112 overland

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STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH 1922-1988

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

JANETTE TURNER HOSPITAL

Isobars

A Fugue on Memory

Where does a circle start? Wherever one decides. All these circles begin and end in Melbourne.

And what is an isobar? An isobar is an imaginary line connecting places of equal pressure on a map. All lines on a map, we must acknowledge, are imaginary; they are ideas of order imposed on the sloshing flood of time and space. Lines on a map are talismanic and represent the magical thinking of quantitative and rational people.

These particular isobars connect points where the pressure of memory exerts an equivalent force.

And how is a storm front plotted? The detection of warm fronts, cold fronts, rainstorms, cyclones, and other such assorted cataclysms and disasters requires the intuition of the scientist. If the meteorologist has received sufficient advance training in oceanography, statistical mathematics, Jungian archetypes and dreams, he or she will be able to read the signs correctly. Such a meteorologist will watch for the figure in the surface disturbance of water (though to what purpose, discerning the gust in a shoal of lake breezes, no one is ever certain.)

Water.

The Ringwood Lake and the Ballarat Lake were separate bodies of water in the Jurassic Period, early 1940s, when M (for Made in Melbourne, maid in Melbourne, for memory itself, for meteorologist-in-training, for . . .) But perhaps we should be more conventional and call her Em? Or even, more decorously, more appropriately, buttoning our gloves and keeping our knees together in the approved Melbourne manner, Emily. Yes, Emily will do very nicely . . .

The Ringwood Lake and the Ballarat Lake were separate bodies of water when Emily floated the leaves of childhood on them, when she threw breadcrusts to swans now several generations gone. But those two ponds, infinite as oceans in a bygone era, are one puddle now. Statues clutter the walks that surround them. Sometimes the English grandfather comments on the statues, sometimes the Welsh grandfather. The Ringwood town hall and the Ballarat cathedral and the Ringwood railway station push through bullrushes.

The English grandfather's hand is soft and pale, a schoolmaster's hand; the Welshman's is callused. With a grandfather at each side like charms at her wrists, Emily flexes her toes, she sinks her bare feet into gurgling mud. Already she is learning that the property of water is sameness, Ringwood shimmering, Ballarat dreaming, the future sighing at its own reflection.

Once, the English grandfather says, there was a picnic by the lake and afterwards you vomited chocolate in the back seat of the Bishop of Ballarat's car. Your mother was mortified.

The Welsh grandfather says: Don't lean so far out from the edge of the jetty, the swans will snap at your fingers. Once there was a picnic—don't you remember?—where a little boy fell in doing that and got drowned. His mother sobbed and sobbed, she could not be comforted, she had to be taken away.

The English grandfather scoops up lakewater and pours it into Emily's palm. One little drop of memory, he says, can hold everything at once, and forever. It's like having a thousand eyes.

Grandpa, she says. Why is that lady crying? And

what is that man doing?

What lady? both the grandfathers say. What man? Where?

There, she says. There. Over there by the gum tree. Is she the little boy's mother?

Oh, they say, maybe. Or maybe she's someone else. In any case, it's nothing, it's nothing that little girls need to worry their pretty little heads about.

But Grandpa, Emily persists, why is she crying?

No, no, she's not crying, they say. (Their voices are fearful, embarrassed, harsh.) She's laughing. Trust us, they say. Don't look.

And they take her hands, playful, and lift and swing, this is fun, they swing her to kingdom come, out out over the water, over the Pacific, over the Atlantic, over the Arabian Sea

where, briefly, the fisherman offers his hand as she steps into his boat. She is in South India, Pleistocene era, 1970s, the coconut palms throwing spidery shadows on Kovalam beach. When she takes the fisherman's hand, brown flesh white flesh interlaced, he giggles with embarrassment, waits for her to settle herself between the lashed logs, pushes off with his bamboo paddle.

Blood warm water bathes her from the waist down. The boat is stable and buoyant, not watertight; she and the fisherman ride just below the water's surface, passing through the sides of waves as a knife through butter, as spirits through walls, as memory through time. She sees Ringwood swans and a row of little fishes suspended like bubbles in a green flank of the Arabian Sea. The Bishop of Ballarat, concerned, leans forward with his bamboo paddle. You won't be sick, will you? he asks in some unknown tongue. The ways of God are inscrutable, he says; it is not our place to question why. Don't lean so far, he says. Someone was drowned doing that.

Why is that woman screaming? she calls, her mouth full of water. And what is the man doing with the knife?

What knife? the fisherman shouts back. (Bubbles and tiny fish stream from his lips like ribbons.) Where? he calls.

There, she points. There. On the beach.

No, no, you are not understanding, the fisherman says. Man is cleaning fish and woman is laughing, isn't it?

Relieved, she smiles through the fluid green belly of the wave as the fisherman casts his net. His eyes and hers are both amber as cats'-eyes in the water, salt crusts their lashes, branches of their seaweed hair float into the mouths of crabs. Bubbles of laughter fizz from her throat, it's a champagne baptism, euphoric, surf foaming through her lips, and the woman on the beach is laughing too, thank God, (yet it is odd the way a laugh or a scream seems defined by the ears of the hearer). Still. The fisherman knows the local tongue, he must be right, though people do tell lies, Thoreau warns. Especially the avoiders, especially those fearful of being held accountable for what they have failed to do, especially those ashamed of their own fear.

Thoreau is sitting at the edge of the water, his hut behind him, nine beanrows and a hive for the honeybee to one side, Walden Pond flashing sunlight in his eyes.

The man over there under the trees, she says. The one talking to the woman who is crying . . . .

Thoreau looks and looks away. They say she has lost a child, he says. They say she has never been quite right since. And the man is claiming it's his loss too, he's offering comfort, he's promising extravagant things. Thoreau shakes his head and warns: But men rarely mean what they say. Still, he adds, the woman wants to believe him. Can't you hear her laughter?

It's such a strange laugh, Emily says. It doesn't sound like a laugh at all, it sounds more like a—

Thoreau puts a finger to his lips. If you hear a different drum, he says, you have a choice. You can march to it, though this will certainly get you into difficulties with the authorities. Or you can pretend you didn't hear it, like everyone else. You have to weigh the consequences, you have to choose, you have to balance costs, balance is essential. Left foot on one ice cake, right foot on another, no one should be too far from shore when playing this game. Five minutes, so they say, at these temperatures, and the body shuts down.

But warmth is on the way, April is here, the Ice Age is over, spring has come to the frozen St Lawrence, a rubble of ice with a Great Lakes postmark is floating past Emily's dock and should reach Montreal by the middle of this May. A puzzled loon, the first of the season, touches down, disappears, surfaces, watches the mad balancing act.

Don't lean so far when you throw him a crust, the Welsh grandfather says. A boy was drowned doing that.

Do I hear a woman scream, Emily asks herself, puzzled. Or is it simply one fractious chunk of ice shrieking up against another?

Newspapers.

The Melbourne *Age*, the *Sun*, the *Argus* all have pictures: of the little boy who drowned, of the mother weeping, of the murdered woman. Was this all the same event? Emily, remembering a picnic by the lake and much panic, is confused. Her parents and grandparents press their lips together and shake their heads. Her mother says: Don't ever lean out from the dock, don't ever ever *ever* go in the water unless someone is with you.

A man on the Ringwood railway station tells Emily's grandfather: I expect she asked for it. (The mother? Emily wonders. Or the woman with the knifestripes on her stomach?). Newspapers flutter from carriage windows and shout from their stands beside the ticket

grille. These are the facts, the newspapers say. Women and children are always asking for trouble. They get it.

Brisbane *Courier-Mail*, circa 1953. BETTY SHANKS MURDERED. This happened just an eye-blink away from Wilston State School. In the playground, rumours fly. *She had boyfriends, she talked to strange men.* From the school gates, the children can see the police, the reporters, the chalk outline on the footpath.

It seems, the teacher tells the frightened (yet strangely excited) children, that Betty Shanks rode home on the tram late at night. She was all alone. She spoke to a strange man. This was madness on the part of Betty Shanks.

Don't ever speak to strange men, the teacher warns. Don't ever go out alone at night.

That's right, the nice constable tells the class. If you do, you're asking for trouble.

The *TLS* (May 5, 1988) has reviews and scholarly reminders that the victim is always to blame. "Tuberculosis attacks failures," declares medical expert of 1912. (TLS, page 463, a review of a book by F.B. Smith, the Australian medical historian). "It is just the ignorance of millions like yourself that causes the miseries of mankind," Smith reports that a grieving mother was told over the body of her dead tubercular child.

The woman weeps and weeps. She's a difficult woman, the doctors and experts say. Probably over-protective, stifling, the usual thing. Probably *caused* it, in a way; more or less programmed the child for death. A difficult woman.

CBC, Canada, the national news, May 6, 1988: A recent survey of attitudes of high school students toward rape indicates that most boys think girls who are raped were asking for it.

Air. And circles within circles.

Curses fly through the air, and sometimes fists, and sometimes broken bottles. Emily stands in a circle on a street corner somewhere in the heart of Melbourne or in the vortex of Brisbane (they are one circle now: covered wagons, rampart, the ring of accusers, prison wall, ghetto, all the same circle). There are drunks and traffic in all directions. In the air above Emily's head, catcalls collide with Biblical codes. *Come unto me all ye who are weary* . . . leaps out of the megaphone. *Aaah, shut yer fucking mouths* comes winging back into the circle. Emily watches the words eddying together, twisting, full of cyclone danger.

This particular evening (Jurassic Era again, the Japanese defeated but black paint still being scraped from the windows of Melbourne), this particular evening of Circle Time, which is every evening, a ragged mother and a dirty little boy stop to watch, leaning against a shop window. The boy licks an icecream and watches Emily who stares back hungrily. It is his safety she wants; being part of *that* crowd, the circle outside the circle, one of the watchers. Whatever happens, the boy can stay or go. The boy is safe.

Emily wonders when the lots were drawn, when the circles were allotted, and by whom. The kind of thought that comes from beyond the margins, from who can say where? from outside the lines that form the edges of maps, the kind of question that can change worlds asks itself inside Emily's five-year-old mind: Is anyone allowed to change places? Is it against the rules? What happens if the rules or the circles are broken?

The boy licks his icecream and watches her. What is he thinking? She sees him suddenly suck in his breath, sees his eyes widen, sees the man with the knife. A cry with no sound to it flies from Emily's mouth.

Girls! the boy says, exasperated, as he disappears behind scuffling bystanders, police, circle people. The police are angry. *Holy Rollers!* they say, disgusted. *Just asking for trouble.*

Nobody sees what happens, nobody hears.

Nobody saw, nobody heard, nothing we can do, the police tell Emily (Brisbane now, the seedy West End, 1965).

But everyone must have heard the screams, she says.

Tell us exactly . . . (The police are sarcastically patient).

Emily tries to reconstruct: a scream in the air, screams, it is night and she is alone in the house but she rushes out to the street. (This happens much too quickly for fear or thought to intrude). She sees the white man with the knife, the black woman screaming, the pregnant black woman screaming.

And then? the police ask.

And then, and then? Emily pounds at the blank that retroactive fear creates. The knife, the blood, the blur.

I guess I ran between them, she says, amazed, her hands shaking.

Emily is inside her house, bandaging the slash on the woman's arm, when the police say: Not a thing we can do, I'm afraid.

Listen, they explain to Emily (kindly, fatherly). A woman like you shouldn't get mixed up . . . *etcetera* . . . bloody lucky you didn't get yourself stabbed.

About the Abo whore, they say. (Excuse our language). Just asking for trouble. Best to turn a deaf ear. Nobody sees, nobody hears, that's the ticket.

That's the ticket: the same old one that Kitty Genovese held when her number came up in New York, when the knife flashed, when a porridge of her screams filled the air and reached dozens of ears, but nobody saw.

Glittering, curving through air, the knife slices through a life in Boston, March 1987. The blade rests against Emily's throat, whispers to her larynx: I am

steel, I am real. You may scream all you want but no one will see or hear. You've been asking for this, you deserve me.

Air! Emily gasps. Air! she pleads. Air! Fresh air!

Personally, someone (an Australian) tells Emily at a writers' conference, *I think writing about violence is in bad taste.*

You see? the knife chortles, triumphant. What did I tell you?

I'll be back, the blade whispers (a sleazy sound, cold as steel against pliant skin). In dream after dream, I'll be back.

STAND UP FOR BASTARDS

I've only myself to blame.
I said the wobbling second hand
pine billycart of a cot
was a bastard.
At 20 months he agreed, jumping on a bed,
pointing, shouting, "The cot's a bastard."
Now just about everything's
just about everyone's
a bastard.
Even a few buggers manage to be bastards.
The evaporative air conditioner is
the chicken from the takeaway is
the kitchen sink is—
they're all bastards &
I'm the poor bastard responsible.
Irresponsible bastard!
You can see how a meat mallet
can be a bastard bastardizing
the meat (that's also a
bastard—bastardized).
A bastard pounding a bastard with a bastard.
But how can knives, forks & spoons
how can salt & pepper shakers
teeter between legitimacy & illegitimacy?
Do away with bastard &
you'll find plenty of bastards;
do away with bastards &
there'll be even more bastards.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

S.M-S.

Rick Amor 1988

Stephen Murray-Smith 1922-1988

WINTER ELEGY

Six a.m. still dark rain
Whispering through the garden
The fire hissing through the night
Dawn sky—whitening overhead
Clouds mass and losing height
Reform and pass the she-oak
Lifts her ponderous shadow
From the lawn

The black cat slips home
Through the wet grass
Lifting each paw up high
The first bird wakes and calls
Drops hang in diamond patterns
Splash and fall
The wind running along
The tea-tree hedge
Flashes with light
It shakes a head
Of golden needles
In the air
Carpets the ground
And fills the bay
With sound and sigh
The dying fall
The beat of wings
Like an Aeolean harp
The she-oak sings
And clearly now
Under the rain
The cloud the whirling sky
I hear you cry out loudly

"How terrible to die
Never to hear Mozart again."

DOROTHY HEWETT

Stephen Murray-Smith, the founder, editor, publisher and, indeed, 'onlie begetter' of Overland, died at his home in Mt Eliza on Sunday, July 31, 1988. His passing leaves a great rent in our lives, and this issue of his journal is dedicated to his memory.

Stephen's funeral service was held at the chapel in the Springvale crematorium on the following Thursday. More than 350 people packed the chapel. People came from all walks of life, from the multitude of activities with which Stephen had been involved. They included sailors and lighthouse-keepers, writers and academics, ministers of the crown and lifelong rebels. Some of Stephen's favourite music was played, and his friends spoke about his life. Amirah Inglis, Geoff Serle and Ken Gott spoke of long associations of friendship and politics, times of great fun and great ideas. Barrett Reid read a selection of poems, including one of his own. Max Marginson spoke of his friend and read from the diary Stephen kept on Erith. Robert Newton presided with grace and dignity. The great sorrow of the day was lightened by the joyous memories that Stephen's friendship had given to all present.

On Friday, August 19, another gathering was held to pay tribute to Stephen's life and attainments. Some 500 people filled the Public Lecture Theatre at Melbourne University, heard his colleagues talk of the range of his interests and achievements, and watched slides and videos of his life, particularly on Erith. We publish below some of the tributes that were paid on that night. Geoffrey Blainey also spoke, and his words have been published elsewhere. Dorothy Hewett phoned her poem and tribute through, and they were read by the Chairman, John McLaren. Tom Shapcott spoke on behalf of Sydney writers, and presented a book of tributes he had gathered. Some of these are printed in Swag. Max Harris was unable to be present, but forwarded the remarks published here. The evening was sponsored by the Departments of History and Education at Melbourne University. A highlight was the display, organized by Max Marginson, of the covers of all 111 Overlands.

MANNING CLARK We have come here today to pay a tribute to one of Australia's great native sons. I agree with the narrator in Henry Lawson's short story *The Bush Undertaker* that in the presence of the dead "Theer oughter be somethin' sed". I wonder whether I am capable of saying that "somethin". I doubt, too, whether words are adequate to the tragic grandeur of the occasion. Music is the language which takes over at the frontier where words peter out.

There ought to be music. A choir and orchestra should perform Verdi's *Requiem*—that hope that there is someone who takes pity on us for our great folly . . . someone who cares . . . someone who forgives; and even if that is not true . . . the longing and the hope that it may be true remain in the human heart.

Someone should sing *Flash Jack from Gundagai*. Stephen was an enthusiast. For Stephen was a lover and a believer—and Australia was one of the great loves in his life. Look at his work. A man's work is a confession about his life. Stephen's work was the confession of a passionate heart. Stephen could sing with the Psalmist 'My heart was hot within me.' Stephen had a great faith. He believed in the Australia that was coming to be. He believed that we Australians were going to banish from under our bonny skies the old-world errors, wrongs and lies. He believed in "the land, boys we live in." Overland had as its motto the Joseph Furphy credo: *Aut Australia aut nihil*—either Australia or nothing. He believed in mateship and loved the Lawson words:

> They tramp in mateship side by side
> The Protestant and the Roman
> They call no biped Lord or 'sir'
> And touch their hat to no man.

If Stephen tramped with his mates he would be carrying a huge armful of books, smoking a pipe with an enormous bowl, a frown on his brow and his eyes never at rest. His smile was the first hint that there was another man encased within his huge frame. For he believed we Australians should raise a rebel flag and sing a rebel chorus. He believed in Labour . . . "And my name is Labour, though priests call me Christ."

Stephen believed in the Enlightenment, that every human being contained in his soul the jewel of perfection. He believed in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, that everyone should have life and have it more abundantly. He wanted all of us to enjoy and be worthy of the great banquet of life. He was a heaven on earth man.

All Stephen's vast talent, time and energy were devoted to the fulfilment of the great Australian dream. His published works were the outward and visible sign of his faith: editing *The Tracks we Travel*, Overland (the great child of his heart), *Melbourne Studies in Education* and the monumental *Dictionary of Australian Quotations*. These were all evidence of his faith in the word, his faith in Labour and in the Enlightenment. But our age presented Stephen and all of us with a great problem: who can make the Australian dream a reality, or at least bring it closer?

For ten years he believed the Communist Party was the vanguard of a new era in the history of humanity. That did great credit to his heart. He was not timid and he was no walnut-hearted man. He was not prepared to perform the role of a drawing-room Pontius Pilate in 'Yarraside'. To his chagrin and dark, undying pain he found the Communist Party asked humanity to pay too high a price for the sake of some future harmony, that they were manuring the soil with human blood for the sake of some far-off event, that they were deciding for us what we should read and think. Stephen could never be at ease with those who claimed to be engineers of the soul.

So Stephen broke with them and endured in silence and with dignity and courage the hostility and malice to which that exposed him. For he had courage in the things that mattered. Stephen had been a brave soldier in New Guinea and was brave again in 1956. He then had to face again the question: What can a man believe?

By then humanity was moving into a post-Christian and post-Enlightenment era. We were all becoming citizens of the Kingdom of Nothingness. A turbulent emptiness was replacing the faiths and myths which had made life intelligible and bearable. No-one had anything to say. The horrors of the First World War, the purges in Russia, the holocaust of the Jews during the Second World War and the dropping of the atomic bomb put God high on humanity's list of missing persons, and presented a big question to believers in the Enlightenment: enlightened people do nasty things; those on fire with Schilleresque sentiments about human brotherhood and about the end of class domination and oppression and all forms of ignorance and superstition sometimes behave like monsters or wild beasts.

But once again, to his great credit, Stephen did not give way to melancholy and despair. Humanity had been deprived of its Great Expectations. But Stephen did not take any easy way out. He was not seen in the tap-rooms of Carlton groaning to his mates about humanity's lost lollypops. Stephen faced the darkness in the human heart and found a beauty beneath the darkness. Stephen had the strength to join the ever-increasing numbers in the fellowship of the deprived—the ones who have a love and a tenderness for each other because of the loss of their comforters, because of the sorrow deep down in their hearts.

Stephen was also a lover. I like to think he could sing to himself the words of a song from the musical *Good News* (first performed in Melbourne in 1928):

Lucky in love, lucky in love—
What else matters if you're lucky in love?

Stephen had that luck in his marriage to Nita. He forsook his class to cleave to the woman he loved. With her he knew one of the great wonders of the world, the wonder of a man with a woman. She gave him the peace and the strength to continue to be a pilgrim when things were falling apart.

As a lover and a believer Stephen agreed with Walt Whitman that if life "came to ashes, then . . . we are betray'd." If that were true he could not walk 'pleasantly . . . toward annihilation.' No, Stephen believed with Walt Whitman that a man's work is the visiting card he shows to posterity to show them what manner of man he was. No, he believed, as I believe, that the dead stand by and help. He has now joined the mighty dead. He has joined those who were on fire with the same enthusiasms which conferred a grandeur on his stay amongst us. He has joined Noel Ebbels, Ian Turner, Brian Fitzpatrick, Keith Hancock, Martin Boyd, James McAuley, Macmahon Ball, Eleanor Dark, Katherine Susannah Prichard, Judah Waten and Noel Counihan—those who had dreamed of Australia as the land of the Holy Spirit or a Millennial Eden, those who had dreamed a great dream and seen a great vision. The dead are our minders, the vigilantes keeping our minds and hearts on things that matter. So let me now say about Stephen what I should have said to him when he was alive: thanks for your witness to what matters in life . . . Thanks for being one of those who kept alive in me and in others the shy hope that we Australians might one day steal fire from heaven.

GEOFFREY SERLE I like to think my first meeting with Stephen was momentous. One evening near Port Moresby in March or April 1943 a burly figure appeared in the tent flap and asked if there was room for one more, mate. Private Murray-Smith was on his way south after a tough time with the 2/5 Independent Commando Company. As I remember it, both of us were starving for like minds, and we talked flat out for the best part of 24 hours. I lent him Hartley Grattan's *Introducing Australia*, a book that had much to do with starting us both on our Australian jag. Three years later Stephen and his eventual great mate Ian Turner and I, all of us born in 1922, took Manning's course in Australian history, which he was presenting for the first time. A few years later Stephen founded Overland, Ian was running the Australasian Book Society, I was teaching Australian history here.

At the funeral the other day I claimed that Stephen made a major contribution to the process by which Australia moved from colonialism, a period when Australians by and large, especially educated Australians, thought of themselves as necessarily inferior, to self-respect. He did indeed. But we were younger recruits to a movement slowly gaining strength: we were all under the sway of Vance and Nettie Palmer and, as well as Manning, Clem Christesen in Meanjin very much holding the fort, Max Crawford's history school, Mac Ball's politics school, Arthur Phillips and his criticism; Alec Hope and Tom Inglis Moore were starting their course in Aust Lit in Canberra, Vin Buckley was soon to follow here. It was very much a Melbourne movement: the first people I think of elsewhere are Harry and Dorothy Green, Russel Ward, in Adelaide Geoff Dutton (also born in 1922) and Max Harris (born 1921), in his way. This is a rollcall of many of Stephen's closest friends.

We knew we had marvellous poets like Slessor, FitzGerald, Judith Wright, McAuley—whom hardly anyone was reading—likewise the many fiction writers of quality—Prichard, Dark, Palmer, Davison, Stead—writers who incidentally had much more to say about Australia in the ideas they floated than at the time the historians or any other commentators. If we were nationalists, we were all internationalists. Of course we knew we had history on our side, but we had no idea how much it was on our side. Stephen and I in recent years used sometimes to marvel to each other at the developments in our time—quite extraordinary development in the arts and indeed in public life in that we now behave more or less like an adult nation—Aust Lit taught in fifty overseas universities—incredible. I hope Stephen realized the full extent of Overland's contribution over 34 years to civilizing this country—I think he may have.

His range and breadth were quite unusual in this country. Very few academics in modern times remotely rival his diverse interests and knowledge. Perhaps he was fortunate in having knocked around so long before finding a niche in a university. So he was a first-rate historian and educationist—teacher and authority on technical education, an editor in several senses, a student of the language and connoisseur of quotations (not just Australian). His fascination with people and their foibles made him the ideal contributor to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. And he branched out to technology and the sciences—witness his Bass Strait studies, his forthcoming book on Antarctica and his work on remote communities like Tristan da Cunha. To say nothing of his causes and crusades.

But I want to dwell on him as a publicist and general man of letters. You can see this developing in the 1960s, when he did much more book-reviewing than later and captured much of the elegance and urbanity of the English weekly reviewers, based on his breadth of historical knowledge and of international literature, his political experience, and his keeping up with what was going on via the international journals. So he became a major spokesman for writers in the media,

chairman of the National Book Council etc., adviser to publishers and to innumerable young writers knocking on his door. While keeping a special place in his affections for and constantly sponsoring the so-called social realists—Alan Marshall, Judah Waten, John Morrison, David Martin and others *so* unrecognized by the literary establishment, he had a huge range of friendship with writers, interstate as well as local.

I cannot easily think of anyone in Australia who rivalled him over the last twenty years in this general capacity as man of letters. He was recently made Bookman of the Year—I reckon he was probably the bookman of his generation.

DOROTHY HEWETT So much of my literary life was bound up and influenced in one way or another by Steve Murray-Smith, it is difficult to know where to begin. When I started writing again in 1958 after eight years of writer's block Overland published many of those new poems and stories and in no small measure it was Stephen's enthusiasm that nurtured that work surfacing again.

In 1968 just after I left the Communist Party I wrote a poem "Hidden Journey". More polemic and more support from Stephen. It's as if I can chart the segments in my life through the various poems, stories and articles I published over the years in Overland, and of course Overland and Stephen were always synonymous. To have pioneered, produced, fought for and maintained a radical literary journal in Australia is an achievement which cannot be matched by any other journal or editor. The number of new writers that Overland introduced, the number of well-known names that it published and supported through all those years is legion. And not least there were the polemical articles and creative journalism that gave Overland its own distinctive racy communicative style.

Stephen's death has left a great gap in all our lives. As for me, I have lost a friend and supporter and an editor, a man who never shirked a struggle, a man of tremendous courage, energy and loyalty with a great gusto for life that was so endearing, a great gusto linked with an awe-inspiring capacity for hard work.

In his last Swag in Overland Stephen referred to himself as a failed radical and suggested to me that this was a suitable tag for all old ex-communists. In a way I guess he was right, but in another way wrong. Steve was never a failed radical. Until the day he died this Geelong Grammar School boy, born with a silver spoon in his mouth, was always a radical, even when, or maybe especially when, the cause was unpopular and the friend or colleague was in disfavour.

DAVID MARTIN Dear Nita, all the Murray-Smiths, dear friends,

I will do nothing tonight except share with you some memories I have about Stephen. At the cremation a fortnight ago, few of you would have realised that Stephen's life for the last 25 years has actually been a bonus. On the 25th January, 1962, he and I took delivery of a new motor in a sailing boat which belonged to a very unlucky fisherman, Les Eales of Port Fairy. We sailed from Portland to Port Fairy across Portland Bay at the beginning in very beautiful weather. On the lee shore of Julia Percy Island we were struck by storm. It was very bad. We were lucky to get in alive. Stephen has written to me many times since that he had never been so scared as he was that day, not even as a commando in the mountains of New Guinea. I wasn't because I did not realise how dangerous it was. Les Eales pumped, Stephen steered and I grinned. My grin, I thought, was a contribution to uphold the morale. I couldn't do anything else. David Murray-Smith was with us on that day, I don't think he liked it very much either.

On my son's wedding day, Stephen Murray-Smith stood in for me because Richenda and I were overseas. I asked him to read a poem which I had written when Jan was only two years old, "To my daughter-in-law unknown". Stephen read it and gave a speech as well, a few remarks which I had written out. At the last moment he either couldn't find the speech or the poem—I don't know which—and had to rush back to Mt. Eliza to get it—a great panic was on—and he said to me afterwards, "Well at least, you owe me for a new suit."

In 1967, when we went overseas, Stephen saw us to the ship and he said, "I've brought you a book which I hope will bring you back". That was *Seven Rivers* by Douglas Stewart. It did bring me back. It made me homesick for Australia.

I remember once in Boronia before I really got close to Stephen, we got a phone call. Stephen always called me the Abominable Snowman, because I wouldn't come down from a mountain top in Boronia. So he wrote to us or phoned, he was editing then the Realist Writer or Overland—I don't remember which. I got a letter or phone call. It was on Thursday, "Dear David, We are going to press shortly. Can I have a poem on Monday?" I wrote back "Sehr geehrter Herr Obersturmbannfuehrer Stephen Murray-Smith, You can't have your bloody poem by Monday. Hochactungsvoll mit deutschen Gruehssen, David Martin." That brought us onto the right level together. We have been the closest of friends ever since.

Stephen, of course, has an extraordinary phone manner as some of you may know. The reason for it being that he was so damn busy and he got hundreds of phone calls. I became aware of this when I sat in his study and phone call after phone call used to come in and Stephen had to of necessity be very brief. So finally, I learned to trick myself and speaking to Stephen I got just as brief and then one day he said to me, that was last year, "What's the matter with you, David? Can't you talk decently on the telephone?" I said, "But you don't like chatting on the telephone,

do you?" and he said in a small voice, "I like chatting with you". But by that time I learnt the art of chatting to Stephen. But our telephone calls were always very brief.

He never could quite believe that a character in my novel *The Hero of Too* was a combination of him and Ian Turner. There was a character in the book called Stephen Turner, a nationalist and idealist, and Stephen asked me time and time again, "Is Stephen Turner really a cross between Ian and me?" and I would assure him that he was.

He was the greatest builder of networks among people, among friends, that ever existed. Like all of you I have so many friends shared with Stephen. I have stayed with him, in Perth, in Albany, in Delhi, in Benalla, in Prague. God knows how many places. He was the friendliest of all friends, but there was a problem. I thought that he was too generous in his friendship. Sometimes too undiscriminating, too tolerant. He extended his generous affection to people whom I could not love and cannot love. And I wanted him to be the enemy of my enemies. But Stephen said no, he was going to be the friend of my friends, not the enemy of my enemies. That's the sort of man he was.

My last letter to him was a sharp argument about South Africa following an item from South Africa which had appeared in Overland. He was as much opposed to apartheid as I am or many of you are, but he allowed himself to make more humane exceptions than I did. And he asked me in the last line whether perhaps I wasn't suffering from spiritual pride. Before the chance to write back to him and say, "Father I have sinned", appeared his last "Overland" and we got the last copy of it. And in this last copy, there was a Swag item and this Swag item referred to a journal from Beechworth produced by prisoners which I had sent him, which he liked. And he wrote there that "David Martin . . . lives and writes in Beechworth and is tolerated by his splendid Quaker wife Richenda". That was his answer to our argument—I am tolerated. He didn't get this quite right, Richenda is not a Quaker but her great-great grandmother was Elizabeth Fry, the Quaker reformer.

To end I want to mention three things he did for me in the last 12, 13 months of his life. I was going to Penang, in Malaysia. He told me not to forget to visit the English cemetery there. I did visit. It was one of those many places he sent me to. It was a remarkable evocation of the colonial past. Sarcophagian tombs covered with sparkling frangipani blossoms. A strange and unforgettable place. I asked him for a letter of credentials, of accreditation, from Overland because whenever I went abroad I took such a letter with me, because people think that Overland is a travel magazine. That's the title, Overland, and I don't deny it when people think that and I get favourable treatment from railways . . . Much more effective than the Age or the Australian, Overland! Well, he gave me the last of these seven or eight letters of his which I have. And finally, something else he did, the same as for Dorothy Hewett. He recommended me for the Order of Australia, which I wouldn't have got but for Stephen's putting my name forward. Well, since then, I have put the name of somebody else forward and I realise how much hard work is involved. Letters of support, references, and so on and so forth. It's really quite substantial work, and that's the thing about Stephen, he always worked for us. Work, hard work, when he had very little time and even at the end when he didn't have as much energy as perhaps he thought he had. These were all the services of a friend and they all meant work. Only a few hours after Stephen's death, Amirah rang us, from Canberra I think, and said Stephen Murray-Smith is dead. Richenda's first remark was "We can't do without him". She didn't only mean us, his friends. She meant the whole of Australia. We can't do without him. But we shall pretend that we can.

A LONG LOOK OUT

for Stephen Murray-Smith

Sea watchers are most often found
towards the end of day, taking
a long look, with its hint of endlessness.

They call it history, come to think of it,
and sometimes find precision, enough to put
myths in the margin to indicate the yet of it.

They stand apart from the sailors of everyday,
the hunters and harvesters, even apart from
the lookers playing with the dolphin leap of light.

