding firmly with feminine hands
two writhing snakes.

Secretly
I imagine loving you
like that,
my feet balanced
apart,
hanging on without fear
to any pet reptile between us.

But between kisses
my breath tears like wet paper,
holding you in my arms
is a tender farce or a blubbering High Mass;
I skid on my wrenched heart
even more than this old car
skids on the drenched road.

Cars. Lightning. Rain.
When you leave me
I watch every Minoan fresco
ever painted and cherished
drip and burn.

DOROTHY PORTER

HAIKU

Coolie-hat mushrooms
bearing loads of grey gravel
climb up my driveway.

GWEN HOPKINS

POEM ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF PABLO NERUDA'S DEATH

"The poet gives us a gallery full of ghosts shaken by the fire and darkness of his time."
— Neruda, Memoirs.

Fresh from the rich lyric of your memoir,
  the fire and shadow of your life's time,
I imagine you climbing the granite heights,
  Machu Picchu, dreaming the verdant
Chilean forest, reciting in the miners' camps,
  seeker in the hills of shattered Spain
in search of Lorca's murdered bones,
  carrying in the splint of your ribs
your own broken heart for the world;
  singing of the mouths plugged with clay,
throats torn on the bloody scarp of power,
  (frigid stars blinking like distant pity,
the serrated ice on the snow shroud's hem
  like knives in the eyes of generations).
At Isla Negra your plundered home
  is silent, a spoked wreck weaving wind.
The black bootprints of a shrill mob
  are stained deeply on your splintered door.
Where have your wooden mermaids gone,
  their eyes full of the sea's splendor?
Your windows were like sheets of sail
  breasting the planet's fierce dark winds.
In Valparaiso there wafts the spume
  of poems burning like heaps of leaves.
O Pablo, each day recalls someone's death.
  History collects them like black beads.
This one is yours. Tonight the moon
  spiders down the grid of barbs,
seeps through the perished wood of barracks,
  the ocean a seamless silver glaze,
illuminates your cherished nation,
  its hopes strangled in an umbra where
someone reads, persistent as love,
  poems majestic as condor wings.

ROD MORAN

SHE SAYS

If you
don't beg
borrow
or steal
an ego
soon,
I will
stop
seeing
you,
she says.

Bed
is my
favorite
place;
I could
spend my life
in bed,
she says.

Let's go to bed,
she says;
take off your clothes,
she says;
relax,
she says;
stop smoking,
she says.

I've never spent this much time
just *talking* about having an affair;
this is like a d-grade movie,
she says. Relax, she says.
You have a lot to learn
about your sexuality —
maybe I should come back
in five years time,
she says to me
& I sit up & listen.

MYRON LYSENKO

BEYOND

She asked me if I was here.
"Here and there," I said, making light of
Sitting facing her.
She was serious and I had no
Papers to prove it.

JAN NELSON

STRAW-NECKED IBISES

On the grassed river-flats
a flock of ibises —
like elderly orientals
gathered for a festival.

Bald, whiskered, venerable,
they finick over locusts
and other morsels
with their chopstick bills.

ANDREW LANSDOWN

BLUEBEARD RE-SCRIPTED
VERSION III: SISTER ANNE — HER STORY

I'm writing it with my feet —
Small scuffs in sand the desert wind I know
Will easily erase; not lasting,
But it's mine. I ask you
How would *you* like to be listed
Among the *dramatis personae* merely
"Her sister" and have no lines
Except to answer the idiot question
"Is anyone there? Do you see anyone coming?"
It's narrative isn't it? Of course they came.
Him first, rage-red, waving his sword
(Quite an erection) and then my family,
Father and brothers all in a band
Flogging their wretched horses through real heat.
Passion, revenge, a rescue? What a bore,
Predictable whichever way it ended —
I wouldn't know, I've walked off
The edge of the script and sand
Has muffled the rumor of screaming and shouting.
Tonight I'll lie down with silence —
Better than Bluebeard, though I fancied him.
It was all I was taught to fancy,
The man of some other woman:
The mother's cherished son, the disconsolate widower,
The sister's husband with a roving eye.
I'm refusing my cues, am not convinced
My role's peripheral,
Desert and sand the only locations,
Myth the only mode. I'll walk, I'll sleep.
When I wake up, history will start.

JENNIFER STRAUSS

REAGAN v. GADDAFI

I won't flush.
I won't waste water.
I'm taking in litres of
anything wet — beer, cordial, soya bean milk
because I'm plagued by a plague of
millipedes & I'm fighting back.
I'm touching them
like triggers &
catching them
as they curl & drop.
I'm tossing them into
the loo — hard
& firing on
any millipede floaters.
Rear-gunning
my aim's not shit hot
but my front gun's a laser
lined up in a Cyclops' eye.

It's the only thing left
men can do better than women

except having soldiers.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

HEAVINESS IS GOOD

(Cookbook advice on cabbages)

Your cabbage is the cool and careful kind,
green-steady stayer and indeed

no squall can move him, see how his stumps
persist in frosty witness, "Here

lodged the winter-genius, Sauerkraut."
Spring rounds him out and encompassed now

by a place-getting crowd of Cabbage-whites
his furled leaves creak like leather. Soon

age slacks his drumhead. His stuff
wastes into little flowers. The gardener comes.

BARBARA GILES

TWO POEMS BY JOHN A. SCOTT

CALLIGRAPHY

A conceit

"I'm so unhappy with my writing," so,
she wrote, "the cursive shape! For instance, why
are there no letters here on which to play
Gymnopēdies; no vowel to quite dislodge
the bails of 'i'. The 'w' is worn.
The 'l' unfiltered. I shall have to teach
the 'j' to fly — its name of course has made
my choice an obvious one — and yet observe
that lash of tail! No simple task...
No divination of a two of 'g's
reversed; no 't' to keep the Beast away."

And so, behind the screen of my address,
I might have come to kiss that wounded hand;
the indigo of her benignly frail
calligraphy. Except that — moving on
the line of her conceit — I glimpsed the finely
silvered 's' protruding slightly from
the card, where only recently it must
have pierced the throat of wishing I were there.

DE-BONING THE GARDEN

"the garden are you boning"
John Ashbery

For years, familiar with their usage —
working one's fingers to them, making none
of them about it, close to them,
or feeling it in those of them one has...
all of them idle and dry —
in such proliferation, *should* I,
might the garden now collapse?

About this purest of human pleasures,
yes, digging, there's dog been here before
— that's never *Bounce*'s work alone,
nor *Hervey*'s — more a pack! I've had meals
like this: so difficult I merely
re-arranged and waited for (that boneless
thing above all other) *mousse*.

From delicious solitude — struck
by an ancientness that lurks below the surfaces
of anything that doesn't melt or go
imbecilically limp at change; ogling,
if you like, the necessary
underneath — I start to separate
the opposites. Edible.

Inedible. I civilise
this tract (by halves) urbanely proffering
naivety to pull it back
from hazardous profusions. The dangers of
regressing in the afternoon
to these 'green thoughts': a patch now almost fully
corseted — it broods, it sways.

Yet how much to be dug, how deep,
preparing it towards another's stay?
The newly-weds must soon arrive —
their bodies' alabaster guessing nothing
of the clay. And safely so,
reminds us of an effort of unknowing:
that vast amount we must forget.

HEARTBROKEN DRACULA BLUES

bored by wolves & coffins are cold
    dentists expensive
& teeth full of holes
    sick of hanging around
a dump that's a real
    hole in the ground

can't afford blood on medicare
    i'm out of fashion
i'm losing my hair
    there's nothing to get me
no tax rebate
    want to settle down
get me a mate
put an ad in the newspaper:
    "dignified vampire after a date —
SM's out nothing kinky please
    no leather no kitch
no weird strip tease
    i'm heterosexual & sensitive
you don't need dope
            if you're cool like me
    an icy manner is what you see
but lots of affection
            if you agree
    give me a call when you're around
transylvania i'll send a hound
    flowers & a coach & candlelight
the erotic sensations are out of sight
    in a castle made of sandstone brick,
no religious hangups & no garlic."

    there's nothing in life
for a bachelor count
    with blood on his mind
& nothing to mount

RAE DESMOND JONES

TWO POEMS BY KATHERINE GALLAGHER

DINNER-PARTY BLUES

The meal is perfect:
charcuterie, escalope milanese,
salad, cheese,
strawberries and cream.

She hosts us on newly-varnished
floors: we glide about
words flying off our heels —
five years shredded
in a swoop: confidences,
acquaintances, life "over there,"
Australia, changes,
Barry Humphries...

His personas hone in —
glassy-eyed, cumbersome
as uninvited guests,
smiling as always
through razor-fast teeth.

In no time, they take over,
take shots at us
douse the show in wine,
finally count us out...
We've heard it all too often —
the extravagant barbs, such
tireless wringing of hands.

SCENE ON THE LOIRE

All around, a lit stillness.

The moon, placed without shadow
leans like a diva
smiling at her reflection —

while almost carelessly
the river spreads its repose
reminding of a mind completely
at ease, except in one place
where undercurrents break, take over —

where no swimmer
might be safe.

ALEXANDER BUZO

Cremorne: Peninsula of Gentility

This is the fourth of our series of writings on Place. Previous contributions have been by James McQueen, Barry Hill and Peter Goldsworthy.

It used to be that if you got into a Sydney cab and asked to go to Cremorne the cabbie would be very surprised and suspicious. "Eh? What? Drummoyne? Eh?" They would glare at you as if you'd said Atlantis. (Sydney cabbies belong to that school of philophical thought which holds that a cow does not exist unless there is someone to see it.) "Cremorne," I would insist, and if I had friends or relatives with me they would back me up. "Cremorne," they would chant. The cabbie would be most affronted. Eventually he would look up this mythical beast in the directory and discover that it was a peninsula on the lower North Shore. He would take us there, but with an air that suggested he was only doing this to keep his licence. Why we couldn't live somewhere straightforward, somewhere with a football team, like Balmain or Manly, he just could not understand. We probably sounded a bit posh and we left no tip, but he ought to know that those people who sound a bit posh are always the meanest. The cabbies probably couldn't wait to get out of Cremorne. It was all a bit spooky for the uninitiated, and for those who believed in the homogeneity of Australian society.

I was born in the area and, despite long stints in Brisbane and Armidale, mostly grew up there, among the hundred year-old palms and the roads named after cricketers – Iredale Avenue, Murdoch Street, Spofforth Street, and Boyle Avenue. The harbor was all around, and the foreshores were largely reserves full of white gums and flame trees. Roberts and Streeton used to live there and they painted almost every inch of Cremorne Point. The rampant anglophilia of the early years of this century can be seen in the names of some of the blocks of flats and private hotels – The Laurels, Ranelagh Hall, Bannerman Court, The Wycombe and the Langdale Guest House. It was very much Rattigan territory, with The Laurels, in particular, being something straight out of "Separate Tables". One time there was a fire there and they all ran out on to the footpath, retired majors, dowagers, the whole spectrum of genteel poverty and desperation.

When I was about twelve I was walking along one of the harbor paths one morning with some friends and we found an overcoat and handbag. The address inside was The Laurels, so we took the gear around there and discovered from the manageress that the handbag owner's bed had not been slept in. She rang the police. By the time we got back to the harbor path they were already there, and soon after the Water Police arrived in a launch. A man with long rubber gloves reached down and gripped the Laurels woman by the shoulders. They towed her away, with the pale body just below the surface.

Those with a passion for demographics would rank Cremorne in the middle of the middle class. Across the harbor to the south, Vancluse (upper class) and Zetland (working class) were the extremes. We can see in the horrible example of Adelaide what can happen if an incestuous colonial gentry get together and try to create a fantasy world. The result is, among other things, stifling to art and seems to lead to sex crimes. Luckily, in Cremorne the hierarchy never really got going. It was constantly being infiltrated and modified, which was just as well, as I have heard of very few cases of a transplanted culture flourishing. It hasn't worked in South Africa, and they seem pretty miserable in Quebec. Perhaps the only contemporary success story is Bondi, where a group of New Zealand tow-truck drivers have established a society that works pretty much along the lines they're used to. But with all the different strands being acknowledged and all the exceptions noted, you would still have to say that Cremorne was very much an angloid matriarchy where the average age was over sixty.

The middle class has not been over-mythologised in Australia. The last words spoken by Paul Hogan in his first commercial were "Let 'er rip, Boris." He was addressing the conductor of a symphony orchestra, a job that could only be justified by the appointment of a European. Whereas in America the Clifton Webbs, the Jose Ferrers, the Orson Welles and the Adolphe Men-

joux were allowed to play eccentrics or villains, there are a very few Australian stars who allowed to be middle class. Yet a large proportion of them *are* middle class. The country has been 'gentrified' but the secret has been kept: the average Australian male is much more adept at cooking shish kebabs than at wrestling with freshwater crocs. To be faithful to the reality of Australia today, any would-be star born Chips Rafferty would have to change his name to John W. Goffage. Needless to say, the lower North Shore has not been up there with Gundagai and Pinchgut as the icons of a civilisation. Its voice has never been heard.

People spoke very well in Cremorne and were keen to keep it that way. My mother was always at me to drop 'gunna' from the repertoire, as well as other terms I'd picked up at North Sydney Oval. My grandmother, who came from the country, had a few idiosyncrasies. A film was a pick-chore and roast chicken was "the bird", there usually being much discussion about the correct time to put the bird in the oven. "That tap wants fixing," she would say, and in general, wants had it all over needs. Her favorite radio programs were Jack Davey's shows, but she abominated Bob Dyer, purveyor of "Give it a Go" and other aural schlock. "Jack Davey doesn't call people by their first names," was the evidence against Dyer, who was inclined to tip buckets of water on his guests on "Cop the Lot!" My father was much more an ABC man, and his culture heroes were Russ Tyson and Sir Adrian Boult, but in 1957 2UE started its Top Forty and that was the end of radio's golden era of the spoken word. The voices on the radio now were Woolloomooloo Yankee, and Cremorne had missed out yet again.

When Sir Laurence Hartnett came to Australia in 1934 one of his aims was to make an all-Australian car. He realised his dream with the Holden in 1948, which was an instant seller. Not in Cremorne, however. In Cremorne there were Wolseleys, Rovers, Vauxhalls, Morrises, Austins, Humbers and Hillmans, plus the odd Studebaker and one Oldsmobile. This alienation from the home-grown product carried over into culture, where anything Australian was disdained by the middle class, who really preferred "Salad Days" to "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll."

The most moving three words ever written by an Australian, I believe, are "Symphony Number One" and they were written by Alfred Hill. While upper and lower class humor is very similar (the status quo triumphs over someone who fails to treat the status quo with reverence), on the lower North Shore the satirical and imaginative dimensions of middle class humor were evident.

Some of the yarn-spinners and piss-takers you would meet around ther place were wonderful. I ran into one old boy from Naremburn on the Central Coast in 1986 and picked him straight away. The dialogue went like this:

"Seen Halley's Comet?"

"Nah. I saw it the first time around, in 1910. It's overrated."

Among the younger fry in the late fifties and early sixties the favorites were Hancock, the Goons, Mad Magazine and Shelley Berman. Australian comedy in that era was pitiful, the problem being that it was directed at an audience of morons. Here was one case at least where the cultural cringe was justified.

One other assumption made by the middle class is that it has 'adult' tastes whereas the hoi polloi like all the kids' stuff full of sugar. To some extent there were right. Aeroplane Jelly was eaten by everyone from nine months to ninety years. When the French Restaurant opened in Sydney in 1959 the queues stretched, as they

say, round the block. If anything could mobilise the middle class it was the promise of relief from sugar. My family favoured the Grotta Capri, and we often went there for scallopini vitello and Quelltaler hock. My grandmother, who was of Irish parentage, never came to the Grotta Capri. Her idea of a good meal was roast chicken and baked potatoes followed by Aeroplane Jelly.

For the youth of Cremorne, hopelessly outnumbered by the oldies, having a good time was often a problem. Sexual opportunity was limited, mainly because the girls gave very little away on the home front. There were rumors of loose behavior on the holidays in Bundanoon or the The Entrance, and, in one case, the washroom at Naremburn Intermediate High, but at home in Cremorne they'd play it very straight and you'd be lucky to score a four (upstairs outside). This caused much heartburn and even now I blanch when I recall the Case of the Recalcitrant Balletomane. One of my friends made it to the big League when he took out Marsha Rowe, who founded Spare Rib. I thought she was the prettiest girl I'd ever seen and if it is a rule that feminists are raucous hoydens then Marsha Rowe must be the exception. In 1959 she wore a V-neck jumper that set Shellcove Road on fire.

As well as the emerging younger generation, other free agents were diluting the spirit of Cremorne, and by the early sixties it was no longer the province of the old angloid middle class. One boy I knew lived in a semi-detached with his steam-cleaner father and buxom half-sister. He walked into the lounge room one afternoon and found a sailor with his hand up his half-sister's dress. "What did you say to her?" I asked him. He shrugged mournfully. "Give us a fuck or I'll tell Dad." When my friend John Scheding and I joined the North Sydney Cricket Club in 1962 we presented ourselves to the inevitable eczema-encrusted coach holding a clipboard. This old boy was *not* a man of letters and had trouble spelling our surnames. "What's the origin of these names?" he demanded. "Albanian," I said. "Swedish," John said. "Oh, Sweden's a good country," declared the coach, relieved. At one stage a rich legal family moved into our street but this invasion ended in a very Cremorne-ish way. The father was electrocuted when he poked a fork into a toaster and the mother moved in with a Yugoslav migrant in a house overlooking the reserve.

The biggest house in Kareela Road was owned by Mrs Chuey, a tiny, rich Chinese widow from Junee, who shared the wonderful Victorian mansion with her brother-in-law. The Chueys were good fun, holding mah-jong parties and taking my aunt to Chinese New Year celebrations at the Trocadero Ballroom, but eventually the brother-in-law went to China to die and Mrs Chuey sold out. The house was then razed and a new one, all glass and tile, white carpets and roll-a-door, was occupied by a businessman and his second wife. This happened in the mid-fifties and was very much a portent. By 1975 the dilution process had become a wash-out and many of the Edwardian bungalows had made way for units, town houses and so on. The area become popular within the TV push, Qantas staff, and businessmen and their third wives, advertising executives and American Express pharaohs some of whom were our good friends or tennis partners. But we had long since moved out.

My big break with Cremorne came when I started writing plays. I announced my intention to make a living writing plays set in Australia – and make a bloody good living, too. This announcement did not go down well with my family circle. The course I was plotting for myself was unknown to the area. There had been a few cases in the post-war years of eastern suburbs families standing by helplessly while one of their sons or daughters ran off to London and got involved in stage design for Sadler's Wells, but my case – that of contemplating Australian life and language as a subject for art – was unheard of. Politically, Cremorne was one of the safest Liberal areas in the country (my mother used to refer satirically to the Labor leader as "Old Cocky Calwell"), so my intention to write plays in the rationalist/anti-colonialist style was definitely not sympatico. Not was my appearance on Doris Fitton's doorstep with a copy of my first play. "Ay do not receive visitors at may prayvate residence," said the artistic director of North Sydney's Independent Theatre. Seventeen years later, in 1984, "Coralie Lansdowne Says No" was successfully revived there, and I have to admit I lingered a bit in the foyer afterwards. Poor old Doris had gone and all her European plays with her, but there was something unconquered about that foyer. Any victory over the middle class is a temporary one, as is any exit from the lower North Shore.

VICTOR YE

Spring in the Step

Chinese literature today

Victor Ye, who has published stories and reportage in Overland, is a Chinese academic. We believe this survey by Ye on the current cultural scene in China is the first of its kind to have appeared in the English language.

According to an old saying, China is 'a state of culture'. Certainly the Chinese have had a long literary tradition which may be traced back to the written record left by Confucius in his *Poems*. We are proud of our long literary history, which produced a large group of important literary figures and a large batch of significant works, but in recent centuries Chinese literature has not been part of the rapid development of world literature. It is only since the Gang of Four was smashed that a literary spring has really arrived.

Literary journals have increased from fifty or so before the Cultural Revolution to six hundred or so at present. From twenty or so novels each year before the Cultural Revolution, we now publish nearly two hundred. The number of journals mentioned above could be doubled if another group of journals is added – those of culture in general, covering sports, Wushu, entertainment, fashion, youth, women, the old, folk legends, health, gardening and the like.

Six or seven years ago no-one would have predicted the present fruitful situation. Writers remembered the terrible years just gone by, of forced labor, imprisonment and torture.

Deng Xiaoping announced the Communist Party's approval of a vigorously developing art and literature at a conference of artists and writers in 1979; his encouragement was followed by that of other leaders, who on different occasions urged artists and writers to work with more freedom.

Older people compare this change of policy with the so-called "seventeen years" – from the founding of the Republic to the eve of the Cultural Revolution. The great disaster of the Cultural Revolution had not yet occurred, yet criticism of so-called 'rightist' writers never ceased. First were the movements against Hu Feng and DingLing, and the 'anti-rightist' drive against hundreds of thousands of the intelligentsia in 1957, spreading from nation-wide criticisms of a film named "Wu Xung's Life" and of the views of the scholar Yu Ping-bei on the classical novel "The Dream of the Red Mansions". This political drive escalated year after year. The Cultural Revolution was an inevitable result of the previous political tendencies, and suddenly, overnight almost, the nightmare vanished. The 'forbidden area' was thrown open. First short stories, then poems, novellas, plays and other forms of art revived and immediately caught the attention of the public. It all happened so rapidly, so vigorously and so comprehensively, that all of us were taken by surprise.

I still remember how excited I was to read "Class Teacher" – a story by the former teacher Liu Xingwu. This described how a teacher deals with a group of secondary school pupils. Among them, two are given special attention. One is a boy, Soong Bao-qi, while the other is a girl Xie Hui-ming. The boy is difficult to handle because of the anarchist influence in the Cultural Revolution. The girl outwardly appears hard-working and enthusiastic, both in study and public service. But inwardly, she is greatly influenced by perverse ideas widespread in the Cultural Revolution – she is selfish, dishonest and scheming. The story made a big stir because it appeared in 1977, a year after the end of the Cultural Revolution, and it reminded us that even the children had suffered. It was also a long time since we had read a story written this way – direct and closely related to real life. The ideas underlying the story – the theme and the form – was an attack on, and a challenge to, those prevalent in the Cultural Revolution: pretence, falsehood and double-

dealing. People were looking for a new way to tell the truth.

In the wake of "Class Teacher" there appeared a number of short stories which met the needs of the situation. Some exposed the crimes of the Gang of Four and their followers, others portrayed the social and ideological influences of that chaos: "Trace of Wound", "Gypsies", "Bamboo Leaves", "Wake up, Brother", "Prisoners' Dinner", and so on. Some dealt with the arduous struggle against Lin Biao and the Gang of Four: "Sacred Mission", "The General in the Small Town", "The Jailor's Journals", "A Dream on Violin-strings", "May You Hear the Song". Some explored the fierce conflicts through a summary of the historical experience: "Pepper", "The Unfinished Lesson", "To Seek Experiences", "Sacrifice", "Regret".

Because these stories were more or less related to a critical view of the Cultural Revolution and could easily give rise to an outpouring of complaints and anger, they are generally calling 'Sobbing Stuff'. As time went on, both readers and writers asked how all these could happen. Thus we then got the stories of 'Reflection'. One example is the woman writer Ru Zhi-juan's "The Mixed Up Story", which tells of an old cadre's arrogant ways in the years of the Big Leap Forward (an impractical economic adventure in 1958). Another example is Liu Zhen's "Black Flag", about an ultra-leftist Party Secretary.

The 'Reflective' stories provided more profound insights into historical events. They include "Li Shun-da Builds a House", "Wang the Eldest, the Fool", "Fragrance in Mind", "Blossoms spread like Snow", "A Place without Traces of Love."

The short story has been the herald of a vigorous development in every area of art and literature. Novellas, for instance, emerged as an outstanding phenomenon in the past few years. In spite of the fact that the novella first appeared in the May Fourth Movement in 1919 – an important period for the development of literature – only a limited number were published. In the seventeen years between 1949 and 1966, about six hundred novellas came off the presses, while in the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, the number was reduced to seventy or so. However, over eighty were published in 1979, a hundred and ninety in 1980, four hundred and ten in 1981, and in 1982, the climax – over six hundred.

The contemporary novella is similar to the short story in its development – revealing the evils of the ultra-leftist line and musing on the historical experiences of past sufferings. But the scope of the novella allows for a wider and a more penetrating analysis. The middle-aged novelist Cong Wei-xi's "Red Yulan Magnolia under the Big Walls" deals with the fate of a security officer in the Cultural Revolution. The imprisoned hero Guo Lin fights on from within prison. Cong is good at emotional expression, yet his young contemporary Feng Ji-cai is more subtle with his psychological touches. His "Oh" centres round a research fellow in history who is cowardly, worried and panic-stricken on account of the persecution he suffered in the Cultural Revolution. Ye Wei-lin's "On the River with a Navigation Mark" is of a different style. It demonstrates what a college student witnesses in his two days' journey on a river – a scene of confusion and ruin in the south of the Yangtse under the rule of the Gang of Four.

Like the short story, the novella also provokes the reader to consider and reconsider why China has suffered so much in the last few decades. Liu Yang-zhou's novella "A Legend in Tian Yun-shang" directs the reader's attention to the political movements in the 1950s, such as the anti-rightist drive, the Big Leap Forward, the movement to resist the rightist tendencies and the Cultural Revolution. The hero Lo Qong, designated as rightist, remains firm in his revolutionary beliefs. His lover Soong Wei abandons him but finds no happiness in marrying an old cadre.

Recently we have seen a growing interest in the novel, many published in the larger literary magazines. Novelists have increasingly denied the dogma of 'one model for one class' and strive to make literature a science of man. They have certainly put more emphasis on people than on political slogans. Such figures as the old peasant Xu Mou and his daughter Xiu Yung in "Xu Mou and His Daughters", Li Zi-chen and Emperor Cong-zhen in "Li Zi-chen", are among hundreds of convincing characters we now find.

One important development in recent novels is the borrowing of techniques from other forms of art, from montage in cinema, or from western literature (the 'stream of consciousness'), even though they still centre on traditional themes – Chinese history, political movements, economic and cultural developments and the Cultural Revolution.

The foreign influence, particularly that of the westerners, is obvious. It is not just that there are more exchanges with the west, or that more western works, from fiction to criticism and theory, are now introduced into China. More and more writers have intentionally included in their writings techniques they have picked up from their western counterparts. The representative figure of this group is Wang Meng, who has made some courageous experiments in fiction and has achieved some noteworthy results, according priority to psychological issues over external description. He stands for pluralism in the creating of art and literature. Wang also absorbs techniques from traditional Chinese arts, such as comic dialogue and the poems of the Tang Dynasty. His work includes "Butterfly", "Bolshevik Salute", "Difficult to Meet", "Deep Lake" and many other stories.

If Wang Meng has taken in the 'stream of consciousness', Zhun Pu, a woman writer, has benefited from surrealism. Her works, including "Who Am I", "Humble Abode", "Tragedy of the Nut-tree", all explore the relationships between man and ego, man and society, with the help of surrealist techniques which she has modified to her own needs.

The middle-aged writers like Wang Meng and Zhun Pu are fewer than the younger generation who usually started their writing career in recent years, when China opened its door and let in the flow of western influences. They are more open-minded, more sensitive and more vigorous in viewing the situation and dealing with various themes. They are associated with the emergence of a new current of aesthetics, the continuation of the Chinese enlightenment of the 1910s and 1920s, and this is still in development. On one hand the current 'open-the-door' reform policy requires a thorough denial of the conservative and traditional ideas of remnant feudalism, and respect for individual values and freedom. On the other hand, prevalent western aesthetic currents do not completely meet with our needs: we are in a different historical stage. Young writers are therefore seeking a form which combines the Chinese situation with new views and methods popular in the west. Liu Sou-la, Xu Xing and Chen Cun have been successful here. The heroes in their stories "You Have No Other Choice", "Those Young Men and Women", "Altogether Seven" and "Themeless Variation" are all delinquents who play truant, sleep in the daytime, make mischief and become melon-dealers. They are superficially rebels against traditional Chinese culture, yet they are the inevitable results of that conservatism because they can not tolerate too firm a grip on them by it, and actually their absurd behavior reflects a resistence to the traditional values so popular in Chinese society.

Drama and poetry are also changing and borrowing techniques from the west. Chinese plays are to a large extent influenced by Ibsen, who was introduced to China early in this century. This could be noticed even in some plays staged in the first years after the Cultural Revolution, such as "Soundless Response". But soon cinema techniques started to influence plays. "Blood is Always Hot" for instance, gets rid of scenes and curtains, and resorts to seventeen episodes as a film. This provides more space for the performance and expresses modern living. A promising experimental dramatist is Sha Ye-xing. His "Chen Yi the Mayor" has no climax at all. It is Brechtian, with no agreement in time and scenes, only sixteen pieces and ten events throughout. Yet it is original, based on a combination of Chinese traditional opera of the Yuan Dynasty and of western styles.

Sha's "Road" seems to convey more to the audience than the previous two plays because of its philosophical implications. The play portrays a group of young road-cleaners, not as exemplars of hard work, but to discuss the problem of finding a path through foolishness to nobility of mind. Its symbolic philosophic touches illustrate the new explorations the young dramatists are making.

Most of these experimentalists are from Shanghai – one of the centres of drama in China. Another centre of drama is Beijing, where the dramatists are more inclined to work on the traditonal forms of drama, with more consideration to characterization, subject matter and national styles. Their representatives are Li Lung-yun and Su Shu-yang, two recently-emerged young dramatists. They have developed a style after Lao She – one of the most respected writers and dramatists of Modern China. Their plays, such as "Neighbors" and "A Small Lane", are typical of Beijing taste in accent, dialects and customs. Both these schools show much promise.