Apart, too, from the ones who get there,
the tacklers with their gear, the trimmers
bobbing on courage and oil slick,

the suppliers, the tankers squaring off the sea,
the certain users. The sea watchers
have another end in a view. Crusoes of memory

selecting from the margins, with some care
and grasp, handier without prophecy,
the sea-grey polished things left high and dry,

rejecting the pieces bored hollow and too light.
Keeping bits of a life. Along the literal
with a different courage, diffident,

and on altogether another journey
they make their finds. Alone they lift
the harder pieces for shelter, for fire,

even for a raft. Cruise possibility.
At end of day metaphor gives,
gives in, and takes away.

BARRETT REID

BARRY JONES Horace Walpole wrote, "This world is a comedy to those that think, and a tragedy to those that feel". It is hard to summarise more than 30 years of friendship in five minutes. Stephen Murray-Smith, with Ian Turner and Ken Gott, passed through years of personal trauma because of their strong ideological commitment that the path to a new world, brave for preference, lay through revolution and liberating the masses. In the 1960s their return to pluralism, parliamentarianism, Fabianism and pragmatism mean that they lost and gained much in the transition. Some of us, through timidity, conformity and opportunism, had been there—comfortably—all the time, never passing through the fires or storming the barricades.

Stephen, ex-Geelong Grammarian, and ex-Commando, began his political career in 1945 with a hat trick. Within a few months he had joined the Liberal Party, the Australian Labor Party and the Australian Communist Party. He worked as a teacher and journalist in Prague and his pamphlet *There is no Iron Curtain*, written in 1950, must become a collectors' item, even unsigned. He was active in the Peace Council 1952-58 and around 1954 indicated his displeasure with some of us who protested at the simple minded authoritarianism of a Peace Congress held in Melbourne. I didn't begin to know him well until after the 20th Congress, Hungary and his return to what, in our innocence, we saw as the political mainstream.

Although he rejoined the ALP in the 1960s, his heart was not really in it and he took little active interest. The period was traumatic and he survived only with the support of Nita, his family and friends. He devoted himself to his work, his writing, and especially his love for words, his causes, his exploration and celebration of islands, and friendship. He was a great networker as David Martin said. He identified himself with many causes.

In 1961 with the Tate Case, the grisly spectre of hanging returned as a reality in Victoria. Stephen was a foundation member of the Anti-Hanging Committee together with the late Val Doube, Prof. Rod Andrew, David Scott and many others. In 1966-67 there was a less successful (but not less intense) replay with the Ryan case. I came to know him intimately then, when he provided anguished support and counsel.

He took a more up-front role with Freedom to Read, asserting the personal right to choose reading material without having to seek official approval. The campaign, remarkably successful, was focused on two books—Mary McCarthy's *The Group* (1963) and *The Trial of Lady Chatterley*, Penguin Books' account of the obscenity trial in London of D.H. Lawrence's novel. The tactics used had in part been developed in the successful campaign for the reprieve of Tate. Stephen later came to agonise about some wretched excesses in printed (or film) material—ultra violence, mindless cruelty, the violation of children, which can shake the conventional liberal assumptions about freedom, John Stuart Mill and all that.

We worked together on promotion of the arts and he served on the Advisory Council on Australian Archives and on the Board of the Film and TV School.

He was deeply concerned about the social impact of technological change, although he did not write about it directly. His conversations had a strong influence on my own writing and I owe him much. His long campaign against metrication indicates his value systems: he saw the old imperial system (as we must call it) as something which had evolved out of human experience: the foot as a rough, obvious approximation of the pedal extremity, the yard as an

approximation of a stride. This was a system which had evolved upwards and was uniformly understood. He saw metrication as the imposition (downwards, if that is not a tautology) of an abstraction imposed by men in white coats, the metre being defined as one ten-millionth of the length of the quadrant of the earth's meridian through Paris. I don't recall that his enthusiasm for imperial measures extended to the el or the cubit, nor did he explain why 1760 yards, rather than 1500 or 2000 had some special human significance.

His campaign for the maintenance of manned (or even personned?) lighthouses reflected his concern that machines were being used to displace human capacity and not to enhance it.

He developed an enormous enthusiasm for Antarctica and I was pleased to be able to send him there. Like General McArthur, I am glad that he returned. This led, characteristically, to a book which will be launched in Sydney in October and to a private, and very penetrating, report on Antarctic administration at the time when it was my responsibility. I last talked to Stephen from Edmonton on 20 July on this subject.

Stephen was a polymath and we worked together on a number of radio quiz programs—3DB's "Information Please" with Zelman Cowen, Rohan Rivett and Bill Glanville Cook, then on the ABC's "Beat the Brains" with some of the above, and on international quizzes with Britain and New Zealand. He kept meticulous records in his fine italic script of all questions asked.

I have that terrible sense of unfinished business about Stephen: there are so many things that I wanted to consult him on, argue about and plan for. I said earlier that I spoke to Stephen from Edmonton; in London I found he had sent me the latest Overland, in Cambridge I heard he was dead. On my return there was a letter from him.

I admired his passionate concern for words, and his search for meaning in life and his yearning for enlargement of experience: 'sensibility' in the 18th Century sense but also the abundant life as Manning Clark said.

In his last Swag, he wrote about passages that moved him, like Motley's concluding words about the death of William the Silent.

I wanted to propose some sentences from the preface of Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts into Air* which, while not applicable to the way Stephen left us, is expressed in a way he would have warmed to and wept to.

Berman wrote:

> Shortly after I finished this book, my dear son Marc, five years old, was taken from me. I dedicate *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* to him. His life and death bring so many of its ideas and themes close to home: the idea that those who are most happily at home in the modern world, as he was, may be most vulnerable to the demons that haunt it; the idea that the daily routine of playgrounds and bicycles, of shopping and eating and cleaning up, of ordinary hugs and kisses, may be not only infinitely joyous and beautiful but also infinitely precarious and fragile; that it may take desperate and heroic struggles to sustain this life, and sometimes we lose. Ivan Karamazov says that, more than anything else, the death of children makes him want to give back his ticket to the universe. But he does not give it back. He keeps on fighting and loving; he keeps on keeping on.

Stephen was a Johnsonian figure, without the black despair and manic eccentricities, an encyclopedist who enriched our lives. We are all diminished by his passing.

Our love and support goes to his family.

GWYNETH DOW What a hard act to follow—not only tonight's illustrious speakers but, above all, the illustrious Stephen himself.

It is appropriate for me to concentrate on him as a colleague since 1960, but especially since 1966 when he was appointed a lecturer in the History of Australian Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne. We planned courses together; we taught together, not merely in the same team but also in actual lectures and seminars; we examined together; and we conferred as supervisors.

I tend to link in my mind Stephen's work as editor of *Melbourne Studies in Education*—an annual publication which is known world-wide and which he edited for twelve years—with his attitudes as a supervisor of M.Ed. and Ph.D. theses. He and I shared the view that supervision was essentially a teaching task. Its judgmental and selective purpose was important, of course; but it was of secondary importance.

Something of this view spilled over to Stephen's editing. I have acted as a referee of articles for him, and I have had his generous advice on some of my own writing. His sharpness as a critic was always tempered by his respect for the writer's style, values and even idiosyncrasies—a very hard balancing act but one he managed with great sensitivity. I have never known him to be unkind as a supervisor, editor or reviewer. Only those who worked closely with him knew how hard he worked. It was our research assistant, Gwen McDowell, who worked with Stephen in almost all his educational research and writing, who quite some years ago expressed her concern about the fact that, however pressed he might have been, Stephen never said No to any of the countless requests for his help.

There was a strange softness in so forthright and outspoken a battler. He battled for causes and for friends, and my own experience is that Nita was his very important partner in this selfless generosity. His indignation and irritation were often dramatically impetuous—as was his enthusiasm. I recall him bursting into the Education office at a quarter to five one evening—quarter of an hour before the staff finished work and before he began his evening teaching. I gasped at his gruffness with one of the typists. The next morning there were flowers on her desk.

Those of us who, like the Murray-Smiths, had been lucky enough to obtain Nuffield flats in London during study leave, had guarded the few reasonable but strict rules with absolute obedience, and we shuddered when Stephen blithely broke any that seemed unnecessary: for example, he allowed his children's friends to stay overnight in sleeping bags. Margaret McGill, the manager, was beside herself. The rule had been brought in to stop tenants from subletting, and the radical Stephen saw no reason why this should prevent his friends staying overnight. But Margaret also received flowers, and it was Stephen, I think, who first suggested that those Australians who had stayed in Nuffield flats should organize a trip to Australia for Margaret. And this happened.

At work his personal and political frankness made him an unforgettable and provocative teacher. He was always politically alive and direct; but, paradoxically, he was poor at politicking—he was not devious enough. His triumph lay in his work as publicist.

He brought great renown to this University. It was Bon Austin and Professor Frederick who had the foresight to predict this when he was appointed. It is significant that it was the History Department that acknowledged Stephen's contribution by making him a Senior Associate in retirement; but it is gratifying that Education joined History in tonight's tribute.

Finally, let me draw on colleagues' and students' testimony to Stephen's importance. Nita, I know, has been overwhelmed by the number, diversity and oft-times unexpectedness of letters and phone calls. In a comparatively small way, we have shared that experience. The phone today has run hot, and among those who have rung is Imelda Palmer from Coff's Harbour where she had only just received the sad news, and Ray Ericksen who was dismayed at being too unwell to attend. There was also a letter in the mail from John Embling, an ex-student. He recalled having received a letter from Stephen in 1982. The last paragraph, he thought, was "possibly his own epitaph". Stephen wrote:

> I am a great believer in judging a person *not only* on the basis of their beliefs about the future of the world *but also* on the basis of what they behave like in relation to their families, friends and indeed the trees in the streets . . . Macro and micro. I don't think greatness and goodness can be assessed adequately except through this duality.

It is our ex-student Helen Tippett who must have the last word. A few days ago she wrote me a letter in which she said:

> [Stephen's death] has started to feel 'real' to me now—driving to work, and thinking about him, I suddenly started to cry. *And* stopped reasonably quickly, in the interests of other drivers, not to say staying *on* the road. For someone so loved, I think Friday should in some ways at least be a happy time, a celebration; as well as very sad and moving.

She then proceeded to quote an epigraph written by Samuel Butler, which "made me think of S.M.-S.":

> Yet meet we shall, and part, and meet again,
> Where dead men meet, on lips of living men.

MAX HARRIS I find it difficult to find a niche for myself in this tragic but magnificent occasion.

There are others who can delineate better than I the massive contributions Stephen made to the quality of literature, and letters, largely against the philistine odds of yesterday's Australia. His courage and obduracy will be well portrayed. And his staying power.

Tribute will be skilfully paid to his unique integrity as a social and political being. He was a man completely true to his conscience, whatever the cost, and that cost was often high.

In due course, when the words are written, he will, I believe, be recognised as a model of socio-political humanism during his time and tide. I do not wish to be thought guilty of hyperbole, but I am sure he will come to be remembered as Australia's Arthur Koestler.

Others, better than I, will attest his place as the thinker who was also a doer. His actions bespoke his words—not louder, not softer.

Those who worked closer and longer with him than I did will recount the examples and instances.

What is there for me to say, who knew him long, knew him well, but often from great distances of time and place?

At best I suppose I can have us sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the deaths of kings and queens—of Sunday Reed, John Reed, Russell Drysdale, Fred Williams, Alan Marshall, Ken Slessor, Bill Harney.

My theme, in such cases, is that of a kind of loving.

When Barrett Reid phoned and told me of Stephen's death, my wife and I grieved for the loss of a particular kind of loving as exemplified by a man of distinctive quality.

Death works on one that way.

What he did, or how he functioned, seems of lesser importance than the way he loved.

The ways of loving must never be confused with the conventions of loyalty. Loyalty can be produced from self-indoctrination. A capacity for authentic affections is innate.

We know the personal qualities of the man. He wasn't Saint Francis of Assisi, thank God. He was open-minded and close-minded; he was humble and he could get a touch pompous; he was brilliant in his sense of the droll humour of this wobbling world, he was capable of viewing the comic as deadly serious.

No matter.

Differences or agreements all occurred within the context of his kind of loving. If he had enemies, which I doubt, it was because those enemies were incapable of friendship.

His loving was unusual in my experience. It was complex, complicated, and non-egotistical.

His affections were spontaneously inclusive. His family values were part of his entity and identity. He and Nita and his children were in and of each other.

This was the unitary love he felt, and this was what he expected as a response from his friends.

After all, this was what he also gave. He and Nita and his children spontaneously embraced their circle of affections in your circle of affections.

It was the manner and mode of his feelings that I recall and mourn.

It was the richness of the humanity that impinges on me as the all-important loss. The ubiquitous record the loss of a famous Marxist, a fine historian, and a commando.

So be it. But a man is much more than the surfaces of his doings.

Stephen Murray-Smith was a man of quality.

The humanity was in key with talents.

That doesn't happen very often in Australia: nor anywhere else for that matter.

It is the cause for mourning. It is good, no, the best reason, for public tribute.

There is a post-scriptum to these observations.

It may seem prosaic.

My tribute is not being presented in person, because on this day I am working on the humanitarian Appeals Tribunal of the Immigration Department. This involves the pain, the pity, and the desperation of individual human conditions; and what Australia can or should do about these terrible calls for our humanity and understanding.

It's a weird coincidence for as long as I have been working in this territory I have unconsciously called on the Murray-Smith model for my thinking and judgments.

I have the feeling that Steve would say "Do your job. The human condition comes first, second, and third in one's responsibilities to the world."

He was that kind of man.

As I say, he was a man of quality.

KEN INGLIS I first saw and heard Stephen Murray-Smith more than 40 years ago right here, standing at this bench, or the old one that preceded it, speaking at a meeting arranged by the Labor Club. I was 17, he was 24, as far as he could be on the other side of that wartime divide between men and boys because he had been a commando in New Guinea. To my civilian social democrat schoolboy eyes he appeared both communist and military—and also fearsome, as he could look later in life when he wasn't smiling. No lion can *him* fright.

I don't think I saw him between 1947 and 1965, when I married a close friend of Stephen's and Nita's. He came to stay with Amirah and me in Canberra while he pursued some puzzle in the National Library or some public cause in and around Parliament House. For the first time I experienced his interrogation, which was both searching and encouraging, his zest for people, his energy, his affection. We enjoyed other visits to Canberra over the years: he and Nita came up to receive his A.M. from the governor-general, to be at the opening of the great exhibition of work by their friend Fred Williams, and he came up by himself to attend meetings of the Advisory Council of the Australian Archives—until the minister dismissed him for insolence. His smile as he told us that story was the smile of a cherub.

All Stephen's friends are remembering today items from his cornucopia of blessings. Let me lay out a few samples of mine over the last 20 years:

In New Guinea, a journey to Wau, to the airstrip where he and his comrades held the Japanese, and beyond, on his initiative, to the home of Mick Leahy, one of the first Europeans into the highlands, and by the time we met him, in 1974, a cheerfully anachronistic patriarch. It was a revelation to hear him open up in response to Stephen's interrogation.

Arising from New Guinea: A Theodore Fink Memorial seminar contrived by Stephen which he then published in *Melbourne Studies in Education*. This provoked me as I wouldn't otherwise have done to reflect on eight years of work at the University of Papua New Guinea.

In England, exploring the house where William and Mary Wordsworth lived as children and the house where Charles Darwin wrote *The Origin of Species*.

On the Hawkesbury, mooring alongside the old Ebenezer chapel and discovering an informative custodian. From Port Fairy, finding the room in the post office of Koroit where Walter Richardson

died. (Stephen mentions this visit in his last Swag.)

Getting free access to the personal diary Sir James Darling kept while he was chairman of the ABC. He wasn't going to let me have it, but Stephen said he should, and the old headmaster couldn't say No to that old pupil.

Writing for Overland I've found readers I couldn't have reached by another route.

In his last weeks, Stephen sent me pages about Anzac day from Joan Colebrook's autobiography, a letter by D.H. Lawrence about the war memorial at Thirroul, and an anti-semitic poem about the war in the Sudan from the Bulletin of 1885. Each item was something he knew I would want. How many such messages did he send out month after month, year after year, and to what range of people? Nobody else would know. As Ken Gott said at the funeral, he only communicated with you about the things *you* were interested in.

Kosciusko, 1960, l to r: Stephen, Bob Gollin, Edgar Waters, Rod Shaw, Ian Hughes.

I hope someone will explain in Overland why so many of us readers think it's been getting better and better. Span? Tone? A ripeness in the editor? I notice that ripeness in his other recent writing: in his review of Barbara Falk's family history, in the Recollection he set down for *Australians from 1939.* Ripeness is all, says Lear. Old age will bring new summonses, says Stephen at the end of his Recollection. Now he and we have been denied his old age.

Often in recent years Amirah or I, wavering, would say to the other: Stephen would have made that journey or that phone call, written that letter; and sometimes we would do it. I find myself this month behaving now and then more boldly than I usually do, and I realise that what I am doing is mourning Stephen as I think he would want to be mourned, stiffening his friends' resolve, helping them to stay on watch and to act.

Here is a picture of Stephen in action. Driving home from Tullamarine after a visit to the Adelaide Festival in 1986, Stephen stops the car in South Melbourne. What's up, asks Nita. Flat tyre? No answer. He gets out and strides over to a wall they had noticed a few days earlier on the way up, defaced by an anti-semitic obscenity. He takes something from his pocket and scrapes the message off the wall; he gets back in the car and drives on. Where the hell did you get that gadget? Nita asks. Stephen replies: I bought it in a hardware shop in Adelaide.

High Plains, Easter 1961: Stephen and Ian Turner. Photo: Rod Shaw.

We mourn Stephen; we grieve with and for Nita and their children. Stephen lives in our memories, and in what he has done for us, and in what he inspires us to do. May it give Nita some grains of comfort to know that.

Dear Stephen,

Sorry you can't get this letter—yet I'm sending it like a note in a bottle cast into the ocean. Who Knows?

It's been a great life with friends like you around—and although I haven't seen that much of you since we stopped walking in the Snowy country after Ian died—those years and those walks seem to have written indelible memories that will do me for my lifetime.

Do you remember the night we just sidestepped Jack Frost when we lost our way up near Emu Plains (we actually saw emus). We thought we could make some sort of shelter out of some old sheets of iron on a snow-covered tip—but pushed on, and lo! there was the Miners' Hut occupied by a group dropping supplies at points for a later cross-country trip—like dogs burying bones for another day. We stayed, chatted and ate and then had to wait for the whole party—six including two women—to bed down so that we could all fit on the floor after some expert designing.

And the time we came down from Kossie after dark, to the river at Geehi, and luckily found a hut with an openable door, some stretchers and a few bottles of tonic water in a cupboard. We ate, drank—and slept. Next day, all a bit crippled from the interminable downhill trek, we staggered along the road towards Thredbo—after crossing the river in a sort of flying fox.

And the time we went up from Harrietville, needing to beat a troup of scouts to a shelter for the night. We did, and then went on to that flamin' high, bare Feathertop, and over to Hotham—I think. What's it matter where it was? Hiam Brozniak's breath gave out so we carried him back.

I'm putting a couple of photographs in—you will remember the shed somewhere near Happy Jack's—next door to the old original shepherd's shanty with the threadbare vest and leather strap hanging on a nail. And it was snowing. I can't remember who took the snap—but I know it wasn't the man from Snowy River—just the sixth member of our party—was it Turner?

And the second picture is you and Ian.

Well old mate—or friend—or cobber or something—it's worth living if only for those days and knowing you.

Yours
Rod Shaw

swag

Overland has drawn strength from a relationship with its subscribers, readers and writers which has been unusually direct. Most may not have met Stephen Murray-Smith or the other editors but each issue was followed by many letters giving readers' views about it, views often trenchant and sometimes in opposition, perhaps adding to the points made in an article or supporting a contrary view. You offered advice; we sometimes took it. You offered praise; we always took it. Indeed, we depended on it to keep up the hard slog.

The heart of this unusual interaction was *Swag*, the feature in the magazine many read first, and *Swag* was uniquely Stephen Murray-Smith. It is appropriate, then, that this final *Swag* should be written by Stephen's readers. The many, many hundreds of letters to Nita Murray-Smith and family and those to this office have been overwhelming. We would like to acknowledge your tributes here and to share representative examples with you. These are printed below.

But first, something from Stephen himself. Quite some years ago he began a diary which he kept regularly. Here are two excerpts from recent pages:

> Saturday, March 12th, 1988—2.30pm
> . . . still, as a reward for losing weight Nita has just given me a dozen oysters for lunch: I said to her what I sometimes say, *pace* Benjamin Disraeli,
> 'My dear, you are more like a mistress than a wife.'

> Saturday, July 2nd, 1988 [on Erith Island]
> I wandered down the beach, strewn with storm-wrack and quite steep now—the little dune above the beach has grown out surprisingly. The chopper came overhead and, by arrangement, filmed me as I walked. Then back to the patio for a brandy from my fine new silver hip-flask and, seated on the hatch-cover, thought, as I wrote in the visitors' book, on the 'ghosts of Christmases past', the island populated for me by memories and spirits crowding in on each other: Nita walking on the beach, horse-play around the raft, great parties at Don's camp at Kampong, also around the fire-pit at Lower Pong, long evenings in the hut or, on calm nights, outside where I was sitting, Frank Gould on the **Marjorie** giving us his double-armed 'goodbye' wave, tranquility and passion, adventure and humour, and always the smell of driftwood smoke and the steam dispensing from the cray boiler.

Here are some short extracts from just a few of so many of your tributes to Stephen Murray-Smith:

"Once, sitting next to Stephen Murray-Smith at dinner, I told him I had not written a poem for fifteen years, which saddened me. Worse, infuriated me. He said, "When you start again, send them to Overland." I did start again, and I did send them to him, and he published them. My life started again. What more could one ask of an editor?"

"It is a tragedy that the conservatives should have stolen the word 'liberal'. If ever there was a liberal in the proper (historical) sense— by which I mean respecting the rights of others to have opinions differing from his own and expecting them to return the compliment—it was Stephen."

"The protection of the lighthouses of Tasmania was my shared love/interest with Stephen. Perhaps it was one of his lesser-known achievements but almost certainly it will be one of his longest lasting. His persistent lobbying coming from his love of the cultural and natural heritage of the islands of Bass Strait has led to the permanent preservation of Australia's national estate."

"Stephen Murray-Smith I never met in the 'shaking hands' sense but we first met really when I was an adolescent and encountered his extraordinary mind on ABC radio. Later it was through Overland. Then came my experience as a contributor: he was an ideal editor—his copious alterations were sensible but he changed back anything that I was unhappy with.

We spoke by phone several times and I'm greatly saddened by his death. The Australian literary-intellectual world surely is too."

"I thank him for Overland, which got better and more interesting as its years went on; for his commitment to the worth and play of language; for the example of his courage, and the way he

showed us all what it is to be committed as writer and writing citizen."

"Stephen said that those of us who had privileges in society had to work harder and show enlightened citizenship because our privileges were provided by other citizens, many of whom had few privileges. This was the moral basis of his life and I learnt from it . . .

His true autobiography is *The Australian Dictionary of Quotations*, which I read as the story of a mind."

"I was very sorry never to have met Stephen because over a period of ten years or so he has given me all kinds of support—asking me to review for Overland, praising my research work (when I was despairing), writing to me when he liked something I had written and being generous and encouraging in many ways."

"Stephen was a mentor, a mate and one of the first and greatest Lawsonians . . . He was a great spirit, the best kind of fighter, truly humane."

"[S.M-S.] disagreed with my way of writing about Overland but this writing became a labour of love and identification. I began writing from what I thought was a position of 'historical superiority'—I ended writing from historical sympathy. May the magazine live on."

"I remember Stephen as a wonderful companion on a picnic: Australia will also remember him as a fine man with a vision that he had the courage, energy and determination to fulfil."

"Stephen was one of the few people I've met who treated publicists as real people—his courtesy and warmth at the Overland dinner with Peter Carey this year made me feel like a real academic again after four years out of academia. Meeting him then after a break of thirty years made me realize just how much he encapsulated all that is best in the world of learning."

"Sydney readers of Overland have always been grateful for the clear stand of Stephen Murray-Smith in the way he held together the many sides of Australian literature, society and culture. His feeling for the Australian people kept him and us human."

"Stephen published people he'd probably never heard of, which earned him the gratitude and affection of people who never met him. Even later on, when he may have known a bit about who was who, he'd publish odd things, things slightly out of place. We were luckier to have him than perhaps we knew."

"A pivot, a linchpin, an irritant, a great supporter, a passionate advocate, a father confessor, a foot-in-the-door salesman, a mate. S. M-S. was all of these for Australian writing. We're *all* going to miss him in ways yet to be understood."

"But it made a difference to know that he was there. Others will speak about his service to Australian literature. I'll remember his service to civilized discourse, fairness and principle."

"Stephen has been a general intellectual—which was once described as a 'man of letters'—in a society of specialists. This personal intellectual capacity, along with his continuous moral and social concerns, made him a remarkable Australian."

"Stephen was someone who *is* someone and the presence is just there, out of the room, out of the moment but seriously *present.* In 1962 Stephen swept me into his personal excitement with discovery, involvement, reaching out—Adelaide that year changed my work & Stephen—in talk, dialogue, drink & excitement—was the centre of that change. We cannot explain this except by words like 'debt'—sad words whereas the reality is exultant, celebrative—opening out & up. Stephen there, we are still clambering up to listen, to share."

"I've always thought of Stephen as a defender of the underdog, a man who launches into defence of people and principles while others are still weighing up the threats and costs to their own personal interests."

A recent event which S.M-S. would have greeted with the keenest pleasure is the publication of *Nettie Palmer: Her private journal*, Fourteen Years, *poems, reviews and literary essays*, edited by Vivian Smith (University of Queensland Press, $16.95). I have never forgotten Nettie Palmer's journal but was surprised by it all over again. Not by her modernity—in 1935 in London she goes to plays by Auden and by T. S. Eliot; at the same time she was speculating on the emergence of a new kind of writing from South America, eagerly anticipating the astonishing creativity which flowered a generation later—and not by her remarkable pen-pictures of so many people. I remembered these vividly. But when Meanjin first published *Fourteen Years* in 1948 in a handsome edition of five hundred copies, did I, as the proud owner of a copy, appreciate Nettie Palmer *as a writer*, as a stylist? The journal opens in 1925 and closes, with a proper sense of the ending of an era, in 1939. I doubt that any Australian wrote better prose in those years.

A friend drew my attention to an entry which Nettie Palmer wrote on Green Island, that little coral cay out from Cairns, then (May 25th, 1932) a paradise, now degraded in a dying reef. He was right to read it aloud. Magical prose; it is about the green-winged pigeon, sharply seen; it is also about how we see pigeons and how history has seen them. In other words it is about civilisation.

There are many reasons to thank Clem Christensen and S.M-S. wrote of this more than once. One, among many, is that he first published *Fourteen Years* and in such a beautiful edition. To publish that and Judith Wright's first book, *The Moving Image* (1946) is another proud badge to wear.

Stephen would have been pleased that this edition, splendidly edited by Dr. Vivian Smith, to whom we also owe *Letters of Vance and Nettie Palmer 1915-1963* (National Library, 1977) includes an index and comprehensive biographical notes on Nettie Palmer's gallery of characters.

Of course, this book contains much more than *Fourteen Years* but it is this private journal where we find her best prose. Much of the rest of her writing is constrained by the demands of the newspapers and other outlets which paid for her bread and butter. It is constrained, too, by her sense of duty—to Vance the writer as well as to Vance the husband, and to the need, which she felt so strongly, to create an Australian literary climate. This duty-work was necessary and admirable, but it is in the journal that her writing grows wings. It is as fresh now as when it was written. A great deal will flow from it.

Nettie and Vance Palmer travelled more widely than most Australian writers of their time. It took enormous effort. They would have been amazed and pleased by what is happening now. It is hard to keep up with just where many writers are at any one moment.

Geoff Goodfellow recently travelled to the United States and Europe. He used the S.A. Government Carelew Fellowship ($12,000) to give readings abroad. One of the most successful was given, with his friend Ken Kesey, in Eugene, Oregon. Over three hundred people crammed into a coffee lounge meant to hold one hundred. So many people came that the cops had to haul away cars blocking the street. Another success was at the huge Nelson Mandela benefit in Edinburgh.

Those following the continuing saga of Goodfellow's self-published poems *No Collars, No Cuffs* in earlier issues of *Swag* will be pleased to learn that the second edition sold out. A third edition was printed and, aided by the poet's energetic selling of 350 copies on his tour abroad, it looks as if it, too, will soon sell out.

Alan Gould at present is Writer-in-Residence in Lincoln, England. Tim Winton is living in Paris in an Australia Council studio. John Millet has just returned from being a guest writer in Ireland. Dorothy Hewett is Writer-in-Residence at Rollins College, Florida. Forty Rollins College students are currently visiting Melbourne and Sydney as part of their course in Australian Studies.

Tom Keneally has returned to New York University. His first stint there as Writer-in-Residence was co-funded by the Australia Council and the University. It was such a success he returned in September, this time as a guest of the University. Louis Nowra is at Yale and David Malouf is at Yaddow, the fabled writers' retreat on a beautiful five-hundred acre estate near Saratoga Springs.

Barrett Reid

PORT JACKSON PRESS

THE STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH PORTFOLIO

To commemorate Stephen Murray-Smith and acknowledge his support of the graphic arts, Port Jackson Press will, in association with Overland Magazine, publish a portfolio of etchings by artists associated with Stephen and his magazine. The aims of the portfolio will be commemorative, artistic and financial. We intend to raise money to help Overland to meet its present financial crisis and provide a fund to ensure smoother sailing in the future.

After preliminary discussions the portfolio will include the work of Arthur Boyd, Clifton Pugh, David Rankin amongst others yet to be confirmed.

A further announcement of prospectus, publication and purchasing arrangements will follow in the next issue of Overland.

floating fund

BARRETT REID writes: This issue launches an appeal to meet our current deficit of approximately $7000. Already many of you have responded to Stephen Murray-Smith's death by attaching donations to your letters and subscription renewals and brought the fund a total of $3953. We hope to announce another substantial and timely gift in the next issue, as well as the splendid one which heads this list and which lightened an especially dark day. Specific thanks to: $1960, Anon; $200, V.L.; $100, R.M.C.; P.L., D.W.; $98, J.H.; $90, R.S.; $60, N.K.; $50, P.H., M.D., J.McK.; $40, R. & B.M.; $30, J.M., G.T., M.F., V.C., M.L., F.J., G.B., K.S., S.McC., R.A., J.L., S.B.; $25, R.R.; $20, J.S., Z.N., J.P., H.S., H.S., M.V., P.F., L.B.; $15, K.F.; $10, R.M., J.C., K.S., D.A., R.H., B.H., H.S., R.B., M.L., H.J., L.C., A.B., L.B., G.M., K.S., B.R., J.H., I.P., J.P., M.S., D.D., A.H., M.M., E.W., A.W., J.McK., C.D'A., J.R., J.L., J.C., R.F.; $8, A.McG.; $5, R.M., J.T., D.G., B.W., R.B., M.D., J. & L.S., J.W., J.S., J.H., D.C., I.G., S.M., A.B., J. McN., J.R., J.C., M.D., L.A., T.C., F.B., J.W., P.H., R.H., B.R., P.S., G.S., R.H., M.S., R.O., B.B., W.B., C.B., B.S., D. & B.E.; $2, M.E.

GEORGE TURNER

Australia; Where to from Here?

A review of Bruce Grant's What Kind of of Country? Australia and the twenty-first century *(Penguin Books, $39.95).*

The sub-title of this book raises expectations which remain to a large degree unfulfilled. It is not concerned with Australia in the twenty-first century but with the kind of Australia needed to face the challenges of the new millennium. The nature of the problems liable to be prominent in that era receives no attention; there is no assessment of possibilities or recognition of probabilities; Grant marshals his forces of argument like a general who knows the capacities of his troops but has no information of the nature, strength or disposition of the enemy, selecting the best all-purpose battle line he can devise with his available forces, counselling alertness and waiting for the unknown to reveal itself.

The book is not therefore a waste of print and money. It sets out present conditions with cogency; I found it useful for putting flesh on some of my more nebulous conceptions, for setting fragmentary perceptions into coherent structures and as a springboard of my own musings on our national future. My complaint is that it is, in the end, too comfortable a book. It suggests, Do this and do that and all will be well. I am less sure. Nonetheless, his portrait of an Australia preparing to negotiate crossroads of destiny should be carefully considered. Dissent is as important as agreement—a point he himself makes in unexpected fashion at a late stage of his argument.