Drama requires continuous reform and creation so as to keep an audience. Poetry is another area where new forms and ideas flourish abundantly. 'Vague Poetry' is a hot topic.

'Vague poetry' refers to verse in which ideas and emotions are hidden in unfamiliar forms. Because of this, problems of understanding arise. These poems reflect the sophistication of young poets who have suffered, but they also reflect a reaction against the excessively direct and superficial ways of writing poetry so prevalent in the past. The wind from the west helps Chinese poets to establish new values, which in turn are reflected in new forms.

The debate on 'vague poetry' serves to clarify certain principles in both writing and criticism. A recent widely-discussed article by Sun Shao-zhen, "The Emergence of New Principles of Aesthetics", directs the attention of the poet to the value of man, and particularly the values of self. The viewpoint of the new aesthetics is of course different from the traditional requirements of 'realism', yet most participants in the argument see these two potentially unified by their similar aims – benefiting the people and historical development. As to the ways towards the target, the argument is for different emphases – either on the side of self or on the side of a broader sense of reality.

The argument over 'vague poetry' is not the only one. Controversial issues abound in all the major art forms. In drama and cinema the plays "At the Bus-Stop" and "If I were Real" and the films "Bitter Love", "Native Accent", "A Woman Pick-pocket" and "Social Archives" have received more or less unfavorable comment from both critics and audience, either because they are shallow in content or because of the excessive exposure of the dark and evil, and their lack of inspiration.

But there are different roads to good art. This is the

case with the present debate over the films directed by Xie Jing – the most prestigious director at the moment in China. On the whole his films are typical of traditional Chinese culture – human and sensible and touching. They attract big audiences. But now Xie is accused of not strongly enough tackling the negative side of the Chinese character – the narrow-mindedness, conservatism and excessive obedience. All this was simply unimaginable two or three years ago. Traditional culture is now being challenged.

Often such criticisms lead to a healthy and rapid development in drama and cinema after the clarification of viewpoints. In some debates, however, there are no clear demarcation lines between right and wrong, and they function to wake up an awareness which involves a series of problems – how to look at a story, how to introduce western ideas, the relation of feminist literature to literature in a broader sense.

One argument which is still under way lies in the realm of literary criticism. It started with the appearance of an article entitled "On the Subjective Nature of Literature" by a middle-aged critic named Liu Zaifu, who is famous for airing some new critical views, such as the dual nature of human character. The article advances an awareness of the two strategic shifts, from the external to the internal, in terms of creative writing, and from non-human to human, in terms of criticism. The spirit and courage the author shows in the article is attractive. Most readers regard Lun's views as profitable, in summing up some new tendencies and in pointing to a direction in which literature will develop. Others argue that the article is greatly influenced by Hegel's idealism and overemphasises an abstract sense of human nature.

The real point is that no-one is worried about the possibility of punishment or persecution because of their views on such matters. No-one needs to be reminded of the nightmare of the Cultural Revolution or of 1957, when an unguarded word or two was enough to have one designated a counter-revolutionary. Chinese writers now enjoy a freedom of speech never before witnessed in Chinese history. The formation of a free academic atmosphere is absolutely vital to the vigorous development of art and literature. That is our hope.

As a result of the guarantees of freedom for the artist and the writer, a variety of schools and styles are coming into being. Here, Zhang Xian-liang's name is worth mentioning. His stories and novellas have opened up a new area. He discusses psychological and physiological changes, consequential political chaos and personal suffering. His fiction associates a political and economic situation with an abnormal personal condition, such as the loss of sexual powers and ability. Needless to say, this has caused controversy. It is too early to pass judgement on his fiction, but we can understand it better through his comment on Chinese literature during his visit to the United States: "A good piece of fiction is a three-dimensional world. The characters and the plot should be multicolored, polyphonic, many-layered, multi-faceted... China's contemporary writers, who have long used the methods of realism and romanticism, can today also derive artistic techniques from western modernism."

Zhang Xian-liang is not the only one with both courage and talent in a country with such a long literary tradition as China. Many writers are seeking new perspectives on tradition. One is Liu Shao-tang, who is trying to establish a school of 'native-land' literature, with works such as "A Family of Catkin-willow", "Melon-shed and Willow-lane", "Flower-Street", "A Scene of Fish and Water-chestnut", "A Sight of Willow Every Year". They either recollect the author's childhood tinged with a flavor of tradition, or portray new transformations in rural life set against old traditions. He doesn't deal with important events or social problems, but with customs and human relationships, using a language absorbed both from the Chinese classics and the vernacular.

Nor is urban life neglected. Deng You-mei, for instance, writes of the city-dweller in various historical times. His "Nawu" tells of a social outcast who was once a 'young master' during the Qing Dynasty.

'Native-land literature' is merely one of many contemporary literatures in China. China is big and China is old. Chinese national literature now has many strands. Feminist literature, for instance, has risen abruptly, with an awareness of the special mission and role of women in contemporary China, its authors endowed with a subtlety and insight in the exploration of the nature and character of their own sex which has previously been unknown.

Historical themes have become particularly popular. Traditional tales such as "Three Kingdoms", "Water-Margin" and "Western Pilgrimage" are once again brought to notice, and many writers base their novels or plays on historical figures. "Li Zi-chen", written by Yao Xie-ying, is a good example of the genre. It tells the story of the leader of a peasant revolt at the end of the Ming Dynasty, presenting a vivid picture of social life, from the emperor to poor peasants. This five-volume novel goes further than an account of the complicated situation of the times, and attempts to assess the historical experiences itself.

Peasant uprisings have, in a short period of time, become hot property for historical novels. These include "Star-like Grass" (Qing Dynasty); "A Terrible Wind" (Tang Dynasty); "Chen Sheng", a story of the first peasant leader; and "The Boxer Rebellion". Drama follows, with plays such as "The Song of the Wind", "Wang Shao-jung" and "Li Shi-ming, the

Prince of Qin'', all based on the historical figures and events.

War themes are also popular. Soldiers in China enjoy a fairly high reputation and they are usually endowed with a sort of high moral integrity. For quite some time after the downfall of the Gang of Four, war literature seemed at a standstill. The dogmatist tendency began to change when Hsiu Huai-zhong's novelette, ''Anecdotes on the Western Front'', came out. The young hero Liu Mso-mei is a real hero, yet at the same time has his worries, discontents, complaints and an impatient fury, relics of those years of chaos. Because of its courageous exposure of the complicated contradictions within the army, this work encouraged a new type of war fiction: Zhu Chun-yu's ''Green Shade in the Desert'', He Gu-yan's ''Fresh Camellia'', Meng Wei-zhai's ''The Birth of a Sculpture'', Li Cen-bao's ''A Wreath below the Mountains'', and Zhu Su-jing's ''Shoot at Sirius''. ''A Wreath'' particularly caught the notice of the common people, and caused a stir on account of its theme – the self-defence war with Vietnam. The novella touches on back-door favoritism and ethnic divisions. Other war themes include the border conflicts with the Soviets in the sixties, the Korean war in the fifties and the anti-Japanese war in the thirties and forties: Wei Wei's ''East'', Meng Wei-zhai's ''Yesterday's War'' and Lin Ya-zhou's ''Two Generations of Heroes.''

Lin's ''Two Generations'' is worth mentioning in spite of its weakness in characterization. It deals with the two generations of army men. Father is a senior military commander who is just, firm, but inconsiderate to his family. His wife dies sadly and regretfully. The daughter and her boyfriend, however, have their own values and their own ways of looking at things. The generation-gap conflict is touching and effective.

To be true to life, to narrate and describe what life really offers, is perhaps why literature flourishes and prospers. Reportage, for instance, has great capacity to praise good and repudiate evil. Good and evil are what most of our writers try to observe and depict. Only now can Chinese writers choose freely what they want to write of, and how they want to write.

Apart from hundreds of pieces of reportage which praise 'model' people in all walks of life, including ''Forty-eight Hours of a Woman Magistrate'' (Mufu, Yanghe), ''A Blind Manager'' (Zhang Xiao-ling, Deming), ''Beauty'' (Chen Zufeng), ''Commander of the Blue Troops'' (Jiang Yonghong), Li Zhungren's ''Return Journey'' (Gu Xiaoyen), many writers now turn their attention to the intelligentsia: research workers, doctors, actors, teachers. Such work includes Huang Zhung-ying's ''Love-story of Wild Geese'' and ''Orange'', Deng Jia-rong's ''Ma Ying-cu, the Specialist of Population'', Liu Bing-yan's ''A Person and His Shadow.''

Nonetheless what is pushing reportage to a new height is its ability to penetrate social issues and raise some new questions. There are some writers who emphasise real life and events and who have the courage to inquire into and expose such issues as bureaucracy and back-door favoritism. They include such well known writers as Huang Zhong-ying, Mu Qing and many others. What is worth noting is the appearance of younger reportage writers with talent, insight and courage. Qian Gang's "The Great Earthquake in Tang Shan" spread over China on the eve of the tenth anniversary of the Tang Shang earthquake. It reveals the relationship between man and nature – how tragic disasters ruined a big city in a few seconds, and how the common Chinese had the courage in the face of the disaster to re-establish their lives and work, and rebuild their city.

If reportage can be regarded as a fresh growth, children's literature is a flower in bloom. China has a long tradition of children's literature, which began to appear as early as the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Ye Sheng-tao published his children's stories seventy years ago, marking the birth of our children's literature. But unfortunately, children's literature was long ignored. It was not until after the Cultural Revolution that it began to grow rapidly. Today in China, there are over eighty literary magazines for children. While some of the older writers, like Ye Jung-jian, Bing Xing, and Yuan Jing, still make occasional contributions, most is from younger writers: books such as Liu Houming's "Green Purse", "Black Arrow and Duda", "The Little Bear and His Master"; Ren Da-lin's "Cricket", "Grandpa Celebrates His Birthday With Me", "Identity"; Ren Da-xing's "Lu Xiao-gang and His Sister", "Three pieces of Copper-sized Beancurd", "My First Master"; Wang Lu-yao's "The Story of Solving a Case". Poets like Ke Yan, Jing Bo, Ren Rong-rong and Tian Di are welcomed by children. Writing for children has gradually got rid of ultra-leftist influences and has widened a great deal, paying more and more attention to children's specific concerns and interests.

And much else is happening – for instance, in science fiction and folk-lore, the last few years have seen bumper harvests.

A large proportion of the most productive writers of the day are from two groups who have been through severe physical and mental tests: the former 'rightists', and the intelligentsia who were 'rusticated.'

From 1957, many of the former were forced into physical labor in remote areas; some were abandoned by their wives or husbands or put in prison for years. The intellectuals in the latter group were forced to live in rural and mountain areas during the Cultural Revolution, working in the fields and living in huts, like millions of poor peasants who tilled the land for countless generations.

These bitter experiences shaped and matured these writers. Today they are mostly in their thirties, forties or fifties, at an age of vigor and vitality. What they lack in literary experience they have gained in other ways. Their output is rich and varied. After years of waiting, their chance has come. It it now spring, or early summer. If the sunshine and nutrients hold, we can expect a fruitful autumn. Then China will really be 'a state of culture.'

Since the above article was written, it has to be noted that there has been a revival of campaigns in China against 'bourgeois liberalism' and to some extent against western influences. Some foreign observers and commentators have seen this as the equivalent to the repression which followed the 'false dawn' of Mao's hundred flowers, but this is to take far too gloomy a view. It is to be expected that, in a country with the complex recent history of China, and with the emphasis inevitably placed on 'ideological understanding' in our political system, there will be argument and counter-argument and changes in the pace of the opening up of cultural life. The current event does not at all mean an end to the opening-up policy, but rather suggests a re-adjustment of that policy – to stress some basic tenets in accordance with the circumstances in this country. After all we have to admit that our country is a socialist state, and our freedom has to be limited within a certain area – namely to adhere to the Party's leadership and Marxism-Leninism. Any freedom is certainly not allowed beyond that limit. The current changes maybe show again that we have to remind ourselves constantly that we must be aware of these basic principles. The hundred flowers can go on to bloom if they can tolerate the necessary limits. The essential points are, however, that the new literature and art of China, freed of many past restrictions and imbibing new concepts, is contributing powerfully to the strengthening of the Chinese people and their institutions; and that this process has the strong and continuing backing of the political leadership in this country. The door has been opened. There are and will be arguments about how far it should remain ajar. But it will not be closed again.

DAVID MARTIN

Writing Starts with a Chocolate Bar

From Fox on My Door, *a journey through the author's life for young readers, to be published shortly by Collins Dove*

My brother and I were at boarding school in a part of Germany called Thuringia, a beautiful region of hills and deep forests. The land and the ancient villages were lovely, but that is where the charm ended. We twins were the only Jewish boys in that school and those were the years when Hitler and his Nazi mob, the chief bully and his underbullies, were rampaging through the country. Life was harder than it had ever been; millions had no jobs, and scapegoats were needed to blame for these troubles. The handiest were the Jews. There were not enough of them to fight back successfully.

I cannot say I hated everything about that boarding school. It had some first-rate people, young and old, but the air smelled of cruelty and violence, like in the Wild West when a gang of outlaws cows a whole town. To make out we were happy would be a lie. I was dreadfully shy but I covered it up with bluff. I could have talked my way out of an angry swarm of bees. This appeased some of the boys but underneath they resented it, and when they turned on me it was with still greater fury. In every zoo there are animals which must kick and bite any beast that does not growl or grunt quite as they do.

Those were years of fear and ferment. It laid hold of the boys like a fever, suddenly to disappear again. Teachers were baited without mercy. The chemistry master was driven frantic when we stole the key of the poison cupboard. Another poor wretch we pushed to the edge of a breakdown when, day after day, lesson after lesson, we organised ourselves to stare at his trouser fly. Imagine it: forty eyes! Yet another teacher suffered the indignity, one weekend, of having all his furniture removed to the cemetery. We did not forget – not we – to put his slippers under the bed. What savages we were!

Rudi and I added our mite to the chaos. We had been given a roulette game for our birthday, a small but perfect replica of the real thing. We joined with some mates to establish a gambling den, turning our dormitory into a secret casino. We pooled our pocket money. We two were the 'bank' and the other young gentlemen had to chance their luck against us. The bank is supposed always to come out winner over an evening's play, but we must have got it wrong somehow because ours was 'broken' the first evening. A new syndicate took over and did better. It was glorious while it lasted. Half the night we sat up in our pyjamas, spinning the wheel and breathlessly watching the tiny silver ball roll and hop. Next day we staggered into class, bleary-eyed and worn out. We possessed proper playing chips. Money changed hands, and debt slips. There were bashings and mock duels. Not to mention haggard poverty for some. The show went on for roughly three weeks, until, one midnight, the headmaster walked in and confiscated the whole doings. The school shook with his wrath. Expulsions were threatened. But what I still cannot fathom is why he, a puckish wit, thought he could stamp the madness out by taking away our crystal radio sets as well. Every single one was put under seal. What programme on the wireless did the headmaster believe had rotted our characters?

I have no enmity towards teachers. I owe too much to too many of them. One or two of course, for all I cared, could have taught in hell, especially the man in charge of a certain primary school who loved canes better than chalk. But we shan't dwell on him. With great affection I do remember Mr Friedrich whose cheeks were criss-crossed by scars from his duelling student days, who not only taught me French but to love the land where it is spoken. Or old Kerkoff, that doddery ruin of a prof, long retired but still held to be good enough for the crammer's school where we met up.

(Crammers in Germany are schools where no-hopers are crammed full of dusty knowledge, like geese being fattened for liver paste. No homework: everything is done in class under the eyes of some bored instructor. It is so unspeakably dull there that you would exchange your treasured grand-final tickets for a bolt of lightning to

strike the roof. My grandfather used to say that from our particular crammer any horse could pass the matric on his way to the knacker.)

But Kerkoff gave me a glimpse of what history is, the hopes and fears of people past. He lent me books and discussed them with me. And even the sad sack whose trouser fly we gawked at, he too has my gratitude. That I can write this in English I owe mainly to him. If he could read this page his skeleton would rattle in amazement.

In that school we had an underground homework scheme which can only function where there are boarders. It was the Collective Speciality System. Boys who were clever at algebra or geometry did the homework in maths for eight or nine numbskulls. Boys who shone in nature study did it for those who could not tell rhubarb from roses. Original it was not, but we had developed the idea remarkably. One of our maths experts, for instance, having done his duty by a fellow who could barely count his toes, would then pass it on to another to put in a couple of minor mistakes. Thus we ensured that the ploy did not become too slickly uniform. Nevertheless, how the staff could have squared the quality of our written work with our pitiful efforts on the oral side remains a mystery.

I was the leading collective specialist in history and German, which includes literature. The history cheating was easy, but between a Friday and a Monday I sometimes gave birth to half a dozen essays. For the faker this is a dangerous game. It trains him to write in a style which is not his.

A few boys refused to rely on the assembly line. And my own stopped dead the week I produced an essay under my own name and came close to being kicked out.

This was our subject: "What is Better, Boarding School or Day School?" Having cooked up a tasty mixture of arguments, for and against, for my classmates, I took a deep breath and wrote my own piece. I felt rebellious, put upon by adults, and ready to lash out. Day Schools, I put down, are better than boarding schools for the simple reason that their teachers do not have the same opportunities to brainwash the pupils. Teachers, I pointed out, love what they call 'helping to form character'. It is their aim, their dream, their hobby. Lead them to a little character seedling and watch them rub their hands! In a boarding school they can mould and knead character all day long, from first bell to lights-out. But it was, I reasoned, revolting for any person to want to muck around with the character of any other person, large or small. With mine, for example. I had enough trouble with it as it was. Lay off, don't touch! The best solution would be to employ private tutors, paid to pass on pure information. (Did I realise I was calling for more crammers?) Leave the poor blighters to themselves, don't twist and trim them, let them grow up to make their own characters. My parting shot was a question. How many of our teachers were so happy with the character they had that they felt entitled to shape us in their likeness?

There is something in that, I suppose. I am still not sure that this character-forming rigmarole is such a great invention, but how do you get round it? Only when my work was handed in did I realise what outrage I was guilty of.

The morning arrived and the teacher entered the classroom with our exercise books under his arm. He hurled them on his desk, scattering them in all directions. And then he said, or rather shouted, something like this:

"We have one boy here" – he looked straight at me – "who has the heart of a poisonous toad, if that's not an insult to toads. To him nothing is sacred. He hates authority, he hates his teachers, he thinks himself superior to all you boys. He does not want to be like you and me; all he wants to be is his stuck-up, swollen-headed self. His parents send him to us, so he can grow up decent and straight, but that does not suit His Highness. He wants his own personal tutors, if you please, so nobody can interfere with his precious little soul, God help us!"

I sat white and trembling. This school claimed it could model snotty-nosed brats into patriotic sons of the fatherland, and I, a Jewish boy, had spat on it like a boy-scout on his toggle.

The headmaster called me in. He enquired whether I would not feel better at some other school which did not expect so much from its students. I said no. "I was thinking about discussing it with your father." – "Please, sir, don't." – "Well, at least remember that your brother has to keep his own end up here." Many boys caught the virus and I was sent to Coventry. I was more lonely than ever.

We had moved up into a higher form where the Collective Speciality System was going out of fashion, when I came face to face with a teacher of a different breed. His name was von Haller. He came from one of the Baltic countries where many Germans lived. He was past fifty but tall and wiry. His eyes were set deep and for a nose he had an eagle's beak. He had been a strong athlete before an unlucky pole-vault jump shattered his pelvis. He was often in pain. He walked with a stick, slowly. Sometimes he taught us in his own room, lying on a couch. Once I sat down too close to him, touched him carelessly and heard him wince. But normally the most he would let you see was the quick closing of the eyes. He always dressed in a blue tracksuit and comfortable tennis shoes. In his smile irony blended with affection. We knew he would not put up with any nonsense but he had no discipline problems: his lessons were too interesting for that.

Von Haller taught us German and English. He had led an adventurous life and in his young days

had been a sailor. He knew any number of English sea shanties, and learning to sing them helped to give us a feeling for the language. How we roared the "E-ri-e Canal"!

> We were forty miles from Albany,
> Forget it I never shall!
> What a terrible storm we had one night
> On the Erie Canal!

And the booming chorus:

> Oh, the Erie was a-risin',
> An' the gin was a-gittin' low,
> An' I scarcely think we'll get a drink
> Till we git to Buffalo-o-o,
> Till we get to Buffalo.

If I live long enough I aim to sail through that canal and see where the cook, the grand ol' gal who wore a ragged dress, was hoisted upon a pole as a signal of distress. We sang those songs, plus a few that are rarely heard in respectable schools, and we didn't fluff our exams.

We read English books with him and translated German ones into English. In this way we were introduced to Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat, To Say Nothing of the Dog*. It tells of three friends, Londoners, who row up the river Thames in the company of Montmorency, the dog. The book first appeared in my grandparents' time but is almost as fresh and funny as it was then. There are some passages in it where Jerome really lets himself go. They are tenderly poetic descriptions of nature, or of his beloved river in a sad or playful mood. One of these we had to study with particular attention. It evokes a beautiful night which the three travellers spend resting at a pretty spot on Magna Carta Island, some way beyond the township of Staines. Here is a small part of it.

> It was a glorious night. The moon had sunk and left the quiet earth alone with the stars... They awe us, these strange stars, so cold so clear... And yet it seems so full of strength and comfort, the night. In its great presence, our small sorrows creep away, ashamed.

"Right boys!" von Haller said, standing before us leaning on his stick. "Do you see this slab of chocolate?" He held it up. (I remember the make: *Mauxion*.) "I am offering it as a prize. You will take this piece of English prose and translate it into German, but as poetry this time. You follow me? I want you to turn English into German and prose into verse. You must all have a try, but there is only one prize. You have four days to do it in."

I like sweet things, but a poem can linger on the tongue and in the heart longer than the best chocolate. Poetry could make me tingle; it excited me, those ballads of ancient heroes and their noble or mysterious deeds in words that could growl like thunder or speak in dreamlike whispers. I had not yet discovered the power of wine, but poetry filled my cup and left me tipsy. It was my black-maned mustang, the storm in my sail. I would win that chocolate, I would put in their places those jackanapes who thought they could distinguish between a poem and a pumpkin. I would... but I too was no poet. I did not have the gift. I with my rasping melody, my stale, stunted, stammering song! Von Haller knew a windbag when he saw one. He would show up my pretensions for what they were.

I undertook to give Rudi some help with his own poem, as well as to write one for a mate. It cannot have been a cheerful task, for I could not risk writing a poem with which they could win the prize. That would have been a fitting punishment, but too painful.

Having finished the false job I began tackling the true. The first step, the plain translation, was easy, although the "small sorrows creep away" gave me some trouble. I did not think I could master free verse, so I chose to use rhymes. I pondered and ruminated and rejected, I wrote and rewrote and suffered all night in the stuffy garret which we twins inhabited. At dawn I threw away the stuff I had thought so good, lines as flavorless as twice-boiled cabbage. I began again from scratch. I grasped at least one secret: poetry is like a coiled spring. I must tighten and compress, not let it swell up flabbily.

When it was completed and given in I felt I had been a fool. Such a great to-do, and for what? A piece of chocolate that cost less that a tennis ball. What is poetry? Shadow boxing, a trick to impress girls. Millions of kids are writing reams of it. The best poem is not half as important as knocking down some rough-neck or kicking a goal for your House.

Monday came and the hour when the winner was to be announced. There was no tension among the young bards. Von Haller came in, dressed in his tracksuit, and mounted the low platform. He seated himself and laid his stick down. He put the pile of poems in front of him, placing the slab of chocolate on top. He looked around the room and said, in his downright way:

"Well, I have read your poems. One or two strike me as rather similar; I fear some of you may have been rowing up the same river in the same boat." He smiled his cool, friendly smile and I lowered my eyes. "But it doesn't matter. If you need somebody else to man your oar it proves that you are not cut out for it." He tapped the chocolate. "Of course this is no laurel wreath. And Jerome is no Shakespeare, which is just as well because we have no Shakespeares in this class. Also, it may not be a fair test because some boys are better at translating than others. However..."

He picked up the chocolate and called out my name. I stood up.

"Please advance." I did so. He handed it to me. I thanked him and went back to my place without unseemly haste. He said no more and the lesson proceeded in the customary manner. He did not analyse any of the poems, and if my memory is good, as it is bound to be in this case, did not read out mine. I put the chocolate away and sat in my seat, wondering why it had to be like this.

When the bell rang von Haller took his stick and rose. The class filed out. I was about to leave myself when he motioned to me. I went over to him with my prize in my hand. He gazed at me for what felt a long time. He was tall, if slightly stooped, and the platform added to his height. He said, still looking at me:

"Yes, my lad. I think perhaps you will be a poet some day."

No handshake or pat on the back, no other praise. He got down from the platform, went past me and out into the corridor.

I will see if I can be as simple about it now as he was. It was then, that morning, that I made up my mind to try to be a writer.

I do not know what became of Herr von Haller. He cannot still be alive, and it is impossible for him to have known that the boy to whom he awarded the chocolate did become a writer, and that this prize meant more to him than any other in his life. Or not the prize so much as his words.

MEANJIN

2/87

AUSTRALIA INSIDE AND OUT

Ruth Abbey and Jo Crawford ask some probing questions about *Crocodile Dundee;* Stephen Alomes looks at images of Australia in the British press; John Murphy analyses our Vietnam literature; Dennis Altman reflects on the meanings of the mateship myth. Reviews include Stuart Macintyre on *The Fatal Shore;* Noel Butlin on Stretton's *Political Essays;* Brian Matthews on Fay Zwicky and Harry Heseltine; Ann Diamond on Colin Johnson's poems; and Bernard Smith on the National Gallery of Victoria. Fiction by David Brooks, Marion Halligan, Carolyn van Langenberg, Chris Mansell, Louise Dow. Poems by Anna Couani, Peter Porter, Bruce Beaver, Alison Clark and others. Subscriptions $20 from *Meanjin*, University of Melbourne, Parkville 3052. Single issues $5 in your bookshop or $5.90 posted.

WALTER CROCKER

Richard Casey

In recent years Australia has produced some outstanding biographies, the best bearing comparison with the work of Philip Ziegler, Elizabeth Longford, her daughter Antonia Fraser and a few other masters. W.J. Hudson's *Casey* (Oxford, $35.00) takes its place amongst our best. A reader does not have to agree with everything in it to see that. Richard Casey, too soon forgotten, or too much shrouded in myths and quarter-truths, is revived memorably. Hudson ferrets out the facts, clears away the shadows, and sets the eighty-six tempestuous years of Casey's life correctly and revealingly in the historical social and cultural conditions which shaped it.

As an achievement of the historian's craft Hudson has brought off a *tour de force*. Casey, a compulsive writer, left millions of words behind him, perhaps more even than Queen Victoria, in diaries, letters, memoranda, state papers (in Britain and India as well as in Australia) and the business papers of a multi-millionaire. Hudson, formerly an academic but for some years now the editor of historical documents in the Department of Foreign Affairs, seems to have burrowed into and mastered enough of this daunting super-abundance to have missed nothing of significance.

It is possible that diaries or papers of close associates of Casey such as Sir Keith Officer or General Sir Walter Cawthorn or of Lady Casey herself, and letters, might yield new facts or additional explanations, but it is not probable that the picture drawn by Hudson will be changed substantially. Moreover, he gives us more than facts, important though they be. In the 350 pages of text (which are complemented by forty-two pages of documentation and about twenty well-chosen photographs) he gives us both insight and art. Casey the man, the husband, the father, not just the statesman, is looked at with cool judiciousness, urbanity, sobriety, compassion and delicacy. The last quality is exemplified in the treatment of such testing matters as the convict origins in Casey's mother's family, the characters of his father and grandfather, family life and various personal matters. There is nothing of the immaturity, psychological as well as cultural, so obtrusive in much of academic writing today, and nothing of innuendo or meanness. Students of Australian history, as well as survivors from Casey's day, can have nothing but gratitude for this notable book.

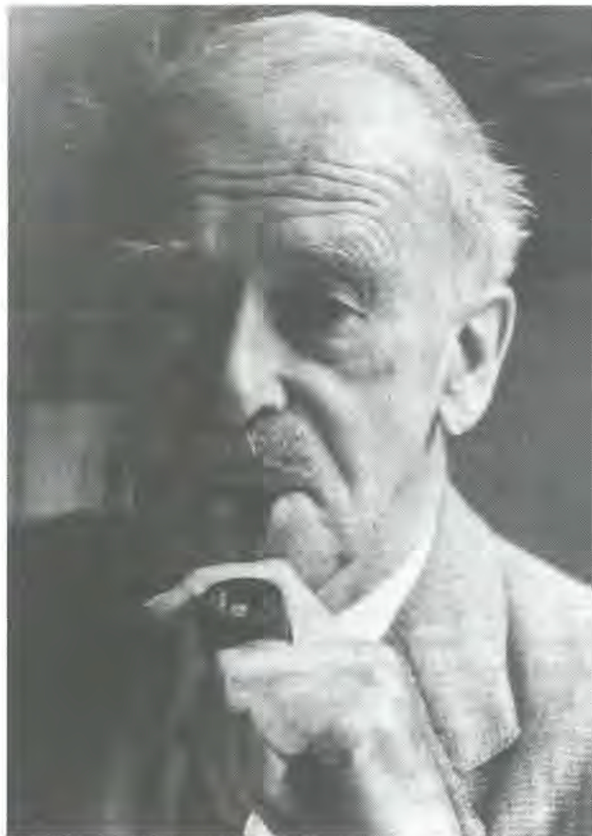
As Casey is already largely forgotten, and his world almost superseded, it is necessary to recall the main stages in his long and varied life.