Of the book's nine chapters, seven are devoted to examination of our recent historical and political past. The eighth offers a consideration of the role of government in guiding the country's progress, while his conclusions and recommendations are given in the ninth and last. The general argument seems to me reasonable within the limits he has set himself (the narrowness of these limits is my major complaint) and his plain political bias should be found objectionable only by the extremists who listen to no voices but their own. His patent approval of the Hawke-Keating nexus does not greatly affect the main thrust.

Grant's Australia is in a state of flux, recovering from "three sharp shocks"—the war in Vietnam which led to "a wide-ranging social attack on authority and tradition", the dismissal of the Whitlam government and that action's shaking of the common man's confidence in "the democratic values on which Australians had long believed their society was based", and "the realisation in the 1980s that Australia's vaunted high standard of living was in danger".

With complacency challenged, new directions were sought and found; today they are under discussion, under examination, to some degree under trial. Grant's seven expository chapters set out the process and progress with considerable clarity; if the reader finds little that is new to him, he will at least find the turbulence of the last two decades rendered orderly and comprehensible. This was worth doing but the few clues to the future must be caught on the run and sorted from statements of things as they are.

So, in a chapter headed The New Politics, we find that: 1. A Labor government realises that not only union co-operation but private sector co-operation is necessary to successful administration, that the gap between "us" and "them" must be narrowed by perception of mutual advantage. 2. Political decisions can no longer be purely parochial but, in a world of high speed communication, must be made with an eye to immediate action and reaction from other powers on the world stage. 3. If a recognisable (i.e. conservative) Australia is to be preserved, it must reconsider and realign its friendships and external commitments.

Following chapters with such headings as The World, The Region, and Nationalism and Internationalism rehearse the problems of and arguments about changing relationships within and without the country. Despite a failure to compartmentalise, so that subjects tend to slide into each other rather than appear in sharp outline, Grant's portrayal of internal frictions, regional assertiveness and grapplings with the older

masters of international stature come through convincingly.

Then, in a chapter entitled Visionaries and Entrepreneurs, Grant asks at last: Can our national values and attitudes persist? He thinks they can if they are everted from an inturned to an international outlook, but that while government may encourage such a change of stance it is the general population which must accomplish it. In this intellectual stratum, he feels, our immigrants have much to offer; the Europeans, in particular, know already much of what we must learn.

That our major entrepreneurs are already dealing successfully on a gobal scale is not, he suggests, a good use of the outward-looking stance, in that their raidings and networkings lay us open to precisely the same attacks from outside. Indeed, every twitch of the stock market tells us that we are more acted upon than acting.

(What is one to think of this? Economic effort remains a matter of taking advantage of periods of stability and hoping to judge the next swing accurately. There is no escape from external influences while no such thing as a viable economic theory exists. From Douglas Credit to Thatcher monetarism, theories have come in splendour and exited in poverty, and so it will remain while corporate greed is unchecked in its career of creating companies and cartels overflowing national boundaries and commanding incomes greater than the revenues of many of the smaller states. Grant has only warnings to offer here; I know of nobody currently doing better.)

He closes the section with the interesting thought that in a time of fluctuating influences, when we must be ready to change direction instantly, the country must have on call both the visionary and the pragmatic entrepreneur—both Whitlams and Murdochs. While agreeing, one must note the upsurge of Murdoch lookalikes but few Whitlams.

A penultimate chapter on The Role of Government may be summed by quoting its closing paragraphs:

> Older generations of Australians regarded government as a provider in times of need. Whatever fears they may have held about its effects on their lives were held in check by the knowledge that it was slow and inefficient. Today's Australians are perhaps more aware of the international record of government, sensitive to the volatility of Australian politics, alert to the tendency of government to violate privacy in the public interest. On issues of the state and civil liberty, Australians are suspicious of government, even fearful.
>
> If healthy democracy survives in Australia, politics will continue to attract those who want to develop the country—and to change it. Government will therefore remain Australia's most important instrument of national development. It will need, however, to become more sensitive to the rights of citizens than it has been in Australia's brief and simple history.

Grant's final recommendations for our stance against the future, under a strong but flexible government, may be summarised under six heads:

1. Defence and foreign policy must be seen as interdependent. Self defence must be the priority, not trust in friends or partners. We must have military alliance with the US without the vague entanglements of "special relationship".

2. Nuclear power installations will be in the long run an inevitable need as demand grows and resources shrink. Despite anti-nuclear qualms, we should explore the requirements now, not wait until necessity finds us unprepared and vulnerable.

3. Having already the basis of a multi-racial society, we must continue a non-discriminating immigration policy, drawing on "the widest possible range of talent and resources available anywhere in the world. Equally critical is that the government remain firmly in control, so that the immigration process is deliberate and able to withstand, if necessary, sudden pressures from abroad, especially from within Australia's neighbourhood."

4. Australia should become a republic, though not immediately. The change will require great planning, not least the rewriting of the Constitution, which must accommodate both a Prime Minister and a Head of State. This need not damage links with Britain.

5. We should not imitate the American style of democracy, which stresses consensual liberty above equality. Liberty in Australia is based on dissent and equality on the idea of fair treatment. Our democracy must be based firmly on both.

6. We must become an entrepreneurial trading nation, forsaking dependence on sale of primary products. Our special attention should be given to Asia, which already takes 40% of the value of our exports and provides 30% of our imports. On this, Grant writes:

> Australians will need to understand that their governments have to be as active now internationally in trying to improve the world trading system as they were twenty years ago in trying to make Vietnam safe for democracy. Only this time it is to be without the approval of the United States. Unflinching vigour is required to change the direction of the economy and to remove restraints on trade. It will be a test of leadership, inside the country and representing it abroad, that the Australian people will have to monitor as best they can while the political battle rages round them.

All this seems not far from the common perception

of those who think on such matters, but it is based on the concept of *this* world, not tomorrow's. Grant's recipes may do well enough until the turn of the century, but by then the world's attention is likely to be fixed on environmental change on a scale not known in human history.

While Grant mentions technology now and then, he takes only a commercial view of it and the word science lies altogether too quiet, as does another intimately engaged with both, education. He does not note the kind of change that must be made to our educational system if we are to evolve a community capable of coping with his six recommendations or with any other statement of aims and principles. Attaining national cohesion is not a matter of propaganda (and its legacy of mindless nationalism) but of educating new generations in what we want and why we want it.

A solid grounding in technological matters will be a twenty-first century educational necessity. The Minister for Science, Barry Jones laments, rightly, that we are not a technologically literate nation, that we understand neither our limitations nor our opportunities because we do not consciously observe how the technological revolution has affected us and will continue grossly to affect our lives. How Mr. Jones would tackle an education in technological literacy I do not know, but it would have to begin in youth, with every child learning enough of modes and effects to allow him or her to make decisions about its uses—to know when to welcome, when to suspect, when to bypass. Many of the uses are already suspect, subversive on every social level from TV homogenising of the individual to invasion of the national systems of communication and information gathering. It will be a brave person who attacks the problem of creating a useful syllabus, but the Minister's criticism is just.

Hand in hand with proliferating hardware goes the spectre of rampant expansion of biological knowledge and putative interference, from the various forms of extra-maternal birth to the viruses in laboratory test tubes. In biological technology, also, we will need to be literate in order to keep control of our fate as a race.

If I suggest now that the future we must prepare against may be one of life or death, I do not refer to nuclear holocaust; it seems unlikely when the totality of the price to be paid is so well known. I refer to three matters in particular: climate, food and population.

Climate. The Greenhouse Effect is constantly in the news but is not yet a subject of general conversation, though a recent convocation of concerned scientists in Canada has at last voiced a loud warning. Nobody knows yet what the results of inexorably rising global temperature will be, but it will certainly effect rainfall, the location of food-growing belts, the balance of seasons, distribution of flora and fauna and even, possibly, the direction of ocean currents.

Too much rain at the wrong time is ruin to grain crops; climatic changes can cause wholesale shifts of farming areas (and therefore of population), losing years of productivity; turning to the oceans for emergency diet could see entire species of sea life approach extinction ten times faster than is happening today. I doubt if the knowledge exists to foresee the outcome of wholesale relocation (or extinction) of insect and, consequently, bacterial life.

Even if the South Polar ice does not melt (which some of it well may), a four-degree rise in global temperature, which is one of the better calculated predictions, would raise the ocean level by about one metre, causing unimaginable damage to small islands and coastal cities. (How many Melburnians have noticed that at Newport the river freeboard, if I may so misuse the term, is about five centimetres?) Wholesale relocation of populations may be a twenty-first century priority, costing vast amounts of money; the planetary economy, given the standard of its present handling, could shudder under the strain.

This is a subject which probably interests the Commission for the Future, but it will need a Commission with teeth and a popular voice to make warnings heard by government, which is well aware that there are no votes in the future. Perhaps, as the temperature rises, there will be.

Population. Demographers promise a slowing down of population growth, mainly in the opulent West, but the basis of their figuring is today's conditions, which are transitory at best. Nor is slowing down enough in a world which can feed itself twice over but might not be so well able when climatic change interferes. What then of the millions who already starve on a planet of plenty?

Population growth can be curbed. China and India have made attempts, not yet too effectively, but have shown that it can be done. But—what would be the psychological backlash on a world forced to place bans on the primary human function? Has the question been asked?

So, in Australia, do we want a larger population for defence and commercial purposes, or a strictly limited figure able to sustain itself in a world crisis?

The charitable impulses of the wealthier nations (often wasted for lack of proper investigation) may not be present when crisis comes. The snarling beginnings of selfishness can be seen today in a Britain unwilling to limit the emissions causing acid rain over Europe, in America's lack of response to the similar destruction of Canada's forests and lake fisheries and in the EEC's fight to retain policies destructive to the trade of other nations. Let us not expect the world to show a common front against common disaster. Policies, if present history is a guide, may come down to devil take the hindmost.

The Australia we will need in the twenty-first century will be one that can tighten its belt and become self-sufficient inside a small ring of Pacific Ocean friends, whom it would do well to cultivate. Grant's Australia will do well enough as a springboard, but only that, from which the challenge to global change can take off.

Both Whitlams and Murdochs may indeed be necessary with, I think, some enthusiastic Barry Joneses.

A footnote. After completing the above I received, from a friend, a clipping from the Adelaide Advertiser (16 July, 1988)—a front page lead story, no less, reporting that the South Australian government is "considering new planning laws to counter an expected rise, over time, of up to one metre in the sea level around the SA coast."

A government looking a generation ahead! Well, it's a beginning. I was astonished—and then, suddenly, heartened.

George Turner is a Melbourne novelist whose latest work, The Sea and Summer, *deals in fictional form with some of the questions raised here.*

ON "THE AMAZING CRUISE OF THE GERMAN RAIDER *WOLF*" BY CAPTAIN A. DONALDSON, 1919

Wolf was a raider, sailed the seven seas,
with a jolly good crew of jolly chaps
chattering culturalese.

Wolf mined lots of shipping
off the Australian coast
(before you were born, my darling).
Perhaps they were prone to boast.

For *Wolf* was highly successful,
it's terribly long ago,
the only folks who remember *Wolf*
are silly old folk in the know.

Wolf took plenty of prisoners
(I said they were jolly chaps),
on her decks men of nineteen nations
paraded their different caps.

The mild merchant off-i-cers
learnt while imprisoned below
how little they liked one another
and they said, "Well, it just goes to show".

Let's hear it for *Wolf* and the Kaiser's boys
from Dusseldorf and Berlin,
they did a good job without much noise
and then they sailed home.

I drink tonight to the boys on *Wolf*,
I toast them with respect,
for they show that our left wing historians
are writing selective *schlect*.

ROBERT HARRIS

THREE RIVER IDYLLS BY ALAN GOULD

AUSTRAL BLUEBELLS IN MOLONGLO GORGE

Milky blue asteroids, little atolls of sky,
they appear to have no yesterdays,

but lean from the leaf-litter on their thin wires.
I come upon them beside the walking track

and they take my breath away; cryptic fragments,
irresistible, like the clues to an enchanted future.

I walk on, wanting more, more, these pentacles
of inexpressible blue, drifts of them, gifts of them.

For it is a flawless afternoon in March
which, with unnerving simplicity seems to ask,

How are you here
now time has freed you from your outsets?

I look around myself, preparing an answer,
but the track, scribbling between the trees,

has lost the prospect of a destination.
Across the gorge the railway line

is silent with aeons of disuse,
its cuttings brambled, its power-poles askew.

Black cypress pines in sorcerers' headgear
absorb the summer winds and turn them green,

the stringybarks dishevel themselves—
grey rope matting gashed with sorrel,

while far below, the shale-brown Molonglo
tumbles to its own applause.

And so I answer—Yes, I came,
but left, perhaps, the old way of remembering,

walking thus into the sidereal
which is these woods, groundlit with bluebells.

And the history I believe in now will tell
how this morning, minutes before the sunrise,

the east shattered and blew away inland,
littering the world with these stelliform tessera,

these blue Pleiades, rare in their everywhere.
And if I walk on, I'm also staying

like one accepting hypnosis; to stare,
journeying deep into the idea of blueness

until it haunts like a memory of rapture,
and I will return to what I knew,

looking back, as the visionary looks back always
to catch in the commonplace of his years

momentary glimpses of some celestial once.

BLACKBERRYING

Now it is mid-February again
and we will choose an azure morning of cool change
to move upriver, grazing from bush to bush
among the blackberries. From high and low
the tendrils will stretch toward us
their thin, snaggy fingers that gleam
with fat signet rings, clusters of jet-black pearls.
And like all harvesters, we shall be mildly astonished
at the millionfold mineral gleam of summer's
provender,
so that we will laugh often, picking greedily,
filling hats and bags, or gorging ourselves,
handing up berries to the children on our shoulders,
who will suck thoughtfully, each in his way,
voicing their animal appreciations—More! More!

Upriver. It will be beyond the council parks,
the plastic bottles like bloated fish in the shallows,
and shopping trolleys gleaming like underwater
aviaries
from the riverbed where they were pushed for a
lark.
We will have come among willows and willow-
caves
eating the full, slightly formic berries
in craters of leaflight beside the tree-deep lagoons
and their reflections which are a green and
greenblack
enamelling of willows. Gladly we'll forget
our homes for this, for wild sea-lavender
in its tiny gas-jets of flower, for purple loose-strife
pushing through riverbed stones in streets of leaning
steeples,
and gaunt skeleton weed rising head high
on tubular superstructures; such rife synchronicities,
we will be utterly present here. And if we stop
to watch the river awhile, the skyblue dragonflies
will flit and tremor-hover as though performing
air-sea rescues, while the crickets will be shrilling
their morse at incredible speed.
And if we walk on,
we may surprise a blacksnake at a turn in the path
which will leap-recoil in a hiss-flurry,
head-flattened, vanishing.
And, when we feel like it,
mouthful on mouthful, we will be ravening
blackberries,
until our lips and fingers are mauve
with the sun's tanged, exquisite sweetness;
impossible to stop ourselves,
or resist
a vagary of all our Februaries,
of mouths stained magenta from such harvest,
washed off in eyebrown reaches of the river
where we swim in the afternoon heat, through
reflections
so true, so still, so dense, we might believe
our own reflections had the richer lives.
At dusk we would cast a line and wait for
red-fin
or the rare trout. And dark would find us raiding
gardens
for apples, nectarines, living like possums
between the sleeping families and the moon.

And later, in the open-endedness of our time,
we'd cross the river and take the higher path.
The willows would give way to ti-tree, casuarina,
yellow grasshoppers would catapult from the
brassneedle grass
beside our path, snapping fingers—quick quick!
quick quick!

And we would walk a few miles each day;
by April, maybe, reach the bluer hills
with their crests of cloud, so white, so palpable,
one might ski down their generous slopes forever.

FEBRUARY 23rd 1987

Everyday, and in the everyday
the furthest epochs may infiltrate our lives,
as when a dragonfly arrives
like a nerve-impulse from the palaeozoic
to sun itself in a tenterhook immobility
for some minutes on the lichened stone at my feet.
The willows glisten as though with fresh oil-paint,
the rocks absorb the heat like loaves
while the river, broad here, uncreases, flattens itself,
a translucent parachute; beneath it tiny gambusia
fish
dart-poise among algae-furred weed and
floodwrack
in their brown Jurassic landscape.
And the dragonfly is thin as a hairclip.
Across its black thorax I note
the tattoos of sulphur-yellow,
the yellow hyphens that highlight its twiglike
abdomen.
I think how infinitely fine that stylus was

that drew their wings' scribble of nervures, nervules,
those doodles in the margin of a page,
begun idly, then growing suddenly fascinating and
schematic.
I think how steady the hand
that set the thousand facets of their eye,

and catch again how easily my thought
has framed a pre-Darwinian God around itself,
as though I were, myself, that watchful village cleric,
a pinned specimen reflected in my lunettes,
from which I'm making careful notes
in the creamy parlour-light of a 1780's vicarage;
as though the eras lived in the mind like lamellae,
in a delicacy of shifting highlights.

But I am here also, and now;
some hills away a farm-dog barks persistently,
my scent having travelled upriver through scrub for
miles.
And the dragonfly has launched;
it shifts back and forth across the lagoon
like the nib of a seismograph,
and for reasons I do not understand
it spanks the surface here and here and here,
creating tiny roundels of disturbance;
then, faster than I can follow,
it scoops some wriggling thing and vanishes
downstream,
devouring its prey on the wing.

Tomorrow I'll read how the species, Odonata,
will fly hundreds of miles in search of habitats,
how horses will shy from their flightpaths;
I'll read, and later still, observe, how they pair,
veering inseparably down the summer zephyrs
in copulatory semi-breves, the male
climping the female's head in tiny pincers,
and she, doubled over to take his sperm smear,
their wings in furious shimmer,
erotic usages from the Carboniferous not lost on
us.

But my one dragonfly returns, vanishes, returns,
as though flying in and out of a landscape painting
or in and out of my particular time.

EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY DOOR

The museum offers it to us
hanging on its hand-made convict jamb
like a stoushed jaw, the knocker
knocked up, hinges clapped into rust.

It is unmoved by exhibition status,
stuck with gawk reflecting gawk,
unable to close. Above its right shoulder
a bare Osram bulb throws nakedness across it,
a dark edenic arc of civilization.

People file past it in shushed, guided clumps.
They are not told about the battlers' time
when the doorless were first sold the story
of finite space, & queues were invented,
when going in or out, or being turned away
were a life's achievement . . . & so they passed,

some with aching legs in this house of the Muses,
some dreaming forward to the bedroom padbolt,
others back to childhood's door & the door next
door,
the sounds of a brass key turned in a brass lock,
or to the door not opened.

The museum is a maze of entries
but it has no door where the cat is put out at night,
& no door where those without knock endlessly.
To excuse itself, it offers to us the exhibit's
inscription:
'This door came out from England circa 1820.
It is made from English oak.
The English were fond of transporting doors.'

TERRY HARRINGTON

ROBERT PENN WARREN'S BOOK

Robert Penn Warren's book
smells like wet diggings.
I open it, and slaters spill
like grey water over my hands,
leaves stick to my fingers.
Having been lifted from recent
delvings into the layered past,
the poems are damp and heavy:
here a rotting beam, here
a mattress, its springs exposed,
here a bottle with its marble
trapped like clamorous language
in the buried throat of all
discarded things.
The book is falling apart
in my hands the pages go to mud.
The contents page has become a stack
of peat bricks, cut from an acre of bog
and left to dry on the Galtee road.
I put flame to some of them
and sit back to read in their light
with the Chieftains on the stereo
and whiskey burning my tongue.
I know nothing of Robert Penn Warren—
the poems refuse me his history.
And yet, sometimes I see him climbing
through headland trees, a purple
flower exploding in his hair;
sometimes I hear him moaning:
Oh warden, keep that morphine moving!
But it's the smell of his work
that keeps me here, fingering through
the poetry of decay, the poetry
of turned earth and all that issues
forth from its black incarnation.

ANTHONY LAWRENCE

BUD AND BLOSSOM

The eucalyptus bud:
a cup with a cap.

Lift the lid and
the filaments fizz.

This effervescence,
red, like sherbet.

ANDREW LANSDOWN

CAPTAIN, ART THOU SLEEPING THERE BELOW?

The Captain is drunk again,
sprawled out in the brig
dreaming of Drake. If he dreams
at all. The ship turns
North West North South East.

Up in the crow's nest
that hairy sailor in his
Hollywood costume, ill-fitting
striped rag and frayed pants
knotted with rope.
He does nothing
but squint into the distance,
scratch himself from time to time.
His hair is bleached
and the texture of hemp.
He pretends to be deaf and dumb.

The Captain's monkey
runs up to the crow's nest
down to the brig.
He dreams of an audience,
plucks at the boards,
almost remembers . . . a vision
of whales, their slow backs
carving the sea.

That was in the old days
when the Captain steered the ship.

ANNE CASEY

DEVELOPMENT SITE

Trevor Cudlipp sits in the cabin of his Hitachi
Domino,
A lever in each hand
And eight hundred horsepower under his tail.
The caterpillars stand
On the bricks that once were Manning's Family
Pharmacy
(Leave Your Photos Here).
Mr Manning retired when the shop was sold,
And went to Austinmer.

The next wall in line for destruction bears the
seaside mural
(Now rudely exposed to natural light)
Of Aldo's Capri Espresso.
The ghosts take flight
Of thirty thousand cappuccinos, seven thousand
five hundred short blacks and at least two
hundred and fifty metres of apple strudel
with whipped cream.
If Aldo's lasagna ever gave you the runs or more,
As sometimes happened in summer,
Well, Mr Manning was just next door.

The Domino's great arm reaches for the clouds of
Capri as tentatively as the paw of a cat
Trying to coax movement from a baby's toy.
See how gently Trevor drops the steel claws over
the top of the wall.
The Domino shrugs, and down comes Aldo's pride
and joy.
What have we here? Suzie Martin's florist shop, from
which on Friday nights
Strode young Ted Byrne, the best-hung stud in all
creation,
With six red roses, two sprays of baby's breath
And a single great expectation.

Roses for lovers, yes, and shasta daisies for the family
man,
And the whole place heady with boronia,
And on the wall, beside the till (but gone now),
A kindergarten self-portrait of Fiona.
Weirdos, winos, widows in pairs and other idle
gawpers stand entranced as Trevor gets stuck
into it.
The scattered bricks, bereft of plaster, reveal what
nobody could have guessed:
How casually the mortar was sloshed all those years
ago
By bricklayers long since trowelled, trimmed, tapped
and laid to rest.

Everybody watching thinks it perfectly right to
demolish these shops,
Even if nothing much better will rise from the rubble.
It doesn't faze them at all that what took so long
to plan and build
Can be knocked down with so little trouble.
But of course the past has been such a monumental
fuck-up
That everyone loves to see it go. Well, then,
Pull it down, they say. Blow it up, smash it, obliterate
it,
And start again.

GUY MORRISON

FOR THOSE WHO SAY WORK

It gives a false but acceptable
sense of achievement.

I did it.

I was bored/didn't want to be there/but I did it.

Almost the—

I didn't want to see the doctor but I did.
I didn't want to take the tablets but I did.

I could say work helps to stop the confusion.
Lifts me to a stage where I can deal with the
confusion.
That when I leave the office I'm better equipped
to deal with the real confusion. And write.
I could say that.
I'd also say so what.

So it irons out the edges
as does a prescription for Serenace.

It also prevents any real work.

FIONA PLACE

ON SPECIAL

good morning shoppers
welcome to bi-mor
where the store-wide specials
are exactly what you & your family deserve

on the stand behind me
are versatile nasty slices
serve these up with a dollop of dead horse
& you'll have them running back for more
when you shop bi-mor you're assured
of dinner time smiles
this is a bulk purchase special (stock up
the freezer at this price) nasty slices
right here only $9.99 a dozen
nasty slices for that hasty tasty snack
buy a few dozen & have them ready for
unexpected guests school holidays & all those
moments you never have time to plan for
(oh. pasty slices, is it?) bi-mor pasty slices
sufficient is never enough

moving on
moving on

other specials in the store this morning
include a megabuysupersave on puppy pajamas
make your pet the best dressed pooch on your block
& a once only not to be missed offer on
purple ear-muffs just right for walking the dog
on cold winter mornings & in the gardening section
we have barrels of fish emulsion feed your plants
& introduce the smell of the sea into your garden
a few litres of this in the laundry & the family
will be out there hard at work in no time

moving on
moving on

in the shoe section we have a genuine
reduction on dancing pumps for people
with two left feet snap these up it's
a once in a lifetime never to be repeated
selling fast bargain & there's a money back
guarantee on these size 16 sneakers
if they don't produce a healthy *aroma de foot*
in a fortnight the sneakers are on us

so spend shoppers
here at bi-mor there are storewide
twenty second specials there's sure to be
something for everyone at bi-mor

JENNY BOULT

RAUCOUS STALKS

Rhubarb rhubarb
r h u b a r b r h u b a r b r
hubarb rhubarb rhuba
rbrhubarbrhubarbrhub
arbrhubarbrhubarbrhu
BARBRHUBARBRHUBARBRH
UBARBRHUBARBRHUBA
RBRHUBARBRHUBARBR
HUBARBRHUBARBRHUBARB
RHUBARB RHUBARB RHUB
ARB RHUBARB RHUBA
RB RHUBARB RHU
B A R B R H U B A
R H U B A R B
R H U barb

ROBIN GURR

A DIFFERENT AIR

A black hole waits to suck me into that
unknown from which no tidings will revert.
Request, consent, none: just a tearing wrench
from all that holds me dear. That is the hurt,
not screaming flesh. Would it not be as well
gently to disengage each steel-like thread
now, so the loving mind will not slide down,
smothered in wounds, nor be bedevilled before by
dread?

A new perception comes then. As an explorer,
wading through tangled flowering undergrowth,
cannot, until that clinging patch is over,
appraise the country or enjoy its aura.
The black hole here could be a white hole there,
energy surging, singing a different air.

ROBERT CLARK

FRANCIS WALSH

The Wolves of Manhattan

You moved closer, carefully rearranging legs and arms, lifting your hips closer, kissing deeper. The blankets slipped, the sheet rolled back but still somehow you were enclosed, breathing in another place. You slipped an aching arm free and finger-tipped the rise of her eyebrow. Passion ebbed. You held your breath. It had been perfect. All perfect. Now a tide of filtered light lifted from the hooded streetlights below. You softly groaned. There was light. More light came from it. Light that lips and lids could not contain. Irritation. Alanna stirred, whispering to herself and to you, "The most beautiful. Most beautiful city."

Then you fell down sideways, full length, soundless, asleep.

In a dream you got lost somewhere in the Lower East Side, around Avenue B or C. There a pack of dogs rolled a garbage can and dug out fish heads, paper and bones. And you saw that there was bounty in this place. Scroungers survived too. Alanna said they hardly ever went hungry, although you thought that this suffering went on forever. You planned the future—the alleyways could be blocked and the crumbling apartments rebuilt. It would be worth it. It would return some dignity to the whole catastrophic jumble, even if it meant levelling the city and letting Central Park weed up every road and concrete lot.

Alanna said you were an Australian jerk. Too uncomfortable in the greatest city of them all—a city which was a perfect model of everyone's heart and mind. Of course, it was easy for her because New Yorkers fall in love much too easily and they scatter their hopes around like autumn leaves. Your country demanded so much more.

One dog, boney beneath its scrappy fur, stopped to watch you. Sniffed at your scent and barked twice. Do you remember? Funny how he seemed slightly human the way he stared so coldly. But he was still hungry. That set him apart from the rest. The appetite of a wolf among the more contented dogs.

When first light came you took your usual run along Riverside Park and the Hudson sparkled and slid south, mysterious in gun-metal grey. A shiver ran along your shoulders and down your arms. Was someone watching you?

Alanna once said that there were no wolves in Manhattan, but she was wrong. You'd seen them and you knew that they starved until they could bear it no longer.

"Shake it off." That's what you said to yourself and you swung your arms like propellers. The great city began to rise around you, drawn up by theatrical strings and pulleys, but the chill at the nape of your neck would not recede, no matter how fast you ran.

When you were under the West 79th Street loop you saw two people dragging a dinghy down to the shore. They rowed out into mid stream as you got closer and what a surprise you got when you realised who they were. It was Jack and Maria. What were they doing? Fishing? Surely there were no fish in that dead river.

You yelled out to their boat which floated soundlessly on the golden reflection of the sky. Cargo and container vessels rode the current down in their path and you called again. They looked back to see your body outlined against the shore. Saw your arm waving. But they weren't going to come back and explain just because you didn't understand.

Maria reached into the bottom of the dinghy and lifted up a frail cobweb net. You thought they were mad to try for fish in that river of paint and oil. As you stared they cast the net and the corks sank beneath the water with the weight of the catch. The dinghy dipped its edge into the lapping river which thrashed and glittered alive. Again you thought someone was watching and there, off to the left in the distance, a muzzle and a mangy tail slipped behind a tree. And further away, behind a blur of traffic, a dog was watching. Maybe it was a dog?

They turned the boat to the shore and dragged the net in. The fish struggled in the suffocating air, mud sticking to their eyes, they flipped and flapped. Seagulls shrieked overhead, excited and anxious to avenge their hunger.

Jack scratched his head and laughed while Maria

clapped her hands in prayer and joy. She said, "Look, there's treasure in this city. Everything you could possibly want."

You had to agree. But then it was her city. She would probably die with her passion undisturbed. No-one could place a demolition order on her New York heart. It was ridiculous to even think about it. She was a lucky one. Unlike you, it seemed she had nothing to lose and there were gifts on every street corner.

At eight-thirty that morning, sweating with your t-shirt stuck to your back, you climbed back up the stairs. Breakfast was boiled coffee, crisp bacon and toast. You took a tray to Alanna and woke her with a kiss then pulled the bamboo blind up to the ceiling and the island city was all flesh pink and royal blue.

Alanna sat up, rearranged the pillows and settled, catching her breath with a particular satisfied sigh. She reminded you of the christening. "Nina's baby. The ceremony is on this afternoon. You are the uncle. Well, you live with the kid's aunt."

She moved her hands as she explained the details of the relationship. "This is a great joy. A baby, honey. New life is a treasure." But the coffee split into the tray.

"But I'm not a Christian. I was never baptised. Anyway I've been to these things before. The priest says, 'Do you condemn the Devil?' and you have to answer, 'I do'. All formalised. Well, of course I condemn the Devil but what good does it do if there is no passion in your voice?"

Alanna thumbed out the window. "You need it here, you know. This isn't Australia. There are real devils in New York and monsters in the Bronx. All you're got back home is weather and land. Hardly any spooks at all."

"We've got our ghosts. We've made terrible mistakes and never sought forgiveness. Never paid proper compensation."

"So have we, but we forgive ourselves."

"Australia never forgives."

"Look, you're a Christian by osmosis. Take it from me, you're from a Christian country."

"As thin as the topsoil."

She turned her back and stared through the window. "Maybe you shouldn't come this afternoon."

"What'll you tell Nina?"

"I'll just say you were possessed."

She turned on the CD and a woman began singing high abstract jazz. Sophisticated New York phrases and chords steepled and swung across the bright morning and you got lost in the music. Staring at your hands you saw Manhattan before the Dutch. Way back, five hundred years before, when the island was white grass floating by marshland, protected from the unnamed Atlantic sea. It was an earlier Walt Whitman's democracy with Indian paths winding through. Paths worn down next to a river with a forgotten name. You were at peace in the land and you stood by that shore although no-one saw you there. The fish leapt from the water into the exhilarating air and fell back down splashing.

And it was there, in the song that was carried on the country breeze, that you heard the wolves. They howled to your ochre spirit. Wolves. Crying down through the thin, glassy air, hidden by a fine screen of grass that bent in the fisherman's wind.

Five hours slipped through the dreaming day. Alanna dressed in an elegant black gown and went off to find a cab. But you would not go. Too troubled, you wanted silence to think it out although even the muffled quiet of the apartment was not quite right. There had to be some passion . . . maybe some trees and birds. How badly you missed the dry aromatic bush and the piercing brightness of the sun on the oldest continent—scattered cloud shadows crept over vast paddocks of air, following down tracks, the scratches of a thumb nail in an horizon of red soil. From the window you blessed two weeds tufting through the sidewalk.