Born in Brisbane in 1890, his mother's city and the scene of his father's foundations of wealth, his parents moved with him to Melbourne when he was three. Melbourne remained his home or base, until he died in 1977. His education included Melbourne Grammar School, the University of Melbourne briefly where he began studying Engineering, and Cambridge (Trinity College) where he graduated with the degree in Engineering. Being wealthy, highly presentable, rowing for his college, and with a sociable side to his nature, he took an active part in mundane life as well as in his studies.

This was the mundane life of Cambridge before the First World War, the *belle époque* when class, style, elegance were supreme. Most of it ended in the mud and blood of Flanders in 1914-18, the cruel revenge for its follies, but it left an indelible stamp on Casey. For the rest of his life he was inseparable from style and elegance and the gentleman's code. It went much deeper than his Savile Row clothes. During his Cambridge years he also travelled on the Continent, acquiring reasonably idiomatic French and German, and, significant of Casey's instinctive attraction to America's new world, then widely laughed at in Europe, especially to its engineering wonders, to its new methods of administration, and to its invention of efficiency and public relations.

The past of Europe, the past altogether, always meant little to him. He might not speak against cathedrals and other ancient buildings created in Europe's or India's or China's or Angkor Wat's by-gone days, but all that bored him. It continued throughout

life to bore him, as Australian ambassadors discovered forty years later when they tried to take him on a sight-seeing round over Rome or Athens or Delhi. His heart was in the present. His clothes might come from Savile Row, and his speech and manners from pre-1914 Cambridge, but his heart belonged largely to the engineering glories of Chicago and Detroit.



Casey returned to Australia from Cambridge at the begining of 1914, significantly via the United States. The Great War, the watershed in the history of post-Napoleonic Europe, and indeed of the world, broke out seven or eight months later. At the time he was up at Mt Morgan and not long back from some weeks in wild New Guinea, starting his apprenticeship in his father's enterprises. Within three weeks of the outbreak he volunteered for the army.

He spent over four years in the AIF, seeing action at Gallipoli and then on the Western Front. He was awarded the MC and the DSO. These terrible years had the maturing effect on Casey common to most participants.

Demobilized in 1919, instead of returning straight to Australia he visited some of the industrial deserts of the US once again. While doing so his father died suddenly in Honolulu. Casey hastened there to take his mother back to Melbourne.

The death of his father relieved him of paternal tyranny which was harsh even by the standards of the time and by the standards of the self-made millionaire. The father's pressures, unremitting throughout Casey's boyhood and youth, must have had a considerable effect on his make-up. His obedience was equally unremitting. His father's death also made him a wealthy man. He was nearly thirty at the time.

On arriving in Melbourne he decided to try to become the Henry Ford of Australia. In his characteristic way he threw himself into this picturesque dream with frenzy. Though the most eligible bachelor in Melbourne, perhaps in Australia, he eschewed balls and the like for factories and machinery. In particular, he put time and money into Gregory Steel and into a firm which was to produce a crankless engine that burnt less fuel than the engines then in use. He did not get far on the road to becoming the Australian Henry Ford, but these beginnings were neither besotted nor contemptible. American motor car manufacturers took the crankless engine seriously, deciding against it because the fuel economics would not justify the costs of revolutionising their current engines.

Meantime Casey had been seeing something of Prime Minister Bruce. The latter was living in the old Casey house, Shipley, and he shared with Casey an Anglo-Australian background. In addition to being seven years older than Casey, Bruce had an entirely different temperament; but both men had the same ideal of patriotism and of the duty of the wealthy to give themselves to the common weal. Hudson, it seems to me correctly, believes that Bruce became a surrogate father to Casey (Casey's mother, though she lived on until 1943, and though he inherited not a little of his physical make-up from her, seems never to have counted greatly with him). Exercised over the failure of intercommunication between the British and the Australian governments, especially as regards international affairs, Bruce persuaded Casey to go to London in 1924 to act, in effect, as agent for the Prime Minister of Australia and to work out a *modus operandi.*

Casey did the job to perfection. He was the right choice for it. Britain, like most of the British Empire, was still run by a governing class, much as the 1914-18 war had eroded it, and the governing class still transcended parties, or the functional distinctions between Parliament, Cabinet and the bureaucracy. Casey had all the credentials for this governing class – his Cambridge education, his war record, his wealth, his handsomeness, his unfeigned social graces combined with his enormous enthusiasm and his enormous capacity for hard work. Political figures like Churchill, Baldwin, Amery gave him time; so too did social figures like the Astors and Lord Dawson of Penn. His marriage in 1926 to Maie Ryan, a fellow Anglo-Australian, wealthy in her own right, both 36 years old, and the house they built in

Westminster, added a new dimension to the elegant entertaining he had been going in for. Though she took up her husband's piloting of aeroplanes and driving fast expensive cars, her affinities were with artists and musicians and actors; she herself painted, composed music and wrote. She was familiar with life in England and Europe and was as much at home in London as in Melbourne. Noted for her strength of character as much as for her intelligence, from now on her life was devoted to Casey and his interests. The union had much in common with that of Browning and Elizabeth Barrett.

Casey got restless several times during his five-year stint in London. Towards the end his thoughts were on returning to Australia and going into politics. He did not get far with the idea before Bruce was defeated at the polls in 1929, losing his own seat. Scullin became the worthy but short-lived Prime Minister in 1930. Casey resigned, though not immediately, and he arrived back in Australia early in 1931. Before the end of 1931 he was elected to the House of Representatives. Australia was in the depths of the great depression at this time.

Casey brought to his life as a politician the same bustling busyness as he had to his life as a diplomat in London. Sport, as always, counted for nothing with him. His only hobbies were flying and motor cars, and those hobbies were subordinate to work. Towards the end of 1933 he was rewarded by Prime Minister Lyons' making him a junior minister. This added fuel to his fire. Yet by 1935 he was toying with the idea of quitting politics, such was the restlessness, almost the unrootedness, which bedevilled him again and again, especially in politics. Whether the arrival of Menzies on the Canberra scene in 1934 had anything to do with it is not clear; it was already being spoken of that Menzies would step into the shoes of Lyons in due course. What is clear is that some of Casey's political colleagues already distrusted his party orthodoxy. They saw him as not a good party man. This would not be surprising; he had shown that he was far from believing that the ALP Opposition were "all fools and knaves"; privately he thought some of his party colleagues were just that. He was not an unqualified admirer of the capitalist system. His main concern at this time was for more job creation and more social legislation; concerns not popular either in Cabinet or in the party room. And, as enthusiastic as ever for efficiency, he was shocked with much about proceedings in Parliament and still more in Cabinet.

Towards the end of 1935, however, Lyons, who liked Casey, made him treasurer. The promotion re-activated Casey's political hopes; including for the leadership, the formidable Menzies notwithstanding. He had indeed made a rapid and a high flight in four years. Yet once again the aberration of judgement into which he leapt more than once, and which must have affected his standing throughout his political life, was showing itself. In 1939 after the death of Lyons (April), just as the war clouds were gathering ominously, and just when his chances of getting the leadership had some promise, he joined with Page in an appeal to Bruce to return to Australia so as to lead the country. Was Page, a man of guile, exploiting Casey's simpler nature? To cut a dramatic story short, Menzies became Prime Minister and Casey resigned from Parliament, accepting the offer to go to Washington to open an Australian Legation there.

Casey arrived in Washington in March 1940, six months after Britain and Australia, together with France, had been at war with Germany. He turned out to be as ideally suited for this appointment as he had been for the London appointment sixteen years earlier. Having put Australia on Londons' map then, he now proceeded to put it on Washington's, and to an extent on America's map. His good looks (always an important factor in America) and good manners, his wealth, his flying his own plane, his driving enthusiasm, not least for American modernity and American efficiency (though at times he wondered about this confident American claim to efficiency as he also wondered about certain human elements in America now being promised by populist politicians that this was the century of the common man; the populace in the US often made his feelings about US mixed) served him well. As in London, he got access to a variety of powerful people; they were all the way up to Harry Hopkins and President Roosevelt, the latter, to Casey's joy, coming to call him Dick.

But by the end of 1941 the old restlessness had come back. The Menzies government had given place to Curtin's ALP government (the Japanese were now in the war and the Cabinet, understandably, was edgy); and the Minister Casey had to deal with, too, was Evatt, some distance from a serene Buddha at the best of times. He began early by bruiting it abroad that "Casey is a swine"; and some of his ministerial instructions were so outrageous – Hudson's word – as to look like an invitation to resign. Yet when Churchill was in the US in March 1942 and he offered Casey the post of Resident Minister in the Middle East with a seat in the War Cabinet, both Churchill and Casey acting with propriety and considerateness to the ALP government, Curtin's reaction was angry and Evatt's was worse.

The appointment, a risky one from the British Cabinet's viewpoint, was a tremendous compliment to Casey. He arrived in the Middle East in April 1942, one of the most difficult points in time in World War II and not least in the Middle East. Throughout the two ensuing years he justified Churchill's gamble to the hilt. This was the more notable because Casey was never free from the underhand hostility of the British

Ambassador, Locker Lampson (later Lord Killearn), who resented the presence of a War Cabinet Minister in his bailiwick as a slighting of his own importance. Harold Macmillan, who held an equivalent post in French North Africa, a critical and sceptical observer, liked Casey and came to admire much of what he was doing and aiming at though, high-brow *par excellence* as this old scholar of Eton and scholar of Balliol was, he found him "ill educated". Casey's knowledge of history was indeed as spotty as his knowledge of literature. Macmillan's knowledge of both was profound. Macmillan had not met Evatt or some of Evatt's lesser colleagues and so had yet to discover the relativity of the word 'educated' among Australian politicians. The British military men liked and admired Casey.

What Casey had taken on was no sinecure. The spread of countries under his surveillance, the multiplicity of responsibilities, the size of his staff, and the stretch and pace of his own movements, make that clear. So did the resulting deterioration in Casey's health – fevers, dysenteries and recurrent boils. But he revelled in it. His wife, never far from his side, did too. For some time the dominant concern was whether Rommel would take Cairo (typical of the need to treat diaries critically, at times with scepticism, is an entry in Hugh Dalton's diaries – Dalton was a senior Minister in the British Cabinet and seems to have got this gem from Gladwyn Jebb who, not a malicious man, must have been told it by persons hostile to Casey in the Foreign Office – to the effect that Casey, in the face of Rommel's advance, panicked, got ready to bolt and sent off his wife in his aeroplane). And, even before Rommel had been pushed back, Palestine became the playground of Zionist terrorists. They were raiding British ammunition and other supply dumps for their own plans against the Arabs settled in Palestine for centuries, and they were spearheaded by American Zionists, some of them highly placed in Roosevelt's apparatus. The Zionists complained to Churchill that Casey was antisemitic. It was a gross lie but it resulted in a precipitate angry telegram from the passionately pro-Zionist Churchill. Casey had no difficulty in rebutting these charges. Casey's successor, Lord Moyne, was assassinated by Zionist terrorists.

Churchill was sufficiently satisfied with Casey's performance in Cairo to offer him late in 1943 the governorship of Bengal, together with an hereditary peerage. Bengal was one of the three Presidencies – i.e. senior Governorships – in India, and ranked just below the Viceroy. Casey declined the peerage, on the grounds that after the war he would be returning to politics in Australia, but he accepted the governorship.

He arrived in Calcutta in January 1944. Boils were still plaguing him, and recurrent attacks of dysentery and fever, but his drive became as furious as ever. In addition to the huge flow of paper across his desk he spent hours most days in seeing Bengali politicians of all parties, journalists, and other persons of standing. He travelled among the seventy-odd million subjects for whose well being he was officially responsible. He revelled in the panoply of the governorship; not least in his second year when he suspended the constitution and ruled by decree. He revelled too in Curzon's old Government House, with its 300 rooms and the thirty-odd clocks which one of the ADCs was responsible for winding.

He had to deal with the agitation against the British raj and the still greater agitation of Muslim against Hindu and Hindu against Muslim, erupting every now and then into murderous violence, as well as with the millions of outcastes. The racial and religious ferment was envenomed by the over-population. This was the time when Casey came to see the population problem as among the world's most dangerous problems, a view he retained to the end of his life and which he early passed on to his son who gave his life to it. Over-population was the cause of the two terrible famines which struck Bengal in the 1940s.

During part of Casey's governorship Gandhi was living near Calcutta. He succeeded in having talks with Gandhi, an episode deserving more attention than space allows here. He also had talks with Nehru, the leader of the agitation against the raj.

Aberration of judgement was still a possibility with Casey. Hudson publishes a strange, almost violent, letter from him to Viceroy Wavell. Hudson's own judgement falters somewhat in his Bengal chapter. He has been at a disadvantage in having no first-hand knowledge of the inordinate complexity which was – and is – India.

World War II came to an end at last in August 1945. By then Churchill's Government had given place to Attlee's. Casey, with Attlee's goodwill and warm appreciation, left for Australia in February 1946. He had spent only two years in Bengal and while there had the help of able Britishers, but none of the other governors under Viceroy Wavell outshone him.

He returned to Australia expecting acclaim for his six years war work, which was indisputably notable. He received some acclaim but it was muted and short-lived: war-time Washington, Cairo and Calcutta counted for little in comparison with the fury and the provincial self-centredness of Australian politics. It suited some, including Menzies himself, that the acclaim remain meagre. Casey went through a disappointing period. After eighteen months he was given the largely honorific post of President of the Party, with the highly unhonorific task of raising money for it.

In 1949 Menzies won the elections and Casey won a seat. By then he had been absent from Parliament for nearly ten years. He soon found that he was not at ease in the House, nor, apparently, in the Cabinet,

nor in the portfolio of Development itself. For Menzies he came to feel what was rare in Casey, especially as regards Menzies, something for which the word *hatred* is too strong but the word *dislike* is not strong enough. Hudson sees these months as showing Casey's "inability to tolerate political reality". Perhaps, but is it certain?

Improvement came with his appointment as Minister of External Affairs early in 1951. He was sixty at the time. He held that portfolio for the next nine years. At last, and increasingly, he got fulfilment. He lived with great affairs and world issues, he dealt with foreigners of standing, and of experience comparable to his own, and he got away from Australia for at least three months a year, visiting London, Washington and other capitals significant for Australia, especially in Asia where he became as welcome and as appreciated as he was at Australian embassies. He attended the UN regularly and, though he retained little faith in it, he usually spent several weeks at the General Assembly. The parochialism, the littleness of outlook and the ignorance which he found in the majority of his fellow Ministers he thus escaped. He counted for little but he was left alone to run an *imperium in imperio* of sorts.

The ignorance of his colleagues did not mean, of course, that they had no strong views on international relations. What they did not have was facts, or a readiness to hear Casey on the facts. Perhaps he had become less articulate or more clipped in speech; perhaps his growing deafness hampered communication; perhaps, as some complained, he went in for something like name-dropping at times (after all he did know many people of importance overseas); perhaps one or other of his errors of judgement diminished confidence in him, Casey succumbing to an old tendency to gullibility or to his taste for miracle workers or to American-type PR. Whatever the reason, his plans for educating the Cabinet or the party or, through periodical meetings with editors, the public in foreign relations and Australia's interests did not get far; in some cases not as far as was deserved. He was genuinely concerned about Asia and about race relations. As regards the latter he confronted the most sacred cow in Australia's herd at the time – the White Australia Policy; so sacred that he had to move obliquely, not front-on. He took the initiative in 1954, bold at the time, of having my 1950 inaugural lecture to the ANU published and distributed. It was on racism and was in effect an attack on the White Australia Policy. He also intentionally bent the Colombo Plan (then the name for our overseas aid program) to bring Asian students to Australian universities. He was expecting, and was ready for, an attack against this in Parliament and the press as well as in his party room. In the mid 1950s he had a senior African from Ghana invited to Australia and had him put up at the Melbourne Club; another innovation requiring courage. Today it is forgotten that men of standing in all parties were still retaining squeamish feelings about the colored skin, Evatt and Calwell as well as Menzies and Fadden, not to mention Sir Stafford Cripps in England (duly punished by his daughter's contracting a highly fertile marriage with a Negro). Casey was also concerned with setting and keeping appropriate standards in our small pioneer foreign service. He gave to the two founding heads, Sir Alan Watt and Sir Arthur Tange, his support for their efforts to get the intellectual, professional and personal standards desirable.

Specific achievements of his as Foreign Minister included our acquisition of Cocos (although Sir Paul Hasluck had some part in it), the Antarctic Treaty (worked out and signed at last in 1959), the expansion of the Colombo Plan idea as far as current politics would allow, a softening up of the White Australia Policy – so much so that a decade after his time it could be quietly buried – and, though he wobbled at times and failed to think through ideas about the Cold War, he did give reminders that the West's rhetoric about it needed checking against the facts and realities. He would have liked to visit Communist China – he did take the trouble of meeting Chou En-lai – and, as soon as the political compulsions permitted, to give diplomatic recognition to that country. His belief in getting to know and to talk with practitioners of all varieties of regimes and philosophies (among the political opponents with whom he talked regularly were Haylen, Daly and Schmelta; he also had some contacts with Evatt and with the DLP; he would have preferred a bi-partisan foreign policy) was as relevant and as valuable as the style he impressed to some degree or other on Australia's Foreign Service.

Twice he was humiliated to the point where he was on the point of resigning, in 1954 over SEATO and again in 1956 over the Suez Affair (he never had any time for Eden, not even in World War Two). I believe analysts in the future will decide that his stand in 1954 was broadly right, and that in 1956 he was indisputedly right while Menzies got near to making a fool of himself.

Hudson writes of the passage in Casey's diary about Australia "feeling the hot breath of Asia on our necks" as "one of Casey's pithier lines". It was in fact a quotation from what Sir Alan Watt had remarked to Casey. When, however, Hudson writes that "unlike his predecessors, Evatt and Spender, Casey did not come to the office with a huge ego and a matching determination to achieve radical change in Australia's international relations" he is right.

We who had to deal with Casey day to day lived lightly with his foibles. We were grateful for his hard work, his support, his open mind and his spirit which was always honorable, considerate and generous. Nor could we be without pride in somebody who project-

ed on a pleasantly surprised foreign world such an honorable and such an elegant image of Australia.

Casey resigned in January 1960. Parliament was in recess and it was the dead season of the year. Menzies himself took over the portfolio. The timing and the manner of Casey's resignation, including his failure to make the valedictory statement which thoughtful Australians would have listened to, showed once more some innate lack of talent for politics. He went out not with a bang, not even with a whimper. He just went out. With some misgivings he accepted the offer of a life peerage. Menzies' public statement about it was ambiguous and not generous. What Menzies said even added to the damaging myth current in some quarters that Casey was a UK man rather than an Australian. A main reason for Casey's acceptance was that he felt the House of Lords would be a useful forum for his ideas on the Commonwealth (now growing in numbers with the accession of one ex-British colony after another). Nehru, to whom he broached the notion that Indians and other members of the republican part of the Commonwealth should be made peers, was polite, as I heard at the time, but not responsive.

The years of his retirement were once more an anti-climax following on the anti-climax of his resignation. The responsibilities and the activity he needed had gone. Lady Casey could, and did, console herself with writing books, painting pictures (some of them good) and with a voluminous world-wide correspondence as well as sharing in his flying, motor cars, and travel; but Casey lacked her inner resources. He asked friends, myself among others, for ideas for this or that speech in the House of Lords. He found himself speaking to empty benches. The old England he knew was almost dead. By 1964 he gave up speaking there.

Then in the following year, 1965, there came a revivification for him. He was made Governor-General of Australia. By then he was seventy-five, though a youngish seventy-five. For four years he lived Bengal over again, but without the famine, the over-population, the disease, the civil disobedience campaign, the murderous communal and racial outbreaks as well as without a 300-room Government House. Once more the right appointment for Casey. Hudson well says "he had the age, the bearing, the voice and the enthusiasm for the job". His performance was highly successful. He retired in 1969, handing over happily to Sir Paul Hasluck whom he respected both as a political figure and as a man. A little later the Queen made him a Knight of the Garter, the culmination of his many honors, the first Australian to be elevated to this ancient and most restricted dignity.

Casey was too much the stoic to expect old age to be comfortable. He suffered various personal set-backs, and his spirit was uneasy about England's downward slide and about the weakening of Australia's ties with the Mother Country of his active years. His efforts to get on to friendly terms with Menzies, who had retired in 1966, were scarcely successful. In the last year or two of Casey's life an incident in the long drama of their aversion took on pathos: the two men, by coincidence both in the same hospital, both hobbling on sticks, happened to pass each other in the corridor. . . To the affliction of Casey's deafness was added the pain and the immobility resulting first from a fall and then from a motor smash. Much of the last year of his life was spent in hospital. Death came in the mid-winter of 1976. His brother Dermot, the only surviving child of Casey's parents, died a year later. Lady Casey lingered on until January 1983, becoming more and more of a recluse, absorbed entirely in memories of the man with whom she had shared a life, active, colorful, at times stormy, always interesting, mostly productive, above average, for half a century, and whom she had come to adore more and more. In her last years, dressed in a cardigan and trousers, she sat in the cold library of the cold house at Berwick surrounded by boxes of letters, note books, other papers and photos covering their years together, needing little physical warmth in comparison with the spiritual warmth these memories brought to her. Some of the papers were sorted out for burning. What were they? She once selected a photo of Casey in his plane en route to Cairo and handed it to me as a gift. For me it was a dear gift, and symbolic. The last talk she had with me a few weeks before her death was in a frail voice heard with difficulty; but her sense of humor as well as her quick mind were intact; above all she was serene to a degree one did not expect in her. Was the frustrating of the great hope of the Prime Ministership at length forgiven? All passion spent and peace at last?

Such then was Casey's life. It was exceptional in its diversity, its range, and in the fact that so much of it was spent in, or close to, the corridors of power. Hudson asks what made Casey tick; with frankness and modesty he volunteers that he has not found a complete answer to the question.

My own life, an ordinary life, happened to have touched Casey's remarkable life at several points during half a century, and fairly continuously over his last thirty years. I will therefore venture not a direct answer to Hudson's question but some impressions and an assessment.

When Casey was Bruce's intermediary in London he visited Oxford about 1926 to address a student club. He struck everyone present: his uncommon good looks, his strong melodious voice, his manner serious but pleasant, and his matter measured. Some weeks later I happened to be walking with a friend in Westminster and we passed Casey. My friend's attention was aroused by the splendid apparition, "Ah," he remarked, "I bet that's an officer from the Irish

Guards." I corrected him, though I agreed that Casey looked the part: tall, upright, straight-back, lean, and even his legs with the engaging slight bandyness of the cavalry man, while his handsome face was made the handsomer by the classical Irish combination of black hair and blue eyes. He was not acting. Then, as always, he had less vanity than most men and no vanity at all about his looks. Not for the first or the last time in life would his appearance belie him. He had almost nothing of Irish about him except his looks and his name, and horses never interested him in the slightest. Engines, nuts and bolts, motor cars, aeroplanes, gadgets and industrialization predominated for him.

A decade later, in 1937, and again in 1939, when international relations were working up to the explosion of World War Two, I was sent to Canberra from Geneva and I saw something of Casey again. He seemed to be as unresting as ever. One pitied his secretary.

In 1945-46 I saw him once more. I was in the British Army at the time and found myself in Bengal – my parent formation had been a West African division then in Burma. Bengal was emerging from famine and units in the army were given the task of procuring and distributing grain. I was put in charge of operations in a certain area. Casey kindly invited me to Government House. He was frank to me about his intentions to return to Australia early in 1946 and to re-enter public life. He once volunteered that he would not serve under Menzies again and he scarcely concealed the belief that on his return he would before long become leader of the party.

At the end of 1948 I happened to be in Australia from the UN and had more talk with him, this time at his house in East Melbourne. He said nothing about the non-realisation of the hopes revealed in Bengal some two years earlier. He looked under strain and a very different Casey from the exuberant confident Governor of Bengal. Menzies in truth had out-played him and, more galling, there was little if any public appreciation or comprehension of his war-time triumphs overseas.

The next time I saw him was in Canberra over a year later. I had been appointed Foundation Professor of International Relations at the ANU. In 1951, a year after my arrival, Casey, not long made Minister of External Affairs, invited me to go to India as High Commissioner for Australia. His interest in India was as well informed and as enthusiastic as ever and I accepted the invitation gladly; the more so as Sir Alan Watt, an old friend of mine, was now head of the Department and bringing his outstanding combination of brains, professional skills and uprightness to making it a Department with quality. I stayed on in the Australian Diplomatic Service, and from then until Casey retired in 1960 I saw him frequently, in Canberra and in the overseas posts where I happened to be ambassador, and I exchanged letters with him. After his retirement I never lost touch. Sometimes he was a guest, and a most welcome guest, at my embassy. Contacts continued after I retired in 1970, by telephone as well as by post. He was enthusiastic about my ABC Guest of Honor address in 1970 arguing for the diplomatic recognition of Communist China. (Whitlam also complimented me with a warm telegram.)

Casey did much and he gained much, but what he most wanted, the Prime Ministership of Australia, he did not gain. His hopes, long enduring from the 1930s, flickered on into the 1950s. His losing the election for the Deputy Leadership to Holt in 1956 had been a cruel mortification. Yet even that did not quell his hopes entirely, as his watchful curiosity about Menzies' health suggested.

His defeat in 1956 was due in part at least to the intervention of Menzies. Because of Casey's Prime Ministerial ambitions, and because of Menzies' involvement against them, Menzies came next to Lady Casey as the pivot of his life for two or three decades.

The two men had for years been close political partners but personal enemies. In this real-life drama one does not have to denigrate Menzies in order to give Casey his due. From the time of Menzies' arrival on the Canberra scene in 1934 their roles were set. Conflict over a great and worthy ambition was to be expected. It is common form in politics. But background, temperament and style of living, as well as difference in mental equipment, sharpened, at times envenomed, the conflict. Whatever failings he might have had Menzies had an intellectual force, including concentration, together with a power of expression, including devastating ridicule, a stability of nerves and emotion buttressed by body mass, a combination for leading men which would be unusual in any place or time, and which were beyond Casey's reach. Menzies, the classical Scotch scholarship boy, at times both pawky and brash, was in the 1930s conspicuously arrogant and sneering. Perhaps he would have been less than human if he had no resentment of Casey's, as he seemed to have had of Bruce's, wealth, background of English education and physical and social graces.

Normally Menzies was not a mean man, and to Casey he showed generosity more than once, but the generosity he could have risen to, namely to arrange, or at least to work, for Casey to have the Prime Ministership for the last two or three years of his public service, he avoided. Perhaps the notion of the Prime Ministership to Casey as a final consolation prize belongs to a dream world, not the world of Australian politics. Perhaps, too, Menzies was sincerely convinced that Casey was not up to the office or to the national leadership which both the Party and the country needed. He would not have been alone in so thinking.

More than once Casey had muffed his play. As far back as 1939 he did so. He did it again on returning

to Australia after World War Two. And fellow ministers who were prepared to take his views on international relations seriously, Menzies not among them, were disconcerted by changeableness and inconsistency, at times by a certain shallowness; the shallowness which led Hugh Dalton in his war-time diaries, and Gaitskell some years later in his diaries, to write off Casey. Some of Casey's sharper colleagues, Menzies among them, did not accept his views on the value of, or the prospects for, the Commonwealth. Some of this misjudgement of persons, such as certain of his miracle-workers, is known to have harmed him. In 1949-50 for instance, he persuaded Menzies to bring one such to Australia to work out and run our development plans, and to take him on a Prime Ministerial investment propaganda trip overseas, such travel in those days being by ship. The miracle worker spent much of the five weeks at sea sun-bathing for a good tan. Menzies, convinced that the fellow was a mountebank and that Casey had been taken in once more, shook him off impatiently. Also, while Casey did have an extraordinary list of highly placed acquaintances overseas his reputation, on the whole unfair, for name-dropping was understandable.

Probably the correct or basic question is whether Casey had the essential quality for leadership at a national height. Bruce, our most under-valued Prime Minister, once in a moment of rare irrascibility remarked to Sir Keith Officer (who quoted it to me) "Our Dick is a good major but not the man for commanding the regiment." By this Bruce meant that Casey tended to need a leader above him. Hudson makes a similar point in referring to Casey's life-long element of dependence on more decisive and more rugged characters; thus his dependence on his father, on certain generals in World War One, on Churchill and Roosevelt in World War Two. Should Casey's strong-willed nimble-brained wife be added to the list?

Yet I for one remain sorry that he was not given a spell as Prime Minister, even if for only two or three years. Admittedly he had passed seventy by then; but Adenauer or de Gaulle taking over their countries had been older. I believed from first-hand experience that he had more qualifications than disqualifications for the role; and I believed that, just because he was not a politician but a pragmatic high-principled engineer widely experienced in high office, it would have been good for Australia to have him in charge for a while. The half-dozen men who became leaders of the Liberal Party after Menzies' retirement, most of them Prime Minister, were mostly midgets noticeable only for their dagger work, virtuoso smilers with a knife.

Having said that one can agree, however, that Casey was not well suited to the politicians' world at all. Long years in that world led him occasionally to certain tricks, usually mild, but it never led him into the mentality of trickery let alone the morality of justifying trickery. Nor did it lead him to a taste for, indeed any appreciable grasp of, the game of politics as a game which fascinated so many practitioners who otherwise had normal moral standards, such as Harry Truman or Churchill or Attlee or Menzies or Playford. Moreover, against Casey, an engineer by temperament as well as by training, was his tending to assume an unwarranted rationality, calculability, reliability, in human beings and their affairs. Those realities defy slide-rules. Lady Casey did not have to learn and re-learn this truth. Debates in parliament bored him as much as Party exaggerations; and though after his period in Washington he took up the harlot's science of public relations his inhibitions prevented him from using it effectively just as they prevented him from playing to the gallery blatantly.

He would have been at some disadvantage in Australian politics in any case, though not as much as in the years which followed him when certain political luminaries, better not named, gave new life to the cult of Ned Kelly and Breaker Morant as national heroes. As for Casey's inhibitions, he once recounted to me his first election campaign and how when he asked his agent how he thought he was getting on the agent replied unenthusiastically, "Well, all right. But let me tell you this, son: you won't get anywhere unless you roll in the gutter with the bastards." Casey could never feel that the people at large were bastards or wanted to roll in the gutter.

An undoubted disadvantage over and above his natural reserve was a sense of humor which was too frail and fleeting, and all too seldom ironical. A dash of the spirit of Montaigne or Machiavelli as well as of plain P. G. Wodehouse would have helped. So would have less matter-of-fact-ness. Born politicians, a numerous breed, know in their bones, and they know it almost from their pram days, that men are bored with facts and yearn to be entertained. The refreshment Menzies got – and before him Abraham Lincoln, though the latter unlike Menzies was never armed with a glass in his hand – in telling stories, some of them venerable chestnuts, to a group of cronies or, *faute de mieux*, to a group of captive listeners from the Civil Service, Menzies roaring with laughter, was denied to Casey. Not that Casey was shy to the point of having the nature of a recluse. In his own way and on his own terms he was gregarious; but he was not, and never could be, the hail-fellow-well-met nor the man getting relaxation from roaring with laughter.

He relaxed with difficulty. Holidays were a penance for him. His health lacked robustness: he had none of the beefyness of the bovine bully boys who flourish in the political world, tirelessly bawling out their dubious wares. Yet constitutionally he was strong. That he reached eighty-six shows that. But nervous tension, revealed often by the strain on his face, interfered with

his sleeping. In his last decades his insomnia was broken only by a considerable dosage of sleeping pills. Because from his time in the Middle East and India he often suffered from dysentery too, medication for that was added to the medication for insomnia. Being Casey, he never complained. Few people knew of his health troubles. I felt that his insomnia in particular had a serious effect on his concentration and so on his mental grasp.

How much he was penalized by being Anglo-Australian is not clear. Today the penalization would have been heavy: Australians now prefer their Australians neat, and without ice.

Before we leave him and the sort of man he was we must be clear about what sort of man he was not.

That is to say, we must clear away the fictions and the stereotypes which have grown up around him over the years. These reflect not Casey but, rather, an Australia which sees so little of style and elegance that in the name of equality it has come to prefer flat dull mediocrity, a form of English which is the worst spoken in the world and one of the basest linguistic communications extant, and the excuses of anti-elitism which in practice mean the pleas of the ocker. Or is it that the anti-elitism has been made by certain official bodies, including the Departments of Education and the ABC, to appear to be the preference of the majority?

The first fiction about Casey needing to be cleared away is that he was not a true Australian. As late as November 1986 the Australian could give as the heading to its review of Hudson's book ENGLISH IN ALL BUT NATIONALITY. The heading had no relevance to the review which, by John Wheeldon, was balanced. The sub-editor in choosing the heading would have been instinctively responding to the stereotype, and probably congratulated himself on the aptness of his choice. At its worst the stereotype came to imply that Casey was so English as to be anti-Australian. The truth, as we who knew him had no doubt about whatever, is that Casey at heart was very much Australian. Yet such has been the change brought about in the last thirty years by massive immigration, by the swing away from Britain and our British connections, and cheap-jack politicians turning multi-culturalism into a racket, that a manifest patriot like Casey, the descendant of pioneers and the winner of both the DSO and the MC as a volunteer in the Australian armed forces, could be derided as non-Australian.

Another factor to clear away is that Casey was just a money-man. He was born rich and he died rich but he was no worshipper of Mammon. Like many wealthy people, he had slight comprehension of how the great un-affluent majority have to wrestle with the problem of making both ends meet. He once advised one of my officers who complained of feeling depressed that he ought to buy a Porsche car. Casey grasped with some difficulty that the officer was depressed because of a new baby's being accompanied by a new demand from his bank manager for a settlement. And like not a few wealthy people, who as a group are dunned and conned relentlessly (Casey's begging mail was revealing), he had occasional moments of absurd economizing, even of stinginess; but to good causes and to most individuals he was generous, even to paying for the education of some. His generosity, too, was anonymous.

He was the rich man who had no time for idleness or self-indulgence. He worked longer hours than most laborers; he was temperate; he was as far from the playboy as possible. His practice for a year or two of giving copies of Fleming's meretricious James Bond novels to people, some times oddly chosen, was a manifestation of faulty judgement, especially about a need to be 'with it' as regards modern life. Pornography was as repugnant to him as lechery. About sex he was comprehending, not squeamish, but responsible and sane. In practice he was strictly monogamous. All coarseness was foreign to him. Like Menzies, he never swore.

Nor was he a snob. In Australia to speak English clearly and correctly in latter years has come to be taken as a sign of 'putting it on'. In essentials Casey had more than a touch of the aristocrat by temperament, as well as by his formation in the years of the *belle époque*. He had no need to 'put it on'. In his younger days he was probably not without a streak of the uncaringness of the rich, but in his maturity, say the last half of his life, he was well above the vulgar snobberies. In fact they repelled him. Martin Boyd once complained to me that Lady Casey was too much of the *arriviste* for his taste. Whether he was right or not Martin Boyd was a penetrating observer of the human condition as his novels attest. He never said this of Casey.

Casey admittedly saw a case for class, still more for manners, but he disliked the common manifestations of class-consciousness and the whole world of old-boy networks, school-ties, club arcana, Oxbridge college boasting and genealogical trees, hypothetical or not. He had sufficient of the spirit of aristocracy, I believe, to be untroubled by the convict strain in his mother's origins. He was a monarchist, was strict about the respect due to the monarchy, and he admired most members of the Royal Family, the Queen deeply.

Yet I felt that his deepest admiration was for the self-made men – excluding the rampant pirates and the white collar criminals – those who, like his father, had surmounted daunting hurdles, especially the creators of wealth like Henry Ford or Essington Lewis. His fascination with two Australians of non-bourgeois origins who built up a fortune out of taking over, organising and finding markets for US Army dumps in Asia

will not be forgotten by Australian diplomats familiar with the Far East in the 1950s. A major reason for his life-long love affair with America was his admiration for what the self-made men did there; an admiration some of Casey's social equals could not share. If my own observations were not mistaken, Casey in truth felt more at home with American business magnates than with the English aristocracy.

Finally, he was *not* a Tory ideologue. His attitude to trade unions and the ALP and certain strands of the welfare state has already been mentioned. He had good personal relations with a number of ALP men. With Calwell there was a friendship. When Calwell's only son was stricken with leukemia Casey's concern was unstinted; and so too when the boy died. As Minister responsible for Australia's secret service, believing that the Leader of the Opposition should know the fundamentals about it, he took Calwell into his confidence. When he was offered a life peerage and was exercised about the decision he consulted Calwell, who, with the admirable frankness of a friend, gave negative advice which he knew would not be palatable.

As already mentioned, Casey could never believe that all communists were damned and damnable. When he invited me to go to India, which was at the time of vociferous anxiousness in the Menzies Government about communism in Australia, and in some not negligible quarters the spirit of the witch-hunt, I felt obliged to tell him that my wife had been, though no longer was, a member of the Communist Party and that her brother was an active member, and I suggested that in Casey's political interests I had better decline. His reply, after some questioning, was that he would speak to the Prime Minister but that for his part the invitation still stood. A courageous stance at that time. (So was Menzies' in supporting Casey.) Nor could Casey believe that the communist regime in Russia was 'all evil', especially when compared with the Czarist regime existing in his youth, or that it would soon be 'rolled back'. His reservations about the Cold War and about certain American policies, and his wish for the recognition of Communist China, have already been mentioned.

He was not an ideologist of any hue or shape. His loyalty was to the truth and to good government.

Casey was no philistine, as was at times made out. On the contrary he had a sizeable streak of the intellectual in his make-up. He was an assiduous reader and he wrote five books. He was naturally a thoughtful reflective man, even if at times lacking depth. For me it was a regret that he never drew together and published his reflections on life. Whenever I spent time with him his talk was quiet, unegotistical, and interesting.

Having cleared away the grosser misconceptions about Casey, only a brief recapitulation is required as regards the traits which struck us who worked with him – distinction of bearing, charm, *noblesse oblige*, self-control and fortitude in the face of set-backs and sufferings and tense nerves, stoicism, and, following his hard rule not to talk about people unless it is to say good things about them, turning away from gossip. He had some respect for religion but none of the consolations of religion, and no more inkling of mysticism than of poetry or music or landscape. Among the several reasons for his output of writing, notably the diaries and the letters, a main one, I think, was whistling in the dark to keep his courage up. Another reason was PR – to give an image which would maintain or strengthen his popularity rating. Little of what was really preoccupying him went into his diaries and letters. His guard was rarely lifted.

For me one of his major traits was innocence.

His marriage was an example, though only one example, of the innocence. The marriage was the foundation of his life from 1926, and it was rock-firm on both sides. There were no secrets from one another; and no selfishness towards one another. Lady Casey's strong mind, strong body, strong nerves, and strong courage were joined to a loyalty to him which was of the fierce proprietrial kind usually reserved to the higher wild animals, and they usually reserve it to their young. Menzies had to endure on several occasions he never forgot her masterful interventions on behalf of her Dick. Smarting at times after such an encounter he would refer to her as Madam Lafarge (from Dickens' *The Tale of Two Cities*) and, a couple of times at least to me, as Lady Macbeth. The children of many public leaders suffer from seeing too little of their parents. The Casey children were no exception; and, rightly or wrongly, an observer felt that among the notable gifts of the parents there was not the gift of being the normal father and mother – of listening and speaking to their children at their level and putting them to bed with the long affectionate protective hug children crave. The Casey's had no need of any human beings in the world other than themselves. Even their children were secondary, such was the bind of their union.

What does the Casey story add up to? The usual sound and fury signifying nothing?

It adds up to more than that.

It is the story of an Australian public figure who achieved things for his country which were not insignificant and who in most of the great questions exercising his country and his times was broadly right even if he was occasionally diverted by some gullibility or by con men, or he failed to think through to practical steps for solutions – population growth, race relations, aid to poor backward countries, industrial relations, the parliamentary and cabinet systems, the limited time we could keep Dutch New Guinea in cold storage, the

arms race, the Cold War, the need to recognize Communist China.

It is the story, too, of the end of the British Empire, believed by the world at large, and by Casey up to middle age, to be so powerful, and so deep-rooted, and so useful, as to be assured for generations to come. It vanished within a mere decade. And Britain herself, World Power No. 1 until the 1930s, quickly declined into an economic, military and political power of the second, perhaps the third, rank, bankrupt except for the luck of the North Sea oil strike, her great cultural contribution sinking to a comparable level, as the novels, the theatre, the mass media, with their capitulation to mass tastes and hedonism, illustrate. And with this change in Britain's status, already painful for Anglo-Australians of Casey's background, went step by step a loosening of Australia's connection with Britain.

Casey's life also signifies the limitations of a philosophy of modernism and development like his. Was it as empty as Marxism? Schumacher, the friend and protégé of Barbara Ward (whom Casey knew and admired) had something of relevance to say on this point in his book *Small is Beautiful*. Machines do not necessarily mean destroying men as men, the image of God, but in practice they tend to mean something like it, more Detroits and Yokohamas and São Paulos, more spoliation of nature, more pollution of land, sea and air, more unemployment, and more psychiatrists thanks to the devastation of human personality.

In the long run what holds me about Casey's story is that it is the story of a decent upright man, be his judgements or his politics or his prejudices what they might be. It is not easy to be clever. It is still less easy to be good.

An element in his goodness, his wholesomeness, his innocence (surprising as that word might sound), was his eccentricity. Eccentricity is commonly a sign of authentic individuality, and its acceptance a sign of maturity in the society concerned. Casey's eccentricity was not flagrant – not as flagrant as the brilliant and fearless Billy Wentworth's – but it is possible that in the future it will be seized on, perhaps will be accepted, as a dominant quality after his innocence – his enthusiasm, at times passionate, for rain-making, for flying saucers, for the Dead Sea Scrolls, which led him to making notes on the Bible book by book (he gave away copies of both to twenty or so people, including myself), for mechanizing the Department of Foreign Affairs, for his scheme of setting up a small core of ambassadors, the "Flying Angels" as the over-worked sceptical head of the Department called them, who as crises arose in this or that part of the world would fly there, look at the trouble spot, and then fly back to Canberra with the truth.

Another example was his boyish enthusiasm about our secret service and his desire to get it transferred from the Defence Ministry to Foreign Affairs. And one more example was his and Lady Casey's taking a holiday in the 1950s, flying by their plane into the Centre to shoot eagles from the air. Misled by his proclivity to Amercian-type PR, he expected some attention for so unusual a form of sport. He got the attention but it was widespread condemnation and a good deal of ridicule, especially from the growing conservationist movement.

That Casey knew nothing about eagles or ornithology is not surprising. His expectations as regards reactions were surprising. He had a delightful habit of making gifts, usually small, their value being mainly sentimental. He gave me books from time to time but, just before he became Governor-General and I visited him in London, he gave me a safety pin which had been dipped in gold paint. He had a supply of them made. Biros were another favorite gift in the early days of that abomination. Hudson records a gift of a new type of razor blade which he had come across and passed on to Evatt. Unfortunately he does not report Evatt's response to this piece of political ecumenism – nor the response of the austere Chief Justice Owen Dixon to a gift of a James Bond book. Barry Humphries, whom Casey had heard with pleasure, was, on his meeting him, given a nail from ancient Rome.

Sometimes the gifts misfired. For instance he liked giving Australian opals (of the best quality) to people of standing in the foreign capitals he happened to visit. Once when in Delhi after being received by Nehru he asked me to give Indira Gandhi, then Nehru's housekeeper (apparently shy and shrinking, without any connection with politics or public affairs) some opals. Unfortunately in India the cult of luck and the astrological omens are of paramount importance. Opals are nearly always counter-indicated there, and in the case of Indira Gandhi so strongly counter-indicated that she declined to receive them or touch them. It took some finessing to handle the matter without displeasure to either her or him.

He got much refreshment from shopping sprees at Singapore, refreshment the more welcome after, or in preparation for, visiting Djakarta or some other troublesome Asian post. His love of gadgets was given full reign, and he would leave Singapore with supplies of this or that new thing, watches, for example, which you could set to go off with a gentle buzz warning you that the twenty minutes of your diplomatic call was up. In 1956 he arrived in Djakarta when Sukarno was at the height of his dictatorship and his anti-European goings on. He refused to see Casey. He was busy instigating mob demonstrations, at times with violence, against selected whites, and especially against the Dutch High Commission. So jumpy had Europeans become that even the US embassy, for some time bent on giving Sukarno everything he demanded, includ-

ing trifles like West New Guinea, on the ground that Sukarno was preventing Indonesia from going communist, was nervous. I decided to get the Dutch, the US and the British ambassadors to meet Casey over a working lunch so that they could give him their version of the situation. As our embassies were being watched by Sukarno's men I arranged to take over the cottage of a junior officer for the day and to hold the lunch there. Half way through the lunch a bang went off, apparently from the dining table itself. Everyone but Casey leaped up, as though some infernal engine was the cause. The cause, it turned out, was that Casey was wearing on his chest one of the toys he bought in Singapore. I forget its purpose but it made a pretty bang. That also required a little diplomatic finessing. Casey said nothing, wisely.

Future researchers will probably strike some rich ore of the comic in diaries and in correspondence with, or concerning, him from those who had meaningful contacts with him.

The eccentric or the comic side was illustrated by the acquaintance, occasionally the friendship, he cultivated with unlikely, now and then with unworthy, people. The trait seems to have been there from at least the 1920s. In his London days, for instance, he made, and for some time kept up, contacts with Maundy Gregory, the sinister character who sold peerages and other titles on behalf of Lloyd George to raise money for the latter's personal political fund, and who eventually had to flee from England because of a murder. Ellis was another odd acquaintance. Again and again throughout life Casey was taken in. The list is long. In Cairo he 'discovered' Billo (not his real name), an Australian junior officer, and, launched him on a spectacular career; in Bengal he 'discovered' Sudhir Ghosh, a hanger-on of Gandhi (also subject to con men and con women), a superlative sample of India's genius in the way of con men. I inherited Sudhir Ghosh (now dead) when I went to India as High Commissioner. He mis-read Jinnah, Hammarskjold and Harold Wilson. His enthusiasm for Roosevelt, for President and Mrs Johnson, and for Ky of South Vietnam was not without naivety but, after all, they were renowned heads of state and few can see through the cocoon of legend and PR which commonly swaddles heads of state. His enthusiasm for Maurice Chevalier, Grock the Swiss circus clown and Joyce Grenfell was for genius and for light, and were therefore admirable. His enthusiasm for Noel Coward as a man, fairly enduring, was puzzling. His enthusiasm, not enduring, for Bill Gunn and Bill Waterhouse (the Sydney bookmaker) partook, surely, of eccentricity.

There was an element of the comic in the Casey foibles. They would have done him no good in certain political circles but they did harm to no-one. On the contrary they added to the gaiety of life, and they illustrated a boyish side in his make-up. There was nothing of the comic in the sense that there was in McMahon, for instance. Nothing contemptible, nothing ridiculous. It was the comic we find in Mr Pickwick or G. K. Chesterton; the comic which betokens innocence, even sanity. Men and women who have it can face much in the way of reverses without having to go into psychiatric wards.

Those of us who had dealings with Casey over a protracted period would in the end single out as his most unforgettable quality his loveableness, his Pickwickian loveableness.

Perhaps the most revealing single thing in Hudson's book is the big photograph on the back of the dust cover. That gives a strong hint of the quality I have in mind. It is reproduced with this article.

Casey had not escaped suffering, of spirit as well as of body, and he had his bouts with gloom, occasionally despair, but he avoided all truck with despondency or with sickly preoccupation or with the 'dark corners of the human soul.' His disgust with Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" and similar plays and novels was an example. He was well aware of the dark corners and dark moments of the human soul, but he refused to dwell on them let alone to gloat over them.

One of the basic rules by which Casey lived is hit off exactly in John Bray's lines:

> The wise know well
> To seize the heaven and swerve past the hell.

CHAIN-LETTER

Did you think Peter that we wouldn't have
examples of
and so recognise your handwriting on the
envelope
or notice the unimaginative misspelling of my
surname?
Did you really believe we'd be amused by
superstition
ignorance and illiteracies or worried by death
threats
in the chain-letter you sent us?

Even Ned Kelly signed his Glenrowan
Letter and
the Jerilderie letter equally illiterate and life
threatening
but then he had among other things purpose
:his family were distressed and though much
younger then
than you are now
had nevertheless grown up.

What distressed us most of all was that you
our friend for more than a decade could so
misjudge us
as to believe that we in turn would copy your
litter
multiply your multiplication twenty-fold and
post it to
among others you and so
wait upon more
ignorance.

We dragged and broke the chain Peter and in
its place
send this to you alone :I doubt you'll want to
copy it
send it anywhere or allow any of your (n – 2)
friends
still unaware of your activities after sunset
to
read it.

Ironically your foolishness had produced in
this
a letter which will chain itself for other
reasons and
as you furtively stuff more chain letters into
envelopes
so like the bank robber who stealing coin or
notes
of too-small a denomination wonders anxiously
whether he has the time to fill his bag and
escape you must
occasionally wonder why you do it and why it
is that I
who only ever had about one more friend than
you
should now feel sad about the finality of
the
loss of another.

And whilst this letter is not signed it is still as
identifiable
as anything I've written could be :ask yourself
"Who is Canberra's best poet
and in the past
was once my friend?"

TIMOSHENKO ASLANIDES

DR STRANGELOVE

He would sit in
his armchair
headphones on, eyes
closed listening
to Pink Floyd — 'pure
rock' in its
vital colorings:

"and everything under the
sun is in tune
but the sun
is eclipsed by the moon."

Travelling from Beatles
to Creedence to
Led Zeppelin
my father
learned a new
tempo to his Classics
and doctor's surgery
routine.

"I like tunes
with a good melody"
he would say,
"New Wave is too
disjoint."

I can see him now
— a Jimi Page or Roger
Waters writhing
in lead guitar,
asleep
in his chair.

What do you want
to do with your life?
I kept meaning
to ask.

MIKE GREENACRE

EVE AT EIGHTY

Never mind, though I slip
From girlishness into old age
(What, no mellow fruitiness?)
It will be very soon as if
A fresh-born loaf crumbled
Mouldy overnight, or this
Sapling self may (quick
As your shrewd wink) be changed
Into a crabby stoop. Adam dear
I once hoped complacent
Middle age would turn me
Plump, comely, fat lamb
For your enjoyment, my whole
Being swelled pregnant with great wisdom
— Funny how knowledge proved
Harder to bear than our children were!

But we trundle on: at times
Two wooden marionettes
Creaking uphill with our hurt, rigid smiles
At others raffish as magpies
We flaunt our plastic promises
Giggling when they zoom like pointed darts...
Two elderly children hand in hand
Romp through the tangled twilight
Cleverly missed, eh? those boring lessons
In the overlord's eternal school-room!

Our nervous flinch near the burnt tree
Tells otherwise: we know
Something pends, that's where
The serpent swings, eager
To pay our wages (children too
Have nightmares darkening
Their frailer days). Deliberately
We choose to sing
On the flipside journey

Our child has gone down
Singing, before us.

HILARY COHEN

TWO POEMS BY KATE LILLEY

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

Your sister cut your face one morning by the
creek.
When you touched the bone the blood welled
out
in specks on the colorless grass.
You walked together then, not speaking,
and you never washed it off — not much
will grow in that dirt but burrs and wild things,
boys with slings in their hands.

One day you pick up and go, taking nothing.
Your mother waves on the wide verandah
of the house on stilts in the heat.
And you think that it's the same boy walking
the long grass unafraid: all the duties
you couldn't have known as you knocked your
first bird
hurtling from the sky.

Cane and timber cutter, cattlehand and
rouseabout.
You mined coal in Mount Isa, went to war,
and shipped out escaping Menzies.
Then striding down the gangplank dressed in
white
you heckled my mother on her Party soapbox
and were married at forty, an anarchist
straight off the sea.

The black coal hit the engine as the ship swung
out of port.
You turned and saw her standing with the other
sailors' wives:
skirt lifted in the wind, hair blowing.
She thought she was looking her last,
but you came ashore soon after, breaking
your exile, the boy who was raised in the
paddocks
never reconciled to standing still.

Now your children are old enough to be
explorers.
You lean on the iron balcony learning
what it is to be left.
Sixteen, as you were, with your backward
glance,
I walk unhindered to the gate, carrying nothing
but a 1930's shot of you,
bare-chested with carpet snake.

REQUIEM

The windchimes in the cherry tree
shimmer in the breeze

while I sit in the summerhouse
the tide runs over her

nymph of our garden she surfaces
as the froth on some distant fountain

in Arethusa or the Hesperides
on the shore I weave this wreath

my sister bright-haired sleek mermaid hear
the beating clamor of bells

open-mouthed with love as they
swing in perfect circles

so I leave the sheltered arbor
trellis running wild

I will not pass again into
the grove where we played

Father she will not be back
risen from the lake iced over

TWO POEMS BY LYNDON WALKER

GUILTY

It's a hot day in an Australian December
and I've just got a good second-hand copy
of Joe Cocker standing a little rain.

It's a great record, very relaxed,
sadder, older and not all that wiser, like the rest
of us.
It's the record that made us feel like saying
"It's been a long dry summer — come home
Joe."

I stand at the sink up to my elbows
in hot water and 'Morning Fresh' in the
afternoon.
I can just see them all cutting this record:
Joe and Jim Price, Randy Newman, Ollie Brown,
Ray Parker, Nicky Hopkins; all of them
doing wonderful songs by Harry Nilsson,
Billy Preston, Jimmy Webb and Randy and Jim.
Sweat the color of whisky running down their
smiling faces,
their hair just beginning to turn white as
cocaine in places.

I stand there listening to this great old stuff
thinking about this woman I'm living with
and how I don't tell her any lies
and how we've fought our battles out
and feel a long long truce coming on
surprised to find we're both still around
to work it out.

"How come I never do, what I'm supposed to
do?"

"It takes a whole lot of medicine darlin'
for me to pretend I'm somebody else."
And I get up and play it again and again.
God they don't make music like that now.
And I get up and play it again.

UNSOPHISTICATED POEM WITH HOUND DOG TAYLOR ON THE RECORD PLAYER

The woman of the long night, the moon still
over shifting clouds above these casual trees
dark as Negro musicians
taking a break out the back
way out the back.

The woman, who the dog, stopping on his own
agenda,
trusts.

The woman of ghosts. The woman of white
horses.
The woman of all women. The woman of her
father.
The woman of dreams. The woman.

The woman of herself. The woman of Indian
food.
The woman of taking this no longer. The woman
of tea,
of independence. The woman across the table
in the pub.
The woman of knowing.

Thirty miles from town, the white van around
the corner
on the dirt road, suddenly, the woman. The
woman
of secret openness. The woman who was loyal
in the face of faces. The survivor.
The woman who's had four men thanks.

This woman. The woman of the blues.
She's the one. I hurt. I love.
That woman.

DEATH OF A SAILOR

The woman shifted uneasily on a slab of wood
Her wedding mattress removed from the wedding bed
Ribs racked / head lying where feet usually are
Feet raised by a pillow (two ducks full)

Her index finger & a short pencil coupled together
Upwards at 45 degrees   writing in an exercise book
Makeshift diary   eleven fidgety lines   a game called nothing
But the heart's inner spiral   to be sealed
Whereabouts unknown

She wanted to go
Someplace else   north   west   east
To islands of his dreaming / defined by word as ethereal
Eyes ears mouth shut off to jargon of the hamlet
To oh God just once   oh God / twice
To some place where she could open her legs to sunlight
With music & a white light running between leaves
To break out of this role playing to which she was slotted in
Mother   widow   victim (all night a duality of sorts
As she kissed her husband's opaque skin   fish & salt
Scented skin   rough & pale tundras of skin)

In half light or grief's song shooing away influenza
The woman sat up to fizzling sounds   pithy cooing out beyond her skin
The child of theirs / hers   was wooing an ant on lino
Forehead stamped mean & close with Sunday's collateral of frowning
Busy busy instigating word games
"Mummy Mummy how big is your tummy?
Mummy Mummy my bum is yummy"
Language & offspring / space   silence
Not reciprocating the forbidden habits of pain
Arousal is often discreet
It can be offered
The motive & gesture of the day

& the truant boys with paper jets ran with cricket bats
From broken windows   tousled terriers chased old cars & flannel trousers
Down back lanes with rickety palings / peeping neighbors
Peeped   ones of the hammer & the thumb & the 'kerist'
Din seekers tongue riding a cacophony of motor mowers
Cooking noodles or with / the hangover (long maggots momentarily)
Peered over the fence at these two / woman with a plait
Child with a dead ant / both holding a coin of memory
A husband   a father who toiled the waves / said that
The apostles were nitwits / "fancy giving up your job
To follow a bloke in a caftan"

A good man   gap-toothed whale gunner who rattled boxes
Of matches imitating incessant calls of willie wagtails
Sayer of the unsleepable in the village of the unseen
Owner of the pledge
& his own boat
Whose boat was burning the night of the big swell
The night the whole world seemed to burning
Still night / shifting fog / small red sun in a fuzzy black sky
The night the plovers promised rain
There were people on the end of the pier
Peering through & looking at the reflected fog

"Burning burning the whole world is burning
My husband's eyes   my husband who sailed on water
Disappearing in flame   earth of my husband
Flesh   carcass   hands becoming like the fog"

She thought that love was superstition / multiplied by rumor
Reduced by fear & fever to instinct / what remained was divisible by love
Mother & child rocking to & fro all night under a moonless sky
Foggy apparitions gasping sucking in the icy wind
For a hint of warmth
The child's arms clutched at the mother's baked-dinner thighs
Her slender arms filled the husband's empty coat

ROBERT DRUMMOND

THREE POEMS BY RUDI KRAUSMANN

SURFERS PARADISE

Attracted & repelled by
high rise buildings and sex once

I made a second attempt at dreamworld.
In five minutes I turned off

at the casino and won but
lost control next morning

under red surf umbrella.

By joining the virginal blue sky
with the evil white sand

paradise was regained.

DDR

It's recommended to enter legally
plus to book in advance

and it is possible to
be illuminated by
Jena glass at night
spotlighting the struggling faces

and thinking about the decaying west

or by shopping en gros
in the Thomas Mann bookshop

finally by making photographs
of the Goethe-Schiller statue

which is still holding the frozen ground
of eternal politics

GOSLAR

It's possible to walk in five minutes
from the thousand year old Kaiserpfalz

through medieval streets into
a modern psychodelic delicatessen

offering unreal salmon.

The balanced tourists sits simply
sipping coffee at the Cafe am Platz
meditating the urbulent past
as if nothing had happened.

If the emperor Heinrich could come back
he would certainly stay at

the Hotel Kaiserworth eating
some of the noble cakes

kept on impeccable imperial ice
in his memory.

BETH YAP

Kuala Lumpur Story

From a novel in progress.

In the heart of Kuala Lumpur's bustling Petaling Street, amidst the sweetmeat sellers, and the man who twirled umbrellas above his head with energetic cries of "Special offer! Special offer!", and the blind beggar woman with her yellow eyes cocked half-open in constant look-out for kind donations, there sat an elderly man in a small rattan chair. He looked for all the world as if the people around him, so wholly engaged in their separate business transactions as they were, were actors in a comedy which, although absorbing, was not quite amusing and of no real consequence. He sat there looking a little superior, in fact, and he was, of course my father. He was doing what he loved best: nothing.