So you started to run. Down the stairs and out onto Amsterdam Avenue. Block after block, then along West 74th Street. You ran until you were in the very heart of Central Park. There, in the greenest place where the boughs swept low and the sunlight just softly splattered through a mosaic of leaves; there where the city was entirely forgotten, where the weird treachery of this primal forest was secreted; that was the place where you fell to my savagery. Your heart, leaning toward your native land like the sea leaning towards the moon, suddenly found its release in the danger and violence of my lair. Then you saw we were the same . . . our particular longing, our hunger and passion . . . you came with me.

Someone once said there are no wolves in Manhattan but we were plundering our way through the Bronx before you were even missed.

GEOFF GOODFELLOW

What Price

It didn't really surprise us on Friday when we picked up our copy of the New York Newsday to find that a man had been shot four times in the chest and stomach and was in a critical condition. It didn't really surprise us that he had been critically wounded in a subway train in the Bronx at 9.40 p.m. It didn't really surprise us that the assailant was unidentified and was attempting to rob the victim. And it didn't really surprise us to find the column relegated to the size of a Camel soft pack at the bottom of page 20. After all, the highlight of the day, the major headline, the bold black print that beckoned us to buy, read, 'Bat Attack Leaves Teacher Critically Hurt'.

"I didn't know they had bats in New York", my wife said, leaning over the headlines, "but then again, I never read National Geographic".

"A different type of bat", I said, catching her eye and gesturing a baseball swing. "Look, fourth assault on teachers in a week".

"What price *is* a life here?" she asked.

Page 5 told us that a local resident, who asked not to be identified, said the assailant was a dealer who sold crack to school children. *He* obviously knew.

We'd been in the city for less than a hundred hours but we were learning quickly. Five minutes after our arrival at Penn Station, we were given our first taste. Struggling off the platform in the peak hour rush, we must have looked like walking targets. Me in a white panama hat, a camera bag slung over my shoulder, a heavy black leather briefcase in my right hand, and in the other, a nylon sausage bag bursting at the zipper with sleeping bags and toiletries. And Sally, struggling alongside with a backpack that even Mike Tyson would find uncomfortable, rolling those shoulders that wouldn't even rival the width of just one of his thighs; and both of us, casting furtive glances above the throng of heads for an exit sign; our Aussie suntans flashing like beacons under the fluorescent light. On reflection, 'come and get us—come and get us', must have screamed off us with the pitch of a New York siren.

"Follow me sir," he said, "I've got a taxi waiting for you". He was a slim young black, about 5'8", 150 pounds and around 25 years old. In his jeans, sneakers and maroon windcheater, he looked like a taxi driver.

"You've got me", I said.

"This way sir, maam", he said, pushing his way through the crowd and creating a tunnel within a tunnel.

Sally looked anxious. "No", she whispered. "No, let him go". I looked at the reddening patches on her shoulders."C'mon", I said, "It'll be sweet". I could see the weight of the huge backpack bearing down on her 112 pound frame, and I wanted to see that grimace disappear from her face.

"No", she whispered again, not wanting him to hear for fear of hurting his feelings.

"We'll be right", I said, "trust my judgement".

It was then he reached for my bag. Not the cheap disposable nylon one, but the black leather, the one I had made by the 'leatherworker-in-residence' at the Box Factory in Adelaide, eight years ago. The one that held my forthcoming manuscript, copies of my current book, a videotape of my recent reading with Ken Kesey in Eugene, my list of contacts across America, my address book for home, my diary: my bag was my pulse, my lifeblood.

"No", I said firmly, "I'll carry it myself". We hadn't gone more than another ten paces when he reached back for it again. "Leave the *fuckin'* bag alone", I demanded.

"Trust me sir, trust me".

"I don't fuckin' trust anyone", I lied, "I'm an Australian".

"Crocodile Dundee eh", he laughed. "'Yeah, I don't blame you sir, don't trust many people myself. It pays to be careful".

I looked back at Sally, struggling up the stairs behind me. She was no longer 5'4". She was hunched over to barely the height of a dwarf. When I turned back the eager eyes of the young black met mine. He was grinning. "Sir. Look, the sign", he said, pointing to the wall ahead. The mere sight of the arrowed TAXI sign, along with his sudden look of sullen contempt for my obvious mistrust, broke down all my barriers. I turned and winked at Sally. "Look", I said, "we're nearly there", and a supercilious grin overtook my face. It was then he made another reach for the bag.

"No, it's okay", I lied, "it keeps me balanced". My shoulders were screaming with pain but I wanted to maintain the upper hand; and I wanted to see the open door of the taxi.

Out of the subway and onto 8th Avenue, the bright glare of sunlight, the never ending boxes of concrete and glass, the seething snarl of honking cars and buses and trucks, the wail of sirens; all combined to overwhelm me. Jeez, I thought, rolling my head around like a prizefighter before a bout, Sydney and Melbourne are just country towns.

"Here sir", he snapped, "we'll get you into a taxi now". Three other young blokes, also blacks of about the same age, stood on the roadway signalling taxis to move up on the rank.

"Sir! Yes you sir, where are you going? Uptown or downtown?" He'd moved off the kerb and was speaking to me while signalling his cohorts to keep the cabs moving. "An address sir, c'mon, where are you going?"

"Orr shit. Sally, where's Sally? Hey Sal., where we goin'? Can y' give this bloke the address".

"East 105th between 5th and Madison", she said, tucking a crumpled piece of paper back into her jeans fob pocket.

"You'll have to come back here sir", he said, moving backwards, still snapping out orders to his underlings who were actively moving the line of cabs forward. It seemed strange to be moving to the back of the queue of about ten cabs, but this was New York, this was a world I didn't know. "Hey. What's goin' on?" I enquired. "What about them?" "Airport cabs sir. They're all scheduled for the airport".

And like the Pied Piper he led us, all the way to the back of the queue.

"Sir, maam, stand there. No. Not there, back on the corner. No. Back up, on the footpath". It was then he turned and said to our initial guide, "no, you can't go on break now, we have to get these airport cabs out first". A few minor grumbles were heard, but they soon silenced when he was told firmly that he could knock off in another twenty minutes; at six o'clock.

"We'll have you in the next cab sir", he confided. "I'm the boss on this rank and the guys they give me to work with—all they ever want to do is knock off. He shouted a few more orders to affirm his position and then yelled, "this one, pull this one in for them". Two of the young blacks stepped out onto the roadway and hailed a big yellow cab which drew into the kerb. I looked around and Sally's backpack was sliding down her calves. Two huge fiery red welts were glowing on her shoulders from amongst her twisted blue cotton singlet. I almost breathed a sigh of relief myself as the huge dead weight slumped to the pavement.

"Get in the cab maam", the leading actor called, pulling open the door. He beckoned one of his side kicks to open the front door of the cab. "Throw the pack in with the driver maam. Get in the cab maam". His voice was a series of orders. The front door slammed tight as Sally slipped into the rear seat, rubbing her shoulders and looking bewildered. I looked over the cab to the driver's side and saw the back of a crimpy head of hair leaning in towards the driver, the voice lost in the traffic. As I moved forward to enter the cab, the leading man sprung in front of me while his sidekick moved away from the front door, positioning himself somewhere behind me. "Your bags sir," snapped the head man. I handed him the sausage bag which he threw in on top of Sally, but dropped the leather bag to the roadway and straddled it.

"Hop out the way and I'll get in", I said.

"It'll be $17.50 sir".

"What for?"

"The fare to go uptown is $17.50 sir".

Uptown, downtown, I didn't know where I was going by this stage and I couldn't even see Sally who was lost somewhere in the rear seat under the luggage.

"Doesn't the bloke have a meter?", I said, trying to screw my head inside the doorway to get a look.

"It's peak hour sir. A standard fare applies. It's $17.50 pre-paid plus a tip for the driver on arrival. You do want to go uptown don't you sir?"

At that point, having been on a train from Boston for the past five hours, I wanted nothing more than to drop my bags and fall under a shower and relax.

"Yeah, yeah", I said, unclipping my camera bag to get at my wallet which was safely stored inside. I opened my wallet. It was choked with notes, which is something of a rarity, and dragged out a twenty. He snatched at it like a kid from a family of ten snatches at candy, then spun his head around and leaned into the back of the taxi.

A moment later and he was back. "Driver's short of change. Have you got the fifty cents?"

"Err, no," I said, fumbling amongst the few nickels and cents in the coin compartment.

His head ducked away into the back of the cab again, but he was back as quick as a drake on heat. "The driver needs change sir. I see you've got some twenties there. Give me five! Give me five sir, we've got to keep the cabs moving". I flicked five out, handed them over, and again watched his head disappear into the back of the cab. While he was exchanging the notes I separated my smaller notes from the larger, exposing the one, crisp, hundred dollar bill sitting in the back of the wallet, awaiting a new mate. When his head retreated from the cab his eyes seemed glued to my waiting hundred. Immediately his hand snatched at it and he was off . . . running across 8th, five twenties clutched in one hand, a hundred in the other, and his three mates in hot pursuit, their mouths as open as my empty wallet.

I stood there momentarily, shocked and stunned. Thoughts flashed through my mind with the speed of a strobe light. Could I catch them? Could I beat four of them if I did? Would anyone help me? Would

they have guns? Would they have shivs? Would I lose my panama in the middle of 8th and see it crushed by the back wheels of a bus? Would I lose the rest of my wallet, my plastic money and the contents of my camera bag?

"Bastards", I yelled, to the backs of their disappearing heads. I threw my black leather bag into the back of the taxi and clambered in. "Those fucking bastards. They just emptied me of two spot".

Sally was aghast. "What", she screamed, her face now as red as her shoulders. "The rotten bastards, the dirty rotten bastards", she screamed, thrusting her head into her lap and clutching at handfulls of her own hair. The cabbie swung around. His face showed nothing but honesty and surprise. I knew he wasn't part of their act.

We drove to our destination in silence. I demanded it. I didn't want to talk about it. I was thinking about what I'd said on accepting his offer. He'd got me. He'd fucking got me alright!

That evening I lay in bed, still refusing to discuss it. Where did my money go? Up their arms, up their nostrils, up in a whiff of smoke: I'll never know. But it was theatre, high priced theatre, but I'd had a front row seat.

Four days later, Sally and I were travelling uptown on a bus along 5th Avenue; we had seats for a Broadway production. Crossing 72nd Street was the aftermath of a minor collision. A rust bucket of a yellow Camero sat parked over the kerb, its rear fender looking somewhat distorted. A small Asian man in his late forties backed away from the driver of the other car, a small white Japanese wagon sitting in the middle of the road. Its owner, a heavy set young guy who looked to be in his mid-twenties was poking a baseball bat at the retreating Asian. Our bus passed by and the trees of peaceful Central Park swallowed up our view, and once again, I'll never know.

After the matinee we wandered the East Village, bought some shoes, an LP of the '10,000 MANIACS', and a stack of New York postcards to send home. We boarded a subway train at 6.15 p.m. and headed for the safety of a double deadlocked door in an apartment on the edge of Spanish Harlem. Two minutes before the train entered the 103rd Street Station, a man entered the carriage we were occupying, along with twenty or so other people of various ages, colors, sexes and sizes, and proceeded to give a short performance. He started talking immediately on entering from the adjoining rear carriage. He was perhaps 43 years of age, 5'10", and had longish collar length greying hair and a droopy grey moustache. He wore pastel green slacks, a white shirt, and a light, lemon colored sports jacket. He was caucasian, his clothes were neat and clean—he looked like a suburban husband on his way home to a wife and two or three kids. But his performance caught everyone's attention. Eyes darted from seat to seat.

"I don't want to alarm you people", he said, striding through the doorway, "but I'm a vet. I've had three feet of my intestines chopped out, I've got mounting medical bills I can't pay . . . and I need some money from you good people".

By this time he'd passed by our seats, but had said enough to command everyone's attention. When we looked up from the book we were both reading, he was doing a pirouette at the other end of the carriage. He flicked back his jacket with a rather grand and elaborate style—and there they were. Exposed on his right hip was a black leather gun holster, complete with pistol, and on his left hip, a six inch stainless steel knife pouch with a handle protruding from the top. "Now sometimes", he continued, "It's better to be humble than try to be brave. I don't want to draw any metal if I don't have to . . . but I do want some donations from all of you people".

At this point the brakes were being applied for the station stop. People scuttled to exit and it was a major race through the turnstyles and up the staircase to the relative safety of 103rd Street. We walked away quickly, our adrenalin pumping like athletes breasting a tape; not hearing any gunshots, not hearing any screams, only hearing his voice echo the hollows of our heads. After walking about fifty paces, Sally turned to me and quietly asked the same question that I had no answer for on Friday night.

TIM WINTON

Letter from Ireland

After dinner these days it's still light enough to walk down through the ragged remains of the ash wood below our place, and climb the stone wall of the old bull paddock to check the rabbit snares along the hedges. The Slieve Bloom Mountains float behind the mist. Choughs, rooks, jackdaws will be trafficking along the hawthorn. Even down at the swampy bottom of the valley you can smell the sweet smoke of peat fires from houses whose lights are coming on, whose dogs are barking, whose children are thwacking hurling sticks against each other's backsides. A hare might flush from some knot of grass and bolt uphill in a long arc, a hundred, two hundred yards, and it'll always head for the castle grounds. I trod on one once, in a hailstorm, and it did exactly that. Always into the shadows cast by the castle whose new windows reflect the last of the sun. It's nearly seventy years since there's been windows in that place, and now and then you'll come across some bloody, wretched rook who's tried beating his way in or out, totally confounded by the glass that's probably the dimmest racial memory in his family mind. With the marbled sky behind it, the grim shadow of Leap Castle is always in the edge of your vision as you make your way uphill, rabbitless as usual. There's a long evening ahead, a cottage full of books, a fire, a pot of tea.

Ireland was never somewhere I dreamed of, the way I dreamed of Paris and the islands of the Aegean. I planned for Paris, but Ireland just turned up. One evening at home in Perth (that sunny speck in my mind's eye, these days) someone rang and offered me his cottage in County Offaly for five months. I'm glad to say I wasn't stupid enough to knock back five months' worth of generosity, and the chance to have somewhere quiet to write. I'm into the fifth month almost, and now with my wife and son, I'm mentally getting ready to leave. It's a strong place. That's what stays in my mind as I go through the accountancy of settling up, looking back, sorting out—just how strong a presence the Leap is.

In the mornings I climb the short hill to Spencer's Cottage where I light a fire and straighten the damp-curling pages of my novel. Spencer used to be the gardener at the Castle, and from his place you can see the whole valley, the gate-lodge where we live, the old estate walls, the ruins of the castle itself, and behind it the quilted wens and bumps of divided fields whose shades of green must all have names in someone's mind. When the mixture of turf, coal and wood burns hot enough to cheer my room up a bit, I get down to the daily business of a thousand words of novel. I suppose for that time I could be anywhere at all, maybe even the places where my novel's set—Perth, Geraldton, Margaret River—but whenever my concentration lapses, or I step out to the stone and slate barn for a pee, my eye will always be drawn to the castle. The sight of it is rarely a neutral thing. It almost always sets off things in my mind. I've discovered it's the same for a lot of locals, and for the Australians, Americans and others who come by or stay awhile. There are innumerable legends and stories about the Leap, and they all compete everytime you look at it. Even for those ignorant of its past, it's often a grim, unavoidable presence. What the effects have been on me and my writing of being in its shadow all these months I can't say, but like all strong places, places of memory, of perversity, beauty, the kind of places I've lived near in Western Australia, I'd be surprised if these effects were entirely negligible.

Places, like the bedrock of most good ideas, tend to attract bullshit, and Leap Castle has brought forth more than a good share of that, but as Sacheverell Sitwell writes in *Dance of the Quick and the Dead*, "The intensity of this strange place exceeds in its details anything that the most dramatic mind could design.", and Sacheverell should know. Leap was built by the Ely O'Carrolls in 1380 to guard the pass from the Slieve Bloom mountains into Tipperary. The valley roundabout is dotted with prehistoric burial sites, ring forts, stone remnants. Leap's history is long and depressing (though history itself seems long and depressing), a chain of betrayals, fratricides, tortures. It's hard to imagine the spaces between each 'major event' in its history. An event, as always, is some awful

deed, a spear in *someone's* guts. The castle's oubliette, the spiked dungeon high in the tower, was cleared late last century and "three cartloads of bones were removed from it and buried in consecrated ground. Bits of several old watches were found among the remains." Tradition has it that Teige O'Carroll murdered his priest brother before the altar of the chapel in the keep, as he was saying Mass. The O'Carroll's slaughtered their own mercenaries, prisoners were often thrown off the battlements, rooms were sealed up with people inside; it goes on and on until the stories take on the familiar ring of myth and legend. Like this for example:

> A weird story is told of the Jonathon Darby of the time, usually known as "the wild Capitain." It is said that before he surrendered the Castle he collected his money and treasure and with the aid of two servants hid it somewhere in the walls of the fortress. He then sent one of them for his sword and in the meantime threw the other over the battlements. Upon the messenger returning he slew him with the weapon he brought . . . Later he was arrested on a charge of high treason and imprisoned at Birr. He was several times reprieved, and at last liberated, his legs having mortified. Upon his return he was only capable of murmuring, "My money, my money" but was quite unable to say how it was concealed.

Old men still tell me about the treasure "under the flags" or in the twenty-foot thick walls, and I wonder whether these stories have some factual basis or whether they are created out of some universal story-pool. They seem so recognizable, such familiar territory. Is it because they are archetypal myths or just because they're so damn typical of human behavior? Regardless, the stories stay with the place and with the locals who have all ingested them since childhood. Certain stories are family favorites. The ones that stick are the ghost stories. Daisy Bates, word has it, once wrote a ghost story set at Leap. When I first arrived, it struck me that the whole valley, the entire farming population was burdened with them. Neighbors would hardly let me in the door before setting off on a familiar tale. To me, the whole business seemed oppressive. People seemed to need to get these stories off their chests. Poltergeists, terrible stenches, moaning—all related to the castle. The later they were told in the evening, the more they were prepared for by endless rounds of Power's and Guinness, the less truly felt and more high-toned the stories seemed to be. Then I was reasonably sure that the Paddies were just engaging in their favorite entertainments—getting drunk and frightening themselves to death. It's only in a lull that they'll talk politics, and only at the point before their legs give out that they'll sing. But the stories of sober women particularly interested me—

the weight of them, the way they sounded like they needed to be got off the tellers' chests.

The ghost business goes back a long way at Leap Castle. After the Darbys took it from the O'Carrolls, servants dreaded having to go to the chapel in the tower and the ghosts and the Darbys have ever since been connected. Leap has the reputation of being the most haunted castle in the British Isles, though how

one quantifies ghostification is beyond me altogether. Nevertheless, there is a persistent and 'well-documented' tradition. 'Serious students of the occult' have included one Mrs Jonathan Darby (otherwise known as the author Andrew Merry) whose article in 1908 in the Occult Review features Leap and a few things that Steven Spielberg would pay dollars to realize on screen. Mrs Darby also wrote an account of the Sunday in 1922 when the IRA bombed and burned the place to a ruin.

Besides the ghosts, the chief narrative the locals embroider and wonder upon is the burning. Until a few years ago, the IRA man who led the mission was living just down the road. I've spoken with children and grandchildren of the bombers who are all keen to see the castle restored "to bring life back to the area." Many of them played around the grounds and in the ruins as children (though never at night) and, though the castle was thoroughly looted, they were forbidden to take anything from the site. Earlier this year, the day after St Brigid's Day, my son's little friends found two candles that had been burned in the tower for the saint's day and they took them home only to be promptly sent back because "Daddy says there's the divils in 'em." One wonders what the Republicans thought they were burning down, the Proddies or the Divil himself. I guess they weren't too keen on that distinction. In any case Darby left the place and gave the castle to the gardener whose cottage I slosh up to every day to light a fire and write my novel in. There's supposed to be a secret tunnel linking castle and cottage, but I've never looked for it. Maybe for fear of finding it.

What I suspect has affected me, as I mentioned before, is the strength of the place, in its physical aspect, its weight of stories, the way it preoccupies people. Here where every field and some trees have names, where walls and cottages have names, where a cluster of houses has a collective name to distinguish it from the cluster five hundred yards down the valley, here place and region are a serious proposition. This is where a Faulkner could borrow a complete world for his own ends. The Irish do not forget. There's a kitchenful of stories waiting you at every house. Perhaps if I felt they belonged to me I'd stay and take a crack at it, but my mythology was handed down in suburban streets by the sea, stories of fishermen and jockies and superhuman women in Harley sidecars. My reference has been the sea—that's what I saw through my window every day. That was the overwhelming presence in my physical and imaginary world. It was how I gauged my smallness.

Coming up the long defensive slopes near the Hanging Field in the waning light of a spring evening, beneath the whirling rooks and jackdaws, it's possible to know how a human-built structure can have such relentless presence in people's imaginations. Inside at any time of day it's a grim, cold place, even now that the cellars have been cleared of rubble and floors put back into the keep and one Gothic wing. The spiral staircase, where all the sightings of the 'elemental' are recorded to have occurred, is not a pleasant place to be in, regardless of the electric lighting and the clearing out of the jackdaws' nests. It's not a place I like to be alone in, though I can't decide why. The weight of story, or the presence of Evil? I'd tend to side with the former, though not out of scepticism. After all, I believe in Heaven and Hell, Angels and Demons and plenty besides. My three year-old son is fearless, even without the lights. Some evenings he leads me up to a tiny chamber whose floor is long buried in bramble twigs and straw brought in by jackdaws over the decades, and he'll get me to lift him to see the valley through the slot of a window. "This is my room," he says. I imagine it's the view that gets him. It sure as hell can't be the decor. Melba stayed here at one time. I hope she got a better room. He likes to run across the rubble floor of the chapel at the top of the tower and he peers breathless into the horrible oubliette. "Stinks, eh. It's all very old," he says, giving me the tour guide arm-sweep. "It's a ruined."

An Australian is renovating the castle, and he'll move in any day. He speaks of "bringing positive feelings" to the place, "healing" the place by living positively in it. His mother was an O'Bannon, a name familiar in the annals of Leap, so he feels connected. He's a generous and intense man. The building obsesses him. He wants to use it, not to restore it. He's not interested in creating a museum. He plans to live there, to write there, to have people stay. A billion things. He's consumed by the notion of continuing its story and, in a sense, I imagine, changing its course for the better. On his fortieth birthday the keep was full of dancing and music and locals, who jigged and sang over their pints of Harp and gnawed chicken bones. Dust rose from the boards and I never heard a single ghost joke. The whole night became another Leap story by morning, and these last couple of months it's evolved a few sub-plots of its own. And nothing awful happened at all.

There aren't many work days left before I leave, but I still go up the hill of a morning with my nose running in the wind. In Spencer's cottage I drag the biro across the page, trying to write this novel, the one full of all the stories I grew up with, the digressions my grandmother managed to slip between verses of Browning, the things I overheard during an insomniac childhood, the things my parents told me, half choking with laughter, while the meat and three veg was still a lump in our chests of a Sunday noon. The rain comes and stays. I get postcards full of sky and water. I look up and that grim old place is there.

Tim Winton's latest novel is In the Winter Dark *(McPhee Gribble, $24.99).*

JOHN HIRST

A Quiet Way to an Australian Republic

The opponents of republicanism (and some of its supporters) imagine that a republic cannot be established without US-style presidential elections, a disavowal of our British heritage and a refusal to accept royal visits. None of this needs to happen. There is a quiet and simple way to becoming a republic.

Most of our ties to Britain have already been broken. In recent years, with the support of even the Queensland government, the Australian courts have finally become independent with the abolition of Privy Council appeals. Only one substantial link to Britain remains—the British monarch, on the advice of the Australian prime minister, appoints the Governor-General. Australia is not a self-sufficient state while this arrangement remains, since it does not control who the monarch is, on what principles he or she may act, or indeed whether there will be a monarch. To put an extreme case: if Britain were to become a republic the Australian constitution would be unworkable because our head of state, in whose authority the government is carried on, could not be replaced. The fact that the monarch's title is Queen of Australia in no way alters the situation.

The constitution should be altered to provide that the Governor-General be appointed by a process wholly Australian and cease to be the representative of the British monarch.

An elected Governor-General

I take it that the Australian people are not seeking any fundamental alteration in their system of government and would not wish the head of state to be directly elected. Certainly there is danger in giving to a head of state with chiefly ceremonial powers any claim to a popular mandate.

In a number of countries the head of state is elected by the legislature. The election of the Governor-General by the federal parliament would not be regarded by Australians as sufficiently dignified or likely to allow the Governor-General sufficient independence. There would also be a danger that the quality of the people appointed to the office would decline. At the moment the prime minister is comparatively unfettered in making his recommendation to the Queen; once the choice lay in the hands of the party having the majority of members in the legislature, quality might be sacrificed to other less worthy considerations. A wider and more acceptable constituency would be the members of all the legislatures, federal and State. A further advantage in involving the States in the election of the Governor-General is that the Governor-General could then be empowered to appoint the governors of the States (see below).

West Germany and India

The most appropriate models for Australia to follow in this matter are West Germany and India. In both countries the president, with powers similar to our Governor-General's, is elected by the members of the central legislature and those of the States. The voting power is divided equally between the two groups. In Germany this is achieved by allowing all members of the Bundestag (the elected House of the federal legislature) to be members of the Electoral College which elects the president, and allowing the State legislatures to elect a similar number of delegates to the Electoral College. In India all members of elected Houses (central and State) vote, but the votes are weighted so that the combined voting power of the State members equals the voting power of the federal members. The voting power of the State members is further weighted according to the population of their States.

The West German and Indian constitutions have been in operation for over thirty years. The elections for president have nearly all been contested, with the major parties or groupings offering candidates. In both countries the presidents have been men of high calibre who have given general satisfaction. There have been occasional tensions between the head of state and the head of government, but the heads of state have accepted the limitations of their position.

The West German constitution envisages that the

members of the Electoral College will meet together to cast their votes, though they are prohibited from entering into debate. In India the members do not meet and they vote in their States or at the capital. This seems preferable, since it avoids the costs of bringing members together. Voting would be secret and conducted by the electoral office.

State Governors and deputy Governor-General

At present the governors of the States, like the Governor-General, are appointed by the Queen. This arrangement should be replaced, but there is no need for a second system of election. Since the States would be involved in the election of the Governor-General, the Governor-General would become an appropriate person to appoint the governors. He would act, as the Queen does, on the advice of the premier.

The longest serving governor would become deputy to the Governor-General. The appointment of deputies to the Governor-General is another matter which, at the moment, involves action by the Queen.

A republican Australia

With the Governor-General and the governors provided for in this way, Australia would be an independent and self-sufficient republic. It is not commonly realised that this comparatively small change is all that is needed to secure this result. (The only other change of consequence would be to the oath of allegiance.) Under the scheme proposed, even the names and titles to which we are accustomed would be retained: Governor-General, Governor, Commonwealth of Australia. There is no disowning of our British heritage in providing that Australians make their own arrangements for the appointment of their head of state. Our British heritage would still be acknowledged in our continuing membership of the Commonwealth of which the Queen is head. The great majority of the member nations of the Commonwealth are republics.

John Hirst teaches in the department of History at La Trobe University.

TIM THORNE

Of Garrets, Communities and Literature

In conversation recently with an arts bureaucrat, I came across the term "garret writer", a term, the user hastened to add, which was not necessarily pejorative, but which served to identify those whom the various funding bodies for literature did not consider as "community writers".

"Garret" connotes both poverty and isolation. The accuracy of the former implication is conceded; one could hardly argue against it either as historical fact or reasonable prediction. That garrets should be confused with ivory towers is, however, rather disturbing and smacks of the "blame-the-victim" syndrome currently fashionable in discussions of unemployment, AIDS and declining VFL attendances.

I am sure that most of those who use the terms, "garret writers" and "community writers", have as genuine an interest as I in the role of literature in the community and, in particular, in its importance as an element in any overall community arts program, but the use of this simplistic dichotomy betrays a mechanistic approach to the issue of community literature. Such an approach must be detrimental to the achievement of what are, ultimately and in the widest sense, political aims.

Too often in Australia have community literature projects been of the "insert writer A into community B" type. "Community writers" are those who are, firstly, chosen (rarely are the positions advertised) and, secondly, deemed to have slotted in successfully. Success is judged on such short-term criteria as can be dealt with in a report or on the actual production of a book, newsletter, video or whatever.

The concept of a writer "working with" a community is dangerously similar to that of "working on" a community, as if a community were a blank, static and passive entity rather than an organic and dynamic process, already acting, inter-acting and reacting in its own historical development.[1]

Ideally, a community would produce its own writers, its own literature, as one of its natural functions. But waiting around for this to happen spontaneously is like sitting in front of a computer terminal waiting for the answer to a problem. Not only do a few buttons have to be pushed first, but a program has to be devised so that the bits and pieces of hardware are channelling the energy in useful directions.

In other words, creative writing skills need to be acquired by enough people so that their use is not seen as the practice of some esoteric craft, but, rather like reading or driving a car, as a generally accepted means of widening horizons, augmenting possibilities and reducing dependence.

There are those who maintain that the ability to produce literature cannot be taught, that all the Adult Education workshops, creative writing schools at American colleges, and writers' residencies have not come up with a single Blake or Tolstoy. This "romantic genius" school of thought is often subscribed to by those who have never put in the hard work needed to acquire the skills, and are happier thinking that a facility with such mysteries as plot, metaphor or structure is randomly distributed by fairy godmothers or is manufactured, analagously with diamonds, under the pressure of suffering. Alternatively, its adherents are those who, having the ability to write well, jealously guard it as a mark of their superiority, a sort of key to the executive washroom of culture.

This attitude ignores the fact that we are all born illiterate, but that Shakespeare did actually acquire the skills necessary to create *Hamlet*.

Of course, the issue here is with the concepts of "teaching" and "learning". One might equally say that mathematical skills or the ability to speak a foreign language can only be learned, not taught. The distinction is a false one, as any educationist knows.

The real point is that very little learning (or teaching) is successfully done in a vacuum. Wanting to write something is the best motivation for learning how to write it well and motivation is the key to successful education. The most effective creative writing classes have been held in schools, in prisons or with those who were illiterate.

This is because children have not yet learned to discriminate among skills, tending, more than adults, to display an eagerness to learn anything, whether or not it will make them rich, clean or sexually

attractive. Prisoners, too, will grasp at whatever courses are offered, not just as a break in a boring routine, but as a means of improving their self-esteem. Those who come to literacy late in life often jump straight into the possibilities afforded by literature, bypassing the more mundane uses of language in which so many of us become bogged down. The Solentiname experience in Nicaragua was just one of the better known examples of this syndrome.[2]

There have been projects established in the name of community literature which have sought a short cut by avoiding the process of the acquisition of literary skills. Usually these have involved the use of a tape recorder and have, whatever their merits as oral history or community-based journalism, contributed very little to literature. Nor have the participating communities gained anything more permanent from them than the satisfaction of having their stories, conditions or aspirations recorded.

In these cases the "writer", whether a member of the community or an outsider, is at best a ghost-writer and at worst a parasite, either way putting her or his own interpretation on the "material" of other people's lives with varying degrees of sympathy. With the best of wills such a process is as manipulative, if more subtly so, as the presentation of so-called real life in television sit-coms or the Sunday tabloids.

Moreover, the skills required for the effective presentation of oral "literature" are at least as difficult to acquire as those for the production of written work and, as anyone knows who has listened to a lot of radio programs, poetry readings or academic lectures, those who possess them are relatively few.

It may well be that the kind and level of literary skills for which communities feel the need are not those of a Patrick White or a Dorothy Hewett. One of the most successful programs in recent years was the creative writing program at the Williamstown Naval Dockyards, based on the production of a workplace newspaper, and executed without the intrusion of any professional writer, of either the "garret" or the "community" persuasion. On the other hand, *Lifting The Weight*, an anthology of poetry from teenagers in South Australian youth training centres, which developed out of workshops conducted there by Geoff Goodfellow, is proof that a professional writer, an outsider, need not be an inhibiting factor. In this case, the writer happened also to be the best kind of teacher (despite having no formal training), one who saw his role as being a catalyst, enabling the kids to discover resources within themselves which they could then use for their own ends.

The inmates of a reform school, a prison or a shelter, the clients of a CYSS group or even the members of a Trade Union, tend not to see themselves as a community in the sort of positive way that is basic to community arts ideology. They have not made a free choice to associate together. They are often the "target groups" of community arts officers because they are easily identifiable, fit already into a bureaucratic structure that funding bodies can deal with, and are obviously "disadvantaged" as far as alternative possibilities for contact with the arts are concerned.

I am not suggesting that they should be ignored, but that more of an effort needs to be made to identify and contact other communities which can benefit from the active practice of literature. Bikie gangs, CWA branches, the multifarious associations which exist for the families and friends of those afflicted with various illnesses and handicaps, even religious and political groups, dahlia fanciers, football clubs: the list could go on and on, and need not be restricted to those bodies which would qualify for government funding, nor to those whose members are unambiguously proletarian. If literature is important, it is important

for everyone. Those whose professional concern is its practice or its nurturing should see its extension into the communities as more than just an extension of the welfare state.

If a genuine pluralist society is something to aim for, either as an end in itself or as a prelude to, or aspect of, socialism, then censorship must be seen as abhorrent. Censorship of literature before it has even been written, by failing to encourage the universal acquisition of literary skills, is not morally different from book burning, and much more effective.

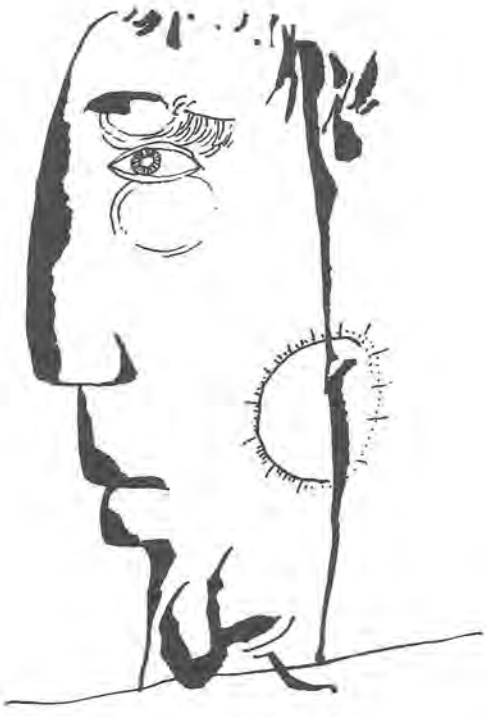
If the inability to create literature is an aspect of oppression, then the more affluent members of society are just as much in need of liberation. It will probably be harder for them to achieve the necessary sense of community, shackled as they are by their satisfaction with material possessions, petty power and individual achievement. However, there is certainly merit in the argument that that miniscule proportion of the common wealth which is available for the furthering of literature be directed towards those whose own resources are the slightest.

Writers of talent should continue to be supported through a system of grants and fellowships. Genuine community literature projects should continue to be encouraged. But a clear distinction should be made between the two activities. Funding a "writer in the community" must be seen neither as a consolation prize for the writer nor as a substitute for the encouragement of communities in the production of their own literature.

That is the real distinction, compared to which any division of individual writers into those who work in garrets and those who are would-be Peter Garretts is not only phony but potentially dangerous.

1. For further discussion of the concept of "community" in relation to community arts, see Owen Kelly: *Community, Art and the State: storming the citadels* (Comedia, London, 1984).
2. See Warwick Fry and Jeff Cassel (eds) *Poetry of the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Pathfinder Press, Sydney, 1985) for the background to, and examples of, the poetry from Solentiname.

Tim Thorne chairs the Tamar Regional Community Arts Committee and is a director of Community Arts Network (Tas.) as well as the author of five volumes of poetry. His new book is Red Dirt *(Mary Place Press).*



Jiri Tibor Novak

JANINE BURKE

Letter to Squirrel

I had known my friend when we were all much younger and she was a ball of energy in pink flowing robes. Her nickname was Squirrel.

She'd say, "How about this?" and pull from a box, like a rabbit from a hat, a crimson scarf shot with blue, silk so fine you could see through it to a burnished world on the other side. Or rings, mad glittering eyes of stone set in silver. Or sandals decorated with leather flowers. Or the head-dresses which Squirrel could persuade no-one to buy, and she wore, all feathers and shells and dripping beads named after a river in New Guinea where missionaries lost their heads. Her shop smelt of musk, a warm scent, of the earth, and she came out of this warmth, towards you, quickly.

One day she and I piled into her orange station wagon and drove to the country. What we liked was to drive and gossip, our eyes lazily scanning the hills and rivers, the patterned backdrop to our adventures. It took about four hours to do a round-up of our lives and, at the end, we'd park outside my house, and summarise. It was at that point, as I was about to get out of the car, Squirrel would reveal a secret as though the talk had been leading there, like the road we were travelling, home.

These secrets made small darknesses in the bright skies of our conversation. But they say, the astronomers, there is no emptiness, only undiscovered connections.

Squirrel knew a man who was showing jewellery at an art gallery in Castlemaine. It was Squirrel's kind of weekend, drive for miles and miles, simply from curiosity. She was so rarely disappointed that even the most fruitless searches and the dullest excursions into the flattest landscape ended by rewarding her.

When we got there it was still early, and our destination was closed. We decided to check out the town; it was Sunday, and deserted. The wide streets were sandy with blond pebbles blowing across the pavement. As we walked, dust pools were created, coating my shoes and the lace hems of Squirrel's long red petticoats.

"Lord," Squirrel sighed, "what I wouldn't give for a capuccino and a hunk of cake."

I was a little disapproving, really, of Squirrel. She chatted up perfect strangers and talked off the top of her head. Larger than life personalities, schemes of grand design—she'd invent them if they weren't around. Even though she was the older one, I used to give her lectures disguised as casual remarks. 'Awful lot of cholesterol', was my style of advice.

We found a place dressed up as an English tea-room, all chintz curtains and porcelain vases. The man who ran it was surprised to have such early customers but he let us in and gave us raisin bread.

Squirrel licked her fingers. "When was the last time you ate raisin bread?" "Years ago at boarding school." I started on another slice. "What about you?" "I thought a wedding breakfast *was* breakfast, so after David and I got married in the Botanicals and everyone came back expecting, well, God knows what, but proper food, I just had piles and piles of raisin bread and little packets of marmalade."

"That can't have been all."

"It was before the age of the croissant." Her eyes wandered to the window. A small boy clutching a toy ship stood on the other side, staring at us. Squirrel raised her hand in a slow salute which the child returned, mirror fashion. "David will never leave me. We made a vow. I said you must never do to me what my father did to my mother." And she gazed at me as if no vision of contradiction existed in the universe.

The jewellery blinked; it was an array of tiny computers with antennae radiating like spider's legs, and flashing yellow lights. Ultra modern. Squirrel crowed over them. The gallery director, a rangy woman with iron gray hair, gave us a guided tour. She showed us Squirrel's favourite, art deco glassware, brilliantly coloured with fiery, liquid patterns. Squirrel turned a vase over in her hands. She had neat, brown hands that matched her nose and mouth. Not for a moment did I think she would drop the vase. Nor did the gallery director who was looking on benignly.

"Pretty good," said Squirrel, "Pretty damned good." It slid, she caught it, and whirled in a circle as though it wasn't a near miss but a sleight of hand. We detoured

home through Gisborne and bought a barbequed chicken which we ate with our fingers. We sang lovesick songs from the Fifties that had choruses where we howled ooh-oooh-ooh in pussycat voices. We sang them very loud so they bounced around the car like battle hymns.

We pulled up outside my house. The landlord had recently painted it two shades of brown and Squirrel and I spent at least ten minutes speculating on the varieties of shit represented by these shades. Dog's for the window sill, we finally decided, and human's for the walls. Then Carlo's name came up; he'd been a childhood friend of Squirrel's. They'd played together on the banks of the Darebin creek where they built wigwams of purple mud and white leaves. He'd betrayed her on a business deal and I thought she was over it because they were on speaking terms again. But the hurt was still there, pink and sliced. She showed me.

"What a bastard," I offered ineffectually. Carlo was a drifter, given to enthusiasms. On the left, he was called Divided Elements. "But he was my friend," she whispered.

I learned to drive and raced through traffic like a Grand Prix speedster. Yet one evening, behaving myself, I was nearly wiped out. I came from beneath a bridge on a green light to be met by a semi-trailer going through on a red. There was no time. I saw the Mercedes-Benz logo heading straight for me and put my hands over my eyes. When I opened them, there wasn't any glass left in the car and a crowd had gathered, including the truck driver, who seemed to be in worse shape than I, picking broken shards from my hair, and murmuring, 'Sweet Jesus'.

Suddenly, Squirrel arrived. She'd seen the accident as she left the freeway. She helped me out with both hands. When she offered to get me away, just leave my car to the tow-truck drivers who were fighting over it, I agreed. When we reached her home, it was unusually quiet. No music played. No long lost friend from the Great Beyond lingered for another cup of tea. Where were Biddie and Brodie, her kids, with their pleas for games, toys and chocolate biscuits? And fruit going soft on wide china plates?

Squirrel opened the fridge and brought out the milk. Bottles of vitamin pills were stacked up where the lolly-water and the wine used to be. When I asked how David was, she said they were having 'something called a trial separation'. She said it with her back to me, then whirled round with the milk in her hand, just as she'd done in the gallery. "Selfish, that's what he called me. Selfish."

She was waiting for me to respond but I couldn't, only look at her. All her extremities had grown pointed; she was tense and slight as a greyhound." Are you on a diet?"

She shrugged, flattered. "We don't need all that extra flesh. I'm burning it up, running." She flexed a bicep that bounced up smooth and firm. "You could do with losing a few kilos." She eyed me censoriously. "Eat salads, that's what I do. I can get through a whole day on a salad. And I'm sick of cooking. Kids make you sick of cooking." She plonked the milk on the table "I've got more energy than I know what to do with." Squirrel's energy was already legendary. I shook my head.

"Where *is* David?"

The kettle was a dragon blowing steam. Delicately, Squirrel removed it from the stove. "Gone to Sydney to sort himself out."

"How long will that take?"

She dropped her head, and busied herself with the tea things, and it occurred to me that despite all the talk there were regions we did not explore, that she kept guarded from me. David. What did I know about him? She said, "Questions about time are useless", as if she'd learned it by rote, painfully.

She unwrapped some almond cake which she made me eat, saying it was Biddie's favourite. It turned out Biddie and Brodie were staying with Squirrel's brother that weekend so Squirrel could catch up with some 'peace and quiet'. She said, "That brother of mine works like a dog", as if she'd tried to talk him out of it, and failed. Then she drove me home.

I was talking quite naturally now. In fact, I was babbling.

"What happened?" she asked. "Did your life flash before your eyes?"

I shut my eyes and felt it again, the impact. How insubstantial my body was, an envelope of air and water nearly posted to the heavens. "It was as though my mind jumped up in fear and I was looking down on everything. Then you were there, and I came back."

She gave off an aura of disturbance, there was something relentless in her profile. I waited for the secret to come. "I am not superwoman," she said. "That's one game I won't play."

"It's the kids? It's too much without David?"

"It's the ridiculous expectations, that's what it is." She waved one hand, brushing away a swarm of annoyances. "I'm thinking of selling up the business." We both allowed the effect to settle. "All I see when I walk into the shop are bits and pieces that I have put together so other people will recognise their true worth."

"That's the joy, isn't it?" Gingerly, I shifted in my seat; my body felt distant and slightly cumbersome.

She gave me a glorious smile. "I might go to art school. I've started to paint."

It was the beginning of her involvement with cults and therapies. She also redecorated her bedroom in tones of pink and white so it became a cool, fantastic place. She pinned up paper cut-outs of vaginas with serrated edges, silver doilies, embroidered tablecloths.

Several of her own paintings, all of lilies. One afternoon, Jenny took a photograph of me in there because the light was right, and neither of us knew where to stand, or look, or sit. She went back to her maiden name and was adamant about its use. She had a Californian psychiatrist who encouraged her to 'be herself' and 'feel everything'. There was a mantra and a life to do with a religious cult she did not share with us. When we discussed it amongst ourselves we said, Squirrel is a survivor.

That summer at Wingan Inlet, we all went bush. Squirrel had come with her brother and her kids. I'd come with my friends and together we formed one straggling tribe. Squirrel had grown stick thin, the bones of her chest a brittle web, her arms and legs laced with whip-fine muscles. At dawn, she ran barefoot along the beach; she went for gruelling walks on the hottest days; she never complained about the mosquitoes though we all wore bracelets of blood and bites and scratches.

David had fully left her, and her mother died. They had taken off her left breast to stop the cancer growing. She didn't hide it, she wore clinging clothes to show it off. We couldn't bear it, her friends, we were the ones who couldn't look. She was more beautiful than ever. Almost radiant.

She planned to travel to India, to the ashram at Poona. It was supposed to be a wonderful place; she described it with her hands wheeling. Then she would go quiet. Watch us. And an ordinary act became outrageously cruel, a complete denial, as if we were engaged in a deadly campaign to reject her.

It was the night of the big cook-up. The pappadams turned out to be the trickiest. They had to float on a pond of boiling oil which spat at us, no matter how far back we sat. Squirrel's brother fished them out with tongs and passed them round on plates, layers of golden wafers, hot and light. Someone started telling lewd jokes and we all took it up, the jokes becoming more crude and hilarious until if one of us had held up a finger, we would have fallen off our deck-chairs.

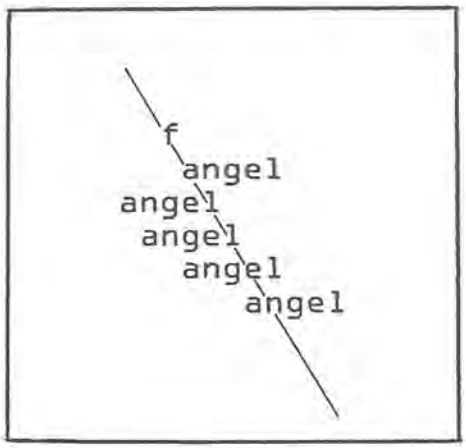
In a belly-ache silence I noticed Squirrel on the other side of the fire. She must have been there for a long time without any of us knowing. On this special night she wore a satin bed jacket and cut-off jeans. Her hair was loose, magnificent, copper coloured. Her jewellery was familiar to me: the coral necklace, the lapis earrings, a clutch of silver bangles. It wasn't that she was so far away. Maybe it was the best place to be. We were howling with smoke in our eyes. It didn't reach her.

The next morning my group broke camp. The packing done, the last billy boiled, we began our farewells. Squirrel took me aside. She stood near the orange station wagon clutching Biddie, her daughter, rocking backwards and forwards. She recounted her plans about closing up the business, about the endless horizons of travel. Her words began to pick up speed, go wild, and in the middle of it she laughed, "I'm raving, aren't I? I'm raving on." I kissed her. "Don't lose touch."

We drove back to town, and left them there.

She would return in secret from India. Give up Biddie and Brodie. Eating, sleeping. Find the hose that is attached to the exhaust, turn the motor on. She'd try it first on the Great Ocean Road. Just crash the car. Alone. Driving.

I have a letter I've never opened. It was written to Squirrel while she was at Poona and returned to me after her death. Several times while I've been writing this story, I've gone to the place where it's kept, and taken it out. Studied my handwriting, eight years old. The address. Her name. Then I put it away, and go on writing.



Ruth Cowen

DON CHARLWOOD

Road Back

Heading toward Melbourne in rain after Jim's funeral I pulled up at Casterton for petrol. The town has changed very little. I went to the garage by the bridge—one of those places inundated every few decades by Glenelg floods. A young woman came out to the pump. As I looked at the river, I said, "I remember when the bridge was opened by the governor."

She looked at me as if I might have known the Hentys. "How long ago was *that*?"

"Fifty years."

She is about as old, I thought, as our partners were. I said, "While the governor was here we had a debutante set in the new Town Hall—danced the Parma Waltz."

"You lived here?"

"In Nareen."

"Fraser's country."

"Not then—Lanes had Nareen station."

Each week Jim and I drove down twenty miles to Casterton to practise the dance and the promenade. Our partners were mostly Casterton girls, eighteen and nineteen year olds. They curtsied to Lord and Lady Huntingfield, we bowed. By now, I supposed, their children would be middle-aged. I remembered Hardy:

These market-dames, mid-aged, with lips thin-drawn,
  And tissues sere,
Are they the ones we loved in years agone,
  And courted here?

Casterton was a lively town even in my paternal grandfather's day. He called there often—a commercial traveller for Lewis & Whitty—taking his tails and pumps with him. After a ball in the 'nineties he wrote: "I danced nearly every dance and was flying through Sir Roger at 5 in the morning."

I shall go, I thought, through Nareen instead of straight to Coleraine. So I drove up out of the valley and headed through Wando Vale, past the tennis courts where Jim and I played first doubles pair for Nareen on summer Saturdays, then made speeches of thanks to local matrons over tables of cream cakes and urns of tea. Year after year we stayed on to dance in the hall with their lissom daughters.

They must forget, forget! They cannot know
  What once they were,
Or memory would transfigure them, and show
  Them always fair.

Pigeon Ponds was much the same; Konongwootong, Chetwynd, Harrow. Father Ryan, tie holding up his creams, was the wit of Harrow in those days.

In a place of giant redgums I passed the *Warrock* turn-off and came to the Brimboal corner. Years before our time there was a Brimboal pub. A bullock driver, for a bet, had shouted orders from the bar to his team outside and had turned them completely around. Or so it was said. And Jim's father sometimes mentioned 'Poor Jack' someone from Nareen who had spent his honeymoon at Brimboal. Only the trees were unchanged.

I came into Nareen at the school end. I say 'came into' as if it were a town; in reality it is a district. The school is a couple of miles across country from the post office and hall and tennis courts; homesteads are scattered on hills and in valleys for miles about. Lucy ran the post office in our time, in fact, ran us all from her switchboard. She knew what each of us was about and what we ought to do—marry the girl, agree to play mixed doubles with someone impossible, let the brute get his own dinner. The mail came from Coleraine by a car still called 'the coach'.

I knew the post office had been gone many years, its building demolished, even the bluestone section. No verandah rail there now to hitch a horse to while buying twopenny stamps. But I wasn't prepared for the school to be gone. I knew it was no longer in use, but thought it was to be retained in the hope of a new influx of children. Only the sheltershed stood in the rain. The fence was still there. Percy, our rabbiter, sometimes leaned on it at lunchtimes and entertained the kids with the names of his dogs: Barney Boo, Dr. Willie Roper, Adolphus Bannockburn Ree, Ipsy Iley Oh. Percy dead many years; the kids mostly gone away, or grown to stout affluence. I hadn't seen any of them at the funeral. It had been Jim's school. It was as if it had died, too.

I came into our long, straight road, down the lovely

Chetwynd valley and found emptiness. There were five homesteads along its two miles still, but only one permanently occupied. It was as if new Highland Clearances had swept away the population. At *Burnside*, where we had lived, I pulled up at the gate and looked at the house and the woolshed.

I had first gone there in 1934, a willing refugee from the Depression. I had left Frankston High in 'thirty-two, in my Leaving year, to take a fifteen-shilling a week job at Austin's Estate Agency and Market in Frankston's main street. I had links with the building: it had been built by my grandfather. My mother had been born there in '86. It had been called *Glenevis House* in those days. I worked in Austin's office there for nearly a year. Near my eighteenth birthday, when my wage was soon to go to twenty-two and six a week, I began training a junior as my replacement. I could find nothing in the city; it was a place haunted by spectres of men who resented the young. Not long before this, Albert Jacka, VC, MC and Bar, former mayor of St. Kilda, had died at thirty-nine; an appeal had been made to provide for his widow and children. It was like that even for heroes.

I went to Nareen at first for a holiday. Cousins of my mother lived there; I had never previously met them. Jim was their only son. I fell in love with the place and its surroundings and Nareen life. When they invited me back 'to help with the shearing and harvesting' of '34, I was undone; I fled from the city. I imagined, too, that I would learn to write during the long, quiet evenings. To my parents' dismay I stayed over seven years.

The Depression was an absurd time to expect to earn money from writing. And how did one learn the craft? I knew no adviser. I began keeping notes on places and people and country life; I selected books from Drinkwater's *Outline of Literature* and had them sent up by the State Library's remarkable lending service. I imitated each new author: Stevenson, Hardy, Borrow, Dickens, Ibanez; for a couple of weeks I even aped Tolstoy. I did a correspondence course in short story writing with the London School of Journalism. It took three months for my finished exercises to come back to *Burnside*, but I began to sell a few stories at three guineas each—stories so dissatisfying that I took refuge in a pseudonymn. I became 'Nareen Correspondent' for the Hamilton Spectator, which paid a ha'penny a line, the Coleraine Albion and the Casterton News, which couldn't afford to pay anything. I walked long distances on heavy Sabbath afternoons, taking my camera along the deep valley of the Wando, photographing scenes that sometimes the Weekly Times published and, less often, Walkabout. I passed Leaving English—an end to my formal education. The examination was held in the Church of England hall in Casterton, next to the vicarage where W. Macmahon Ball was born, a man whose *Letters from Overseas*, broadcast by the ABC, began to have profound effect on me as Hitler's power grew. Years later, when I came to know him, I told him that he more than anyone had convinced me that we were left with no option but to go to war against Nazism.

Out of doors I was the Western District's least proficient jackeroo, one given to long, reflective pauses as I sought words and phrases; I even jotted impressions as we stooked under summer sun, or between picking up fleeces in the vibrating woolshed. After milking, as I turned the handle of the separator, I read from a stack of Blackwood's Magazines, copies that had been sold off secondhand by the Athenaeum Library to an aunt in far-off Melbourne. I tried a long story for Blackwood's. It came back accompanied by a polite, faintly puzzled letter. Yet it was the notes I assiduously kept that brought me to Blackwood's years later and provided material for a dozen tales.

My parents viewed my *Burnside* life with despair. I could scarcely blame them. I was only faintly conscious of the rigors of the Depression. I even went with our cousins to concerts in Hamilton and Melbourne: Austral and Amadio; Pinza and Rethberg; the Budapest String Quartet; Menuhin. But I carried a burden of guilt. I knew that my proper place was in a city office and on a daily train from Frankston. Then Munich came.

During the dipping of 1938 we came in one day to hear Macmahon Ball speaking:

> . . . a number of people here in England, who are usually well-informed, believe that Germany will take the same sort of action against Poland next year as she has just taken so successfully against Czechoslovakia. . . . An increasing number of ordinary Englishmen are now asking themselves very anxiously what is the point, if any, at which Britain and France will say 'Thus far and no further.'*

I suppose Jim and I were fairly typical products of 'decent', 'respectable' upbringings, as used to be said. We were obedient to authority, we knew our duty, we were good sons of Empire, we honoured the Flag, served the King, cheerfully obeyed our parents, teachers and the Law; we asked few questions. But our boyhood had also been spent in the shadow of the 'war to end war'; we had read its books and spoken to returned Diggers. We shrank from bayonet and butt and trenches and barbed wire and dismembered men; we shuddered inwardly as Hitler promised more of such things to his serried, helmeted ranks on our cinema screens. But it wasn't until France fell and 'the Mother Country', 'the Homeland', 'the Old Country' stood alone that we joined up.

If 'Mac' Ball had alerted us to what lay ahead, it was Jim who decided his and my future. I remember the night well. We had driven home from a dance at *Barrama* woolshed. As we closed the garage doors

he said, without preliminaries, "I think I'll try for pilot training."

I had no real interest in aeroplanes; I was not even mechanically inclined, but for years I had been interested in the means by which explorers found their way.

"I'll try for navigator," I said. "Perhaps we could fly together."

"That would be great."

We were both accepted, 'fit all aircrew'; then everything went wrong. Jim was called up months ahead of me; his entire intake were made wireless operators; he was sent to Coastal Command in Cornwall. Although I gained my choice of navigator and tried to join him, I was sent to Bomber Command in Lincolnshire. We never really got back together either during the war or after.

For me the war ended the *Burnside* days; the old place itself lasted only twenty more years or so; then it lay empty. From time to time I went back and poked about the deserted house and the outbuildings, feeling familiar doorhandles, looking from the little room where I wrote; pushing into the stables and the woolshed. Everywhere, every time, I was conscious of silence and stillness and press of memories. I would walk back down the drive unable to stifle completely the hope that 'the coach' might have delivered to the mail box a cheque for a story. The name was on the box all those years: *Burnside.*

It was different as I drove from the funeral. I was no sooner on our road than I wanted to escape. Not a chimney showed smoke; there was no movement anywhere of a man; no *Burnside* on the gate. I didn't get out of the car. The house is gently decaying. I couldn't go up to it and doubt now that I ever shall.

* *Australian Archives (NSW Branch) SP369 Series 2 Box 1.*

GWENDA DAVEY

Modern Legends

A friend of mine told me a story recently about the virtues of computers, an unusual event, since most such yarns are about computers' failings. Before the introduction of computers, I was told, a well-known supermarket chain used to instruct its employees to add two cents to every customer's bill, making an extra profit of ten thousand dollars each week for the supermarket. I heard a second version of the tale not long afterwards, which added ten cents instead of two.

The story has a familiar ring. Folklorists would have no difficulty in recognising this tale as a modern legend, an apocryphal story which can appear in different versions although with the same central theme in many parts of the world.[1]

Everyone has grown up with their favorites. When I was a teenager growing up in Melbourne, there was a well-known 'ladies' lounge' which provided many useful services for women visiting the City—toilets, showers and a comfortable waiting room. Yet girls of my age were often forbidden to visit the lounge, since it was a 'well-known' haunt of white-slave traffickers. Mothers would warn of the perils of a quick visit to the loo—even the underground toilets in the main streets were preferable. The details about the fates that could befall a well-brought-up gel were many and lurid. The showers had revolving floors which whirled you in mid-shower to a dark room at the back (I never found out how the plumbing worked). Hands bearing hypodermic needles would appear through a sliding tile in the lavatory as you sat reading the Women's Weekly. In either case, you would never be seen or heard of again. (If you doubt either my memory or my truthfulness, ask any woman over thirty who grew up in Melbourne.)

Such is the stuff of modern legends, descendants of a long line of myths and cautionary tales extending back into recorded and prerecorded history. It is not hard to see the parallels between the 'ladies' lounge' and the Labyrinth with the Minotaur waiting to devour all who 'took the wrong turning'. Although the symbolism in this urban version of the primrose path is now obvious, the warnings were presented literally, and somebody always knew somebody (or somebody's relative) who had suffered the unspeakable fate, and it usually was unspoken, as the result of entering the lounge to buy aspirin.

Literality is an important part of the modern legend, sometimes also called an urban legend, although their locations do not need to be in the cities. Some classic legends such as the tale about the ghostly hitchhiker who turns out to have been killed on the road some years back, in fact need rural settings to add to the sense of isolation and fear. Nadia Tass and David Parker used, tongue in cheek, one of the classic modern legends in their film *Malcolm*. Once again, this story is set on a lonely road where a father and his child run out of petrol, and the father leaves the child to sleep while he walks back to a distant garage. All night the child hears a terrifying 'thump, thump' on the roof of the car, and later is rescued by the police who warn the child not to look back. Disobeying this instruction, the child sees his father's headless body thumping on the car roof, the murderer being a maniac escaped from a nearby criminal asylum. In the film, the story is presented to Malcolm as a true account of why his boarder is so unpleasant—a deprived childhood *par excellence*, as it were. Fortunately the literal Malcolm is unperturbed, and being more concerned as always with problem solving than with human emotions, he asks whether "the head was put back on again for the funeral."

The instruction 'not to look back' is a clear reminder of the Biblical story about Lot's Wife, and the classic Greek legend of Orpheus and Euridyce. Disobeying the instruction not to look back, Orpheus fails in his efforts to rescue his love from the Underworld. Yet modern legends involve more than simple morals about the virtue of obedience, or chastity, and they are more than ghost stories. Despite the current unfashionability of any kind of functionalism in folklore as in other social sciences, it is impossible not to wonder why certain persistent tales are told, whether fairy stories, yarns and anecdotes, or modern legends. I believe that most folklore has a number of serious purposes related to human beings' basic

preoccupations. These can be as simple as amusing a child or one's fellows through a nursery rhyme, a joke or a yarn, or as complex as agonising about life's cruelties and injustices through a folktale such as *The Little Mermaid*, who was allowed to exchange her tail for a human's feet—which burnt like red-hot knives with every step. Such a story might be seen as a warning to keep to one's appointed place in society, and as a reflection of fears about consequences if one did not. I am sure that my lifelong hatred of injustice has a lot to do with the Little Mermaid!

Many modern legends together with other forms of folklore[2] seem to reflect people's concerns about social change. The passing of the corner grocery store and the neighbourhood fish and chip shop in favour of multinational supermarkets or fast food outlets has produced modern legends such as the 'Kentucky fried rat', or the 'mouse in the Coca Cola', with many variations. And once again, everyone 'knows someone' who has at some time, received something unspeakable in their package of 'fast food'.

Such legends, like many jokes, are international. Bill Scott told the 1986 National Folklore Conference in Sydney about an acquaintance who told him the story of the 'choking Doberman' as having happened to a guard dog owned by his neighbour. Unfortunately, as Scott pointed out, not only had Jan Brunvand published a book of modern legends under that title in America in 1984,[3] but Scott also knew of other Australian versions of the story, in which, essentially, the Doberman chokes on the fingers (etc.) he had bitten off the burglar's hand. Bill Scott also spoke about another legend which he had collected in Australia some years previously and which appeared in the Brisbane Courier Mail in 1986, allegedly about a happening in New York; the same story also appeared in the West German press. The media are great spreaders of modern legends, which frequently appear as fact. I have wondered sometimes whether young reporters are led up these garden paths by older professionals, the journalists' version of sending the apprentice for a left-handed screw-driver or a can of striped paint. Nevertheless they do appear, making it hard to argue with those who believe print is law. I have had some difficulty convincing students that the 'baby in the oven' is a modern legend, perhaps derivative of *Hansel and Gretel*, because they 'read it in the newspaper'. Yet the same story has appeared all over the contemporary world, including Africa.

The 'baby in the oven' (microwave or otherwise) has numerous variants, like all good folklore, and sometimes the baby is put there by baby-sitters who are 'on drugs' such as LSD. Here social fears of several kinds are at work. The microwave oven itself represents modern technology using 'radiation' about which many people (including me!) are still somewhat apprehensive. The fear that those close to us might have dangerous encounters with drugs is very widespread, as is the feeling of powerlessness many people have about the spread of the drug culture. Baby-sitters, or at least strangers hired to act as baby-sitters, are a recent change in social arrangements, brought about (for example) by the decline of the extended family and increased mobility. All these phenomena produce anxiety—and modern legends.

Even newer than the microwave oven is another piece of modern technology generically known as the 'Commander telephone system'. This is a complex system of inter-office telephones offering many admirable functions. These are fine, when you know how to work them. One of the system's functions is to search for someone to answer the call by ringing each extension only a limited number of times and then switching to another extension. The relevant modern legend describes an elderly woman who installed such a system in her house, only to run exhaustedly and unsuccessfully from one ringing station to another, to eventually collapse and die from a heart attack. Having wrestled with such systems myself, she has my sympathy. Bring back the horse . . .

A particularly gory tale common in Australia refers to razor blades being surreptitiously inserted into water slides. Could this legend be circulated by unsuccessful tenderers for these popular and lucrative leisure items, or by residents who have unsuccessfully taken legal action against the noise? (Now I know the latter is true; I read it in the paper.) Once again, it is more likely that the story is a folkloric response to the overwhelming and somewhat fearsome constructions the slides represent, or to the experience of sliding itself. Or perhaps it is the new, *per se*, being distrusted. Less blood-thirsty, though also vindictive is the legend which also is told sometimes in the form of a joke about an aggrieved husband who fills his wife's supposed lover's car with ready-mixed cement. Variations on this tale sometimes have the husband pouring cement into his own car—an expensive gift for him from his wife, just delivered by the salesman who was mistaken for the lover. Here the traditional theme of jealousy combines with the elaborate technology of the giant cement-mixer, the agent of retribution. Cement itself can touch many fears, from its widespread use in popular culture and crime fiction as a means of disposing of unwanted bodies via 'cement shoes', criminal style. This again is a modern version of a traditional means of disposing of troublesome wives, mistresses and nuns by walling them up. (Only women?)