"Well, it's not injurious to anyone," he defended himself, constantly.

And mother would sigh.

My mother could never just do "nothing". In my father, it was inborn: he did nothing whenever he could, and he had it down to a fine art. My mother, he told us, was the type who, if she ever ceased doing whatever she was doing without having something else to move on to, would collapse into a jelly-blob of hysteria. This was hard to believe as my mother was always calm and pragmatic, especially under stress. However, as my father pointed out, she had never stopped doing anything without having first secured something else to move on to.

Thus our home, which was situated inconspicuously among Petaling Street's many shop-houses, was an eternal hive of activity. My father, who abhorred strangers in his living-room, escaped with his rattan chair into the middle of the street.

"To be in the thick of things," he explained caustically, and would add: "Your mother, however, brings the 'thick' into the living-room, regardless of all propriety."

With that he would march off, his back straight, his head high, one hand gripping the arm of his chair.

Mother, of course, paid him no heed and continued to invite the 'thick' into our house. Eric, my brother, just rolled his eyes.

"I saw Dad give old man Lau five ringgit yesterday," he said, but only when father was out of earshot.

Unlike my father, Eric and I enjoyed the company of the desolate, often-moaning and invariably interesting mixture of people who visited our living-room. Father merely referred to them as the 'thick', and so dismissed them. Anyone who wanted to spend time in our living-room had to be thick, he said.

The 'thick' in that day's case happened to be three aunties from across the road, several skinny street children munching on shelled groundnuts and my maternal grandmother, whom my father abhorred above all the other strangers who invaded his living-room.

Grandmother was thin and frail-looking, and had come all the way from China in 1909, a fact she never let us forget. At our ages in China, she said, our parents would have been seeking Eric a wife and I would have been one. As it was, I was past the desired age of the Chinese bride, rather an old maid, so to speak. Eric, however, was at just the right age – but he preferred table tennis to courting and car magazines to girls.

That day, Grandmother sank into one of our cane chairs, sighing and looking a little sad.

"Your Grandmother is very upset," Mother told us gravely. "Her oldest friend has left this world."

"It is God's will," Grandmother sighed.

"Actually," said Mother, as if it was an afterthought, "it happened to be an extremely wealthy friend. Gastronomically wealthy."

"Gastronomical" was my mother's favorite word of the moment, and she used it whenever she could. Eric and I waited patiently for her to elaborate. There was no use in rushing my mother: she ran at her own pace, and to her own tune.

"Please be kind to your Grandmother," she merely said, closing the subject.

This meant that Eric could not skulk around the house doing Darth-Vader-on-the-look-out-for-victims

impersonations, which made Grandmother nervous; and he couldn't do disco demonstrations to the tune of the music which drifted in from the pirate cassette-tape vendors outside, – his spinning made Grandmother dizzy.

That day, we poured tea for my Grandmother. We brought her peeled mandarins and spoke to her in what Cantonese we knew, American-accented as it was. To this she merely remarked: "You watch too many white-devil programs", which made us more worried, as Grandmother was not one for brevity.

When Grandmother was sad, she looked old. Her cataract-filmed eyes lost their particular light and her usually animated face grew disconcertingly still. Her shoulders seemed to grow more bent and her *samfu* hung loose on her, losing her in its dull floral pattern.

"Was it a big ship?" Eric asked, to distract her.

Grandmother sighed and looked at us, sitting at her feet.

"It was a big, wooden ship," she said , "and the sails were as high as two houses, placed on each other."

The crossing from China, Grandmother said, had not been easy. The junk had been tossed on an angry sea and in the hold, where passengers crowded, the stench of vomit had mingled with the moans and cries of sick men and women.

Grandmother had come to Malaya with Grand-aunt Sehu, whose family had not owned enough to feed her, and whom no one had wanted to marry. Although Grandmother could not remember, we imagined them dressed coarse cotton *samfus,* with Grandmother in red, perhaps, for she had left Kwangtung a promised bride, to be the second wife of a mining *taukeh* in Kuala Lumpur, my Grandfather.

Eric and I knew this story well, but it was difficult to think of Grandmother as a young bride, with her face unlined and her voice more soft. We were told that she had been the prettiest girl in her village, but this too was difficult to imagine. According to Father, Grandmother had always been old, but Father's was a biased opinion.

I left Grandmother and went upstairs to my room where I sprawled on the bed, flicking through my journal and chewing on the end of a pencil. Today Grandmother's gastronomically-rich friend died, I wrote, and he must have been the secret lover from China, because Grandmother isn't usually disturbed by death.

I remembered a story I had once been told, and wrote: "When my mother's eldest sister was shot in the head for stealing a chicken because everyone was starving during the Japanese Occupation, Grandmother did not cry. When the soldiers came for the men and boys, she hid them in a secret well under the house, and when they were found and taken away, and she thought that she would never see them again, my Grandmother's eyes were dry, although my mother wept. Grandmother, my father said, was like the finest of Chinese jades, whose heart was made of ice.

When I was twelve I announced that I would make records for posterity, which caused strange looks but few comments.

Six years later, I was still at it. Everyone and everything is in this book, I told Eric once, to which he replied: "You're insane."

My brother was not very intelligent, I liked to think.

Mother came into the room and sat on the edge of my bed.

"What are you writing?" she asked.

"The usual," I said.

Mother was silent, and she had on her 'deep-thought' look, which could either be good or bad. There was something on her mind which I knew she would tell me in her own time. Meanwhile, I wrote: "My Grandmother's life has not been an easy one and she suffered tremendous hardship from the day she was born. In China, there was never enough to eat and her village was plagued by roving bandits and tax collectors. Grandmother's family sent her to Malaya to become the second wife of the rich *taukeh* to save her from starvation, and also because he pledged a dowry which would feed the family for several months. They promised the heirless *taukeh* that Grandmother carried sons in her, it was written in the shape of her head and the curve of her belly."

Mother sat at the end of my bed regarding me rather curiously, but as she still said nothing, I wrote again: "Although Mother and Grandmother both have very strong personalities, Mother has always bowed down to Grandmother's wishes, out of a deep respect, if not love. It is hard to imagine anyone actually loving Grandmother, and this in spite of the story of the secret lover from China."

I stared at the last sentence, thinking. The story of the man from China was one which hung in the air in my family – it was whispered in the kitchen and in the hallways, but only when Eric and I were not around.

"Is Grandmother's gastronomically-rich dead friend the secret lover from China?" I wanted to ask, but could not, because it was something I was supposed to know nothing about. And Mother, in any case, would say nothing.

"It is the writing that makes things clear," I wrote, "as it is the naming that makes things exist, even the things that do not exist, perhaps."

The personal curse of the Chinese is to be surrounded by a myriad un-named things, which peek out of corners in old photo albums or drift out in whiffs of sandlewood and old camphor from long forgotten boxes.

"What's this?" I would ask my mother, digging deep, my hands full. "Whose was this?"

And she would look up, and say: "No-one's" or "You wouldn't know who", and nothing would make her say more.

Ghosts dwelt in our living-room and shades wafted about the stairway, with long straggly hair and their mouths wide open, hungry ghosts, perhaps, wailing to be named. Even the ghost of the secret lover from China, un-named and non-existent, had crossed the waters following an ancient, invisible trail to haunt my Grandmother.

I decided to continue writing, impatient with puzzles, and with not knowing.

"My Grandmother loved him," I wrote, "for things unseen by others. He was not wealthy, indeed the village knew no wealthy people save for the distant sojourners, far across the seas, who had made fortunes and yet had not returned."

She loved him for his serious brow, and the way his hair was parted; for the paleness of his long scholarly hands. He worked as an assistant in the medicine shop, grinding powders and sorting precious herbs; and over the counter he passed her neatly wrapped packets while she looked at his hands and, trembling, gave him the coins.

He watched her too, her bent head and downcast eyes, always averted, and the swish of her hair, braided and shining, reaching far below her waist, and he listened with pleasure to her low, musical voice as she asked for the different medicines.

In the forest east of the village, she went to collect firewood and he to gather the curing herbs. The first time they met he came upon her by surprise, the fallen leaves hiding his footsteps, and she looked up, startled, to see him before her. She dropped the firewood and ran home, without stopping. In her room, out of breath and with her face flushed and hair escaping from her loosened braid, she pressed her fingertips to her forehead, and wept. It was a time for rejoicing, for the rich miner from over the waters had already given his pledge.

They met many times after that. They walked in the shadow of the trees, or sat on rocks by the riverside. He would tell her stories of the medicine shop where he was still an apprentice, and she would throw back her head and laugh, and speak of her family, the farm, her brothers and sisters, and of their hopes of building a new wing to enclose the courtyard, in the summer, perhaps.

They spent some afternoons without talking. He would sit and watch her, her face uplifted to the sunlight, the thick braid falling over one shoulder; and sometimes her lips would tremble, yet she would smile as the tears came, and he would stretch out his hand to touch the line of her cheek, the curve of her lips.

They would never speak the unsaid, or name the rich miner, and so he could not hurt them; yet he hung over them, watching always, from many miles away.

"My Grandmother, of course, left him," I wrote, "although I do not know where her heart is today. Knowing no other course of action, for the family as well as generations of ancestors hung upon her every move, she left him. I like to think, however, that she had lain with him, under the poplar trees, with the fallen leaves rustling beneath them and the breezes mingling with their sighs. I like to think that she had been happy, and had laughed often, as often as she had wept."

"He did not see her the day she left but on the day before they clasped hands and shed bitter tears together, promising remembrance even in the afterlife. The secret lover from China became an honored physician in the village, remembering always; while Grandmother sailed to Malaya, a virgin-bride, for that had been a condition of marriage."

I put down my pencil, the end chewed and ugly. Having absolutely no idea how the Chinese physician was to become Grandmother's gastronomically-rich friend, who had upset her by dying, I had just written my Grandmother's story, but perhaps it was not hers, after all. And perhaps it was. I knew what my father's opinion would be – that the story was not about Grandmother because it tended towards romance, he would say, and Grandmother did not. Eric would merely roll his eyes, and I did not particularly care to think about what Grandmother would think or say or do, were she to see it. My mother, of course, would say nothing, having little time for invention, or for saying things in more words than necessary.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: Our donations total is, at $516, down this issue, partly owing to the fact that it is a shorter time than usual since our previous issue. Financially matters are tight with us, dangerously tight, and I'm not crying "Wolf!" So what you readers have been able to spare for us is all the more appreciated. Thanks to: $154, I.M. ESTATE; $50, J.H.; $30, C.&J.C., A.M., M.L., M.D.; $10, M.D., M.W., W.K., J.S., G.S., C.M., R.T., M.G., J.McC., D.A., S.P.; $5, E.R., P.B., R.N., B.B., P.S., P.W., T.G., C.PRESS, R.N., N.A., A.S., M.W., J.V., D.G., L.B., J.S.; $2, H.C.

JOHN MEREDITH

Frank the Poet

A postscript

Francis MacNamara, better known as Frank the Poet, was an Irish convict. Born in 1811, he arrived at Sydney Cove on the transport *Eliza II* on 6 September 1832. A native of Wicklow in the County Kilkenny, he had been charged with stealing a plaid; found guilty, he was sentenced to transportation for seven years. Internal evidence in one of his poems suggests that the charge may have been falsified, and that the real reason for his banishment was that he belonged to one of the illegal political organisations known as Ribbon Lodges, most likely that called the White Boys Association.

He became famous in convict circles for two reasons – his unceasing campaign of civil disobedience and his amazing ability to recite extempore verse. Hence the soubriquet of Frank the Poet. His recitations became popular among both bond and free and several of them, having entered into the oral tradition, have come down to us as folk songs. "Moreton Bay", "The Seizure of the Cyprus Brig", "Bold Jack Donahoe" and "The Convict's Tour to Hell" are some of them.

When Rex Whalan and I began our research into his life, we had a problem to overcome, as there were many prisoners by the name of Francis MacNamara, and we could find nothing to link any one of them with the legendary poet. At last we came across a verse-petition addressed to a Captain Furlong from the men of the Newcastle ironed gang. We were able to ascertain that Furlong was in charge of that gang for only a year, and during that period only one Francis MacNamara was sentenced to serve in it. We had our man, and armed with his official number, and the prison entrance and discharge books, we were able to trace his movement through the system.

Having at length, so we thought, located all ascertainable information on the man, we proceeded to write our book. *Frank the Poet* was published by Red Rooster Press in 1979.

A major source of annoyance for any writer of historical non-fiction surely must be the post-publication discovery of additional information on the subject of the study. Thus, no sooner had our book been issued than I began to find items which ought to have been included. The first came in the form of a letter from Rollo Gillespie, to whom I had sent a copy:

> Now here's an interesting thing! Last week when I was in the Mitchell Library, I looked again at the portrait of an officer in the uniform of the 1840's which hangs there. I had often looked at it before but had been unable to discover who the officer was or to read the title name-plate on the frame. This time I had my glasses on – and I think the name-plate had been cleaned! I read the name:
>
> *Captain R.T. Furlong.*
>
> and went away wondering who Furling might have been. He is not mentioned in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography,* so I was flummoxed! Yesterday, as I started your book, on page x there is Captain Richard Tasker Furlong, 80th Foot, mentioned as large as life! You may care to look at it next time you visit the Mitchell. It's around the corner, by the card-index cupboards behind where the librarians sit. It's delightful to find an answer to one's questions in such a fashion. It's also delightful to find how Australian history lives so freshly today. Furlong is a good looking man with a strong face and would, I should judge, have been a good officer and a just administrator, different from Logan, whose physiognomy I don't admire!"

In the course of my research for the book I had frequently glanced at the Furlong portrait without bothering to look at the name plate!

Many, indeed most of Frank the Poet's verses have passed into the Australian oral tradition and their

exemporaneous origins may have contributed to this phenomenon. Vaughan Evans sent to me, via Nancy Keesing, a copy of an old sailors' ditty, taken from Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast,* which seems to owe its origin to MacNamara's epigram on beef, or was it perhaps the other way around?

> Old horse, old horse, what brought you here?
> From Sacarap to Portland Pier
> I've carted stones this many a year
> 'til, killed by blows and sore abuse,
> They salted me down for sailors' use.
> The sailors they do me despise
> They turn me over and damn my eyes,
> Cut off my meat and scrape my bones
> And pitch me over to Davy Jones.

By comparison, Frank's epigram runs:

> Oh Beef! Oh Beef! What brought you here?
> You've roamed these hills for many a year.
> You've felt the lash and sore abuse,
> And now you're here for prisoners' use.

MacNamara is said to have prefaced his extempore recitations with this coat of arms, or motto:

> My name is Francis MacNamara
> I come from Cashell, County Tipperary
> Sworn to be the tyrants' foe
> And while I live, I'll crow.

Nancy Keesing, in her *Lilies on a Dustbin* suggests that this motto provided the inspiration for the slogan of the now defunct Anthony Hordern's Emporium, "While I live I'll grow."

A great number of variants exist of MacNamara's notorious "Farewell to Van Diemen's Land" – a tribute to its popularity with reciters:

> Land of lags and kangaroo
> Of possums and the scarce emu
> Squatter's pride and prisoner's hell
> Land of Sodom, fare-thee-well!

A parody on this valediction appears in John Lee's book, *Roughnecks, Rolling Stones and Rouseabouts* (Christchurch, 1977), as having been recited by a New Zealand swagman *circa* 1900-10.

> Land of rocks and rabbits too,
> Rotten squatter, cockatoo,
> Squatter heaven, swagger hell,
> Land of rabbits, fare thee well.

Although stated to be of New Zealand origin, the references to squatters, cockatoos and rabbits lend to this version a peculiarly Australian flavor.

In 1983 I joined forces with fellow folklorist Chris Sullivan for a field trip in the back country to the south of Bathurst in New South Wales. One night we camped at Porters Retreat, and while sipping our mugs of tea beside the camp fire the talk turned to convicts. Chris told me that a couple of months previously he had taped an old bushman, Jack Hall of Ebor, born 1898, reciting a sort of monologue about a convict. He produced a transcription from his swag, and I was dumbfounded to discover that it was a variant, with additions, of the "Farewell" piece transformed into prose:

> Farewell to the land of the cockatoo and flying opossum, the squatter's paradise and poor convict's hell. When I arrive home I'll be able to tell my friends that there are other black holes and dark dens besides the black hole of Calcutta and the dark dens of Siberia, for I served part of my sentence in Her Majesty's cursed dark dens of Van Diemens Land and the black holes of Australia.
>
> I don't know whether it was a song or not but this old convict was singing it. It was only as any bushman would have it. He'd be an old convict, wouldn't do much more than read nor write.

Recently, in a letter, Sullivan described another visit to Jack Hall of Ebor some eighteen months later, in mid-1984, when he again recorded the monologue, and as is usual with orally transmitted folk lore, the piece came out different the second time:

> This is "The Returning Convict", I learnt it off my uncle Thomas Miller...
>
> Farewell, farewell to the land of the cockatoo and flying opossum, the squatter's paradise and poor convict's hell. When I arrive home I will be able to tell my friends that there are other dark dens and black holes besides the black hole of Calcutta and the dark dens of Siberia for I've served part of my sentence in the cursed Her Majesty's cursed dark dens of Van Diemens Land, and the cursed black hole of Australia!

Francis MacNamara's songs and recitations circulated widely in Australia but there seems to be only one instance of one of his compositions being taken back to the United Kingdom. Ralph Vaughan Williams, who was collecting English folk songs in the early 1900s, took down "The Convict's Lamentation" from the singing of Henry

Burstow at Leith Place, Surrey, Sussex. It is a version of what Frank the Poet called "The Convict's Arrival", better known in Australia in a shortened form called "Moreton Bay". As published in *Folk Songs Collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams,* edited by Roy Palmer, four additional lines for verse 6 were added from a published Australian version; with these excised, this is the version sung by Henry Burstow:

I was born in the land called England,
Lately transported from my native shore;
And like Colombus in his circle sailing,
I left behind the girl that I adore.
Through bounding billows that were loudly raging,
Like a bold mariner my course did steer,
Bound to Bermuda my destination,
Till at length that harbour did soon appear.

There we joined hands in congratulation,
The safe arrival from the briny waves.
I soon found out I was mistaken,
For I was transported to Moreton Bay.
There every morning as the day was dawning
To trace from heaven that falling dew,
Up we all started at a moment's warning
Our daily labour to renew.

As I walked out one summer's morning,
By the Brisbane water I took my way.
In silent solitude and meditation
As I stood watching of the flowing tide,
I espied a convict loudly complaining,
While tears of anguish down his cheeks did glide.

Saying: I have been a prisoner at Port MacQuarie,
In Norfolk Island and Emu Plains,
In Castle Hill, likewise Toongabbie,
In all those places I have worked in chains;
But in all these places of condemnation,
Each penal station in New South Wales,
To Moreton Bay I can find no equal:
Excessive tyranny each day prevails.

Now I am bereft of all consolation,
Yet hopes of liberty for me remain.
I am behoved in misery and tribulation,
All there infused by wearing chains;
Yet I have once more to cross the ocean,
And leave this station called Moreton Bay,
Where many a man through downright starvation
Now lies mouldering in his clay.

Now fellow prisoners be exhilarated,
Your former suffering don't bear in mind.
Where from bondage you are extricated
You will leave those tyrants far behind.

In the Australian Magazine, volume 1, number 2, of November 1859, under the heading of "Reviews", there appears an article titled "The Life and Adventures of John Leonard, A Prisoner in V.D.Land.Mss." According to his story, Leonard was at Port Arthur when Francis MacNamara and other prisoners from Cockatoo Island arrived there on 29 October 1842.

After describing the hardships and punishments he had undergone, Leonard told of how the Sydney men organised a campaign of passive resistance. The gang in which Leonard worked was carrying bundles of shingles; a lightly laden prisoner ran at the head of the gang and the rest, carrying full loads, were supposed to keep up with the pace-maker, but this mode of work did not suit MacNamara and his Sydney mates:

> Everything went on well, until one morning the brig *Isabella* came into the bay, and I was told that it was loaded with Sydney men from Cockatoo Island. Next day they came ashore, and were put into the carrying gang. The runner, as usual, started off, but the Sydney men all kept in their ranks, and walked on steadily.
>
> The overseer shouted for them to close up, but they took no notice of him, so that the other men were coming back for loads before they had reached the first resting place. We each had bundles of shingles to carry, and the Sydney men said, "Now, do you think these bundles are overweight?" Some of them replied, "Yes." They then emptied some of the shingles out, and tied them up again, so that by the time they had done that, the other men had been into the settlement with their loads. When they got into the settlement they were marched in front of the office, and the commandant came. The loads were weighed, and found to be underweight.
>
> The commandant then ordered the flagellators to be sent for, and the triangles; and the clerk took down all their names. Amongst the rest there was the notorious Jackey Jackey, Frank the Poet, and Jones, and Cavanagh. There were up-

wards of thirty pairs of cats and four flagellators, and the surgeon, a young man named Dr. Benson, who kept laughing and joking, and playing with his stick as unconcerned as though he was in a ballroom. When their names were taken, every other man was called out, and received thirty-six lashes. A fresh flagellator giving every twenty lashes, and they try to see who can give it the worst.

Next morning they went on just the same. They were then ranked up, and all were flogged and sent to work again; the overseer still snapping at them and if they could have got him in the bush they would have killed him. Next day they were all brought up again, and received seven days' solitary confinement on bread and water. When they came out they did just as before, and were brought up before the commandant again, and he listened to what they had to say this time, and ordered that there was to be no more running in the gang.

Some time after this, some of them were called out to put a log on the pit, and the overseer went with them. Just as he was shouting out, and giving orders to the men, one of the Sydney men went behind him with an axe, and aimed a blow at his head. The runner happened to see it and shouted out to the overseer to get out of the way. He jumped to one side, and the axe sunk into the log. The overseer turned as white as a sheet; and at dinner-time the man was taken before the commandant, and received a hundred lashes. . .

It is recorded in the Tasmanian archives that MacNamara did in fact receive a sentence of seven days' solitary confinement, for disobedience of orders, in September of 1843, a year after his arrival in Van Diemans Land, although the several floggings described by Leonard do not appear to have been recorded.

In *Tales of the Convict System*, selected stories of Price Warung (William Astley), edited by B.G. Andrews, there is included a story titled "The Ross Gang 'Yarner'-Ship", concerning a convict storyteller whose sole stock-in-trade consisted of MacNamara's ballad "A Convict's Tour to Hell". His task was to entertain the prisoners in the gang each evening with a 'yarn', and by rationing the long ballad out, with only a verse or two each night, he was able to keep up the entertainment over a long period.

When the story first appeared, in the Bulletin, 24 October 1891, it attracted a good deal of attention, and Andrews notes that, in response for requests for the complete text of "A Convict's Tour to Hell", the Bulletin announced that it would be included in an edition of convict ballads which Astley had collected. The convict ballad book does not appear to have been published, nor is there a manuscript among the Astley papers in the Mitchell or Dixon collections. One wonders what treasures from the pen of Frank the Poet and other convicts it might contain!

While writing this piece, I received a letter from the indefatigable Chris Sullivan drawing my attention to a book of reminiscence titled *The Man from the Misty Mountains* by James Henry Sturgiss, rather oddly written in a combination of verse and prose, and which mentioned Frank the Poet and quoted one of his epigrams.

When Whalan and I were researching our book, we met with a problem. In December 1839, MacNamara was admitted to the Parramatta Stockade, and we could find no trace of him until, two-and-a-half years later, in May 1842, he escaped from custody at Bargo while being escorted from Berrima to Sydney. We were unable to account for his sudden re-appearance in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. Sturgiss obtained much of his information from an ex-convict grandfather, via his father, and provides a possible answer to our problem.

In hypothesis, MacNamara could have been transferred from the Parramatta Stockade to the Towrang Stockade, near Goulburn, and from there sent to work with the convict road gang who built the road from Braidwood to Nowra, and the transfer somehow omitted from the Parramatta Discharge Book. Chapter 5 of Sturgiss' book is a colorful account of one of that convict road gang by the name of Conn Flynn which involves Frank the Poet:

Oh! Those were the days
when the grasses wide
Wet a horseman's feet on his
morning ride,
When the mighty bullocks,
their work-days past,
As rations to convicts were
served at last.
And the tale is told how it
chanced one day
That a smoking round came
the convicts' way.
Then Frank the Poet, as large
as life,
Stood and tapped the beef
with his carving knife
And intoned this verse, so the
tale relates
To the crowded board of his
grinning mates:
"Oh! Redman, Redman, how
came you here?
You served the Gov'ment
many a year
With blows and kicks and
with much abuse
And now you are here for
convicts' use."

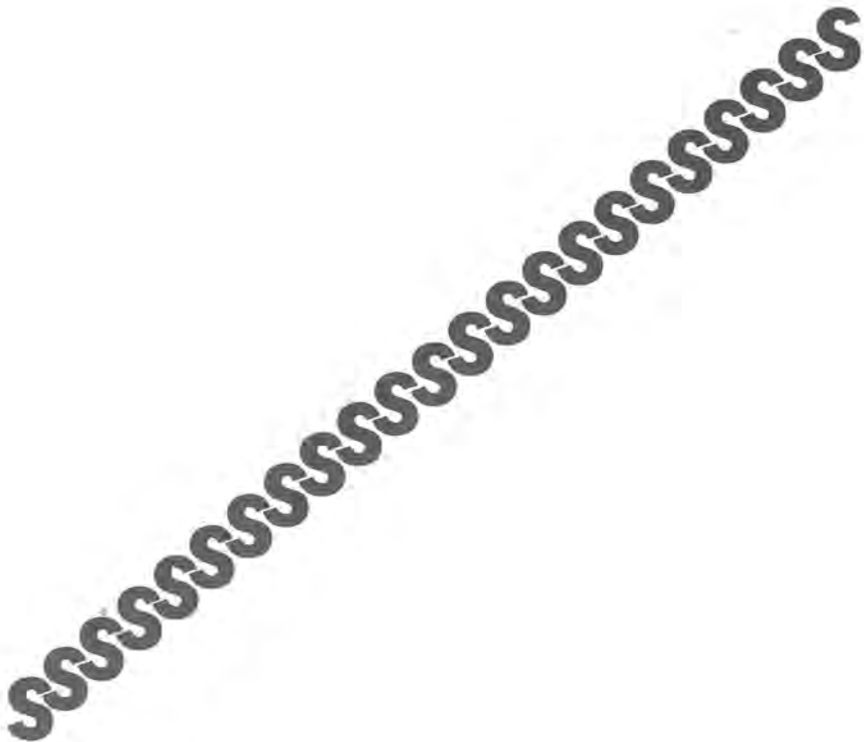
Harry the Forger spoke up:
"Faith! Frank, I don't know
for sure what you will be
remembered most for, your
verses or for that natural

cross in the rocks, on top of the Devil's Pinch, where you always doff your cap when you pass and which they name Frank the Poet's Cross."

"Must a man be remembered at all?" asked Frank.

"That goes without saying," replied Harry. "Tis a poor soul indeed who leaves no signature on history when he departs. Significant and permanent, if it's something great that he has done, or temporary and fading if he has merely passed that way and left no more than a track in the clay, like a straying beast. 'Tis not an epitaph, but his 'signature on history', a symbol to keep his name in the minds of men, as long as the caprice of Fate decrees."

Thus, Frank the Poet, in leaving his signature on history in his own particular way, has, as it were, contributed towards the writing of his biography.



"ZIP"

Alex Selenitsch

Death of an Unfamous Man

JOHN HEROUVIM

Bill Wilson died, noiselessly and unexpectedly, while he slept last Saturday. After more than sixty years his heart fell silent. When his wife Nancy told me on the telephone I was tongue-tied. Dumbstruck.

He lived in Duke Street, Braybrook, in Melbourne's western suburbs – an area described by John Batman as "a flat and desolate plain, unfit for human habitation." Just the setting to place the factories and works in which Bill Wilson shaped metal and created useful things until the poisons he breathed destroyed his health and he could work no more.

Bill Wilson, industrial pensioner, son of a Wonthaggi coalminer from England, would sit in his backyard on a rickety chair whose paint had once been fresh, and talk with me in his quiet Australian voice. Bill Wilson, worker-philosopher, would speculate that human selfishness and self-aggrandisement arose when Man first became conscious of his mortality.

While my baby played awkwardly at his feet, tearing out tiny handfuls of grass and putting them in his mouth, Bill Wilson – father and pedagogue, who had passed on to so many apprentices his engineering skill and tool-wisdom – would accuse our schools of crushing and wasting the native curiosity of the child, and would explain how, as he watched his own children grow, he learnt how children learn best. A few months ago he rang me and told me, in an unhurried but excited voice, of a newspaper report about primary school children studying philosophy in NSW. It was important to Bill that people learn to reason.

After he had finally added his name to the thirty columns of Wilsons in the Melbourne telephone directory he rang me often. His most recent call was to enquire how the lawn in my backyard was going. I was out at the time, and Bill will never know that I followed his advice on how to break down the soil, but have not yet sown the seed.

Bill Wilson, communist, had no gods, human or celestial. The closest approximation to a tone of reverence I ever heard from his lips came when he spoke, as he often did, about the working class, the "slaves" whom he cherished. The animation would come to Bill, as it did when he rose from his chair in the kitchen and told me that the working class gave him life itself. "They make the clothes on my back, the shoes on my feet and the food in my belly." In 1965, after more than twenty years membership, he left the communist party "because the communist party left the working class."

In the 1950s, when wintry winds swept through Braybrook and Sunshine, and the political air was even more chilling for communists, Bill Wilson peddled his bike to deliver the party paper. And, on the party's instructions, he stood for mayor as a communist. When I remarked on his courage he chuckled. The notion of himself as a brave man honestly amused him.