Immigration and racism have produced some modern legends in Australia, for example those concerning the alleged handouts the government gives to newly arriving refugees, usually Vietnamese. Once again, the stories are highly specific. $8000 is a popular figure, and a 'new car' is commonly mentioned. Some time ago I did some detailed checking with immigration and welfare bodies; the reality was that

an interest-free loan of $600 was available.

Modern legends are different from jokes, yarns or tall stories in that the tellers believe them to be true, and to have 'definitely happened', usually to someone known to someone they know, the FOAF or 'friend of a friend', as one English folklorist described it. The modern legend also contains some of the classic themes or motifs common to traditional mythology and folklore such as sudden reversal of fortune, overweening ambition, taboos, sex and death, unnatural cruelty, deceptions, chance and fate and 'wise and unwise conduct'.[5]

The same legends can be widespread throughout the world or specific to a particular place. Alternatively, a classic story can have a local version. In September, 1987, the Melbourne Age printed the following report, a story which I have heard a number of times as having happened in Australia.

> A burglar in Treviso, Italy, stole a family's car but returned it the next day with a note of apology and invited the family of four to dine at his expense at a smart restaurant. While they were at dinner, he burgled their home. (Age, *Odd Spot*, 22/9/87)

Monash University in Melbourne has many versions of classic hitchhiking legends. Given that hitchhiking is institutionalised at Monash, with special pick-up points around the campus, it is hardly surprising. Dr. Enid Neal who collected the Monash legends reported that the most common variant related to the girl student, alone in her car at night, who gave a lift to 'a little old lady'. After noticing something suspicious such as her passenger's hairy wrists, the girl escapes—later to find a murder weapon hidden in her car.[6] Like the classic 'vanishing hitchhiker' legend, the tale warns against the practice of hitchhiking, both as giver and as receiver.

My undergraduate days at Melbourne University had many student legends about charismatic professors. Some *were* true (I was there) such as those about Professor Ian Maxwell, resplendent in old army shorts and hiking boots reciting Rabbie Burns. Others were apocryphal, such as the legend about the Professor of Physiology (who shall be unnamed, although his name was always given) who delighted in discomforting priggish students (alas, usually cast as female) in his lectures on human reproduction. During a lengthy and titillating account of the respective size of the male organ in different parts of the world (India always won, in my day), he is said to have addressed a disgusted student as she walked out of the lecture, "Now don't be in such a hurry, madam, the boat to India doesn't leave until next week".* The reference to the boat dates the legend, as do the attitudes. But I guarantee that today's campuses have their equivalent.

* *This story also appears in print about lectures on sex given in Australia by the late Dr. Norman Haire. With him the country was Africa and he showed slides; at this point the walk-out began. [Ed.].*

Gwenda Davey is co-editing The Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore. *She lives in Melbourne and contributes regularly to folklore journals.*

1. Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* (New York, 1981).
2. E.g. Elli Kongas Maranda, *Folklore and cultural change: Lau riddles of modernisation*, pp. 207-220 in R. Dorson (ed.), *Folklore in the Modern World* (The Hague, 1978).
3. Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Choking Doberman* (New York, 1984).
4. Bill Scott, *Some relatively neglected aspects of Australian folklore*, pp. 215-237 in Keith Hollinshead (ed.), *The Possum Stirs . . .*', Proceedings of the 2nd National Folklore Conference, Kuring-Gai College of Advanced Education, 1986.
5. Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk Literature* (Copenhagen, 1955).
6. Enid Neal, *Folktale at Monash University*, pp. 37-38 in J. Ramshaw (ed.), *Folklore in Australia*, Proceedings of the 1st National Folklore Conference, Institute of Early Childhood Development (Melbourne CAE, 1984).

GRAHAM SEAL

Septic Tanks Down Under

America and Americans in Australian Folklore

Australians have long held contradictory attitudes towards America and Americans. Officially, the Americans have been our allies, trading partners and cultural cousins; unofficially they are 'Yanks', with whom we maintain an ongoing love-hate relationship. We admire America for being a frontier, independent society like our own, a breakaway from the apron-strings of Empire; at the same time we are appalled by the seemingly cloying patriotism, affluence, brashness and apparent insensitivity to small friends displayed by Americans in various social configurations from political to tourist.

This ambivalence is reflected and reinforced in folklore: on the one hand we have a considerable body of expression concerned to denigrate Americans in one or a number of ways; on the other we have continually taken into Australian folk speech American linguistic items of all kinds—'gas', 'buck', 'guy', 'Catch-22', to mention only a few. This continuing contradiction between the official and the unofficial facets of our relationship with the USA, together with a strong, if unremarked, tension within our unofficial or folk expressions can be traced to at least the early years of this century.

In 1917, for example, it was widely believed (and still is) that the brilliant middleweight and heavyweight fighter from Maitland (NSW), Les Darcy, was poisoned in Memphis, Tennessee, because the Americans feared his skill in the ring. As the often-collected folk parody of the song 'Way Down in Tennessee' says in one of its numerous versions:

> . . . And he [Les] gave up hope
> When he got that dope
> Way down in Tennessee . . .

In 1932, many Australians were convinced that the great racehorse, Phar Lap had somehow been nobbled by the Americans when the twice-winner of the Melbourne Cup died in California. Also during the depression years, largely through the influence of the cinema industry, together with radio and the prominence given to American 'country' recordings on airplay lists, American terms like 'bum' (in the American sense of 'hobo'—'swagman'/'swaggie' or 'bagman' being the Australian equivalents) entered Australian folk speech and song. "The Dying Bagman", a well-known song from this period, refers to 'Philadelphia', 'Box-Car Harry' and 'Lucky' along with Australian terms like 'rort', 'whaler' and so on.

All this folk activity took place in a largely notional context, very few Australians having had direct contact with Americans. The war in the Pacific dramatically would fill this vacuum. Between the fall of Singapore in February, 1942, and the closure of the United States naval base at Perth in October, 1945, hundreds of thousands of American troops 'invaded' Australia. While the Americans were allies and so generally greeted with friendliness and hospitality, certain tensions rapidly developed that were eloquently expressed in some of the folk song and verse of the period. It could be argued, in fact, that our continuing ambivalent attitudes towards Americans were focused and solidified through the folk expressions generated by this wartime contact with Americans.

Submerged suspicions about Americans surfaced almost from the very first days of the G.I. presence. The efficient, glowingly healthy (their teeth were far better than those of Australians) and amazingly self-confident ('cocky' to Australians) 'Yanks' burst onto a sleepy nation still suffering chronic colonial cringe. American technology—of death and pleasure—complimented its troops (mostly male) in sophistication, sheen and finish. The Yanks had machines to do just about everything and an accompanying cultural baggage of popular music, film and dance that increased their cargo-cult impact. The G.I.s were better fed, better dressed, better paid and, Australian males immediately feared, better catches than their 'Aussie' equivalents. They also had considerable novelty value for Australian women, as this Women's Royal Australian Naval Service ditty indicates:

> The Russians took Kharkov and Kostov
> The British took Tripoli
> The Aussie's took Buna and Bona
> The Yanks took the T&G.*

One of the most persistent themes of World War Two Australian folklore about Americans is sexual jealousy, often mingled with concern, equally male, of fighting prowess. The following songs are both parodies of 'The Marine Hymn'. The first is a Melbourne text of 'The Digger's Hymn', which also exists in a Perth version:

From the streets of Melbourne city
To St Kilda by the sea
The Aussie girls are showing us
How silly they can be.
In the good old days, before the war
The Aussie girls were gay
But now they've gone completely mad
On the TWIRPS from U.S.A.
With their dashing Yankie accent
And their money flying free
They have captured all the hearts but those
Who have used their eyes to see
Now when this war is over
And the Yankie we no more see
They'll prefer an Aussie dustman
To the glamorous Marine
Here's to the girls who have been true
To the boys of the Southern Cross
They have helped the brave to see it thru'
It will never cost a loss
But the girls who have skinned the digger
For the glamour and the swank
When all this strife is finished
It's the Aussie they have to thank.

A shorter but no less effective parody of the same piece of American military musicology makes much the same point, if more scatologically:

From the 'Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli'
There's a line of Yankee bullshit that means fuck-all to me.
They think they run Australia, but they couldn't run latrines,
They're a bunch of bullshit artists, the United States Marines.

A similar point of view is expressed in this parody, to the tune of 'The Shrine of St Cecilia', along with a concern for the aftermath of sexual liaisons that often features in this material:

The Yankees came over,
Full of glamour and wit,
Some wore silver buttons,
And their suits a perfect fit,
The girls fell for glamour,
But some day they'll say
I wish I had an Aussie.

The Yankees came over,
Marched round the town like kings
Some had side-levers,
On their hands were sparkling rings,
The girls fell so heavily!
But some day they'll say—
I wish I had an Aussie.

At night at eventide,
And in the evening, after dark,
They take a taxi ride,
And go loving in the Park,
When the war is over,
And the Yanks have sailed away,
The girls will always find,
That it's the women that have to pay.
And when they're sad and lonely,
They'll sit, and sigh and say—
I wish I had an Aussie.

Parody, that essential device of folkloric creation and re-creation, was also employed in some other folk expressions of the period. Not surprisingly, like the WRANS ditty quoted above, a good deal of this material reflected the woman's point of view—a distinct change from the totally male orientation of much Anglo-Celtic Australian folksong that has come to represent the typical in our folklore. To the tune of the popular song "When They Sound the Last All-Clear", the theme of sexual desertion and its long-term consequences is aired again:

When they send the last Yank home
How lonely some women will be
When they turn up the lights
There'll be dark, lonely nights
All those good times a memory

Ever more they'll be alone
Those women and Aussies would own
All they'll have is their clothes
And a kid who talks through its nose
When they send the last Yank home.

It seems that many of the Americans were as keen to return home as were some Australians to see them on their way. This American folk view of Australia indicates a considerable degree of disenchantment with the delights of being 'down under':

SOMEWHERE IN AUSTRALIA
By a "Yank"

Somewhere in Australia, the sun is like a curse
And each long day is followed by another slightly worse
Where the brick red dust blows thicker than the shifting desert sand
And haggard men are dreaming of their greener fairer land.

Somewhere in Australia, where a woman's never seen
Where the skies are never cloudy and the grass is never green
Where the dingoes, nightly howling, rob a man of blessed sleep
Where there isn't any whisky and the beer is never cheap.

Somewhere in Australia where the nights are made for love
Where the moon is like a searchlight, and the Southern Cross above
Sparkles like a diamond in the balmy tropic night,
'Tis a shame such a waste of beauty when there is not a girl in sight.

Somewhere in Australia where the mail is always late
And a Christmas card in April is considered up to date
Where we never have a pay day, and we never have a cent
But we never miss the money 'cause we'd never get it spent.

Somewhere in Australia, where the ants and lizards play
And a hundred fresh mosquitos replace each one you slay
Just take me back to 'Frisco, let me hear the mission bell
For this God-forsaken outpost is a substitute for hell.

The poem provoked a female Australian response, the tone of which echoes the unofficial attitudes of Australians toward our powerful allies, then and since:

SOMEWHERE IN AUSTRALIA
Reply to a Yank by an Aussie lass

Somewhere in Australia where the Yankees are a curse,
If I wasn't such a lady I could think of something worse,
Where the Yankee hides are thicker than the brick red dust they scorn
And the baseball players howling wake the roosters in the dawn

Somewhere in Australia where a woman's never seen
With a Yank like you sad poet—what a mug you are old bean
Where the din of tin-canned music robs a girl of nightly sleep
And she wakes at early morning to the snorting of a jeep

Somewhere in Australia where the nights are made for love
Where a Yankee reeling homeward calls down curses from above,
Where you can't enjoy the music on a starry tropic night
For always round the corner there's a b------ Yank in sight

Somewhere in Australia, where the air-raid Sirens scream
And the Aussie girls are getting thin for the want of their ice-cream
Where you can't buy any chocolate since the Yankee horde has come
And you can't walk down the footpath without getting stuck on gum

Somewhere in Australia where the mails are always late
Where you cannot get your card on time 'cause Yankees mustn't wait
Where the picture shows are crowded out with Yankees pleasure bent
Who think the world was made for them—their dollar and their cent

Somewhere in Australia there's a Yank whose name is mud
And we'll never rest 'twixt heaven and earth until we get his blood
Oh take him back to Frisco, let him hear that mission bell
For despite the Japs and Tojo we can manage just as well.

When the 'Yanks' did go home, direct, large-scale contact ended. There were, though, ongoing consequences, as this parody of 'Count Your Blessings', mentions:

Count your children, count them one by one
Count your children, count them one by one
Count your children, count them one by one
And you will be surprised at what the Yanks have done.

A good deal of other folkloric material could be cited to underscore these points. But enough has been provided to indicate the depth and diversity of Australian folk antagonism towards America and Americans. After the war, the overt level of this antagonism subsided but persisted in the informal matrix of folk belief and expression. Strategic, trade and cultural connections continued to develop and strengthen in the years following the war. Officially, Australia and the USA were friends and allies. Unofficially, many of the same fears, suspicions and envies remained. The threat of sexual competition had

been removed but antagonisms towards American technology, mass media, strategic, political and even tourist activities persisted. So did an overall suspicion of what Australians popularly perceived the American 'character' to be: brash, bright, big and cocky.

During the Vietnam war years the folk term for American developed a rhyming slang variant—'septic tank', a term that vividly encapsulates our essential folk view that Americans are an unpleasant necessity. In the same period the subterranean folk attitudes towards America achieved an official alternative political status in the opposition to the war and Australia's involvement in it. The anti-war movement, like all such movements, generated its own propaganda, including lots of songs (the era of the 'protest song'). One of these songs, by Lyall Sayer, achieved not only currency within the anti-war movement but was also adopted by the Australian airforce in Vietnam, slightly amended for its circumstances. The song thus became a 'folk' song in the true sense of the term. "The F-111" neatly expressed the prevailing (as well as past and present) attitudes towards America in terms of the then-political imperatives of the anti-war movement. So the Vietnam pilots' version is worth quoting in full:

Well Sir Robert Menzies
Was walking down the street,
Thinkin' of our Air Force,
Which is mostly obsolete.
Our Canberra jet bomber
Is getting all this hell.
He'd better call old Uncle Sam
And see what he can sell.

CHORUS:

Oh, the F-111, it is a lovely plane.
It flies at twice the speed of sound
And scatters bombs like rain.
Its wings go back and forward.
It's the greatest thing around
A pity that it isn't safe
To take it off the ground.

Bob said to Uncle Sammy,
"We want to buy a plane,
To save our lovely country
From going down the drain.
We want to scare some nations,
So see what you can do."
The answer came, "Bob, buddy,
We've got just the thing for you."

CHORUS:

The order was two dozen
The planes they had to make.
And soon they had one ready
Its first flight for to take.
It whistled down the runway
With a dreadful roaring sound,
And then it broke up in little bits
And fell back to the ground.

CHORUS:

They sent six off to Vietnam
That country to defend.
To wipe out all the Vietcong
And cause the war to end.
But Ho Chi Min said, "Comrades,
Don't waste our precious shells.
These brand new planes the Yankees have
Will fall down by themselves."

CHORUS:

And when the planes are ready
And we will pay the fee,
We'll call Old Uncle Sammy
To make a delivery.
But I doubt if it will be much good
To him or you or I.
At the present rate of accident
We've only got a week's supply.

CHORUS:

Various slang terms for Americans are still common in the Australian vernacular ('Yank Tank' for large, petrol-guzzling cars, and the shortening of 'septic tank' to 'septic', for instance). The World War II song and verse quoted above, and much more like it, is still carried in the memories and the scrapbooks of many older Australians. Dark beliefs about the fates of Les Darcy and Phar Lap persist in the popular mythologies of our past. Folklore, though, is the realm of paradox and contradiction. Even while our official stance of accord is contradicted in our informal expressions, the same unofficial or folk process quietly continues to appropriate American terms. These continue widely to be spoken by Australians, helped along by American television, film and popular music. Despite almost half a century of ever-closer ties, the even more distant past continues to define our folk image of America: an admiration mingled with a deal of suspicion and not a little envy.

Graham Seal teaches at Curtin University.

* *The T&G building in Brisbane, one of General MacArthur's headquarters.*

The songs and verse in this article were collected by the author, 1979-1987, with the support of the Australian Folk Trust. They form part of a much larger project on the folksong and poetry of Australians at war, from the Boer War to Vietnam. The entire collection is currently housed in the Western Australian Folklore Archives, Centre for Australian Studies, Curtin University, Perth.

PHILIP BUTTERSS

The Less Rebellious Frank the Poet

When Marjorie Pizer published *Freedom on the Wallaby* in the early 1950s she wrote accurately that "little of [Frank the Poet's] work and no authentic account of his life have yet been discovered".[1] Since then important research by John Meredith and Rex Whalan, published as *Frank the Poet* (1979), rectifies both of the gaps mentioned by Pizer. They have conclusively identified Frank the Poet as Francis MacNamara who arrived on the *Eliza* in 1832; they have provided a considerable amount of information about his convict experience; and they have compiled a list of "Works of Francis MacNamara" which contains seventeen items. While Meredith and Whalan have gone a long way towards correcting a number of popular misapprehensions about the convict poet, a few remain. In the wake of John Meredith's postscript to the book (*Overland* 107) it is an appropriate time to address some persistent and attractive but unjustifiable beliefs about Frank the Poet, particularly a tendency to present him as a more politically admirable figure, and his work as more consistently oppositional, than the evidence allows.

There is no doubt that Frank the Poet was a strong supporter of the Irish struggle against English domination. In the well known "Epigram of Introduction" he puts his Irishness next to his opposition to tyrants.[2] His "For the Company Underground" (41-42) uses a reference to Daniel O'Connell, leader of the movement for Catholic emancipation, to express his determination not to work in the Australian Agricultural Company's mines at Newcastle. And most importantly "Labouring with the Hoe" refers to transportation from Ireland in terms from the discourse of Irish nationalism:

> I was convicted by the laws
> Of England's hostile crown,
> Conveyed across those swelling seas
> In slavery's fetters bound. (39)

But Meredith and Whalan go too far, arguing that although MacNamara was convicted of larceny for stealing a plaid, this may not have been the true reason for his transportation. In his Overland article Meredith restates this position, writing that some lines in one of the poems suggest 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".[3] The poem concerned is "A Dialogue between Two Hibernians in Botany Bay" (51-53) which was published in the Sydney Gazette on 8 February 1840. Meredith and Whalan recount that when they first examined "this rather odd set of verses" they doubted that it was MacNamara's work. They continue:

> Closer study revealed that the apparently superficial verse might be a cleverly coded message intended for associates in the colony or back at home. Publication in the official Government organ of the colony would make circulation of the message an easy matter . . . members of a ribbon secret society were known to each other by certain secret signs and passwords which were frequently changed and some of the specimens of which were of a singularly absurd and ludicrous character.
>
> We felt that the poem may be a cryptogram, in which phrases following certain key words could be strung together to form a message. (53-54)

There are a number of obvious problems with this line of reasoning. It seems hardly credible that MacNamara would use the Sydney Gazette to communicate secretly with associates in the colony, let alone in Ireland. What were the messages and why use such an apparently unlikely vehicle? Meredith and Whalan are unable to show that there is a link between the twin facts that the poem is "odd" and that ribbon societies used passwords which were sometimes "ludicrous". And even if the poem could somehow demonstrate that Frank the Poet was a member of one of these organizations it could not show that this had anything to do with his transportation.

In any case there are other ways to read "A Dialogue between Two Hibernians in Botany Bay" although

these are much more mundane. It is a humorous conversation between two convicts, Darby who is soon to return to Ireland and Paddy who has just arrived in Botany Bay. A number of MacNamara's other extant poems are comic in intention. Martin Cash's account of his meeting with MacNamara describes Christmas celebrations involving "comic and sentimental singing . . . . and the famed Frank the Poet, who threw off a few extempore verses for the amusement of the company".[4] Nonsense poems and songs in a style similar to the "Dialogue" are still popular in Ireland today.

Meredith and Whalan's initial doubts about MacNamara's authorship may have sprung from the opening and closing segments of the poem. These passages express views which ostensibly oppose Irish resistance to English rule. Darby welcomes Paddy, his first cousin, and guesses that his relative has been transported for joining "the cursed White Boys". Paddy shows that this assessment is correct, blaming "Daniel O'Connell, the great Agitator", explaining that if he had kept away from his "seditious harangues" he would never have been sent to Botany Bay.

However, Darby and Paddy's meeting is followed by several verses which indicate that the poem is intended to be interpreted humorously rather than literally. Paddy gives a newcomer's view of life in the colony, full of distorted ideas about the way that most Irish convicts were treated, and exaggeratingly echoing local criticisms of Governor Bourke. He has heard that Darby had "immense wealth" and that "the Governor puts all his countrymen in berths". It underlines this point, stating that Bourke, like themselves "His first breath . . . drew in the bogs" and that "the English assail him with vociferations,/For putting his countrymen in situations./Places and offices of the greatest of trust".

Paddy turns to the voyage he has just completed and gives some examples of the exaggerated tales which he will tell the "ould people" at home if he ever returns, for example: "How black whales and sperm in droves gathered round us,/Spouting water on our decks, sufficient to drown us." He perhaps touches a more sober note promising to tell them "about iron gangs and road parties,/How famous the hulk is for chaining and gagging". The poem returns to humorous exaggerations with a list of messages which Paddy wishes Darby to give people in Ireland, for example:

> And likewise Darby, tell my sister Onagh,
> That I saw the big fish that swallowed up Jonah.
> Forget it not Darby, a fool can think of it,
> Says you, it is the same beast, wolfed the poor prophet.

It reverts to its original theme, with Paddy urging Darby, on his approaching return, to warn his compatriots against "Daniel O'Connell, the great agitator" who had brought Paddy's ruin. The preceding sections of the poem make it possible that an audience of Irish in Australia during the convict period could have detected a similar joking exaggeration in these verses:

> Tell the boys to desist from killing peelers and arson,
> But cheerfully pay the tithe proctor and parson;
> Why should they Darby, be left in the lurch,
> You know they're the head of the Protestant Church.
>
> To protect them, faith I'd spill my blood, every drop,
> And not only the tenth, but the half of my crop,
> I'd freely give them without hesitation,
> To free me from Botany and vile transportation.

Although to describe "A Dialogue between Two Hibernians in Botany Bay" as "a cryptogram" is impossible to justify, it may be that Meredith and Whalan were correct in recognizing that different audiences might interpret the poem in different ways. In the context of Frank the Poet's other work it is clear that the "Dialogue" may well not have been taken at face value, at least not by an Irish subculture in an English penal colony. For that audience the poem could operate as a piece of distinctively Irish humour. For the different audience that the poem would reach via the Sydney Gazette, it might serve to confirm stereotypical views of the Irish, and Gazette readers may have enjoyed the criticism of Daniel O'Connell and the White Boys in a more literal way.

A very similar process occurs in the treatment of the hero of the ballad "Bold Jack Donahoe". John Donahoe was sentenced to transportation for life after being found guilty in Dublin in April, 1824, on a charge of "intent to commit a felony". In *The Wild Colonial Boy* (1982) Meredith suggests that "Records do not disclose the exact nature of the offence contemplated by Donahoe, but it was possibly of a political nature".[5] His evidence for this is the fact that Donahoe had grown up in the turbulent years which followed the uprising of 1798, and also a reference in one Irish broadside to Donahoe's transportation "For being a bold United boy". The ballad describes (and has therefore been composed after) the bushranger's death in New South Wales; the reference shows Donahoe being appropriated to Irish nationalism rather than a fact about his conviction some years earlier. It is a variant of an originally Australian ballad with a complicated textual history which is discussed briefly below. As with Frank the Poet, it is of course likely that Donahoe's sympathies were with those fighting the English, but there is no evidence that this was related to the crime for which he was transported.

A related tendency is evident in the textual history

of the ballad by MacNamara called variously "The Convict's Arrival", "The Convict's Lament", "A Convict's Lament on the Death of Captain Logan", and, as is most common today, "Moreton Bay". It is essentially a description of the "excessive tyranny" at the secondary settlement at Moreton Bay and of the death of the Superintendent, Captain Logan, at the hands of "a native black". The ending of the ballad is disappointingly passive for those eager for "Irish revolutionary folk-songs".[6]

It is of course impossible to find an "original" version of "The Convict's Arrival". Nevertheless there are three relatively early texts which may preserve a form of the poem that was current at least towards the end of last century (31-35). Jack Bradshaw first printed a version in about 1899. James Scott got hold of a manuscript of the poem in Queensland in 1916 which Meredith and Whalan plausibly suggest may be linked to the Bradshaw text (35). The third version is in a manuscript written by Jeremiah Shea which Meredith and Whalan note "is thought to have been written down about 1870" and which they describe as "garbled and incoherent in part" (34). Importantly, there are only minor variations in the wording of the last eight lines in these three texts. Although Meredith and Whalan are probably correct to give pride of place to the Bradshaw text, the Scott manuscript has been more influential since the "folk revival" and its final ten lines are as follows:

But a native black who lay in ambush,
Gave this monster his fatal wound.

Now I've got once more to cross the ocean,
And leave this place called Moreton Bay,
Where many a man from downright starvation
Lies mouldering now beneath the clay.
Fellow prisoners be exhilarated,
Your former sufferings you will not mind,
For it's when from bondage you are extricated,
You'll leave those tyrants far behind.

Like the Bradshaw and Shea versions, the convict is soon to leave Australia, the Shea text having earlier explained "But now, thank God my sentence is terminated". The death of Logan immediately precedes the last eight lines in the Scott and Bradshaw texts but it is without doubt logically separate from them as it is in the Shea version where it occurs several stanzas earlier. In all three versions it seems clear that the speaker is telling his fellow prisoners to "be exhilarated" because when their sentences expire they too will be able to leave their guards far behind and will gradually forget their sufferings.

This rather weak (but perhaps authorial) consolation did not last. Geoffrey Ingleton reprinted the Scott version in *True Patriot's All* (1952) with minor word changes in the body of the text but with the omission of four lines. Ingleton's last six lines are:

But a native black, who lay in ambush,
Gave this monster his fatal wound.
Fellow prisoners be exhilarated;
Your former sufferings you will not mind,
For it's when from bondage you are extricated,
You'll leave such tyrants far behind![7]

This revision of course alters the meaning in a specific way. The killing of Logan is placed next to the final exhortation and Ingleton's punctuation separates the convicts' exhilaration from the last three lines which relate to the expiry of their sentences. Logan's death now seems to be at least part of the reason that the speaker's fellow prisoners should be overjoyed.

The next step in the ballad's textual history is the emergence of two interesting singer's versions. One was reconstructed by some of the revivalists and was to become widely known. John Manifold, in *Who Wrote the Ballads?* (1964), says that it is "a composite . . . a version put together from fragments recalled by Frank Hardy, Warren Bowden, Bill Scott, Geoff Wills, Charles Murdoch and myself".[8] In the *Penguin Australian Songbook* (1964) the list of assistants is shortened to Warren Bowden and Bill Scott, and Manifold acknowledges that they took "a few essential lines from the Bradshaw text".[9] The resulting version finishes:

Till a native black lying there in ambush did give
our tyrant his mortal stroke,
My fellow prisoners, be exhilarated that all such
monsters such a death may find!
And when from bondage we are liberated our
former sufferings shall fade from mind.[10]

It is here not just the punctuation which suggests that the prisoners are exhilarated at the death of Logan. A version collected from the singing of Simon MacDonald in 1960 (37-38) has lines which are very similar to the composite text and shows that it was close to a current oral version.

Manifold observes that "The oral versions are far more regular in scansion than the others—due to being sung, not recited—and are compressed into a more dramatic brevity. . . . The other quality of the oral versions is a slightly diminished Irishness of vocabulary and syntax". He concludes that the Scott and Bradshaw versions are closer to "the putative 'original' ".[11] If the Bradshaw, Scott and Shea texts are indeed closer to MacNamara's own words, then both singers and editors have felt a need to make the ballad more concerned with physical resistance to the convict system than MacNamara himself did.

Russel Ward's *The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads* (1964) takes this process one step further. In the introduction he notes that he has "frequently combined elements from various sources to make a 'composite' version when to do so makes for greater

completeness or dramatic force".[12] In Ward's version the extrication from bondage is no longer the expiry of the convicts' sentence. His use of a colon suggests a causal link between the death of "all such monsters" and freedom. The ballad now implies that violent resistance to the system leads to freedom and a gradual forgetting of sufferings:

> But a native black, who lay in ambush,
> Gave this monster his fatal wound.
> My fellow-prisoners, be exhilarated—
> That all such monsters such a death may find:
> For it's when from bondage we are extricated,
> Our former sufferings will fade from mind.[13]

Again there is no doubt that MacNamara's poetry did often praise resistance. In particular "The Seizure of the Cyprus Brig in Recherche Bay", "A Convict's Tour to Hell" and "The Ballad of Martin Cash" celebrate the act of taking up arms against the state's coercive apparatus. "The Convict's Arrival" itself is a powerful evocation of the convict system's violence and it is strongly critical of that violence. But in the versions apparently closest to MacNamara, it stops a long way short of advocating a violent response to coercion. Humphrey McQueen has gone so far as to find in the concluding lines of "The Convict's Arrival" "the expectant acceptance of those who made their prosperous way".[14]

In one way, of course, there is no reason to criticize these re-interpretations. Ward notes in his introduction "This, after all, is what folk-singers do every time they sing"[15] and the two singers' versions prove this. The resultant song probably has "greater dramatic force" and it certainly embodies a more attractive political position and may well be more enjoyable for singers and their audience. However, a transformation such as this, like the suggestion that MacNamara was transported for a political offence, helps to create a Frank the Poet whose work was more consistently oppositional than the historical figure's.

Another area which needs some review is the question of authorship. Because MacNamara is the only known composer of ballads during the convict period there has been a strong tendency to credit him with authorship. Virtually every anonymous convict ballad has been attributed to him. The grounds for some of these ascriptions are very shaky.

Fifteen of the seventeen items which Meredith and Whalan identify as "Works of Frank the Poet" are poems. They have excluded some pieces such as "Bold Donahoe" and "Johnny Troy" which had been tentatively linked with MacNamara elsewhere but without strong evidence.[16] Most of the pieces which Meredith and Whalan ascribe to Frank the Poet seem likely, although a few are open to question. "The Ballad of Martin Cash" cannot be regarded as definitely MacNamara's although its tentative inclusion is probably justified. As Meredith and Whalan note, there is no documented evidence attributing the ballad to MacNamara but they point to a personal acquaintance between the two convicts and suggest that the style is Frank the Poet's. On the other hand, there seems to be no justification for Meredith and Whalan's suggestion that "Mcquade's Curse" is the work of Frank the Poet.

The much more important piece, "Bold Jack Donahoe", is also attributed to MacNamara in both *Frank the Poet* and Meredith's recent postscript. This ballad's importance derives partly from the fact that it must have been one of the most popular Australian ballads, judging from the number of times it has been collected in various forms.[17] It is also important because it has long been regarded as "a treason song". There is a strong tradition that the singing of "Bold Jack Donahoe" was officially banned by the colonial government. Though there is no documentary proof that such a law was ever passed, Ward suggests that unofficial censorship may have continued as late as the 1890s. He quotes an old bushman who referred to convict and bushranger songs as "treason songs" and claimed to remember their being suppressed by the police.[18] The commentary on a letter from Governor Darling to Sir George Murray in the *Historical Records of Australia* suggests that "as ["Bold Jack Donahoe"] had an evil influence, its singing was prohibited in any public house on pain of loss of licence".[19]

A ballad about Donahoe is attributed to Frank the Poet in *Captain Stormalong, the Bushranger*, a novel written by John Shaw in the 1890s. In *The Wild Colonial Boy* Meredith suggests that the ascription may be "based upon, or inspired by orally circulating legends of the period". In that book Meredith argues that because Shaw does not quote from the ballad it is not possible to identify which of the known Donahoe ballads this is.[20] However, in other parts of the novel Shaw does quote lines from a ballad about Donahoe:

> There's a pill of lead as'll do you good,
> Cried Bold Jack Donahoe.
>
> For the thunderin' traps are on my tracks
> Says bold Jack Donahoe. (31)

It is quite possible that Shaw regarded or was portraying Frank the Poet as the author of these lines. They do not belong to any of the extant Donahoe ballads.

In *Frank the Poet*, Meredith and Whalan attribute a particular text of "Bold Jack Donahoe" to MacNamara. The only evidence for their ascription is the fact that this particular version rhymes "late" with "retreat". Meredith suggests that "Either Frank

the Poet spoke with a broad brogue, or wished his readers to do so" and he points to MacNamara's rhyming of "please" with "days" (31). But the presence of this rhyme in the Donahoe ballad can be used to argue nothing more concrete than an Irish influence which could easily be the result of transmission rather than composition. Even if it could be shown to be the latter it would not adequately identify MacNamara.

In fact it looks likely that the "late/retrate" rhyme was the result of transmission although this cannot be proved conclusively. The version which Meredith and Whalan attribute to MacNamara is one of three clearly related groups of ballads about Donahoe in *The Wild Colonial Boy*. It seems very likely that these groups (3, 4 and 5) are variants of the one ballad.[21] It would be necessary to go into considerable detail to discuss in full the relationship between the groups. Briefly, group 5, which comprises a version of "Bold Jack Donahoe" published by A.B. Paterson, is the fullest version. It tells of Donahoe's career and last stand. Groups 3 and 4 have a number of elements from 5, group 3 focusing on Donahoe's early career and group 4 on his last stand. The verse where "late" is rhymed with "retrate" occurs in group 4:

> "Oh no," says cowardly Walmsley, "Your laws
> we'll not fulfil,
> You'll see there's eight or ten of them advancing
> on yon hill.
> If it comes to an engagement, you'll rue it when
> too late,
> So turn about and come with us—we'll form a quick
> retrate"[22]

It seems reasonably likely that this verse is an oral variant of an earlier version. Meredith's group 5, the Paterson version, finishes the corresponding verse with the lines:

> And if we wait we'll be too late, the battle we
> will rue."
> "Then begone from me, you cowardly dog," replied
> Jack Donahoe.[23]

The Paterson version may well represent an earlier text for two reasons. First, it reads as a more carefully crafted piece than the one Meredith and Whalan attribute to Frank the Poet. For example, each verse, except the first which is introductory, finishes with the words "Jack Donahoe" but the preceding part of the line is carefully varied: "It's there they titled him the brave and bold . . ."; "These were the four associates of bold . . ."; "And in quick time they did advance to take . . ."; "Than work one hour for Government," cried bold . . ."; "For today I'll fight with all my might" cried bold . . ."; and so on. This feature is of course lost in the "late/retrate" rhyme.

Secondly its status is given support by the earliest extant versions of the ballad, broadsides collected in Ireland, which are clearly versions of an Australian original. These are very close in wording to the Paterson version and belong in the same group. Ron Edwards published five broadside versions of "Bold Jack Donahoe" in *The Convict Maid* (1985) all of which have a verse close to the one which Meredith attributes to MacNamara but with the rhyme "rue/ Donahoe" rather than "late/retrate".[24]

Frank the Poet certainly admired Jack Donahoe and referred to him in "A Convict's Tour to Hell". But it cannot be proved that MacNamara composed a ballad about Donahoe, and it is certainly impossible to make a reasonable judgement about which of the extant Donahoe ballads might have been his work.

In examining the material usually referred to as Australian folk-song and ballad, there remains a need to get away from what Tony Bennett describes as "left-wing cultural populism"[25] to a more careful analysis of popular culture in its social context. Although MacNamara's work in Australia demonstrates a deep antipathy towards the English presence in Ireland, he cannot be turned into an Irish freedom fighter. Even in the convict period, when the line between dominant and subordinate groups was perhaps the most sharply delineated it has been in Australian history, even in the work of someone who professed to be "a tyrant's foe", popular culture was not always purely oppositional. Nor can "Bold Jack Donahoe", a ballad regarded as a particularly powerful expression of resistance both by singers and authorities, be attributed to Frank the Poet.

Philip Butterss' doctoral thesis at the University of Sydney is on the Australian ballad. Earlier this year he worked in Ireland on the Irish influence on our ballad tradition.

1. p. 27.
2. John Meredith and Rex Whalan, *Frank the Poet*, p. 54. References in brackets are to page numbers in this book.
3. "Frank the Poet: A Postscript", *Overland* 107: 62.
4. *The Adventures of Martin Cash*, ed. James Burke, 1870, p. 66.
5. p. 1.
6. Russel Ward uses the term apparently to include the work of Frank the Poet, *The Australian Legend* (1966), p. 53.
7. p. 121.
8. p. 31.
9. p. 27.
10. p. 18.
11. *Who Wrote the Ballads?*, pp. 31-32.
12. p. 20.
13. *The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads*, pp. 37-38.
14. *A New Britannia* (1970), p. 136.
15. *The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads*, p. 20.
16. Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (1966), p. 53; Kenneth Porter, " 'Johnny Troy': A 'Lost' Australian Bushranger Ballad in the United States", *Meanjin*, June 1965: 234.
17. Graham Seal, *The Highwayman Tradition in Australia* (1977), n.pag.
18. "Felons and Folksongs", *Meanjin*, September 1956: 290.
19. Series 1, Vol XV, p. 906, note 183.

20. pp. 39-40.
21. For a discussion of this point see John Manifold, *Who Wrote the Ballads?*, pp. 35-36.
22. p. 54.
23. p. 56.
24. pp. 77-81.
25. Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacott, (eds.) *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (1986), p. 17.

JOHN MEREDITH

Frank the Poet —A Post Postscript

In my contribution to Overland 107, *Frank the Poet*, I inadvertently placed the Irish town of Wicklow in County Kilkenny. It is, of course in County Wicklow. With Francis MacNamara and the prison records describing his place of origin variously as Wicklow, County Limerick, and Cashel, County Tipperary, it was easy enough to make such a slip.

Fresh information, recently sent to me by Bob Reece, the Keith Cameron Professor of Australian History at Dublin University College adds to the confusion. A report of MacNamara's trial printed in the Kilkenny Journal of 18 January 1832 describes the defendant as "a real Corkonian"! Thus:

> As we before observed, there was nothing of importance or out of the usual course of petty crime, incidental to a large and populous city. Of the five persons sentenced to transportation not one was a native of Kilkenny; they were all strangers and quite unconnected with the neighbourhood.
> Mary Bagnell for stealing muslin out of the shop of Mr. Finn of High Street . . . (seven years transportation).
> Same sentence on Francis MacNamara, a real Corkonian, for breaking the shop windows of Mr. John McDonnell, and stealing therefrom a piece of worsted plaid.
> The cross examination of two witnesses by this prisoner, afforded much amusement to the Court; his peculiar accent, cutting remarks, and mode of delivery, were both quaint and forcible. 'Please *your* Word-hip, as to Mr. Prince the constable, his oath should not be thought much of against me. He may know the weight of that book in pennyweights and scruples, but of its awful meaning and substance he knows nothing, often as he has kissed it. He should have the eye of a hawk, and the vigilance of a cat, to see me do what he swears. By the virtue of *your* oath, young man, (to the shop man) did *you* get directions from any persons as to what *you* were to swear against me'.
> Answer—'By virtue of my oath I did not'.
> To the constable he put the same question and received a like answer.
> 'Now your Wordship, I must prove them both perjurers; did not that decent looking gentlement* sitting under your Worship, in a loud and distinct manner, that nobody could mistake, direct them to swear the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'.

On the verdict of guilty being returned, sentence was immediately passed, and he was ordered from the dock. Prior to his leaving it he flourished his hand, and with a cheerful and animated countenance, and in a loud voice said,

> I dread not the dangers by land or by sea,
> That I'll meet on my voyage to Botany Bay;
> My labours are over, my vocation is past,
> And 'tis there I'll rest easy, and happy at last.

And thus Frank the Poet gave us the first of his amazing series of ballads descriptive of the convict system.

* *It will be perceived he meant Mr John Watters (clerk of the Court).*

LOVE'S METAPHYSIC

In memory of Sun and John.

There are disguisements, one of which is love.
Take the hellebore
It is of and to and with its foliage,
Yet it is its own flower.
Is love.

There are punishments, one of which is love.
Take the pangs of failure.
They are in and to and with the act of good.
They are their own success.
Are love.

There are the deaths of love, all of which are love.
Take the burials.
They are in and to and with the deeds of life.
They are the affirmations.
Will be love.

There is the poetic urge, the which is naturally love.
Take the theme,
Which is not in and to and with the times.
Is everybody's nothing.
That's love.

MAX HARRIS

HOT-AIR BALLOON

Suddenly the fat man gasps;
and there he is,
seven storeys tall,
buoyed above the house.

His multicoloured sunlit stripes
horizontal, tight,
exactly what a fat man
shouldn't wear.

Silent between gasps,
slowly, hugely, drifting
down the treetop slope,
past the concrete city.

And we are all day airborne,
just as for a new shoot
on the backward snowgum.

JOHN PHILIP

COUPLE IN A BAR

He leans into the talk
like a veteran driver at night,
watchful but relaxed.
She, much younger, sits upright,
wary of unseen risks
beyond the headlights of the words.

Wine in the glass, a smart bar a touch beyond
her experience, backlit barmen
projecting complex shadows—
He admires the tension between timidity
and courage which holds her very still,
knowing he can lead her beyond green shyness
but feels some guilt because he knows.

Chin in hand, eyes focussed elsewhere,
she is now speaking in an unfamiliar zone—
about herself, surprised that anyone should care.
In his guarded way he finds he does.
A Good Listener, he muses beneath the shimmer
of her words that she should be warned against
such magnificent candour.

He sees himself upon a heath, naked again
amid the lightning and the thunderclaps of love—
but settles for cold stratagems
in bars and the knack of weary charm.
He stares down at a veined hand,
the marble table chill beneath his palm.

KEVIN MURRAY

THE ROUND TRIP

I descended into New Plymouth
where hazily mauve Mt Egmont, now Taranaki,
flared one tidy tusk of snow near its snout
snubbing the height of summer.

And rivalled the Japs' Mt Fuji,
according to slow locals who dwelled below
among asterisks of Jersey cows and sheep:
except for Humphrey's Castle

which boxed up the left slope
like a rude, fossilised railway carriage.
From the green pastures of our forward school,
kids crayoned lovely views

while not at puss in corner.
Just because Egmont could lather Mt Fuji,
prize elders pegged out a rhododendron glen;
brave Freyberg won the war.

I declined to trample that,
but did trudge up to the windy Razorback
and nudged aside a picnic tramper's harakiri,
warned by commonplace shoes.

One big girl giggled along
that flacked backbone of grey scree on wedgies,
crimson coat blown wildly open as I gaped:
our duty mistress railed.

Easy Egmont: past Ngamotu Beach
where sunny ironsand with flat maiden sweeps
hurried soles to their flurry of baby waves
and stray dead seahorse;

behind the double wharf
where Sunday herring placidly gobbed the bait,
and piper jig-jiggled silver lives away,
aired in Gladstone bags;

beyond the chunky breakwater
girls paired upon for snubs to greasy boaties,
squealing through spray by the light's derrick,
(this was well before oil)

lazed our unique Sugar Loaves:
plump praised finales of drab pocketed rock.
Shadow's bursars rising seemly true to name,
they also sat divinely

like giant mortified cosies,
clothed at base with a quietly sequinned rip
famous for dragging dumb foreigners out.
Sirens refused to work there.

LEWIS PACKER

FOUR PANTUN BY R. J. CHADWICK

I

Pierrot and Pierrette are white
on white with a little black
(You grin; you wink; I lightly
frown, slightly taken aback)

Only their eyes are blue and their lips
are red on red on red
(And tonight I will weigh what
I didn't say and could've said and should've said)

II

The gibbon swings from branch to branch:
the fine fruits, the fruits of fire!
(The monk intones, the monk exhorts:
"Cut down the forest of desire!")

The gibboness clutching her gibbon child
leaps past the villager's snare
(The monk repeats, the monk insists:
"Leave not one tree standing there!")

Shrilly the gibbon's warble rings out
from the forest like a bell.
("And then, and then . . ." he smiles a monkish smile:
"Then clear away the undergrowth as well!")

III

A flock of gulls went up
like a clatter of hands
(The sea knows;
the sea understands)

And with them went
a dozen other leaves
(The sea forgets
what a man bereaves)

Like bands and bands
of leaves and gulls
(For the sea forgives
and the sea annuls)

IV

The tide tatters round my feet
and slides away . . .
(We passed, Thingamy;
we said "good-day")

. . . returns, coquette,
but will not stay
(We passed and at last
there was nothing to say)

Pantun: Indonesian verse form in which a concrete observation of two lines is followed by a sententious twoline remark. The form here is adapted to English metre.

MANUEL

He was, perhaps, ten years old,
A thin boy and not too bright
In anything but the most practical sense—
He could flip the cap off a bottle of beer
With a skinning knife
Like the snap of your fingers
If a man called, "Boy!"
When told Australia was further away
Than Raglan (which was twenty miles),
He said it was not possible—
No place was further than Raglan—
Raglan was the furthest place.
He represented all mankind
And I wish him well—
Against the odds.

DENNIS NICHOLSON

ENTERING MIDDLE AGE IN CARLTON

Our lazy conversations treat
of shoes and yachts, bikini wax,
the running-speed of Shadowfax,
Paul Simon's early songs. We greet
the audience from a thighbone seat
of outdoor chairs on Lygon Street.

The pastel shops will soon delete
the way we knew it once, but Slacks
can still remember all the facts
to tell White Jeans *The butcher beat*
his wife with slabs of fly-blown meat
and sold them too, down Lygon Street.

The afternoon's a warm conceit
of everything that wisdom lacks –
the kitsch, the new, the blister-packs
of rainbow condoms fit to eat
or velvet larks with wired-on feet
who sing for cash in Lygon Street,

while twenty-five year-olds with fleet
Mercedes-Benzes claimed off tax
go by in shirts like colored sacks;
they've made a mint, they live on neat
champagne; how smartly they compete
for parking-space on Lygon Street.

Full speed, the engine-noise is sweet.
But in the darkness something cracks
two miles away. The lookout quacks
Ice dead ahead! — Thank you. Complete
professionals of course, we'll meet
our moonlit bergs off Lygon Street,

in time, no doubt; but in this heat
who would believe it? With long blacks
curled in our hands, we leave no tracks:
read book reviews and live discreet
unpublished brilliant tales, replete
with all our years on Lygon Street.

DANIEL NEUMANN

HOUSE OF BOOKS

Today I passed the house of my childhood
surprised, considering it was only built of books
patched together by a companionship of writers,
raised up by heroes, worn down by well thumbed
looks,

that through the dimming years and weather
it has stood, tottering but still inviting bright,
spiked fence rusted, stone path crowded
by unasked weeds frocked in a pale green light.

Vanity had trellissed the conservatory fair,
leaning with prejudice, undermined by pride,
where dog-eared staghorns plumply hung,
matrons, stranded by the social tide.

Alice paid up the endless mortgage, memory.
Bassanio afraid, saw damp and interest creeping.
Heathcliff prowled corridors and moors of
bedrooms
cracked and thin from too much midnight weeping.

Deep behind the Proustian courtyard couch
with cake crumbs and seagrass shadowed fears
lurked Arthur, King, cracking the tiles with legend
and idly breaking cane for knightly spears.

A windy tower grew for a quixotic don
with pennies from Grandpa's old tobacco tin
while lusty medieval monks saw scoundrel words
and glinting eyes behind the broken chimney's grin.

The lettering on the spines grows pale.
Shut the door quickly now, but pass this house
again,
idiot hearts scratched on its dusty window glass
rickety with love and shuttered tight with pain.

NADINE AMADIO

WILD GEESE

In reeds that mat the flat
spilled water under a chinee-apple tree
alive with rainbow birds, imperilling
with their plumage, their bright song
the nest of a magpie goose.
Sharp-eyed, my father stole six warm eggs
and left the tree in thorns.

A clucky white duck
vain of her snowy lineage
coddled under
her yellow feet
changelings.

No golden down
no dawn of alchemy
she must settle for fawn
and grizzled black, with qualms.
How can she love these ducklings
with warlock quacks?
She flatters herself for their tawny heads,
decides they are her feather boa.

They grew into black and white spats
bailing up anything
alien, wingless.
Parochially fed on dry mash and slaters,
no mud or wild swamp lilies for them here.
Each evening I herded them
unwilling goose-girl.

I proffered each black wing
to the kitchen scissors.
Each shaft snapped, feather
after shiny feather fell.
The geese are sedentary now,
an old grudge.
I could never wash off
the smell of goosefeather.

Headless they slept
in bundles of moonprint
under the clothesline.

Once in a wind
of dappled shadowy wings
when blue couch cowered
gatecrashing in
came the wild geese.
Like any party
they danced the rigadoon,
and back-stabbed one another.

When I see triangles of geese by moonlight
flying the trough of the moon
I am our geese, earthbound, envious.

FIONA PERRY

OSKAR SPATE

Quiros and the Poets

And, Southern witch, whose glamour drew De Quiros
O'er half the earth for one unyielded kiss . . .

This is a lightly revised version of part of a paper, "Luso-Australia: in maps and verse" which was originally published as a memorial tribute to the great Portuguese historian of cartography, Armando Cortesão, in the Revista da Universidade de Coimbra, *XXVII, 1979; permission to reprint is gratefully acknowledged. Thanks are also due to Professor Leonie Kramer and the late Douglas Stewart for assistance and comment.*

Oskar Spate's interest in Portuguese culture stems from a schoolboy reading of Camoes's Os Lusiadas *in an 18th century translation; during the war he took advantage of an Army posting in Bombay to learn Portuguese from a Goan teacher. Against his expectation, this turned out to be useful, as well as pleasurable, when he came to write his history of* The Pacific since Magellan, *the third volume of which,* Paradise Found and Lost, *should appear shortly from ANU/Pergamon Press.*

To Europeans, at least before the Jet Age, the usual mind's eye picture of Australia was of endless wastes, deserts or sombre forests, stretching away into grey indefinite distances, and this is certainly reflected in much Australian verse. Yet the Australian poetic tradition also includes the sea; Bernard O'Dowd, strange, crabbed, often intolerably prosaic as he is, yet produced a magnificent image for the long-sought Southern Continent: "Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space". Legions of poetasters have hymned James Cook, few poets; perhaps the seeming matter-of-factness of the man stands in the way, and there is no mystery in what he did—after all, he knew that the east coast was there, and for over a century its conjectural outline, not too wildly divergent from the reality, had been on the maps. Except for Kenneth Slessor's "Five Visions of Captain Cook", it is difficult to recall anything by a poet of stature; Rex Ingamells devoted a whole book of blank verse to Cook, but his reach greatly exceeded his grasp.

Yet the Portuguese Pedro Fernández de Quiros, who never saw Australia, has figured almost as a culture-hero for several poets of our century; the exaltations and miseries of his melancholy questing have taken on a symbolic, perhaps even mythic value. The association of Quiros with Queensland in Elizabeth Riddell's "The Island Graves" deserves mention, and Ken Barratt's "De Quiros Remembers" has a longer and very sympathetic vision of a man in defeat, "marooned by Time, not Sea, in courts and ports you once called home". Three poets have drawn a more substantial inspiration from his story; Rex Ingamells, James McAuley, Douglas Stewart.

Rex Ingamells was of course the founding father of the Jindyworobak school of poets, whose name reflects their emphasis on the culture of the Aboriginals as an important element in the search for a truly Australian identity, a differentiation from its traditional Anglo-Irish roots. They were also in reaction from the hedonist and materialist ethos of the great cities and their greater suburbias. They sought a new symbolism drawn from the rich ore-body of Aboriginal myth, particularly the ancestral dream-time or dream-land of Alcheringa; a rather artificial and humorless attempt to construct a new mythos; as if for example Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, with its Red Indian trappings, were a more truly American thing than Stephen Vincent Benét's saga of the Civil War, *John Brown's Body*. The Jindyworobaks certainly produced some original and delightful lyrics, but the impetus could not be sustained. It is however within this search for new-old roots that we must see Ingamells' attempt at an epic (or more accurately a saga) of Australia, *The Great South Land*.

This is surely an ambitious effort—over 300 pages, 6019 lines of mostly blank verse. There is some good narrative, some flashes of lyricism, but on the whole I think it must be pronounced a failure: Ingamells simply does not have the power to sustain an acceptably high level of poetic quality through such a lengthy work. Yet it is a sincere and imaginative effort to gather into one coherence the diverse strains of human history which have gone into the making of Australia (and, one is tempted to add, some that have not). Amongst the more important strands in the pattern the Iberian bulks large—indeed, four lines gave Kenneth McIntyre the epigraphs for *The Secret Discovery of Australia*, which initiated the current resurgence of interest in a possible Portuguese priority:

What knew the Portuguese of this great Country?
Something for sure, which in their rivalry
with Spain, they kept a secret. Old-time charts
bespeak some knowledge . . .

The three or four hundred lines in *The Great South Land* devoted directly to Quiros are disappointing. Ingamells does not seem to have troubled himself much about sources, only Ernest Scott's *Short History* and an "extract from Major", a long-discredited Victorian pundit. Arnold Wood or the full accounts of Quiros's voyages in the Hakluyt Society's volumes would surely have helped him to a more rounded and truly poetic picture. As it is, and as the quotation above would seem to show, his narrative is generally flat. Very strangely for so passionate an admirer and defender of the Australian Aboriginals, his references to the Pacific Island peoples whom Mendaña and Quiros met are purely conventional; and strangely enough for so ardent an Australian patriot, the possibility of Torres having sighted the continent is not mentioned. Yet "fantastic Quiros, seeking impossible utopias" is often referred to as a sort of ideal; clearly the personality of the man had gripped Ingamells, but he was unable fully to realise the potential of his theme.

It is far otherwise with James McAuley, whose *Captain Quiros* is one of the most accomplished and successful long poems ever written in Australia. McAuley had advantages for this theme denied to Ingamells; not only was he a better poet in himself, but he had experience in New Guinea which gave him an empathy with Melanesian ways of thought, and his strong Catholicism brings to his poem a binding force and a drive which Ingamells' rather naive nationalist urge could not supply. He found in the tragic tale of Quiros an ideal vehicle for the projection of a view of life at once heroic and Catholic.

Captain Quiros is written in 305 seven-line stanzas, a verse-form adaptable to invocation and meditation as well as to narrative and in one or two passages to satire. It is divided into three parts: "Where Solomon Was Wanting", on Mendaña's 1595 voyage; "The Quest for the South Land", Quiros's own voyage to Espiritu Santo; and "The Times of the Nations", the aftermath of hope deferred and baffled by Court and clerical intrigue. The poem is thus both a reflective philosophical essay and a miniature epic, far more truly epical in spirit than the more grandiose *Great South Land*. By the same token, *Captain Quiros* is too close-knit to make brief quotation easy. The story is ostensibly told by the poet Luis de Belmonte Bermudez, in actuality Quiros's secretary and collaborator in the reduction of his narrative, and his devoted friend. Belmonte's own apostrophe to Quiros as his "Lusitanian Star" is quoted in the Proem, which ends with a stanza setting the tone for the poem's criticism of life—a note adumbrated half a century earlier, though usually clumsily, by O'Dowd in "Australia" and other poems:

Terra Australis you must celebrate,
Land of the inmost heart, searching for which
Men roam the earth, and on the way create
Their kingdoms in the Indies and grow rich,
With noble arts and cities; only to learn
They bear the old selves with them that could turn
The streams of Eden to a standing ditch.

In the narrative sections McAuley follows his sources fairly directly, and it is needless as well as impossible to attempt to summarise the whole poem; but I may draw attention to some passages in which he goes outside the actual record to present a more personal philosophic view. My first example concerns Spanish-Melanesian relations in Mendaña's settlement on Santa Cruz. Here McAuley draws on his New Guinea experience for a moving depiction of a tribal festival held by the chief Malope, "the central pole" of the society, which culminates in the dance tracing "the Path of Fire" which all must tread after death. On that path there waits the monstrous "She-Ghost"—

For in a cave-mouth, spider-like, she sits
A maze-design half-finished at her feet,
Which the wayfaring soul with trembling wits
Must labour from his memory to complete
Or be devoured . . .

This descent to Avernus is brilliantly picked up and transformed after Malope has been wantonly murdered by the Spaniards; on the Path of Fire he meets "a Guardian he had not foreknown: The Lady of the Way." The She-Ghost is transfigured into the Virgin, the maze completed as a Cross and, in recompense for his slaughter by Christian hands, Malope is brought to Christ himself, "In Whom he learnt the meaning of his days."

McAuley departs from his sources when Quiros reaches the Polynesian island of Rakahanga, which for the beauty of its people his chronicler Torquemada calls "Gente Hermosa"; Quiros with characteristic piety "La Peregrina", the Pilgrim; and his officer Torres, more realistically, "La Matanza", the Slaughtering. The fatal clashes which led to this last name are omitted; instead McAuley develops an amorous episode, mentioned by Quiros, into some stanzas of great beauty:

Freely the great Camoens could contrive
A magic Isle of Venus in the sea,
Where bathing nymphs in feigned flight only strive
To sharpen the sweet sting of venery . . .
O sweetly vulnerable voluptuous prey
Succumbing with delicious tears and cries . . .

The echo from *Os Lusiadas* is clear:

O que famintos beijos na floresta,
E que mimoso choro que soaua,
Que afagos tam suaues, que yra honesta
Que em risinhos alegres se tornaua . . .

Lovely as McAuley's verses are, I feel that they are also a flaw in the poem as a whole, not truly fitting into his scheme of things. Camões, a man of the Renaissance, can carry off the coexistence of pagan and Christian myth, though even so he has to provide an euhemerical justification. In an age with a different Catholic self-consciousness, McAuley must rather hurriedly rationalise his lone paradisial island into "a specious Eden in our dust", with no further word of explanation. One is left with an uneasy feeling that a passage, in itself a jewel of lyricism, is an aesthetic blemish in the structure of the work.

The climax of Quiros's crusading endeavor, the founding of New Jerusalem in Espíritu Santo, is not the climax of the poem either in expression (which indeed falters a little here) or in McAuley's vision. In actuality, all after New Jerusalem was a long and most sad decline in Quiros's fortunes; in the poem, this is transcended by the comfort given to him by the aged and dying Fray Martin de Munilla as they "limped down the cheerless Mexican coast". Quiros, "seeking truth from dying lips", asks "Where was the fault, that we have merited/ No more than this from Heaven?" The answer is that it is not for man to anticipate God; perfection and the building of the New Jerusalem are reserved for Him alone; but He will approve

The work you have pursued with burning love,
And all shall be made perfect at the last.

The last part of the poem contains some fine stanzas on Spain's decay and the worldly-wise Churchmen whose "discourse ended/With the great need for prudent atrophy", and who arrange the secret *contredespacho* which will ensure that Quiros will "buzz on the flypaper of Peru". In Panama Belmonte records Quiros's dying vision, a prefigurement of the discovery of the true South Land and its refashioning into Australia. There is some very good verse in this section, but a total acceptance of it would depend on total acceptance of McAuley's own creed. There seems a lack of universality, the condition of humanity seems submerged in the theology. To McAuley, of course, there is no problem, all things are looked after in the teaching of the Church; but not all readers will be satisfied by his mystical fiat.

The poem ends with a quiet coda as Belmonte leaves the body of his beloved hero and steps out into the tropic dawn;

And then the birds woke ready for the day.
Calm to the west the clouded Ocean lay;
But I had reached the end of voyaging.

However imperfect one's sympathy for McAuley's ideological stance, at times too polemical, one must feel that Quiros is nobly honored in this memorial written centuries after him, in a South Land far different from that of his dreams.

The last of our three poems, Douglas Stewart's "Terra Australis", is not on the scale of *The Great South Land* or *Captain Quiros*, nor does it have so overtly didactic or so ostensibly great a 'purpose' as the other two. It is rather a wry comment on the psychology of Faith. The poem tells of the meeting, on "some highway shunned by trading traffic", of Captain Quiros and Mr William Lane, both dead but still sailing the seas like two Flying Dutchmen. As unlike as could be in nurture and environment—Quiros the last of the heroic Iberian navigators, Lane an Australian socialist leader of the 1890s—these ghosts have one thing in common: each is seeking Utopia. Quiros's New Jerusalem we know; Lane's was to be a "New Australia" in Paraguay, of all places.

In Stewart's poem, each man clings fanatically to his fixed idea. For Quiros, Terra Australis still lies westward,

Like a great golden cloud, unknown, untouched,
Where men shall walk at last like spirits of fire
No men by oppression chained, by sin besmirched.

Lane knows all about Terra Australis, its chains and its sins, and contradicts him flatly:

Westward there lies a desert where the crow
Feeds upon poor men's hearts and picks their eyes;
Eastward we flee from all that wrath and woe
And Paraguay shall yet be Paradise.

And both of them blame their failures not on themselves but on trifles—liquor, poisoned fish—and on human weakness—the weakness of others; "There was a certain likeness in the stories." The poem ends with a brilliant counterpoint of Quiros and Lane—

"The devil throws me up this Captain Quiros,
This William Lane, a phantom not yet born,
This Captain Quiros dead three hundred years,
To tempt me to disaster for his scorn . . .

Somewhere on earth that land of love and faith
In Labour's hands—the Virgin's—must exist,
And cannot lie behind, for there is death,
So where but in the west—but in the east?" . . .

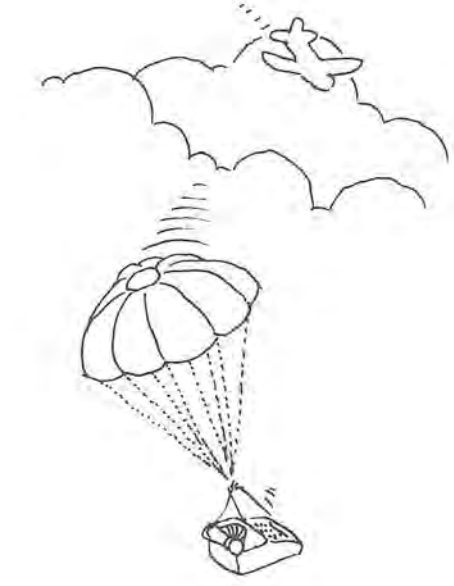
The wind from Heaven blew both ways at once
And west went Captain Quiros, east went Lane.

"Terra Australis" may not have the large utterance of *Captain Quiros*; but it strikes home as an ironic comment on human self-delusion and *folie de grandeur*, and it strikes also as deep a note of compassion for "the wearisome condition of humanity." Witty and effective as is Stewart's conclusion, beautiful as is the description of the ships becalmed side by side on an eery moonlit ocean, what most lingers in the memory is Quiros's plangent statement of his fate:

Three hundred years since I set out from Lima
And off Espiritu Santo lay down and wept
Because no faith in men, no truth in islands
And still unfound the shining continent slept;

And swore upon the Cross to come again
Though fever, thirst and mutiny stalked the seas
And poison spiders spun their webs in Spain . . .

Portugal has a superb record in the opening of the oceans to Western man. She has also a superb poetic tradition. It is fitting that both should find some echo in that remote Terra Australis which, in all probability, the sons of Lusus were the first Europeans to see.



Rolf Heimann

books

Colonialism and Criticism

Judith Wright

Kevin Gilbert (ed): *Inside Black Australia: An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry* (Penguin, $12.95).
Kevin Gilbert: *The Cherry Pickers* (Burrambinga Books, $12.95).

It would be a useful preparation for reading this anthology, to begin by seeing a performance of *The Cherry Pickers*, or reading Gilbert's own books, *Because a White Man'll Never Do It*, *Living Black*, or *People ARE Legends*. Without this kind of preparation, the supercilious anglo- or euro-Australian who knows himself (I am not putting in the obligatory double-gender double-speak here) in possession of the only canon of excellence in world literature and the only valid critical tradition, may dismiss the book as mere protest, clumsy and unpoetic at that. But the honest critic has a propensity to blush at such dismissals, and sits on thorns when discussing Aboriginal writing.

Books like this are part of something new in the Pacific world, where the intrusions of Europe have left a bitter legacy we are only beginning to understand. From the first missioners who saw nothing but nakedness and 'devil-worship' to the miners and pastoralists who denounce the very notion of human rights as applying to 'savages', the Pacific peoples, including those of Australia, have suffered much. We need to look carefully at the function and meaning of words and the criteria we lay down, before applying our standards like Mother Hubbard garments to the raw pain and misery of the voices in this collection.