On reflection I am struck by what an exceptional man he was. This diminutive figure with the suggestion of a hunch felt equally comfortable tending his vegetables and demonstrating the dialectical relationship between theory and practice with examples from his working life. He gave cheek to doctors and talked about horse-racing and politics with the workers in the enormous bar of the Braybrook Hotel.

There was humor in Bill, and tolerance; and perspicacity and wisdom too. He believed that humanity would overcome the horrors which occupied his mind, such as nuclear weapons and acid rain. His optimism was expressed matter-of-factly, yet with such calmly unshakeable confidence that I felt moments of shame at my cynicism about people and the world.

I see him endlessly lighting and relighting his pipe, or wet-eyed with laughter over Patrick Cook's iconoclasm. I hear him describing the mechanical principles of the internal combustion engine, or enlightening local school-teachers on the macro-economic causes of the decline in Australia's manufacturing industry, or explaining how to cook rhubarb. I will remember his devotion to and faith in his class, his utter lack of pretension and hypocrisy, his slow walk and his rough hands. In the backyard of my memory there will always be a chair for him to sit in.

Guest Column

JOHN KERR

Atmospheric Changes

Book publishing in the late 1980s

The years 1986 and 1987 will be remembered in book publishing circles for the buyouts, takeovers and mergers that have surely reached their peak. Lloyd O'Neil Pty Ltd and associated companies, and Greenhouse Publications Pty Ltd, two of the larger truly independent Australian houses, have joined multinationals: O'Neil to Penguin Books, part of the Longman Pearson Group, and Greenhouse to Packer's Consolidated Press, a predominantly Australian group. An event the press never tired of informing us about, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation takeover of the Herald & Weekly Times, saw News acquire book printers as well as publishers: Bay Books, Golden Press, Angus & Robertson Publishing, much of Reed's, the major distribution operation Gordon & Gotch and the 80-shop strong A&R retail chain, as well as a media group.

To these new acquisitions, add more of the ownership of William Collins than anybody else, and News owns other publishers in Britain. Events in New York in March saw News gain Harper & Row, a large and interesting American house, to complete book publishing holdings throughout the English-speaking world. Heinemann now nestles in the arms of Octopus Books, and Pan worries. Pitman's independent existence in Australia, after Longman Pearson's takeover in London, is now ended. Century and Hutchinson are now hyphenated. Allen & Unwin are Unwin Hyman overseas now, after Bell and Hyman took over the London end. Hamish Hamilton and Michael Joseph were traded off like beaver pelts. Ken Thomson's Toronto-held and London-run International Thomson Organisation Limited – the same people who now own the Hudson Bay Trading Company – divested themselves of the two publishers to Longman Pearson's Penguin Books, easily the busiest acquirer around in the trade today. Australian consequences of all this are already being felt, and the trade itself has been provided with breathless gossip.

But very little else. There is a vague feeling that it is happening in other industries, which happens to be true of other information and communication industries, but is not universal. At the bottom there is a silly feeling of historical inevitability.

Authors could be forgiven asking – they don't – if all this is not a good thing. Especially for them. Australia: sixteen million people. Old London Town and New York, New York open the gates to more than twenty times that number. There is precious little evidence (except Colleen McCulloch's admirable experience) that it works; and a dreary if convincing argument that it won't. Anyone who has had the unenviable job of trying to convince a bookseller here that another fascinating book on the bloody Norfolk Broads or a guide to New York's finest restaurants in paperback at $22.95 are good buys because the exchange rate is crook, will give an author some idea of how breathless they are for his or her work in Texas and Taranaki and the airport in Tokyo and along the Thames – dream and hope as we do.

One prophecy has a multi-media author-as-star system, wherein the kingmakers of the multinational multi-media groups play out the undoubtedly superior economics of printing a very great many more copies of fewer titles, utilising their economic strength to advantage their stable. But wealth is the only aim you share. Your chances of publication are slimmer. Subject and style will be laid down. Since royalties are expensive, authorship may become a staff job – as it is in many packaging companies already.

Employees in publishing point to a cheery idea. Their bottom line is their job, and they argue that number of houses times staff equals a constant required labor force for the industry as a whole. So, fewer houses with more pros. They don't ponder too long the sight of the William Collins' representative sucking up orders by running a light pen over a catalogue entirely of bar codes. But takeovers have demolished a lot of rooms at the top within the dominant corporations, and that at least is established. Distribution organisations must be fed with products and this has resulted in varying degrees of interdependence in lo-

cal publishing houses – Gordon & Gotch's old relationship with Lloyd O'Neil, McPhee Gribble's with Penguin, John Ross's with Lothian (this without leaving Melbourne) – are variations on this theme that seem to work well enough for all concerned.

Printers and their employees are roughly as healthy as their machines are busy. Their publisher clients will print where the price is right. Until recently that has been south-east Asia, but now the exchange rate has caused the government bounty system, a subsidy to keep printing in Australia, to bite with real teeth. It now works, and Australian book printers are busy, although expansion is fraught with peril (new German machines cost more Australian dollars, paper prices are up at the very time demand has renewed, and there is talk of lowering or cutting the bounty).

There is a good deal of irritation among the publishers with booksellers, though most of it is privately expressed: good relations with the trade are vital. Booksellers, particularly the larger chains, constantly want more and faster service, longer discounts, the right to return unsold stock, heavy promotion and short shelf-lives. The net effect of this is that new books are bought in, displayed while the promotion is going on, and returned or dumped in bargain bins with greater speed than they used to be, and much more speedily than authors or publishers would like. No one seems to be able to break the cycle, least of all the booksellers, who are not getting rich despite terms of trade many retailers would, on the face of it, envy. That really big publishers, sooner or later, will have to look at moving into retailing, is the sort of prophecy that sits well alongside 'fear of AIDS will change sexual attitudes'.

It's not a big industry: all the books in Australia grossed less than $800 million last year (greeting cards grossed $70 million). Of those books, 40 per cent are reckoned to be Australian, although what exactly constitutes 'Australian' for the form-fillers who provide raw data for industry returns is a shade complicated. Certainly, schoolbooks are overwhelmingly written by Australian teachers, and the publishing functions are largely carried out in Sydney and Melbourne. But unequivocal Australian ownership of the various publishing conduits has reached a lower point than at any other time since the days when *The Wit of Robert Menzies* was sent to England for editing and printing, and shipped back to its natural marketplace 'value added', as Paul Keating would see it.

There can be no doubt that Australians own less of their book world and a healthy Australian book trade employing editors, printers, salesman and booksellers. But at the moment, subsidies to publishers in the name of Australian culture from the Literature Board aid companies who are, after all, foreign multinationals, however benign their acclimatisation here. And our boards of trade could be forgiven if they find no real incentive to aid Australian economic or export growth while the publishing companies are off-shoots of British and American ones.

KATHERINE GALLAGHER

London Letter

A re-enactment of the sailing of the First Fleet from Portsmouth on 13 May, all this turning the clock back – for the better or worse, the Bicentennial has begun. Of course, the celebration has its sticky side, especially as regards the treatment of the Aboriginals and the general ignorance of Aboriginal culture. The 1987 Portsmouth Arts Festival (13 – 31 May), offered an opportunity to enjoy Aboriginals talent: the Bararroga Mimi Dancers from Central Arnhem Land on their first overseas visit, and the West Australia Theatre Company with Aboriginal elder statesman and poet Jack Davis in the British premiere of his play, "The Dreamers". There is an exhibition of new Aboriginal Art, featuring the work of twenty artists, and the Aboriginal theme continues in other areas as well – photography, film and talks.

There are other delights in the Festival too – among them, Circus Oz, the folk opera "The Transports", the Bloodwood Bush Band and the film premiere of "Burke and Wills".

The Queen opened the Festival and saw off the First Fleet. She herself is not going to Australia just yet, although she and five other Royals will visit Australia during 1988. The show must go on! Not surprisingly, the First Family are increasingly news and sell papers

anywhere. There are even fears that the tendency of the popular press to 'Dallasise' the Royal Family may cheapen the essential political role the monarchy might be called on to play in for example, the case of a hung Parliament. But that's a long way from the Charles & Di saga. They in particular have been copping it lately. Is Charles desperately unhappy? Did he marry the wrong woman? Articles abound. Is Charles overshadowed by Superstar Di? Questions for the nuclear age, *n'est-ce pas?*

Australia itself came under focus recently at the OASES (Observing Australia: Space, Environment & Society) conference, organised by Peter Quartermaine and David Lowenthal at Exeter in March. It was a rewarding, headspinning affair: landscapes and space, Australia globally, close-up and afar, Ayers Rock and gumtrees in the kitchen, shiny cars in the desert and so on.

Much of the conference was concerned with the examination of landscape stereotypes, and of how some have become aspects of Australian identity. As usual Paul Hogan, Barrie Humphries and Rolf Harris made their contribution to the 'real Australian' debate. In the UK, stereotypes of Australia abound – especially Barry Humphries' personas. Sir Les Patterson is a favorite (''Les Patterson's the name, Australian culture's the game'' – a recent British Telecom ad). Peter Quartermaine said one of his students who'd seen Les Patterson on television believed him to be 'real'. He is certainly too 'real' for John Morse, manager of the Australian Tourist Commission in London, who was quoted in the Sunday Times as saying that stereotypes, particularly Sir Les Patterson's ''chauvinistic beer-swilling drunk without any sensitivity, without any feeling'', were costing Australia much tourist-trade and ''sustaining the emnity between 'whingeing poms' and gauche Aussies''. As was often pointed out during the conference, in the absence of 'real news' about Australia in newspapers or elsewhere, British people continue to believe the stereotypes.

The conference, while continually reminding us of past errors, stressed the growing importance of landscape architecture in facilitating a harmonious and environmentally-productive use of land. Janine Haddow, a landscape architect from Melbourne, told me that one big problem is that many Australians think that landscape architecture is concerned mostly with plantings. Rather, it embraces rural and urban design and the planning on large-scale regional schemes running from domestic through to industrial developments. ''With the growth of environmental consciousness, people are now looking for environmental solutions for what were once considered as needing engineering solutions,'' she said.

Spring is the loveliest season in London – and as I write in early May it's still on. There's been the usual crocuses in the parks, then the daffs, bluebells, buttercups and daisies, and blossom-filled squares, with the plane trees coming into leaf – so many echoes of school-readers and Eng. lit. for those of us educated pre-Aust. lit. The times sure have changed, almost unbelievably.

Newspapers with leftist leanings are rare in Thatcherland and it is disconcerting to read in the Observer in May that News on Sunday, launched in April, with two million pounds of trade union money, is already ailing. It wasn't helped by failing to retain John Pilger as Editor, and by a clumsy sexist advertisement, ''No tits but a lot of balls'', used in their pre-publicity. The ad was withdrawn but not before a lot of damage was done to the tone and integrity of the paper. Still, there are rumors of further support forthcoming. With the election set for early June, any paper which can draw attention to the injustices and inequalities here, especially as regards unemployment, education and health, is vitally necessary. To say nothing of the need to alert people to the nature of the Tories' extremely pro-nuclear policy in defence and elsewhere. Fancy a nuclear power station next-door – well almost, if you live in London? That's what the proposed Sizewell B nuclear power station means.

The Australian Studies Centre at 27 Russell Square, under Tom Millar and Robert Mackie, continues to beat back the nation of bushwackers image by presenting a wide range of talks on literary, historical, economic and sociological subjects. The centre does represent an 'oasis' of Australian culture in London, and it was worrying to hear recently that it might have to close for lack of government funds. However the Menzies' Trust has come up with the money. Not surprising, you might say. Rumor is that the centre will be known as the Menzies Centre for Australian Studies from July. The lad from Jeparit still batting for his country?

The other big news of special interest to poetry lovers, is Poetry Live, a nationwide poetry-promotion fortnight in May. Termed ''irreverent'' by those who see it as a contest between the Muse and Mammon, this promotion, involving booksellers, publishers and poets, is attracting considerable attention. At the centre of it is Desmond Clarke, formerly of the Book Marketing Council and Faber's, who believes poetry can sell. To this end, he has also launched a mail order Poetry Catalogue (11 College St., Winchester, Hampshire). The interesting thing about Poetry Live is the way it has brought together poets of all 'faiths', from Rastafarian Benjamin Zephaniah to Carol Rumens and Seamus Heaney. Poetry is in the air. There have been readings/promotions in bookshops and on TV and radio, the Albert Hall and on Waterloo Station, at the Poetry Society, in pubs and schools, at the Tate Gallery and elsewhere. The boom is on, or ''real'' as Clarke says. Australian publishers and booksellers, please note.

books

Trojan Horse

Michael Costigan

Charles Osborne: *Giving it Away: The Memoirs of an Uncivil Servant* (Secker & Warburg, $35.00).

Being a generous reviewer of books and having had a few brief but quite pleasant meetings with Charles Osborne over the years, I wish I could describe his autobiography as witty, elegantly written, sophisticated and absorbing – and leave it at that. Unfortunately, while that description is not inapplicable to parts of *Giving it Away*, more appropriate adjectives for the book as a whole would be opinionated, egotistical, gossipy, vindictive and a little bit sad.

When I was in London in 1979 and again in 1983 as Director of the Literature Board of the Australia Council, I fell into the habit of introducing myself in literary circles as "Charles Osborne's Australian counterpart". Allowing for the fact that the Good Lord obviously discarded the mould after creating Charles and that nobody could justly claim resemblance to such a unique individual, I found this a quick and simple way of explaining who and what I was. But I must say that this form of self-introduction produced more snarls than welcoming smiles.

Perhaps unpopularity, especially among writers, is one sign of a Literature Director's success. If so, the Arts Council of Great Britain is unlikely ever to have a more successful occupant of this position than this self-confident and undoubtedly talented Queenslander, who was employed in that institution's Literature Department from 1966 until the end of 1985, and as its Director for nearly fifteen of those years.

Much of this book was written during the final months of his incumbency, while the structure of the Arts Council and its Literature Department was being radically altered in one of those institutional upheavals which some politicians, bureaucrats or management experts like to inflict on such an organisation when fate or stupidity delivers it into their hands. It was written after the budget allocation for literature had been halved and it had been decided that only a part-time Director was needed to manage the reduced program. Although he was offered this diminished position, Osborne declined, choosing to retire from the civil service and concentrate on his own writing and other cultural pursuits. His decision was applauded by the vociferous critics who had been after his blood for years and who blamed him for the savage cut in Government funding for literature. He does not say whether or not the prediction that authors and poets would be dancing in the streets after his departure was fulfilled.

One of Osborne's aims in writing the book was to deal with his critics. Rational argument is not a significant element in this process. He is more interested in scoring points cheaply and in demonstrating by quoting his own smart answers, written and oral, to adversaries that he could out-match any of them in abuse and invective.

In fact, he rather disarmingly concedes the validity of some of the criticisms by re-stating the kind of views on Government literary patronage which so infuriated his enemies, notably those associated with organisations like the Society of Authors and the Poetry Society. He writes:

> Much contemporary poetry and some (not much) new fiction will remain unpublished if there are no subsidised publishing houses to introduce it: publishers such as Carcanet, Anvil and Calder. And even such publishers, to say nothing of the commercial houses, will find new writers of quality more difficult to identify without literary magazines such as *PN Review, The London Magazine, Granta* or *Stand,* the majority of which could not exist without subsidy.
>
> So there remains a public need for the Arts Council and Regional Arts Associations to continue to subsidise a few publishers and literary

> magazines. I imagine that, for the foreseeable future, they will continue to do. What there does not appear to be any public need for is a greater state involvement in the subsidising of writers. If there is, I for one haven't heard the public crying for it. The voices I hear are those of writers, not those of readers...
>
> The yelling of the poets and writers for more money, without substantiating a need for it, has brought much of the structure of the Arts Council's Literature Department down. I imagine that, in due course, the rest will come tumbling after. Then we can all go home and get on with our writing.

Opinions such as these can be defended, but it is as astonishing as the legend of the Trojan horse that, while holding them, Charles Osborne was able to retain his position at the Arts Council for so many years. Not only did his ideas run counter to those of so many of the Literature Department's constituents, but it seems that they were in conflict with the thinking of most members of the Council's Literature Panel during this time. As I found when I went to Cardiff and Edinburgh in 1979, they were also at odds with the policies and practices of the Welsh and Scottish Arts Councils.

I have my own ideas on why, in spite of its unpopularity with writers, the Osborne doctrine had some currency and eventually prevailed in England, while it is not the basis for state funding of literature in other English-speaking countries like Canada and Australia, where the respective Governments give substantial amounts of direct support to individual writers. In those places, for reasons linked with geography, demography and the international book publishing system, the livelihood of creative writers is more precarious than it is in England or, for that matter, the United States of America. The subsidy system in those countries, as in Wales and Scotland, is also linked closely with the need to preserve and assert national cultural identities.

It is therefore both laughable and a little irksome to find that Charles Osborne sees himself as some kind of ex-missionary who once failed to convert the obdurate government literary policy-makers in his native country to his way of thinking:

> In 1976 I visited Australia at the invitation of the Adelaide Festival of the Arts, to give the opening address in their Writers' Week, but also to advise the Australia Council in Sydney on various matters of organisation and policy. I made myself unpopular in some quarters by expressing my doubts as to the wisdom of their spending large sums on grants to writers. Nothing could stop writers from writing, I assured the Literature Board of the Council. The writers needed help with publication and distribution of their books, not handouts to encourage them to write. I could have saved my breath, for the Australia Council continues to fling money indiscriminately at the talented and the untalented. They then frequently have to thrust grants at publishers to coerce them into publishing the books that have been written, which the bookshops fail to sell and which no one even wants to borrow from the libraries.

My own recollection of that visit to the 1976 Writers' Week tells me that Charles is big-noting himself. He was one of a large group of writers invited to Writers' Week in what turned out to be a disastrous year for the organisers, because of the last-minute withdrawal of several of the better-known invitees. I believe he has allowed his memory to magnify the importance of his contribution to the opening of the Week (understandable, perhaps, since it was held in a vineyard) and also of his role as adviser to the Australia Council and the Literature Board.

As a courtesy to the distinguished visitor, whose trip had been partly funded by the Board, Charles was invited to one session of a Board meeting held in the John Bishop room of the Adelaide Festival Centre on 5 March 1976. The invitation included dinner followed by an hour-long discussion, during which the guest described the structure of the Arts Council of Great Britain and its literature policies and programs. After answering some questions, he withdrew. Certainly, he expressed his misgivings about the idea of offering grants to writers, without being unpleasant about it. Nobody appeared to be convinced, although one member, Michael Wilding, subsequently left the meeting (and eventually the Board) in protest because he (and he alone) thought the chairman, Nancy Keesing, should have allowed the visitor more time to expound his ideas. (It had been a hard day, one of its other memorable features being an unannounced 'walk-in' by a group of agitated literary magazine editors.)

Now, Charles Osborne may be justified in thinking that his unusual experience as a reasonably prolific and well-connected Australian writer who became a powerful figure in the English literary world gives him special authority when he speaks on government support for literature in the country of his birth. But his remarks are so inane and ill-founded that they lose all credibility.

I do not relish the role of expatriate-basher. I lived abroad myself for well over ten years, having left Australia for the first time on the *Otranto* in 1952, some ten months before Charles Osborne left on the *Oceania*. But the point has to be made that Charles, who has never spent more than a few weeks in this country on any of his return visits over a quarter of a century,

shows in this book, as he did in Adelaide in 1976 and again when I saw him in London three years afterwards, that he has a very limited interest in or appreciation of the Australian literary scene. The statement about thrusting grants at publishers and the failure of bookshops to sell or of library patrons to borrow subsidised books is more worthy of Sir Les Patterson than of a serious commentator on the work of the Literature Board.

As for giving help with the publishing, distribution and promotion of books, the Literature Board has never neglected these areas. Since 1973, under the successive chairmanships of Geoffrey Blainey, Nancy Keesing, Bob Brissenden, Brian Stonier and Rosemary Wighton, many innovative and fruitful programs have been introduced to complement the writing grants. Does Charles Osborne know (or care) that, as the present Director of the Board, Thomas Shapcott, has pointed out, Australian books have moved from 10 per cent to nearly 50 per cent of the market in this country in the fourteen years of the Board's existence, while a growing number of American and European publishers have been taking up Australian works of literary merit? (Shapcott notes that thirty-eight books by twenty-five Australian fiction writers were published in the United States in 1986.)

These days, even the most rabid critics of the Australia Council and its Boards usually acknowledge the achievements of the Literature Board. In the very years when the literature program of the Arts Council of Great Britain, under Charles Osborne's direction, was in decline, the equivalent program of the Australia Council was prospering and demonstrably producing results.

Should Osborne then be taken seriously as a critic of what has been happening in this country? Should the Literature Board have taken him seriously as its mentor after all? Could he not have been reminded that, since the establishment of the Commonwealth Literary Fund in 1908, Australia, not Britain, has shown the way in this area? In fact, the English were the Johnnies-come-lately when it came to government support for literature – and they have done very little that the Australians have not done on a bigger scale and with more striking effects. If Charles Osborne could have been humble enough to see himself as a learner rather than a teacher when he met the Literature Board in 1976 and when he called at the Australia Council in Sydney in the same year, his last ten years at the British Arts Council might have been happier for him personally and of more benefit to literature in his adopted land.

As Osborne is the first to admit, however, humility and modesty are not among the conspicuous elements of his character. He never accepted the view that part of the function of an art form Director in an organisation like the Arts Council is to serve a committee or panel. He considered that the Literature Panel's members were there to offer him advice, which he could take or leave. One has the impression that he was more often than not inclined to leave it, and that he had very little respect for the ideas of many of the people appointed to the Panel over the years.

While this would-be cultural commissar always held strong opinions and was rarely shy about expressing them, he did not have his own way all the time. In fact, he seems to have been surprisingly unsuccessful in seeing his policies (or prejudices) translated into decisions, whether they applied to grants to an organisation like the Poetry Society (which he detested – but its annual subsidy continued to rise), the New Review (which he favored – but the Arts Council withdrew its support after a few years) or writers (whose direct support through bursaries continued to be favored by the Panel, although he evidently won that battle in the end).

It may also be some kind of indictment of his reign (although the responsibility may not be entirely his) that British authors had to wait many years longer than the Australians and New Zealanders for Public Lending Rights. It could be claimed that low-key persistence and careful attention to groundwork are more effective management tools than bombast and epistolary rockets.

On the positive side, Charles Osborne seems to have had harmonious and useful working relationships with some of the Arts Council's leading figures, including various Council and Panel chairmen. One of the exceptions was the long-serving Secretary-General, Sir Roy Shaw, whom he found to be "more interested in adult education than in the arts." Osborne also launched a number of imaginative and successful projects, including the Poetry International summer festivals, and he formed a productive alliance with the enterprising Martyn Goff of the National Book League.

In the meanwhile, he somehow found the time to write or edit an impressively large number of books, including his widely acclaimed work on the operas of Verdi, his biography of W. H. Auden and several other studies of composers, writers and one bushranger. He travelled widely in Europe, especially to music festivals, and made annual journeys to the United States where, among other things, he promoted his own books while expanding the reputation he had already established in Britain as a music critic.

These "spare-time" activities also drew fire from those Osborne-watchers in England who wondered how a full-time civil servant could fit so much that was essentially extra-curricular and to a large extent income-producing into his life. Personally, I note his achievements and some features of the life he led during his Arts Council years with a mixture of envy, curiosity and admiration. My own experience over a ten-

year period (1973-83) was that looking after the affairs of a body like the Literature Board was more than a full-time job. Charles was either an extraordinarily efficient manager of his own time, or, with the indulgence of a benign employer and in spite of his ideological antipathy to the notion of writers' grants, he was himself the most heavily subsidised writer in all of England.

While his account of twenty years at the Arts Council takes up a good deal of this autobiography, the rest of the Charles Osborne story is not neglected. He writes of his upbringing in Brisbane, giving somewhat lurid accounts of the ways in which, as an adolescent, he was sexually seduced first by a school choirmaster and later by a Viennese-born Jewish widow; of his moderately successful poetry writing; of his attempts over several years to make the grade as an actor, in Brisbane, Melbourne and London; and of his eight years assisting Alan Ross to edit the London Magazine.

He writes warmly of old friends like Barry Humphries, Sidney Nolan, Philip Larkin, Peter Porter and Barrett Reid; less warmly of alienated friends like Patrick White ("a pretty impossible character"), and vituperously of people who really earned his displeasure, such as Maria Callas ("an ignorant fishwife of a woman"), Somerset Maugham ("an insufferably snide and unpleasant creature") and another of London's more successful literary Australians ("you would have to be a masochist to join a club where you were likely all the time to run into Carmen Callil").

Masochist or not, Charles Osborne seems to derive satisfaction from reporting some of the uncomplimentary remarks that others have published about him: "a supercilious little prick" (Sally Latimer); "the Dracula of the Arts Council" and one of "incomparably the three biggest twits in Britain" (Bernard Levin); "the unattractive pseud" (Private Eye); an "odious literary buccaneer" and "an opinionated, second-rate and ineffably conceited power maniac" (Auberon Waugh); "an absolute cunt" (Ian Hamilton Finlay); and "quite the most viperous person I know" (anonymous enemy quoted in the Standard). Perhaps he rates it some kind of achievement to have provoked such abuse.

Admirers too are quoted, but less abundantly – they may be thinner on the ground. Thus Clive James described Osborne as "a man of wit, accomplishment and courage", Marina Warner saw him as "a suave twentieth century version of the universal man" and Judith Wright praised his "brief and tender" poems.

While some of Osborne's many opinions and attitudes are appalling (to wit, his racist views about the Japanese, his general indifference to the world outside Europe and North America, and his cavalier dimissal of the Australian literature taught in his schooldays as "sheer muck"), a person with his intelligence and cultivated literary, artistic and musical tastes could hardly fail to have certain views deserving of respect and attention. No lifelong devotee of Judy Garland can be completely off the track.

A wave of empathy came over me when, as a fellow sufferer, I read his attack on management jargon ("input", "decision-making processes", "arts coordination", "dance activity", "targeting", "catchment areas", "forward-looking, multi-dimensional assessments", and so on); and I found it hard to suppress both cheers and ancient prejudices when he described community arts as "that perversion of the aesthetic urge invented by bored arts administrators yearning to become social workers" and when he pilloried two political activists who aimed "to take over and re-establish art so that it carries socialist meanings and becomes part of a collective socialist cultural drive."

Leaving aside the often petty squabbles which figure so prominently in these memoirs, one can conclude that Charles Osborne has drawn a good deal of enjoyment from life. Much of it came from his associations, some quite fleeting, with celebrated performers and writers. The youth who turned the pages for Hephzibah Menuhin long years ago collected a host of other droppable names in the following decades. Unfortunately, his conscious and almost defiant decision to drop them with heavy thuds on so many pages, and in concentrated form in the final section, does nothing to enhance a book that is badly in need of enhancement.

It is a pity that few readers will find the act of ploughing through *Giving it Away* nearly as much fun as the author evidently experienced in living the life he describes.

Michael Costigan is the Secretary of the Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales. He was the first Director of the Literature Board of the Australia Council, a position he held from 1973 to 1983, when he took up a two-year posting as Director of the Western Australian Arts Council. His short biography of Pope John Paul II, A Man of Many Talents, *was published in 1986.*

The Restless Search

Hanne Bock

Dorothy Green: *Henry Handel Richardson and Her Fiction* (Allen & Unwin, $24.95).

Green's study of Henry Handel Richardson hardly needs an introduction. Since its first publication in 1973, it has established itself not only as compulsory reading for the student of HHR, but also as a thoroughly enjoyable and stimulating reading experience in its own right.

In the new edition, the main text is unaltered apart

from minor corrections. But an Afterword and a selection of photographs have been added, and the title is changed. The Afterword, over 40 pages long, is the most substantial addition to the text. It has three aims. It provides an overview and discussion of materials deposited in the National Library or otherwise made available to Green since the publication of the first edition; it gives a brief consideration of critical and other related studies from the same period; and it answers some criticisms of the main study.

The selection of photographs is another welcome addition. Most of these have only recently become available and are here published for the first time. Given HHR's alleged aversion to being photographed, they constitute, as Green herself comments, a remarkably rich resource, rich enough, in fact, to form a pictorial record of Richardson's life.

These new illustrations have replaced the highly suggestive vignettes by Pippa Walker, which headed each chapter in the first edition; but they remain a replacement rather than a substitution. And as in most cases where such choices have to be made, some regret lingers. The vignettes were pre-eminently an illustration of Green's text, a visual representation of the character of HHR which Green constructs. They served, therefore, to underpin the thematic and aesthetic unity of the text. The photographs are illustrations of HHR as professional photographers or family members saw her, reflecting in some instances perhaps how HHR wanted to be seen, or wanted to see herself; or in other words, the illustrations of the new edition are part of the independent evidence provided by the study, while the illustrations of the first edition were part of the argument.

The final major change concerns the title. The main title of the first edition *Ulysses Bound* has been abandoned in favor of the original, more prosaically categorizing subtitle. While the two additions, the Afterword and the illustrations, add significantly to the book's already considerable value as a resource and reference manual for the HHR student, the loss of the vignettes and the change in title serve to circumscribe the text slightly by placing it more immediately and more firmly within the boundaries of a critical biography, and removing the more overt signs of that other quality of this study, a work of literature in its own right, to which Humphrey McQueen drew attention in his review of the first edition.

It is thirteen years since Green's study was first published; how has it lasted? One of its most direct contributions to HHR research may be grasped simply by running one's eyes over the chapter headings, which, taken together, constitute an original, sensitive and still highly valid conceptual framework for discussion of Richardson's life and work. An example is the concept of "A Saving Occupation" which Green uses to define the role of writing in Richardson's life. This concept encompasses many of the issues raised in more recent feminist analyses of Richardson as a woman, wife and artist in a male dominated society.

Yet, this is not the ultimate study of Richardson's life and work. Apart from Green's own vigorous rejection of any such assumption, several factors count against that view, notably the fact that too much potentially important material is still restricted, and the fact that so much of Richardson's sentimental and literary education was Continental. This needs to be unravelled in specialist studies; and not enough of these are yet available from which to draw a synthesis. It may be argued, however, that Green's work is more valuable than a conclusive study.

It is wide-ranging and erudite. It opens up consideration of Richardson's life and work within a rich historical and philosophical context. It sets standards for research. Though often speculative, it avoids pat answers. Indeed, one of its most tantalizing aspects is the multiplicity of questions raised which invite further research. The additions to the new edition exemplify these qualities in the focus on primary sources released since the publication of the first edition. In sum, where a conclusive study in a sense closes a field, this one opens it.

But more than that, Green's style of writing makes the reader part of the thinking process. The experience the reader takes away from this study is one of doing literary analysis, of making choices, of following lines of investigation through to the disappointment of a dead end or the exhilaration of a new lead. Green's rejection of a neat conclusive interpretation in favor of an open-ended investigation facilitates this sense of a shared experience, and leaves the reader with the impression of having heard a mind at work, a mind, moreover, engaged in exactly that process – of combining a concern for the inert fact with the concern for making sense of the fact – which Green has established as one of Richardson's identifying characteristics.

A study which extends the theoretical context for discussion of Richardson's work, which argues convincingly for a wide set of influences from contemporary literature and philosophy, and which establishes the importance of Richardson's husband as a catalysing agent, inevitably raises the question of the extent to which Richardson's work represents a deeply felt personal vision or may rather, as has also been suggested, reflect current literary fashions. Green herself argues strongly and convincingly for a view of Richardson's work as rooted in her personal experience and writing as a process of psychotherapy.

Yet the question remains. It has only become more tantalizing with this study, because of the analytical precision with which Green peels mask after mask off

Richardson's image, leading us to the question whether a reality and a vision existed for Richardson separate from the realities and visions of her multiple masks. While Green's study therefore adds considerably to our awareness of the complexity of the question, it also by this very success creates a doubt that an entirely satisfactory answer can be found. There is little question, however, that attempts at solutions will have to be directed at the kinds of use Richardson made of her sources, and in this quest the focus is likely to shift increasingly from a consideration of Richardson as a factual writer to Richardson as a literary and creative writer.

As a critic and writer, Green is a humanist in the best sense of the term, falling neither in the camp of adopted male values nor in that of strictly feminist criticism. Her digressions, and there are a few, reveal a cast of mind which restlessly explores the implication of her findings not merely for the literary tradition, but for the world the reader inhabits. In so doing Green closes the forty-one years since Richardson's death and creates a portrait of an essentially contemporary writer.

Hanne Bock teaches writing and research skills at La Trobe University. Publications include articles on Richardson and on student learning.

Grub Street and Beyond

Elizabeth Riddell

Mungo MacCallum: *Plankton's Luck* (Hutchinson, $24.95).
Garry Kinnane: *George Johnston, a Biography* (Macmillan, $29.95).

By the kind of literary coincidence that sometimes occurs the life stories of two writers who knew one another, and who shared acquaintance with the same people at roughly the same time, emerged from different publishers late last year. The books were *Plankton's Luck* and a biography of George Johnston, author of *My Brother Jack* and other novels, who died aged 58 in 1970. Mungo MacCallum (*Plankton's Luck*) is 68, living in Balmain, N.S.W.

Although they were engaged in the same occupation and so had interests and colleagues in common it appears that no two people could be less alike in their family backgrounds, their personalities or their expectations. They inhabited different emotional landscapes.

Some time after the war MacCallum, Johnston and I worked in the same building, the headquarters of Associated Newspapers. The two were employed on the Sun, which may amaze some who know it only in its present form. Cahill's Coffee Lounge was located conveniently on the ground floor and frequented by fragmented groups of journalists, usually between 10.30 and noon. It was during one of these coffee breaks that Johnston confided to the table at which I sat that in Melbourne he had found the most beautiful woman in Australia who was also the best writer in Australia, and that she, Charmian Clift, would join him in Sydney. It says something about selective memory, or perhaps about Johnston's personality, which could be mesmerising, that MacCallum does not remember me being at Cahill's, nor do I remember him, but we both remember Johnston.

It may be that MacCallum meant more to Johnston than Johnston meant to MacCallum in the Sydney years. They came from different kinds of families, Johnston's working class, MacCallum's professional. They carried, as it were, different brands of batons in their knapsacks. In *My Brother Jack*, the novel that made fame and money for Johnston, the David Meredith character and his wife go to dinner with the Turleys who have decent table silver, relaxed manners and a bottle of wine. MacCallum says the original of this dinner took place in his house at Point Piper. The late Geoffrey Hutton, on the other hand, told me that the original dinner occurred at his house in (I think) Eltham. Kinnane is probably right when he says that Johnston was simply using the life style, as he saw it, of both his friends, and probably of others as well as he began to mix with people of more worldly taste than that of his own family.

MacCallum was invited to launch Kinnane's book in Melbourne, and did so. In his remarks to his audience he made two points: one, that he remembered Johnston being a good, intent listener to other people's conversation and/or confidences, whereas the biography gives the impression that wherever Johnston was it was he who did the talking; two, he did not agree with the suggestion of Neil Hutchison, quoted by Kinnane, that he and Johnston had a "love/hate" relationship. Hutchison headed the Drama and Features department of the ABC where MacCallum worked after leaving the Sun, and to which Johnston was a contributor – putting in far more ideas and scripts than the ABC could possibly handle – after his return from Greece. MacCallum and Johnston were friends over a long time. There were big gaps, but they corresponded and MacCallum sent Johnston the typescript of a novel he had written for his friend's opinion.

Johnston's facility was his curse. There was nothing except poetry that he would not tackle, and he wrote at breakneck speed, at least when I knew him. Had he lived he would have been God's gift to television series. A curious custom has developed of identifying some contributors to newspapers, magazines, radio and TV as "writer and journalist". It is a term that is either tautology or a contradiction, depending on one's opinion of the press. It would certainly have been laid on Johnston.

From Cahill's Coffee Lounge MacCallum and Johnston made their different ways, Johnston to run the London office for Associated Newspapers before exiling himself and Charmian on the Greek island of Hydra, and MacCallum to the ABC and various spiritual and physical vicissitudes.

MacCallum began his book as an exercise. It is subtitled "A Life In Retrospect". He wanted to get it all down, partly to test his memory, partly for the information of his son and grandchildren and his second wife Polly. Then he wondered if he would not try to get it published. He says, "Friends urged me to write down my life but I veered away from this... in spite of wins we [the MacCallums] seemed such a galere of mules and losers." If you have come to an understanding of your difficult stubborn self, and of others, it is natural to want someone to share it. He asked himself often the question on recollection posed by the French novelist Nathalie Sarraute – "But was it really like that?" Perhaps she was also saying, as the painter Albert Tucker did of his exhibition, "Faces I Have Met", "I do not want my period to die."

His book begins with a Prelude in which he tells how the Glasgow MacCallums translated to Australia. "My ancestors drifted in cold seas / and were carried south" are the first two lines in a poem called Plankton to Polly. There are other poems. They would probably not be a good idea in a conventional biography, which this is not. As it happens they often crystallise the opinions and related experiences of the text.

The most an autobiographer can do, as Sarraute hints, is to approximate the facts and the tone of any given period or place. By nature MacCallum is a modifier and qualifier. The more sides a question has, the better he likes it. He writes, "Early years come close in old age and this is usually excused as pre-senile nostalgia for a time when all was new. To me it is less a longing than a search for the seeds of attitudes to come." That last sentence is one that Johnston would never have written.

Search is the key word. MacCallum burrows away at his human condition. He examines rigorously motives and behavior. This should, but doesn't, make the writing bleak. It is sinewy and in an unpretentious way, elegant. He is wryly funny about sex and remarkably candid about addiction to drink.

Both *Plankton's Drift* and Kinnane's entertaining book tell us not only the truth and myth of their protagonists but give a wide-screen picture of a certain kind of life lived by certain kinds of people between the thirties and seventies, when in fact everybody's life was changing very fast.

But since I am discussing the books together it has to be said that there is a good deal of difference between them as literary products. Kinnane's writing lacks grace and abounds in cliches – strapping youths, numb disbelief, epistolary skirmishes; with characters who "meet up" with one another, who are "good at socialising", who "get itchy feet" and who "take time off". This means that his subject has to be of such interest that the reader presses on, stumbling over the banalities. It is rather too much to ask.

One also gets the impression that in the course of Kinnane's painstaking research into Johnston's life and times – though not quite painstaking enough to avoid the misspelling of the names of some of Johnston's acquaintances (these may have been corrected in the second edition) – the author heard the words but did not always get the meaning. There is a case to be made for a biographer being familiar with his subject's world. Otherwise the story may come out with the facts right but the conclusions wrong. Some biographers know everything about their subjects except the essentials.

It seems to me that Kinnane sees Johnston romantically, as a novelist who was *not* great only by accident. Somewhere there is a stack of marvellous books that, because of some mishap, never got written.

Johnston wrote to his first wife, with whom he became coolly friendly after his return to Australia, "I am rather depressed by the thought that perhaps *My Brother Jack* was the ONE book I had to write and I can't do another." This was when the novel had been published, received good reviews, and sold 8,000 copies in three weeks.

Perhaps Johnston wanted to be a great writer, rather than to write a great book. The two ambitions are not the same. Nevertheless, as Kinnane sets out in 329 busy pages, with photographs, there were good reasons why Johnston wrote *My Brother Jack* and good reasons why people keep on reading it.

Elizabeth Riddell, poet and critic, lives in Sydney.

Cocksure Firebrand

John Sendy

Carole Ferrier (ed.): *Point of Departure, The Autobiography of Jean Devanny* (University of Queensland Press, $39.95).

It would be hard to read this autobiography without feeling compassion and sympathy for its author as well as disappointment with the aims and framework she set in writing it. As her daughter, Pat Hurd, writes in the Epilogue, *Point of Departure* does not do justice to Jean Devanny.

What a life had this dedicated communist, author of some twenty books, ardent feminist, outstanding orator and enthusiastic nature lover. She died in 1962 but her manuscript remained unpublished until the present. Born in the backblocks of New Zealand in

1894, she married at seventeen to be at twenty-one the mother of three children two of whom later died, one in infancy and the other as a young man. Her formal education extended only to the primary level. However, by 1929, when she landed in Australia with her family, aged thirty-five, she was the author of three published novels and a volume of short stories, a widely-read, experienced public speaker, the intimate of leading members of the New Zealand Labor Party and trade union movement and a figure of notoriety due to the row caused by her novel, *The Butcher Shop*, which was frequently described by critics as "lurid" and which sold a remarkable 15,000 copies.

A large part of *Point of Departure* provides a fascinating account of her childhood, married life in a coalmining community and her graduation to radical politics, feminism and writing. One of the youngest in a family of ten, of laboring parents, she vividly tells how the children grew up like rabbits, undisciplined and untended, how they fared well for food and acquired a love of nature:

> Of an evening, I often sneaked away by myself and floated about in the old canoe. Here, the boom of the bittern alternated with the hoot of the owl and, at times, the surface of the tide, among the rushes near a bank, would be broken by the popping out of an eel to challenge with his bark the oncoming of night. When the black swans came in and settled on the inlet in their thousands, I spent hours drifting idly among them. A little distrustful but yet not frightened, they would point their bills at me and then majestically sheer off.

In 1911 she married an intellectually-inclined coalminer, Hal Devanny, a union official and strike leader. She studied music and as a teenager and young mother read Blatchford, Ruskin, Buckle, Thoreau, Emerson and Marx. In the miner's village she taught the piano and learned the art of public debate and proffers some of the best comment on public speaking I have read:

> The maxim that if you thoroughly understand your subject you will find no difficulty in explaining it, is mischievously misleading. Some of the worst speakers I have ever listened to had a thorough knowledge of their subject. But unfortunately, that was all they had. Knowledge of your subject is the first prerequisite. Then comes organisation of your material into its most telling form, and to a length just sufficient to fill in the time at your disposal – or the time you should occupy without boring your audience. Follows the practice of it, the learning to put it over, delivery in a style both interesting and impressive.
>
> Again, the time never arrives when the public speaker may abandon comprehensive preparations. There only comes a time when preparation, as a result of long practice, becomes less difficult.

Already some of the characteristics which dogged much of her life had become entrenched. Warm, impulsive, reckless and outspoken, she was never far removed from conflict and trouble. Her mother frequently warned her as a child to be patient. One of her sisters summed her up astutely: she "always had to do everything too much." Typically, when being sentenced to four days' gaol as a result of an unemployed demonstration in Sydney she created a stir by announcing from the dock her intention of joining the Communist Party upon her release.

She did so and threw herself into furious activity on behalf of the communist cause, speaking constantly in halls, at factories and on street corners to the unemployed and the down and out. At one stage at the height of the Depression all four family members worked full-time, unpaid, for the Communist Party and gave themselves wholly:

> Hal was engaged as tutor for seven classes weekly, teaching economics, history and philosophy. Shortly he was made publisher of the *Workers Weekly*, the national organ. The children worked in the printery, at distribution and selling of literature, and so on. One day Patricia came home in great perturbation. The *Workers Weekly* was held up for lack of funds: could we do something about it? All we had left was about forty pounds of my last cheque from London. But thirty pounds would tide over the pinch, we learned, so that much we handed over. Then Hal went and applied for the dole.
>
> Hardship? Not at all! Each of us was buoyed up with satisfaction of fighting back against a relentless foe.

She explains why so many people listened to street speakers in those years. Such an atmosphere may be inexplicable to people in the more affluent, consumer, car and television society of today.

> There were no restrictions on street meetings; each night, dozens of communists spoke at street corners and in the parks. Most of them were not good, but so fierce was the pressure upon the workers that the worst speakers could depend on getting an audience. Numbers of men lived catch-as-catch-can in empty houses, thousands of families were in lack of everything that made for family life, and listening to speakers of their own class was something to do, something to give them hope, by way of an understanding of the

forces responsible for the tribulations by which they were engulfed.

Jean Devanny became the first of numerous outstanding communist women speakers who captivated audiences large and small in many parts of Australia from the late 1930s until the early 1950s. Following her came Bella Weiner, Freda Lewis, Dulcie Miller, Phyllis Johnston and others. But Jean was the most notorious and controversial.

She must have been good; there are plenty who say so. She certainly impressed the poet, Hugh McCrae, who first heard her "breathless" and marvelled at her "words at express speed" and "tongue like an axe in a woodchipping contest." One of her contemporaries recently told me: "She was a firebrand and a rabble-rouser, good, fiery and knowledgeable." Another assessed her more all-sidedly: "She could antagonise people with extreme statements, be difficult to get on with and lacked the personal charm of writers like Katharine Susannah Prichard and Nettie Palmer. As a speaker she tended to be maladroit in handling questions from audiences. An outspoken person, a rebel, a feminist who often got a tough deal in a man's world."

Point of Departure seems to reveal that, while the Communist Party of the 1930s criminally down-graded the importance of Jean Devanny's literary career, the impetuous writer readily accepted this herself, believing that the time of depression, poverty and hardship for the huge majority called urgently for socialists to organise for revolutionary change; art, while part of the revolutionary struggle, was secondary to it. Carole Ferrier in her introduction quotes Jean as saying in 1935: "What's a book to *people* in need." From all accounts here and elsewhere Devanny espoused the woefully mistaken communist line of those years which held that revolutionary change was around the corner and not a moment was to be lost in preparing for that "great day". She is on record as saying she might have been a good writer if she had put writing first. Apparently, she did not. It is a pity that her communist friends did not persuade her to do so.

When I first heard of Jean Devanny during World War Two, communists who were ultra-leftists themselves used to joke about her political sectarianism and tell of her super-left activities and exaggerated statements. She was one of those who led the unfortunate physical assault upon the ALP speakers on the Melbourne Yarra Bank May Day platform in 1932. For many years the joke circulated about Jean telling a meeting about the Soviet Union after her visit there in 1931: "And the pigs, comrades, bigger than any pigs you've ever seen; they were Soviet pigs." Another more ribald version, almost certainly untrue, circulated about Soviet love. Such stories were told by people who themselves had an exaggerated conception of Soviet achievements.

These points are made to demonstrate that while Devanny worked tirelessly in communist causes such as support for the unemployed and against war and fascism and was the victim of the usual communist misconceptions of the times, her well-known impulsiveness led her to embellish and exaggerate those misjudgements even more than many others.

The first half, or more, of *Point of Departure* is good, perhaps close to brilliant. It is when she comes to the real reason for writing it, her burning desire to clear her name with the Communist Party, from which she had been expelled, that her writing degenerates and the narrative becomes somewhat unintelligible, opaque and even irritating. My own knowledge and experience leads me to believe that most of the many expelled from the CPA throughout its history were the victims of injustice. It is not difficult to accept Jean Devanny's plea. However, her tormented attempts at self-justification, her bitterness and outrage at her treatment, while understandable, do not make for good literature in this case, and her judgements sometimes smack of the harshness and irrationality of which she accuses others.

Jean Devanny's characteristics and idiosyncracies have been evaluated by friends, non-communists and writers, whose assessments seem to coincide with what oozes out of the autobiography. Nettie Palmer wrote of her to Frank Dalby Davison: "I respect her courage, admire her generosity and friendliness, but resent her general cocksureness, her way of charging into a thoughtful questioner at a meeting, simply riding him down like a policeman into a harmless, interested crowd."

Marjorie Barnard commented to Nettie Palmer:

> So you've been seeing something of Jean and Jean is running true to type. It's good of Hilda Esson to give her asylum. She needs the chance to repair in a quiet spot. She has run through half a dozen lives and this I think is the hardest. Married at 17, 3 children at 21, then a musical career, then novels thick and fast, then the Party – or perhaps something else in between. A temperance campaign somewhere (she takes her whisky neat). And she's come out of it all knowing nothing – but really nothing – about people, or life if you like. Yes, I've read most of her novels. They are amazing in their lack of grasp aren't they? She's amazing altogether, of an essential impenetrable innocence, as brave as lion, and *no brains.* I'm genuinely fond of her.

The book gives Jean's viewpoint of and her attitude to significant personalities such as Bartlett Adamson, J. B. Miles, Katharine Susannah Prichard, George Finey. It could have been improved by reference notes which identified many of the people referred to obli-

quely by non-de-plumes or by deliberately vague descriptions designed to protect communists at a time when victimisation of them was widespread.

This is a valuable and useful book despite any weaknesses it may have. I look forward eagerly to Carole Ferrier's forthcoming biography of Jean Devanny.

John Sendy lives at Kingower, Victoria.

Alan Wearne's The Nightmarkets *was reviewed by Tim Thorne in our previous issue. Since then the novel has received the National Book Council award, and to mark this we publish a further appreciation.*

Enthusiasm of Words

Kevin Hart

Alan Wearne: *The Nightmarkets: A Novel* (Penguin, $14.95).

From Romanticism to the present day, English poetry has been dominated by the lyric. There are many reasons for the lyric's displacement of the epic, the verse essay and the verse narrative, but perhaps the most obvious is purely negative in character: the rise of prose fiction in the late eighteenth century. As well as extending what could be achieved in writing, the novel occupied a good deal of poetry's traditional ground. By the early twentieth century, with the onset of modernism, it could only seem as though that ground were lost forever: more supple in structure and far less burdened with their own past, the novel and the short story became far more popular genres than poetry and, indeed, were privileged as sites of formal experimentation. Now, as prose fiction is itself increasingly supplemented and supplanted by film, the pressures on poetry have multiplied. Some poets adapt by retreating still further from the realm of prose, writing ever more impacted lyrics; others try to meet prose on its own ground, pressing the technical advances of prose fiction and film into the service of poetry. Alan Wearne's *The Nightmarkets* belongs to this latter group; it is a resolutely centrifugal text.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which poetry can positively respond to the challenge of prose. In the first place, there is the 'prose poem', variously explored from Baudelaire to Tranströmer, in which the writer grafts all the resources of poetry (except lineation) onto the form of prose. Here, while the lyric is displaced, its motifs and moves are simultaneously confirmed at a deeper level. More aggressive and more risky than the prose poem is the 'verse novel', and here one thinks of Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and, closer to home, Murray's *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral*. Wearne's verse novel is far closer in spirit to Browning than to Pushkin: although much of it is written in very relaxed Meredithean sonnets, its primary structure and animating power is the dramatic monologue. The text consists of ten interrelated monologues which circle around a mixed group of twenty-six characters who, in turn, are involved in a comedy of political and sexual manners.

The novel is set in the eighties, though its main characters are very much of the sixties generation. Sue Dobson, a journalist, is sent to interview John McTaggart, formerly a Liberal Party politician and now the founder of the New Progress Party. They become lovers. Sue's old boyfriend, Ian Metcalfe, is hired by McTaggart to investigate rumors of high-level corruption associated with the Crystal Palace, a classy brothel, and quickly becomes emotionally preoccupied with one of the girls, Terri. Meanwhile, Ian's brother, Robert, is running for parliament on a Labor ticket; and from time to time we meet McTaggart's mother, Elise, who ponders upon her son's political past and future. From beginning to end there is enthusiasm for the sixties, and one of the novel's oddities is that this enthusiasm is never explained or accounted for. "Who wants to be blanketed by permanent nostalgia?" muses Ian Metcalfe, and at times the reader is led to ask the same question.

All the same, it is enthusiasm which characterises and sustains the novel: not only the writer's obvious engagement with his characters but also, and more importantly, the liveliness of the text's surface. One has to go back to *A Stretch of the Imagination* to find another Australian text which shows so much pleasure in the presentation of dialect, idiolect, and intonation. Here's a passage from early on in the novel, Ian Metcalfe reflecting on Sue Dobson during the years 1976-78:

> All through the next year, as any defeated
> rationalist scrounges
> for excuses, Sue took it head-on: slathering
> Australia in all-purpose abuse.
> 'Want to go away and never hear about this
> place again. What would be the use?'
> I cringed: 'Not another petulant expatriate
> bad mouthing through transit lounges?
> Europe won't move. It's complete, and that's
> not colonial arrogance,
> it's what life out here is worth. Ours *have*
> to be better battles.
> What can Britain do? Make you
> another presumptuous social critic: *Oh, hi,
> antipodes, we've come to awaken you.
> This is politics, this is culture, this is your
> real world.*'

Wearne's verbal energy is plainly in evidence here but so too is a tendency to prolixity, part of which is

occasioned by the dutiful search for rhyme. In some sections, most notably in the monologues by Robert Metcalfe, John McTaggart and Elise McTaggart, the energy fails, and it's hard not to think of these characters as windbags. Wearne writes most convincingly in the voices of Ian Metcalfe and Terri; indeed, the most successful section of the entire novel is Terri's narrative, a monologue whose greatest and most pressing precursor is the 'Penelope' chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses.*

There can be no doubt that *The Nightmarkets*, with its scope, verve and ambition, is a great advance on Wearne's earlier verse novel, "Out Here" in *New Devil, New Parish* (1976). Even so, one should not forget the distinction of Wearne's early lyrics in *Public Relations* (1972), and one can only look forward to what Wearne will do with the lyric now that he has learnt so much from the novel.

Kevin Hart teaches English at Deakin University. His last collection of poetry was Your Shadow. *His translation of Giuseppe Ungaretti's selected poems,* The Buried Harbour, *is forthcoming from Leros Press.*

Diva and Dirigent

Kenneth Hince

Therese Radic: *Bernard Heinze: a biography* (Macmillan, $29.95).
Therese Radic: *Melba: The voice of Australia* (Macmillan, $29.95).

If there were a prize for industry offered to Australian writers (as perhaps there is: there seems to be one for most other things) it should have gone in 1986 to Therese Radic. Her study of Melba was published in July, the book on Heinze in August, and her play "Madam Mao" was running at the Arts Centre in June and July.

Dr Radic's book on Heinze does not tell the entire story. She signals as much in her preface. "I do not pretend," she says, "to have catalogued here all of Heinze's activities in the shaping of Australian musical organisation. What I have tried to do is to mark the peaks that should bear his name on the map of Australian music history." To which she might perhaps have added a note that she had confined herself to considering Heinze's public activities. There is very little in the book about his private life, little enough to suggest that the reticence is deliberate.

Within her scope, Dr Radic gives a good and faithful picture of Heinze's career. There are a couple of details with which I would disagree, but they are not of much significance. And what a subject she has for the book! Heinze was not only the most commanding and masterful personality in our musical history, but easily the greatest achiever in the world of Australian performing music.

Ormond Professor at the University of Melbourne at thirty-one, he vitalised and reformed musical practice across Australia, in virtually all its forms and aspects. He brought into existence our first permanent orchestras, and engineered the ABC's control of them. He was responsible for the fact that there were six orchestras, and not a single national orchestra as Malcolm Sargent had wanted. With these orchestras he began the celebrity concerts, the schools concerts, the youth concerts, and the subscription series which still exists.

Others helped: but the initiatives came largely from Heinze, and his practicality and political shrewdness converted them into realities. In fact there were only two areas of musical activity in which he did not exert himself. One was opera, to which he was not strongly drawn. Although he chaired the committee which set up what is now the Australian Opera, the orchestra remained his point of engagement. The other was the training of young conductors, their encouragement when they did appear, and for that matter the encouragement of prominent overseas conductors to put down roots in Australia. Hiroyuki Iwaki's record term with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra would have been unlikely during Heinze's ascendancy in Melbourne.

Few of Heinze's achievements were disinterested. The good which he did – and it was enormous – was generally a by-product of his ambition in the forwarding of his own career. This is well recognized by Dr Radic: "He was genuinely interested in Australian composition, as he was in educating the young; there was nothing cynical in his espousal of noble causes, but that the causes always coincided with an advantage to his own career cannot be denied."

After an interesting and egostistical introduction from Barry Jones, Dr Radic opens her account with a partly fictionalised picture of young Heinze sitting in his room in a Berlin pension in 1923, wondering whether or not to come back to Australia. She casts this as a crucial decision, and the dramatic contrivance is effective. The chapter closes with Heinze returned to Ballarat to judge the string playing at the South Street competition, and with economy we have been launched into Dr Radic's main narrative.

She sets a good musical background in place, and sketches against it the chief events of Heinze's career – the accession to the Ormond Chair, the amalgamation of orchestras, the celebrity concerts of the 1930s, his close contact with the infant ABC, the furious pace of his conducting commitments across the country during the war years, the increasing tension between the professorial board and his administration of the Conservatorium, and the final phase of his career in Sydney, after the deplorable collapse of the Goossens regime. It is all very capably done.

On the whole I have only two reservations to make about this study. One is that, although the flavor of Heinze's personality is accurately caught in its mixture

of imperiousness and a charm both spontaneous and polished (Neville Cardus once said that he was an even finer host than Beecham), its grand scope and amplitude are not. To a point this is a result of the decision I have guessed at to review only his public life. The second is that one of Dr Radic's predilections, a distaste for British forms and institutions, has her attributing to Heinze a late disenchantment with the old Anglo-Australian relation. To my memory this did not happen. But it is a small thing anyway.

This does however loom rather larger in Dr Radic's book on Melba.

I found the structure of this in itself less satisfactory. I do not think that she does as good a job of establishing her background here. The continuity of the narrative is often interrupted with long secondary explanations of people and institutions. Others of these are handled in long marginal glosses which are often very interesting, and indeed there is good new material in the book. But the historical interjections disrupt the Melba story and confuse the chronology.

Also, Dr Radic's preoccupations (feminist and Anglophobe) jangle about the text in and out of season, without doing much to advance the picture of Melba.

The British royal family is consistently diminished into "the royals", which even as a stylistic trait is irritating: and at one point Dr Radic remarks that a certain operatic conjunction "must have tested the credulity even of George V and Mary of Teck." I do not know more about George V and Queen Mary than most people do, but I am not aware of any evidence that they were persons of uncommon credulity. Nor does Dr Radic point to it in any footnote.

It is possible to read Australian colonial history in a mode which differs from Dr Radic's: "With Melba we realised it was possible to stop cringing to the English and to get up off our knees." And it is certainly permissible to take a view of opera quite different from the one she expresses in her preface, with some violence and a little opacity: "[the prima donna] has little choice but to accept the dictates of managements and agree to give life to male projections of transsexual dreams, rape fantasies, incest taboos, moral fears, and political theory, exalted by transformation into a high art form designed to appeal to a ruling class, whether aristocratic or bourgeois, for whom she acts as high priestess. . . " What price Verdi?

These preoccupations reverberate throughout the book and give it an emotional tone which is strangely ambiguous.

It is hard to know whether Dr Radic admires Melba or detests her. She fails to answer some of the questions she poses in her preface, and I finished my reading without discovering whether Melba was sexist or racist, a snob or realistic opportunist, or whether opera is "largely the melodramatic product of male sexual fantasy, as it appears to be." And there are many questions answered by other questions, or by might- have-beens.

But even if it is tendentious it is a stimulating book, written with considerable energy and giving us a good deal of new information, some of it from the archives of the Melba Memorial Conservatorium, some from America, some from the Podhragy papers now in the National Library in Canberra, some from other correspondence. There are lively accounts of musical affairs in Melbourne not otherwise recorded, and in the end Dr Radic does give us a more rounded and human account of Melba than she does of Heinze, because there is more personal material here.

There is a mass of excellent photographs. Although the size is awkward, the production is quite good, but the proof-reading poor. Apart from a few verbal infelicities (pearl for purl, pelph for pelf) there are a good many misprints and mis-spellings.

A former librarian of the University Conservatorium, Kenneth Hince was the first music critic of the Australian, and is now senior music critic of the Age.

But Where Is The Man?

Baiba Berzins

John Ritchie: *Lachlan Macquarie: A Biography* (Melbourne University Press, $37.50).

I feel in a difficult position about John Ritchie's recently-published biography of Lachlan Macquarie, the fifth Governor of New South Wales, since I disagree with every other reviewer. Sandy Yarwood, in the Age, had reservations but everyone else, in print or on the radio, has been enthusiastic, and the book has now been nominated for a National Book Council award.

John Ritchie's scholarship is impeccable and extensive. It is obvious that, for *Lachlan Macquarie,* no fact has been left unturned. Indeed, the footnotes to this research occupy five per cent of the book. Unfortunately, most of the individual footnotes are overwhelmingly long and refer to whole paragraphs rather than to individual facts. Thus, it is impossible to determine which fact is footnoted where. This is my irritation, but it does not detract from the quality or scope of the research, which is accurate and detailed.

It concerns me somewhat – although not greatly – that John Ritchie's biography does not differ markedly from Malcolm Ellis's 1947 – and many times republished – biography of Macquarie. Ritchie has uncovered some new facts about Macquarie (e.g., that he probably contracted syphilis in Egypt in 1801) and offers different interpretations of major policy directions (e.g., the administration of the Aboriginal peoples living in and near the settled areas). Nevertheless the differences in interpretation emerge far too

subtly, and the basic structure of Ritchie's book is very similar to that of Ellis's. Ritchie acknowledges his admiration for Ellis's work, but it seems a shame that he chose to improve on it by working through the same structural process rather than by adopting a fresh approach.

For me, the basic problem with Ritchie's biography of Lachlan Macquarie is that it gives no sense of the living, breathing man who played such an influential role in the early history of New South Wales and who left his mark on the atlas of Australia, although only one monument to him has ever been erected. There are many reasons why the man does not emerge. Unlike Ellis, Ritchie chooses to paraphrase from Macquarie's journals, a unique and invaluable source of self-revelation. To paraphase, for example, the excitement which Macquarie expresses about his wedding night with his first wife, Jane Jarvis, is quite insensitive. Ellis admittedly quotes from the journals at excessive length, but judicious use of this fascinating source of insight would have enlivened the academic and ponderous tone of the biography.

In his correspondence, likewise, Macquarie was extremely open to those he trusted, such as his brother Charles. As the pressures on him mounted, his handwriting became larger and wilder. After his return to England, his struggle to clear his reputation obsessed his energies, and his letters from visits to the Continent reveal a man whose energies had become exhausted but whose time moved at a more leisurely pace. Such striking self-revelation could well have been used as part of the pictorial component of the biography. In many ways, visual information, from sources often not regarded as visually rewarding, reveals more than the familiar portraits of Macquarie and his family which are reproduced in the biography.

The problem highlighted by Ritchie's book is, I suspect, the academic approach to biography. Every individual has his or her unique complexity but, in 'definitive' biography, the accumulation of factual information takes precedence and the voice of the individual under examination becomes stilled. Lachlan Macquarie left a considerable mark on Australian history and, especially, on Sydney. He is even perpetuated in legend: the current reconstructors of Sydney have paid homage to his memory spectacularly in the preservation of Macquarie era buildings and the rebuilding of Macquarie Street, soon to be the premier street in the Premier State. A man of myth, Macquarie was also a vulnerable human being, with his fair share of deceits, dishonesties and manipulations. His reputation as the enlightened, humane Governor of Ellis's version certainly needed re-examination but, in my opinion, is only slightly altered by John Ritchie's biography. The challenge of Macquarie the man still awaits its biographer.

Baiba Berzins is the Mitchell Librarian, State Library of New South Wales. Her recent work includes the preparation of the Library's 1988 Exhibition which will deal with life in Australia, 1788 to 1822.

Early Birds

Michael Dugan

Doug MacLeod (ed.): *Kissing the Toad and Other Stories by Young Australian Writers* (Penguin, $6.95).

Kissing the Toad contains a selection of work from five thousand entries to the Australian Young Writers' Project conducted as part of International Youth Year. The ages of the writers published in it range from fourteen to twenty-five at the time of entry.

During the late 1960s and 1970s, when 'creative writing' was undergoing a boom period in schools, anthologies of work by young people abounded. They ranged from the rigorously selected collection in which Michael Dransfield and a number of other poets now well known made their first appearance, to slipshod and superfluous collections of children's writing made by proud teachers in the wake of Brian Thompson's excellent *Once around the sun. Kissing the Toad* is the first anthology of young people's writing I have seen for some time and, as one would expect from both editor and publisher, it belongs firmly in the first category.

Doug MacLeod has given 'story' a very wide definition. The title piece, for instance, is a well-constructed and appealing short story about an adolescent boy who arranges a meeting between a girl he has taken for granted since childhood and a boy she is interested in, and is then surprised at his jealousy when the meeting turns out to be a success. Similarly, Ann-Luise Freer's "Sammy Dull" and Charles Amsden's "Byron's Rose", both of which deal sympathetically with social outcasts, fit well the traditional short story form. All are of such quality that I would not have felt surprised to have read them in Overland or any other of our leading literary journals.

Other contributions are autobiographically-based accounts, including several that touch on current social issues such as drugs, road carnage, unemployment and our attitudes towards the disabled.

Some stories, such as Chad Loeven's "The Man in the Alley", provide little hope for the future. Dean Wright's "The Cost of Unemployment" is an understandably gloomy expression of frustration. Wendy Stack's "The Pepper Tree", which deals with the same subject, has a more hopeful and optimistic conclusion. Aboriginal writer Leah Wilson writes about a girl's realisation of herself as an Aboriginal. Brett Woodland's "Nothing Special" is a short story indeed, fulfilling the basic requirements of plot and character con-

struction in four paragraphs that even end with an O'Henry 'twist'!

Also included is a selection of poetry. All the poets have something to say and most say it well. They range from Michael Winkler's wryly witty "Enrolling at the CES" to Jemal Sharah's skilled and moving "Memorial". Winkler is one of the few young contributors who is able to take a dispassionate approach to one of today's problems and even find some humor in it: most, and who can blame them, take life pretty seriously.

One result of reading this collection was to send me back to an anthology of poetry by writers of similar age that I co-edited a decade ago. Of the eighty or so young poets I recognised six names as those of people still publishing poetry regularly in literary magazines, five of them with books to their credit. Two other names I recognised from other areas of writing: one a journalist and the other a film-maker and script writer.

This seemed to me quite a promising result. What value to the poets this early publication had been I could not know, but I feel sure that it would have been only encouraging and beneficial to them to see their work in print among that of their peers. Print itself is an important stage in the young writer's development. What has been largely a private involvement becomes public with the first publication that opens the work to comparison and criticism. For the young writer it can lead to re-evaluation, with the realisation that his or her work is now in the public arena.

I feel confident that in ten years' time Doug MacLeod will be able to look back at the authors' names in his lively and varied anthology and recognise some of them as those of writers still actively engaged in writing and publication. He will find it makes the mammoth task of reading and selecting that is involved in producing this type of book seem very worthwhile.

Michael Dugan is a Melbourne writer and editor.

A Bully Down to Size

Ken Buckley

Bede Nairn: *The 'Big Fella': Jack Lang and the Australian Labor Party, 1891-1949* (Melbourne University Press, $35.00).

It is difficult for a biographer to be unsympathetic towards the person under study, but Nairn manages it. In his view, Lang was "basically a bully", "probably never had a friend", was humorless and menacing. Despite this, Nairn tries to be fair to the "big fella"; and he writes as a historian with no particular axe to grind.

The result is a book of careful, sound scholarship, which tracks the parallel development of Lang and the New South Wales ALP, particularly from 1913 when Lang was elected to the State Parliament. He became a member of a Labor Cabinet in 1920-22, and Premier in 1925-27 and the fateful years of 1930-32. He was subsequently a disruptive force in Labor politics and remained a declining negative element even after being expelled from the party in 1943. He was re-admitted by a sentimental State annual conference in 1971, on a motion moved by Paul Keating. Perhaps a future biographer of Keating will examine the symbolic significance of that move.

Although Nairn has an encyclopedic knowledge of Lang's political career, there are important gaps in information about the early years. He is described as "a child of the Sydney slums", selling newspapers on city streets and gaining some sympathy for underprivileged people. Nairn adds that Lang acquired a more vital ambition to escape from such poverty and become rich. It sounds plausible yet the only source for the newspaper-selling story was Lang himself, who was generally deceitful. Rising from nothing is a standard form of boast by a self-made man. More important, Nairn notes that Lang became wealthy through his activities as an estate agent in the decade or so from 1900, linking his business to local politics and becoming mayor of Auburn. Again, little hard information is given about this early episode of his life.

Where the author excels is in description of the intricacies of Labor politics. There are blow-by-blow accounts of faction fights, skullduggery and corruption. Rather oddly, Nairn does not use V. G. Childe's classic, *How Labour Governs* (though it is noted in the bibliography). Perhaps this is because Childe was thoroughly disillusioned and mordant, whereas Nairn retains faith in Labor as a party of reform. Nairn has long been respected as an honest, straight-down-the-middle Labor supporter and historian.

Nairn's own background moulds this book. On the one hand, he has some affinity with Lang through the latter's apparent democratic sensibility and rejection of the extremes of Left and Right. On the other hand, Nairn detests Lang's egotism and authoritarian methods. Nairn, a lifelong upholder of the value of trade unionism, is contemptuous of Lang for knowing "virtually nothing about trade unions", apart from manipulating their leaders.

Nevertheless, Nairn's own moderation of approach, broad-church Labor though it seems, has self-imposed blinkers. He has no time for socialists in the labor movement, regarding them as marginal. He makes the extraordinary statement that the word class "is irrelevant to Australian history; it is avoided as much as possible in this book." The corollary of this exclusion is that the study of politics centres upon personalities rather than policies. That is the way journalists (and

politicians in their memoirs) treat the subject, and the result is lack of analysis and obliviousness of general trends. Nairn does better than that. He is reliable on facts and he does not cover up. His background information on politicians, particularly their sectarian standpoint, is illuminating, as is to be expected from a general editor of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Yet the amount of detail is often overwhelming, leaving no scope for broad surveys.

While concentrating upon the minutiae of Labor politics, Nairn does not ignore social policy. He acknowledges that the Lang government of 1925-27 was reponsible for significant social reform, for example by initiating family endowment, though this was more a matter of longstanding party policy than Lang's own aims. Yet Nairn has virtually no interest in economic matters, so that politics are treated as if in a vacuum. This deficiency is glaringly apparent in relation to the Great Depression, beginning about 1929. Nairn is well aware of the disastrous impact of the depression in terms of unemployment and balance of payments problems for Australia. Labor governments were faced with very serious problems, and Nairn traces the reactions of Lang and others, culminating in Lang's dismissal from office by Governor Game.

Yet there is virtually no consideration here of the worldwide context of depression. Lang's Plan to cope with the depression in 1931 – a plan which had been put forward by other people in the labor movement before him – had some unreal elements in it, but basically it proposed a reduction in interest rates in Australia and suspension of payment of interest to holders of Australian bonds in Britain. In short, moneylenders should be hit: the burden should not be borne only by workers. Understandably, conservatives (including many in the ALP) screamed about the sanctity of contract and organised the downfall of Labor governments.

Nairn argues that Lang knew that there was no chance that the Premiers' Conference of 1931 would agree to his proposals: he was simply manoeuvring for political advantage for himself. Perhaps so, but the Lang Plan, tossed aside in this cavalier fashion, deserves examination on its merits. Even if it had meant repudiation of overseas debts, as critics claimed, that was not unthinkable. There were precedents in the history of other countries, and in the 1930s many undeveloped countries were in a predicament similar to Australia's. Not all power rests with creditor nations, as debtors such as Brazil are realising today. It is true that if Australia in 1931 had suspended payment on overseas debts there would have been retaliation, particularly by cutting off further loans to Australia. So what? Even without suspension, Australia was unable to raise fresh loans for several more years.

Nairn's book is not the last word. It does not supersede *Jack Lang*, the book edited by H. Radi and P. Spearritt. Even so, Nairn's account is comprehensive and coherent political history, which should be consulted by anyone interested in the subject.

Ken Buckley teaches Economic History at the University of Sydney. He is the author of books on labor history, civil liberties and business history, including a two-volume history of Burns Philp & Co.

A Mother Lode of a book

Eric Beach

Jas. H. Duke: *Poems of War and Peace* (Collective Effort Press, GPO Box 2430V, Melbourne, 3000, $18.00).

Poetry – 268 pages of it in a red and black cover with a torn anarchist symbol. This book demonstrates that it's possible to have a wide-ranging acquaintance with world poetry and still speak with an authentic voice, in this age of mumbling modernism, ripping the words out of his mouth with his hands, whether he's bellowing Stalin at the bluestone walls of Pentridge Prison until a nervous warder's head pops round the corner, or asserting "No, no, you can't do that" at the anarchists' ball (they were all shouting Yes) or quietly declaring "I'm in the shit business" – "I work in the sewerage department", or reciting tirades bound by hoops of irony: the man's funny. Take "Solidarity Explained":

> When the axe first came into the forest
> the trees said to each other
> the handle is one of us.

Those who fought in the old revolution will look in vain for a social program, this book's no boy scout manual for social realists, the 'author as eye of god' is a naive technique and sometimes the rhetorical flourish at the end of poems is merely quaint. When Duke succeeds he jiggles one's mind out of lazy habits of thinking. The only reason I can see as to why he's not been taken up by most anthologists is his refusal to be boring, either that or the sheer scope of the man's work makes him unfashionable.

The poems are ordered without attention to chronology, a good idea, as one can more readily see how influences were swallowed and digested, a telegraph style reminiscent of surrealism, a filmic style in which words can become pictures, or become a narrative, more displayed by images than told (e.g., the excerpts from "Destiny Wood").

The political stance is anarchist; one would assume a committed socialist only too aware of socialism's follies. (Duke left the Communist Party at sixteen, or was pushed – they sent him up on a bridge to write a slogan, he leant over and painted it, the next morning they

discovered the slogan was written upside down.) His acute distrust of the state reminds me of Jorge Semprun's work, there's something wrong with programmatic solutions. I find "The Accident at Grantham" a moving account of two class enemies who failed to handle the contradictions, still humorous, though mordant. Pondering over the annoying List of Contents (no margins) you can work out the book is divided into Poems, Assorted Sound Poems, Translations, Concrete Poems and extracts from "Destiny Wood".

Poems. The earlier work, the rhyming poems, pile up sound upon sound, much as Sylvia Plath piled image upon image, employ archaisms, rhyme depends on clumsy word-inversions, they're sing-songy, and, in this collection, a little like archaeological relics. I like his music best when it doesn't rely on special effects. They're to be read in gulps of breath, as though reciting whilst cranking a car. The more recent poems tell some marvellous stories and exhibit a dramatic flair. Much of the humor is in the timing, the cadence. Poets from Vincent Buckley to Robert Gray bemoan the lack of narrative poems and, while Alan Wearne has been accepted, not so with Jas. H. Duke, Pi O or Shelton Lea. Some of the rambling commentaries appear self-indulgent when juxtaposed with well-made stories like the one about George Kaiser. "National Asset on Trial", or "California Love Story". I like the way Duke can explore political ideas and simultaneously convey the workings of a compassionate intelligence. He's spent time in Germany but his stick-it-up-'em stance is pure Oz. He is only occasionally heavy-handed, the jokiness of the monologist, he is better than that for the most part; screamingly funny, groaningly droll. Readers who have a tin ear might gloss over the print and miss the music in his lines. When I first delved into this book I had to break off and go and write a poem, which came out sounding a lot like Jas. H. Duke.

Assorted Sound Poems. He makes it look easy, they come with his own particular and sometimes peculiar reasons for doing them. All honor to the voice. There are various clues as to how he uses it as an instrument. This book should be said as well as read. The book as a whole makes no false distinction between poetry as text and poetry for performance, in a way, "Positive Poem" may be viewed as a sound poem. He makes most poets appear to be lacking several dimensions.

Translations. From the German, I enjoyed each and every one of them. Strangely enough they remind me of the writing style of the New Zealand novelist, Keri Hulme: word sequences which build or fall, a sense of using words as building blocks, a device which he extends to sentences elsewhere, so, suddenly, a matey yarn is seen to be dealing with serious subjects, a quality he needs when his poems threaten to become lectures.

Concrete Poems. Along with his sound poems, which he's best known for (he precedes Imants Tillers by several decades) I've heard the chains of words read as sound poems. Again his prodigious imagination means that his poetry overlaps several categories, bewildering to the critic, but to me life as it should be. The ironic bent translates well into pictures.

Extracts from "Destiny Wood". Encyclopaedic, an autobiography of the mind in which politics, aesthetics, friendships and love affairs stick their heads in the door and begin to talk, as Jas. H. Duke is wont to do. Some of it is as cornball as Biggles, then jumps into scenes reminiscent of Dali's peculiar novel and out of a welter of images, some great lines: "Drenched through with darkness and peace".

I think Pi O in selecting poems for this book out of a mass of material, was wise to let them fall over each other, rather than place them in strict categories. Since his earlier 'expressionist' days, Duke has tended to deflate the idea of poetics: "There is another world / but it's here" as Paul Eluard says. In that way I can make more sense of the inclusion of poems which waffle on, deliberately lowering the tone. We get a firm idea of where the poet lives and works. There's a shared alienation in "Before and After the Election", but it doesn't stand up well if juxtaposed with a piece crafted more stringently. Some anecdotes suffer from the limitations of home movies, but at least we know Jas. is an office worker who sides with the tea-lady, a lover who's been humble in the face of his love, a gleaner of arcane knowledge, intensely interested in the revolutionary spirits of our age. It is hard to divorce the man's faults from his virtues, but it's still a risky business including his old clumsinesses of style, as his writing has gone ahead by leaps and bounds, his sense of the absurd more finely tuned to the everyday.

Lest these criticisms seem carping, they'd still leave the book at over 200 pages. All in all Duke obeys D.H. Lawrence's dictum, "a man in his wholeness wholly attending". We're confronted by an original intellect: this will confuse the mere stylist, who might justifiably point out one general fault – that Duke often adds a resolution when the point's already been resolved in the corpus of the poem.

Other poets are bound to mine all around this mother lode of a book. There are so many approaches to verse exhibited in it that any fair review is bound to be a mass of contradictions. There is a whole stream of poetry called 'performance poetry' which has been largely ignored in this country (New Zealand, being more homogeneous, accepts its range of poets more honestly). All 'performance poetry' means is that it reads well out loud. This book may well serve as a flagship for a host of phosphorescent baubles who flicker on and off the radio waves. I'm tempted to mention the aural and visual tentacles of Jas. H. Duke's poems which have appeared in New York and London or

Italy or Germany, but, relying on the text alone, I don't see how any compiler of an Australian anthology could ignore this oct / opus – except that he might make some of the other contributors seem namby-pamby.

Eric Beach's poems and performances are well known. Based in Melbourne, he performs in all States and in New Zealand. His last book was A Photo of Some People in a Football Stadium.

The Fatal Shore

Eric Rolls

Robert Hughes: *The Fatal Shore* (Collins, $39.95).

The Fatal Shore, the story of convict Australia, is history as history ought to be written. Robert Hughes set out to tell a good story and he succeeded on a magnificent scale. The writing is superb, the book is thick (about 285,000 words), it is selling in tens of thousands, sufficient to counteract the idea that a popular work has to be written down for the mass audience. Hughes's English makes no concessions. What he is selling is the best he can do. It is a cheering work. It demonstrates the intelligence of readers.

What excites me most is that it crosses the border between fiction and non-fiction. It is fiction with the accuracy and argument of non-fiction, it is non-fiction with the intelligence and imagination of fiction. Scenes are real, characters come to life. A fat prostitute, after too many glasses of port wine, "in a pub on the Woollomooloo docks late one night in 1958", sang Hughes "The Wild Colonial Boy" "not in the rollicking front-room way of men, but as the off-key dirge of a mother grieving for her dead son." He shows us Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Davey arriving to take charge of Van Diemen's Land as drunk as Kerr to the Melbourne Cup. "Davey marked his arrival in Hobart Town in February 1813 by lurching to the ship's gangway, casting an owlish look at his new domain and emptying a bottle of port over his wife's hat. He then took off his coat, remarking that the place was as hot as Hades, and marched uphill to Government House in his shirt-sleeves. Nicknamed 'Mad Tom' by the settlers, he would later make it his custom to broach a keg of rum outside Government House on royal birthdays and ladle it out to the passersby."

As a well-known art critic and, presumably, as a would-be painter, Hughes brushes in Macquarie Harbor with extraordinary strokes of words. "Sea and land curve away to port in a dazzle of white light, diffused through the haze of the incessantly beating ocean. All is sandbank and shallow; the beach that stretches to the northern horizon is dotted with wreckage, the impartial boneyard of ships and whales. No one has ever lived there or ever will. To starboard, there is a jumble or rocks. . . . it looks directly into the Roaring Forties; the prevailing winds are northwesterly, and the waves of the Southern Ocean have the entire circumference of the world in which to build their energy before they crash on this pitiless coast. And so, when tide sets against wind. . . millions of tons of water a minute come boiling through the entrance."

He introduces us to Lieutenant-Colonel James Thomas Morisset as he is about to take up duty as commandant of Norfolk Island in 1829. "He was slender, elegantly dressed (by Buckmaster, one of the more fashionable London military tailors) and fond of gold embroidery; even his forage cap was covered with it. But the look of the military dandy was brusquely contradicted by his face. At La Albuera, a 32-inch mine-shell had exploded near him and left him with the mask of an ogre. His mouth ran diagonally upward and made peculiar whistling noises when he spoke. One eye was normal, but the other protruded like a staring pebble and never seemed to move. The cheekbone and jaw on one side had been smashed to fragments and, without cosmetic surgery, had re-knit to form a swollen mass like 'a large yellow over-ripe melon'."

Morisset's character was as grotesque as his face. Lord Bathurst selected him to make Norfolk Island a place of terror. He succeeded so well the convicts conducted suicide lotteries. "A group of convicts would choose two men by drawing straws: one to die, the other to kill him. Others would stand by as witnesses." So the killed escaped immediately, unless the killer botched it; the killer escaped by hanging after a trial in Sydney; the witnesses gained temporary respite in travelling to Sydney to give evidence.

John Price at Norfolk Island and Macquarie Harbor, Patrick Logan at Moreton Bay were equally savage. The accounts are chilling. But this book is much more than blood overflowing boots, women paraded naked to the lash, or maggots crawling in the flesh and blood at the foot of triangles ("Another half pound, mate, off the beggar's ribs"). It details the whole complex and difficult society from its beginning to the last convict ship into Fremantle on 10 January 1868.

The First Fleet voyage had an astonishing beginning. "Phillip ordered his flagship *Sirius* to weigh anchor. The signal flags fluttered, but nothing happened; the merchant seamen in some of the transports refused point-blank to go aloft. . . . It turned out that the seamen – who were not under military command, being the crew of chartered commercial vessels – were on strike against the ships' owners, who owed them seven months' back pay. The owners, skinflints all, hoped to force their crews to buy 'necessaries' from ships' stores on credit at inflated prices."

The reasons for the settlement are still in heated and sometimes nasty dispute. Hughes, probably correctly,

settles on a gaol as the prime reason. He records the starvation and "mean-souled despotism" of the first few years, then the perverted beginning of sound agriculture in the predatory actions of the Rum Corps. One hears the sobs of convict mothers parted from their children and the clinking of chains as men danced on deck under the better captains. He treats the just Macquarie fully and justly. One sees him at work with his wife, Elizabeth, a frustrated architect who brought an album of building and town designs with her, and with the erratic convict Greenway. They ignored the financial strictures of the British Government and put up fine buildings that are still standing. He follows the lives of all five Scottish martyrs. He shows us the conditions the convicts came from. He builds Tasmania into its strange, separate identity. He records the raw sensibilities of the Sterling and the Currency. He marvels at thieves' cant and the bitterly imaginative slang that developed in Australia. He comes to the conclusion that many convicts found a better life in Australia than Britain ever would have allowed them. "For assignment worked. Despite all its imperfections and injustices. . . it did give a fresh start to many thousands of people."

But – it is unfortunate that there has to be a but – much of the game of writing history is keeping it accurate. It is impossible to write a work of such scope without making some errors. After six years people still write to point out mistakes in *A Million Wild Acres*. One exasperated woman told me I had married one of her ancestors to the wrong man, and that was despite my checking of the work of the best genealogist in Australia and her checking of mine. (Some clerk in the 1850s combined the records of two unrelated families of the same name. The woman who found our error worked from a different source.)

Hughes makes too many unforgivable blunders. He has a chronic inability to copy anything down correctly. Stephen Murray-Smith told me he had checked twenty quotes and all were wrong. I checked seven more. They, too, were wrong. Are there any right? The errors vary from merely a word or two spelt differently, a hyphen deleted or inserted, to long quotes that are not in the newspapers quoted. On pages 374 and 375, where Hughes gives the scientific names of some Tasmanian trees and the giant crayfish, he makes a fool of himself. Apparently knowing no Latin or Greek, and working from out-of-date nomenclature anyway, he miscopied names into unpronounceable and meaningless italics enfolded, in apparent erudition, in brackets. So *melanoxylon* became *melanocylon,* for example, *aspleniifolius* became *asplemfolius*. The five names given are all wrong.

On page 582, in quoting a French song, he gives *dessechés* an extra absurd acute, *dé*s*sechés*. But these are relatively minor mistakes. He makes greater blunders. Among the excellent maps in the front of the book, "Historical Boundaries of Australia, 1788 – Present" shows the Northern Territory administered by New South Wales between 1858 and 1911, not South Australia. On page 91 he has Sydney's Aboriginals dying of cholera and influenza in 1789. There has never been an outbreak of cholera in Australia. The Aboriginals died of a mysterious attack of smallpox. On page 373 he says "Macquarie Harbor is the wettest place in Australia, receiving 80 inches of rain a year." Tully in north Queensland has an average rainfall of 4547mm, about 180 inches. The summit of Mount Bellenden Ker almost doubles that. The error is the more serious because it negates our rainforests, as wet and as prolific as those in any country. In a note on the bottom of page 631 he dispenses with Robert Gouger, one of the founding fathers of Adelaide. He says he is the pseudonym of E.G. Wakefield. Gouger knew Wakefield. He edited his book, *A Letter from Sydney*, and he did it with his own separate hands. There are other errors: a gross exaggeration of the amount of cedar in the Hunter Valley, a misunderstanding of Aboriginal fires, a few careless repetitions.

Nevertheless, *The Fatal Shore* is a notable book and a book to be proud of. It was published in America and England. The first edition of 50,000 sold out in a couple of weeks, the second printing is selling quickly. If it had been published in Australia, it would have sold about 15,000 in hardback over a couple of years and would have been regarded as a book that yielded its potential. As a work of literature it has not the simple uniqueness of *A Fortunate Life*, a living voice out of the past, that sold in Australia as on a world market. But it proves that if an Australian publisher is presented with an exceptional work dealing with a subject of world interest, then it will pay to produce thousands of dollars for advertising throughout the world. There are an extra seventy to eighty thousand copies to be sold. When I have finished writing the human history of the Chinese in Australia in twelve months' time, I will be having hard talks with Angus & Robertson.

Eric Rolls explained Australia in They All Ran Wild *and* A Million Wild Acres. *He is now writing the story of the Chinese in Australia.*

EX MUP SEMPER ALIQUID NOVI!

AUSTRALIA AT THE CROSSROADS:
REFLECTIONS OF AN OUTSIDER
by B.A. Santamaria

'If the contemporary world is run by anybody — an increasingly dubious proposition — it is not run by philosophers.' It is, in fact, run by financial speculators, who produce nothing except personal wealth for themselves, and who manipulate the whole political and social system to suit their ends. Many people will be surprised by the radical thrust of the thoughts of a 'conservative'. **MAY $17.95***

FRANK HONYWOOD, PRIVATE:
A PERSONAL RECORD OF THE 1914–1918 WAR
by Eric Partridge, introduced and annotated by Geoffrey Serle

Few know that the 'word-man', Eric Honeywood Partridge, was born in New Zealand and educated at Toowoomba Grammar School; and that he served during WWI in the AIF and was later a brilliant product of the University of Queensland. His moving war-autobiography, first pubished in 1929 and long out of print, ranks with the very finest contributions to the literature of the Great War. **MAY $22.50**

AUSTRALIAN SQUATTERS
by Hubert de Castella, translated and introduced
by C.B. Thornton-Smith

Dr Thornton-Smith's lively translation of *Les Squatters australiens* by Swiss-born Hubert de Castella gives fascinating glimpses of working and social life on a cattle station near Melbourne in the years following the gold rush — years which brought great prosperity and a feeling of buoyant confidence to the squatters. A different view of the settlers' vigorous outdoor existence, with illustrations taken from originals by de Castella. **JUNE $27.95**

Other forthcoming titles of general interest will include:
Peter Yule (ed.) *Sergeant Lawrence Goes to France* (a sequel to his *Gallipoli Diary*, MAY, $19.95); Manning Clark *A History of Australia* Volume 6 (AUGUST, $35.00 HB; $25.95 PB); Frank Horner *The French Reconnaissance: Baudin in Australia 1801–1803* (SEPTEMBER, $47.95); and Helen Rosenman (ed. & trans.) *The Voyages of Dumont d'Urville* (2 vols., SEPTEMBER, approx. $65.00 set).

From all good booksellers — or **record your order now and be sure to receive your copies on publication by writing to the Melbourne University Bookroom, P.O. Box 278, Carlton South, Victoria 3053.** When ordering, please give your Bankcard or Visacard number and expiry date, and sign your order. You will be charged when your copies are dispatched.

Melbourne University Press

*prices recommended only

Michael Sharkey