We can therefore hardly lecture, if those we have dispossessed of their own voices refuse to accept our standard of limitations on the proper subjects and methods of art. It is, after all, only a very few years since we have allowed that Aborigines possessed even an art and a religion, let alone a literature. We are now exploiting their art (for virtually nothing and under almost no copyright protection) as a tourist attraction. Their religion, even as it shrinks under our touch, is being exploited too (Dreamtime Liquor Bars, Dreamtime tourist resorts). Meanwhile the realities of the squalid reserves and fringe camps are only revealed when yet another inquiry gets the headlines.

Our own literature has touched on those realities very seldom, and has certainly not had any influence on their lives. Few of our writers have spoken of them as feelingly as did Olaf Ruhen, sailor and stumbling anthropological speculator, when in the beginning of the 'sixties he wrote of them as a 'gracious and a considerate and a kindly people' who 'walk much in sorrow'.* He knew the other Pacific peoples well, too, and wrote of the Pacific world that 'there will yet be discoveries made here that will cast a new light upon the history of the world as an entity.' Since then, Australia has indeed been discovered to hold such secrets (those 'more than 40,000 years' of occupation must in fact go back far beyond that limit of radiocarbon dating), and these are only the first revisions of the judgments made in days of massacre and dispossession.

Dispossession and centuries of silencing have robbed the people who speak in Gilbert's anthology of their proper voices; worse, they have robbed us of the chance of learning from them and left them with only a stumbling command of our language and a minimal schooling in their own. The first step towards amends ought to come with anthologies like Gilbert's, and to hell with critical standards.

Perhaps, then, Gilbert should have titled this anthology, not an anthology of Aboriginal poetry (since we arrogate that word to ourselves) but an anthology of Aboriginal experience. Even though we do, now, allow that such song-cycles and tsaradas as have escaped our murderous attentions are classifiable as 'poetry', and even allow parts of them into our own anthologies and crib their methods and cadences for our own use, we seldom do more than let an occasional poem in by the back door as meeting our requirements. It will be the same with these products of the lives of the reserve and fringe communities and the ghetto suburbs.

What they do have, in abundance, is passion and

sorrow and longing for their own ways of living. To read them is to hear realities, couched in what terms we have left them to express those realities. Better not to take the high ground, here.

The 1960's gave us something new. They saw the first publication of a book of poems by an Aboriginal woman (then Kath Walker, now Oodgeroo Noonuccal); a book which went into edition after edition, a record in poetry sales in Australia for a woman writer. Four years later, Kevin Gilbert of the Wiradjuri people wrote the first Aboriginal play in English. Now it has been published, in the same year in which the Aboriginal National Theatre Trust came into being and began a series of productions of Aboriginal plays, by many new playwrights such as Jack Davis, Bob Merritt, Bob Maza and others. Over less than a quarter-century, the bone structure of Aboriginal writing and theatre has taken shape. Aboriginal actors, dancers, film-makers, writers are coming into this new movement and putting flesh on to the stories and voices to the words.

We are not going to enjoy these plays. They tell a miserable story. They put in front of our eyes the hushed-up lives of those whose lands we occupy without their consent and without acknowledgment or compensation. But at least the story is out now, and some people at least are listening.

Kevin Gilbert worked on this play from a life which gave him ground-level knowledge of the story. Even now, the so-called Aboriginal reserves—really scraps of land which their enforced occupants neither owned nor, often, identified with their own home country—were managed in effect by local police and wholly unqualified and ill-paid white State employees, taught to despise the people they lorded it over. (Yes, I have visited such reserves.) Koori, Murri and other Aboriginal people were herded together, and for the most part, except for the dole (where the police allowed that to be collected) they had to depend on what ill-paid seasonal work they could get. Reserve life involved not only poverty but desperate boredom, fear and deprivation.

> Got no work—on
> social all day
> too much plurry handout
> the white man say.
>
> Guv'ment give us money
> all the day
> look about around you
> see my pay
>
> No clean runnin' water
> our tucker all flour
> bit o' bully beef or
> mutton gone sour.
>
> Our babies got trachoma
> blind in the eyes
> sick and nose all runny
> dyin' like flies . . .

sing the Cherry Pickers. Justice Einfeld, in a rage, discovered recently that this is as true as ever it was; but little if anything will be changed at Toomelah and the other miserable reserves dotted round the country, as long as we are here.

So the Cherry Pickers, gathering at their campfires to wait for a picking season to begin, have nothing to do but drink what liquor the dole will buy, bet their few cents for a loaf of bread, and joke bawdy over sex and death, to keep hope alive; and to look for a good picking season and the return of "Johnollo", the last of the old men who links them with a better past to give them strength. Their hope is counter-pointed by the song that tells their story:

> Stole my country
> kill the kangaroo
> now I live on bit 'o land
> like Jacky in the zoo.

Plays seldom come alive on the page, unacted. But the bitter humour and bawdy courage of the Cherry Pickers, and the sombre end with the news of Johnollo's death, make this play at least stick in the memory like a bindi-eye.

* *Olaf Ruhen*, Tangaroa's Godchild, *Macdonald, London 1962.*

An Authority At Last

Robert Darby

W. S. Ramson (ed.): *The Australian National Dictionary: A Dictionary of Australianisms on Historical Principles* (Oxford University Press, $75).

> *The possibility of [an Australian] literature is dependent upon the uniqueness of Australian landscapes and the individuality of Australian life. Its distinctive character will consist, partly in the themes which it handles, partly in its method and outlook. . . . [The Australian vocabulary] is smaller and simpler than the vocabulary of middle-class Englishmen, for Australia does not tolerate forms of thought and expression . . . which are perplexing or offensive to the average man; and it has rejected . . . the beautiful names of an intimate countryside . . . . But in their place there is the Bush and a new vocabulary of the Bush—billabong, dingo, damper, bushwacker, billy, cooee, swag, swaggie, humpy, stockman, jackaroo, squatter, bushranger, sundowner, brumby, drover, never-never, outback, backblocks. . . . Here, surely, is new wealth, expressive of a distinctive and vigorous life, material for an individual literature.*
>
> W. K. Hancock, *Australia*, 1930.

Over fifty years ago Nettie Palmer, ahead of her time as usual, called for a dictionary of Australian English usage. "Every now and then, in reading or in writing about our own country, we are stuck for want of an authority", she wrote in 1932. "We meet with words and phrases that belong to our life and landscape, but we are not sure sometimes of their spelling . . . exact meaning and usage." What we needed, she continued, was a "searching dictionary with illustrations from all types of speech and writing"—in other words, a dictionary of Australianisms on historical principles which now, in the form of the Australian National Dictionary, has materialised in miraculously complete fulfilment of Palmer's prescriptions.

The ten-year project by Bill Ramson, Joan Hughes and their staff is not the first attempt at such a reference work. Edward Morris, Professor of English, French and German at Melbourne University, published his *Austral English* in 1898; it was most unusual for an academic of that period (at least in the humanities) to show any interest in Australian phenomena, but the resulting compilation, with its wealth of citations, remains a most useful reference. The Red Page Rhadamanthus, A. G. Stephens, with S. E. O'Brien, collected materials for a dictionary of Australian slang in the decade after 1900; although never published, their notes lie in the Mitchell Library, to be consulted as required. In 1945 Sidney Baker published his path-breaking study, *The Australian Language*; and in 1978 appeared G. A. Wilkes' comprehensive *Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* (2nd ed., 1985). Valuable as all these works remain, they are now surpassed by the scale, authority and precision of the *AND*, with its 6000 main entries, 10,000 words or word combinations and, its most useful feature, over 60,000 citations. The editors, writes Ramson, took "particular care to select citations which established the Australianness of the word or its referent . . . in recognition that, as the words added to a language by a people are an index of their history and culture, so the actual context of use provides evidence of their social and cultural attitudes". The result is a substantial volume which contains just about everything an enthusiast for Australian culture could want from such a reference work.

In his introduction Ramson explains that the aim of the *AND* is to provide as full an historical record as possible of words and meanings of words which have originated in Australia; or which have a greater currency here than elsewhere; or which have special significance in Australia because of their connection with the history of the country. The *AND* confirms the truth of Morris's remark that relatively few slang (and especially rude) words in use are of Australian invention, and it agrees that they are usually adaptations of English expressions. It is presumably for this stern reason that a word like "bugger" is omitted, though in the case of terms like "bastard" or "bloody" the editors unbend to explain, with scholarly gravity: "Used in general English, but from its frequency and ubiquity often thought of as characteristically Austral." (Blood' oath, sport!), and a column of examples follows for each. Ramson also comments that the most common method of expanding the Australian vocabulary has been by forming compounds and collocations from English words. Take an everyday English word like sheep: there is no need to define that, but the *AND* prints over two pages of quotations for compound terms like sheep-bridge, sheep-grower, sheep-proof, sheep-wash and so forth. Only sheep-dip seems to have been forgotten in the ovine stampede.

Nettie Palmer had a sharp ear for language. She commented once that Henry Handel Richardson had revealed her national origins in her novel *Maurice Guest* by making two Americans refer to their home town as a township—in Palmer's view, a very Australian word. She hoped that the dictionary she envisaged would:

> seek out the origins and meanings of the singular word hatter: of swag and its derived words, swagger, swaggie, swagsman and swagman . . . of ropeable . . . and of borak which, about 1880, turned into barrack. . . . Those are a few nuts to crack, and their kernels will have very interesting and delicate flavours.

Cracked they have been. The *AND* confirms the accuracy of Palmer's intuition on Richardson, with an entry for township which gives two main meanings and a column of citations which show that visitors recognised it as the characteristic local word for a small town. Naturally the dictionary includes entries for ropeable (very angry: a genuine Australian invention), swag and its derivatives, hatter and borak, the last two of which terms deserve comment.

Hatter is a word familiar to students of Henry Lawson as the right term for describing the eponymous hero of "The bush undertaker". Morris defined it as

> A solitary miner—miner who works without a mate/partner: sc. [that is to say] one who has everything under his own hat.

Wilkes differed slightly by defining hatter as "A bush-worker who lives and works alone (? mad as a hatter, *OED* 1849)". The *AND* accepts both these definitions and suggests that the word grew out of the (English) phrase "one's hat covers one's family", used of those who are alone in the world, an identification later strengthened by the catch phrase, "mad as a hatter", a phrase popularised by Thackeray (1849) and in the later nineteenth century by *Alice in Wonderland*. According to Brewer's dictionary of phrase and fable, the original "mad hatter" was a seventeenth century

eccentric; insanity was common in the hat trade owing to the use of "mercurio nitrate" for treating felt.

Borak is not a word encountered much these days, though it was common in the speech of supposedly down-to-earth characters in novels of the 1930s-50s. It was originally Australian pidgin for negation and, by extension, a word meaning nonsense. The phrase "to poke borak" meant to make fun of or ridicule somebody. Morris asserted that the word gave birth to barrack, an etymology which surprised me, as an ex-Aussie Rules follower: was not barracking an act of support for one's team? Not according to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (3rd ed., 1944), where barrack is defined as an Australian word, derived from borak, which meant "To shout derisively so as to disconcert players". I suppose that barracking could sometimes have this effect; but, by this definition, if you were a Melbourne barracker you would be consciously encouraging the other side. The confusion is laid to rest by the *AND*, which gives the standard meanings for borak and states that barrack has no connection with it. Barrack is a northern Ireland dialect word meaning to brag about one's fighting prowess. Its original meaning in Australia (earliest recorded usage, 1878) was to ridicule or verbally abuse; but, with the addition of the preposition for, it soon came to mean "to give support or encouragement (to a person, team etc) usu. by shouting names, slogans or exhortations" (earliest recorded usage, 1890). The citations given show that, in the football context, barrack has always carried a positive connotation.

Ramson writes that Australian English reflects the composition of the immigrant population and makes the interesting point that "regional dialect and slang words which have remained non-standard in Britain became generally current in Australia". We have seen how this principle applies to barrack, and the observation also helps to account for two of the great problem words in the Australian vocabulary: larrikin and billy.

There have never been doubts as to what regrettable social phenomena were designated by larrikin, but the origin of the word has always been a mystery to social historian and lexicographer alike. Morris rejects as apocryphal the most colourful "just-so" story about its emergence:

> The story goes that a certain Sergeant Dalton, about the year 1869, charged a youthful prisoner at the Melbourne Police Court with being "a-larrr-akin' about the streets" [i.e., larking, pronounced in a music hall Irish accent]. The Police magistrate, Mr Sturt, did not quite catch the word—"A what, Sergeant?"—"A larrikin' your Worchup." The police court reporter used the word the next day in the paper, and it stuck.

Despite diligent searches in the records, no report of any such incident could be discovered. As alternatives, Morris suggested a derivation from thieves' slang, in which leary meant knowing and kinchen a youngster; or from the French, larron, a thief. If these possibilities seem far-fetched, it is probably because they are wrong: larrikin, according to the *AND*, is an English dialect word which means "a mischievous or troublesome youth". What is interesting is how quickly English people in Australia forgot the origins of the word—though it is not perhaps a matter of forgetting. The original larrikins probably brought the word with them, but it was evidently not known to those further up the social scale, the mainstream Oxford men, like Professor Morris, who sought to record their usages.

How the famous Australian camp cooking pot came to be called a billy is a question which has caused controversy for years, not least in the pages of this journal. Nettie Palmer did not claim to have the answer; she offered a choice from several options:

> The word billy supersedes camp-kettle somewhere in the fifties, but its derivation will always be as uncertain as what songs the sirens sang. Some say it is short for an arbitrary name, William, as we say Long Tom or Spinning Jenny, or as facetious persons may call their typewriter Marmaduke. Others derive it from the French bouilli, as billies were often made from tins that had contained boeuf bouilli. A third explanation gives the Aboriginal word, billa, water or a river (as in billabong . . .).

Like the story of the origins of larrikin rejected by Morris (from whom Palmer took these alternatives), such explanations have an ingenuity which puts them in the class of nature myths and makes one almost regret the scientificity of a correct answer. Still, it is nice to know the truth: billy-pot is a Scots dialect word for cooking utensil. Origins, however, are only a small part of the story: who would have predicted in 1849 (the date of the earliest citation) that this lowly word would become something of a national symbol so omnipresent as to grace the verse of writers like A. B. Paterson and fill nearly a page of a weighty scholarly reference book?

When I was a young child I had terrible trouble with the last verse of "Waltzing Matilda". How on earth could a swagman fit into his billabong? I was unaware that billabong meant a river backwater and assumed that billy was not a word in its own right but merely a diminutive; for the swagman to escape the police by disappearing into his cooking pot seemed the most wonderful sort of magic. No doubt my elders informed me at some stage that a billabong was part of a river and was unrelated to billy, so the mystery cleared itself up. Sorry as I always am to see the magic mists of childhood evaporating in the hot light of

science, I would have enjoyed solving this conundrum for myself; if I faced a similar problem today I would be able to turn to the engrossing pages of *The Australian National Dictionary*, confident of finding both entertainment and sound knowledge.

Robert Darby is a post-graduate student in the English Department, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra.

Dusk, Sunlight, Fire

Martin Flanagan

Peter Cowan: *Voices* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $12.95).
Kate Grenville: *Joan Makes History* (University of Queensland Press, $22.95).
Mark Henshaw: *Out of the Line of Fire* (Penguin, $12.95).

The image on the cover of Peter Cowan's collection of short stories, *Voices*, is as ambiguous as the text: a black and white photograph, taken at night, of what appears to be an Edwardian house. Its facade is dimly lit by a single lamp and the two windows bordering the faint wash of light are large black rectangular holes. One wonders whether the house is occupied, but closer scrutiny reveals only the coarse texture of the bricks.

Peter Cowan's characters are habitually confronted with similar facades. In "Swampland", a sardonic teacher enduring a biology excursion in the heat of summer observes two of his female students: "A graceless pair. In the sun. Solid. Heavy. Awkward. Drawn together in that, perhaps." He returns to school, only to find himself accused of having molested the same two girls. He reacts incredulously, dismissively, but the facts fit their version of events with disconcerting ease. He struggles to establish belief. The story ends with the following exchange, the headmaster speaking first:

> "I have to take this seriously.
> How can it be serious.
> I'm afraid it has to be. What do you suggest I do?
> I don't know. Let me talk to them.
> I don't think that would be a good idea, Myra said."
> He has been robbed of language which in this book is his only defence.

There is no pool of shared belief in these stories, nothing which could be termed a common sense. At the centre of the book is a black hole of silence and the voices exist at its rim: dry, sharp, anxious and coercive. The tension never eases and there is no redeeming imagery: even light is a force which binds. "The Night" finishes: "He lifted the blind slowly. A faint clear light, long fine clouds above the shadowed buildings. He let the blind fall. She raised her hands to her face".

Personality in such a scheme can be no more than a faulty structure; what varies is its ability to withstand adversity and subtle foes. The characters are prostitutes, drug runners, women who live alone in isolated houses, a man released from prison re-visiting the woman he is accused of having raped. The active agent in the final story in the collection is not even an external voice. "At times, now," says the narrator, "I am sure it never happened, that in fact I awoke from this particular small nightmare, and was in this way saved. A clairvoyance. The trial postponed." The blank facade, which in this case implies judgement, is now within. That a book with such a narrow range of cause and effect does not degenerate into caricature is a measure of Cowan's mastery of his minimalist, sinister art. That is his achievement, nothing more and nothing less.

The transition from Peter Cowan's *Voices* to Kate Grenville's *Joan Makes History* is like passing, in a blink, from dusk to the brightest noonday sunlight. Kate Grenville is a pointillist: she has a word for everything and her words are unfailingly bright, buoyant and exact. At times, one has the sense of reading someone who is in the tradition of the great women novelists, a writer for whom every moment is a room to be entered and fully observed, with the variation that this exponent of the art has been touched by the psychedelia of the '60s. This is a description of a Swedish laborer who has suffered frostbite: "Then there was a huge pale man with cropped hair and ears like feet sticking out of his head: his name was something that sounded as if he was about to bring up his breakfast, and his enormous hands, each one the size of a dinner plate, were as bright red as if they had been boiled."

Joan Makes History is a vista of vivid dots and, in a sense, that is the novel's plan, for its conclusion is Joan accepting that she is but one dot among many. "Oh Joan, what bogus grandeur. There was not a single joy I could feel that countless Joans had not already felt, not a single mistake I could make that had not been made by some Joan before me . . ."

The simplest remark one can make about *Joan Makes History* is that a lot of women and, hopefully, quite a few men, will enjoy it. It is the story of a spirited, wilful woman who believes the only role consistent with her vaulting sense of destiny is on the Great Stage of History. The book divides into the story of Joan's adventures or, more commonly, misadventures, as she pursues the star of her destiny and episodes from the lives of other Joans throughout Australian history. There are moments of great comedy: the convict Joan, for example, squeezes naked

through a porthole and flails ashore to pre-empt the landing party in their costumed glory. "Mine was not only the first foreign foot to step ashore: mine was also the first foreign laugh to sound out, sharp and rude, across the waters of Botany Bay".

The cast of the novel is as various as Joan's fortunes. It includes rogues, poseurs and wankers, a vicious landowner who gleefully poisons flour in the knowledge that it will be consumed by the local Aborigines, the clinging society which encircles a Governor's wife, the recurring figure of a good husband, and brief guest appearances, it would seem, by the writer Herman Melville and the painter Frederick McCubbin.

The concept behind *Joan Makes History* is inspired, a mockery of the view that history is the history of Man, and there is much to be admired in the book's execution. When a writer can climax a chapter with an incident as small as the manner in which a groom grips his bride's arm as they approach the altar, readers know they are travelling first-class. The problems with *Joan Makes History* are problems of form. With each new Joan there is a lull, a certain sense of repetition. The book's central dynamic is the grandeur of its theme but this also creates an expectation which the work does not satisfy so that one is left with a sense, perhaps unwarranted, of slightness and insubstantiality. One feels the concept of Joan is never wholly consummated, but to remedy that inadequacy the novel would have to be a hundred times longer, the work of a female C. E. W. Bean.

Out of the Line of Fire is a novel of ideas. Mark Henshaw takes each as he meets it on the road of the plot and holds it to the light, turning it and examining it. Some have to do with the nature of perception, others with the fiction of writing fiction (what poet Peter Kirkpatrick called "the brooding mind insinuating meaning"). The ideas are incorporated into the drama of the novel through the person of Wolfi, a German wunderkind whose nursery has been the mansion of nineteenth and twentieth century European thought where doors open onto doors, windows onto other windows. Wolfi's father is a disciple of Wittgenstein and from the age of three it is not enough for the child to note that the sky is blue, he must explain how it is that he knows it to be blue.

Out of the Line of Fire has as many faces as a cut gem. It has Wolfi's story, the story of Wolfi's relationship with the narrator, an interview with a Latin American novelist called Ramon Fernandez, a slab from one of Fernandez's novels, lengthy asides on the lives and ideas of a host of European intellectual heavyweights, passages of erotica and whole sections in German and Spanish. Why the German and Spanish? Because what is blurred in translation is the hard edge of meaning. The book brims with high intellectual endeavor, but Henshaw is as alert to its comic potential as he is to its other aspects. When Wolfi loses his virginity to a prostitute, arrives home and declares to his assembled family that he has become a man, his grandmother who has paid for his initiation (interesting family, this) mischievously asks: "But, Wolfi, how do you know that you are a man?"

What is remarkable about this novel, given the density of some of its materials, is its lightness. Henshaw even has us rushing towards his conclusion with the unseemly haste of Harold Robbins readers. The substance of the plot can be roughly summarised as the relationship between the narrator and Wolfi. In a book where passion is almost exclusively sexual, each character is, in a sense, the sum of his thoughts. Wolfi is not larger than life, but he is larger than the narrator. Karl, the rogue who lives off his wits in Berlin, is larger than Wolfi and there is a sense in which the identity of each is, in turn, absorbed. The plot climaxes with the narrator going in search of Wolfi, who is believed to have died after being arrested for a mugging in a Berlin subway toilet in which Karl killed a man.

At the last, however, Henshaw conjures a trick which reveals the whole complex structure of the book to have been an illusion. More to the point, it is an illusion in which the reader has participated. That, I think, is the point of this extraordinarily accomplished first novel.

Martin Flanagan is a law graduate who writes for the Melbourne Age.

Enjoyment of Variety

Elizabeth Riddell

Jennifer Strauss: *Labour Ward* (Pariah Press, $10.00).
Peter Goldsworthy: *This Goes With This* (Angus & Robertson/ABC $12.95).
Kate Llewellyn: *Honey* (Hudson, $14.95).

To come suddenly and unexpectedly (nobody's fault but my own) on the poetry of Jennifer Strauss is to experience true excitement. Here is, for me, an unfamiliar, rich, ringing voice; not in the least self-important; unaffected, confident in the kind of way that implies there is much more where this came from, and that all of it will be enjoyable. I had read one poem before the *Labour Ward* collection—in Susan Hampton's and Kate Llewellyn's admirable *Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets*, whose constricting title proved to be largely an illusion: even those women poets who do not care for segregation could find pleasure in being included.

This poem was "Guinevere Dying", characteristic of Strauss in a certain historical mood, and very moving

in its mannered mediaeval way. The mood is to be found in *Labour Ward* in "The Anabaptist Cages", "Munster" and (a different period) "Wife to Horatio".

In this slim volume—I hesitate to use the word, but slim it is—there are 28 poems varying in length from the five lines of the title poem:

> In grief,
> Joy's a foreign country.
> It's there, but you need a visa.
> No-one will issue it;
> You must bear it yourself.

to the 93 lines of "The Cages" which is about a 16th century religious movement in the German city of Munster—Lutherans and Catholics against the new sect of Anabaptists, a conflict in which the latter came off badly. Jan van Leyden, crowned as an Anabaptist prophet and his two lieutenants got their comeuppance.

In Strauss's words:

> "And let the bodies of those condemned—
> Krettech, Knipperdolling, Jan the King—
> Being brought from the place of execution
> Be severally hung in iron cages
> Wrought to that purpose.
> And let the aforesaid cages hang
> High on the steeple of St Lambert's,
> That being the place of first offending"
> with an addition for The Polygamous Wife
> "Brag in the wind, old bones!
> Preach in your stinking cage till the trumpets sound
> To set to partners in that resurrection dance
> Where there'll be neither marriage nor giving in
> marriage. . . ."

Strauss likes to remind us of historical moments and has, as can be seen, a strong grasp of the politics of power but she is by no means committed to these matters. "A Weekend in the Country" has a real appreciation of pastoral winter:

> Hail rock-salts
> The green and gentle hills
> Of the western district
> Where larger blotches of white
> Are lambs. Not my affair
> To count how many will never get up.

From "Love Notes":

> This handkerchief from the pocket
> of an unwashed summer skirt—
> smelling of sand and sex
> smells of you;
> behind closed lids
> the sun's wild catherine wheel
> spins again,
> the sea's surge resounds
> in dizzied ears.

Jennifer Strauss is a poet for our times, as Louis MacNeice and David Campbell were for theirs. She reflects the enjoyment of variety, of changing places and views, of what can be endured, and what can't.

The other two poets are well-established in the prose world, Peter Goldsworthy with prize winning short fiction and Kate Llewellyn with her successful book about life in the Blue Mountains of NSW, *Waterlily*. In the matter of their verse I can't help wishing that Llewellyn would say less and Goldsworthy would say more. Llewellyn pours it all out, the imaginatively splendid with the limply banal. Closing the book, the acute observations (little crystals) compete with a hazy mixture of love, trees, mist, grass, morning, regret, excuses, clouds, snow, ribbons, dreams.

But then Goldsworthy holds it all back, or rather releases a little of it at a time, making sure the untidy bits are tucked back in, and the whole thing squared up neatly.

Llewellyn's eighty poems are attractively put together in a shiny-covered paperback (unfortunately not one of these books will stay open without pummelling). Donald Brooks, Bob Brissenden and Marie Tulip recommend it warmly above a photograph of the author wearing shades in which an unidentified person is reflected. Among the successful poems are "A Walk in Dorset", "Three Brides", "The Australian Guide—Uffizi Gallery Florence", "This One", "Eggs", "Glenelg Mirrors", "This Arm". Llewellyn has trouble with tenses and with pronouns—you, it, I in one quatrain—and with the meaning of words: disinterestedly for uninterestedly. Too many things are like other things—white wisteria at Giverny like angel's hair, snowflakes like ribbons, hands like potatoes. Some poems begin well but fizzle out. In "Vienna to Sydney":

> Soon I am going home
> everyone will be speaking English
> I will kiss my friends
> and walk along the Esplanade
> see the yachts hear the cockatoos
> and the demented kookaburras

ends limply with

> I will hose the lawn
> and see how tall the treeferns grew.

The poem takes up again quite strongly in the second verse but dwindles in the third and last.

I suppose what I am saying is that a real talent is in danger of over-relaxation or over-decoration, or sometimes both.

Goldsworthy practises medicine as well as poetry, and as befits a physician he is king of the colon; it is his favorite form of punctuation. Printers hate colons, but with the end of hot type the spirit has probably gone out of their objections.

In *This Goes With This* Goldsworthy may be saying that poetry is not the most important of his, or any man's, occupations. He sometimes gives the impression of a poet watching himself write. It would be too easy to say that the work is a bit clinical, so I won't say it. The poem called "Alcohol" is extraordinarily clever, and I mean clever. Few have put it better:

> You are the eighth
> and shallowest
> of the seven seas,
>
> a shrivelled fragmented ocean
> dispersed into bottles, kegs, casks,
> warm puddles in lanes behind pubs:
> a chain of ponds.
>
> Also a kind of spa,
> a very hot spring:
> medicinal waters to be taken
> before meals, with meals, after meals
> without meals

with a final sardonic, resigned verse

> For always you make me a child again—
> sentimental, boring
> and for one happy hour very happy—
> sniffing out my true character like a dog:
> my Sea of Tranquillity
> always exactly shallow enough to drown in.

Goldsworthy can be read, with enjoyment, as an antidote to much that is superficial and show-off in recent poetry.

Elizabeth Riddell's next book is her Selected Poems *which will be published soon.*

Uncomfortable Reading

John Yule

Humphrey McQueen: *Suburbs of the Sacred: Transforming Australian Beliefs and Values* (Penguin, $19.95)

In the first three pages of this book the author proposes to examine "recent Australia from the angle of the art world". It will do this by "focusing through the works of Keith Looby". Why Looby? Because "what is important is Looby's work, not his life, and his work is important because it operates at the centre of Australia's post-war experience". Where is that centre? "Paddington".

Now every one of these propositions is highly dubious. To start with, artists are exiles within twentieth century Western communities, as Wind and others have established. McQueen himself concurs when, later in the book, he states that Paddington provided "a stay-at-home expatriatism". In other words it's not really part of Australia! To set out therefore to study a country through such a displaced, distorted mirror is perverse; and to narrow the beam down on to one artist, even more so: the man would need to be a colossus. And the more McQueen tells us of Looby, who starts off as a "romantic drunk" doing pornographic comics while dreaming of becoming "the Australian Diego Rivera", the less he seems suited for such an inflated role. In any case the claim that his work is important because he was at "the centre" is absurd—the only thing which makes a work important is artistic quality, not where it was done; otherwise every Tom, Dick and Harry living in Paddington at that time could make the same claim. And the extraordinary thing is that McQueen admits this when, on page 152, he pours scorn on "those who confused location with achievement"—the very thing he himself is doing on page 3! Finally the flat claim that Paddington was *the* centre is poppycock, and before long names like Boyd, Nolan, Tucker and Brack come crowding in, not one of whom ever worked in or near Paddington.

As for Looby's life not being important, half the book is occupied telling us about it.

The major general issue McQueen is anxious to examine is "the attempts to generate the . . . myths needed for contemporary existence". He admits that, among painters, the Melbourne artists "laid out alternatives for . . . these castles in the mind", but then by sleight-of-hand he avoids any further discussion of them by saying that in the late 1950s, when Looby began his career, these others had run out of steam.

Pursuit of these diverse themes allows the author to throw in, on the one hand, a confetti of incidentalia—Looby's frilly underpants, Johnny Earls "who dropped out of physics to take up the guitar", Brian Dunlop and Looby sharing digs but not speaking to each other, and various episodes where Looby's flamboyant sister Audrey features as fairy godmother—and on the other a sally of rather ponderous theoretical asides: his opinions on the inefficacy of religion; on the proper goals for Australian art; on how to view the Aboriginals (a good deal less than noble, he suggests); and a section on the, to him, nonsensical idea that nature on its own can have any serious significance. For nature is "but another product of human cultivation, neither innocent nor sustaining".

It is not advantageous to the reader that all this is presented in a rambling, haphazard way. But McQueen reassures us that it doesn't matter: he is merely "presenting information in the way we encounter events and each other—from one angle, then another". He tells us the decision to adopt this "structure" arose "in order to cope with accumulating information". Well yes, information does come usually in random packets—but the writer's job is to disentangle that and present an orderly array.

If there is one guiding thread through this foggy wilderness of a book it is Looby's progress as man and artist. We can skip over the former. His art work, to date, divides into four main categories: an early set of paintings using Biblical themes; a series of drawings depicting Australian history and his own personal history; portraits of prominent people (Hayden, Anne Summers, Senbergs, Max Gillies, David Combe); and a period of formal exploration painting such things as chairs and sofas. This last is of no interest whatsoever to McQueen, and is mentioned only in passing.

But the Biblical pictures are given considerable attention. They are large works, strongly lit and soft-textured, showing groups of people crowded into extremely shallow space. Stray hints of Bosch, Stanley Spencer and Arthur Boyd (whose "Bride" series deeply impressed the young Looby) are detectable. They are notable for a complete lack of religious feeling. "Looby," we are told cheerfully, "has never been religious or spiritual if those terms require a belief in another life or in God." They have impact by reason of size (for the most part McQueen doesn't bother with the accepted courtesies of quoting pictorial dimensions, but we do learn that "Knock! Knock! Is God home?" is 862.5 x 736.5 cms), and because they have a contrived geometric ordering. The participants are flaccid, hollow-eyed, grim mouthed zombies staring catatonically hither and yon. John Berger in England dismissed them as being too derivative of Boyd, but really they are not like Boyd at all. Boyd's religious pictures are notable above all else for the dynamism of the paint surface and the offbeat pathos and compassion of his interpretation. One feels Boyd engages with the sacred. Looby most certainly doesn't. We learn his mother was a Catholic, his father a Communist atheist, and that something of his mother's beliefs haunted him. It is not unreasonable to surmise that his huge, spiritually vacuous canvases may have been attempts to acquire religion by mimicry or force. But he never succeeded, and in the early 1970s abandoned the attempt.

In like manner, Looby's "histories" seem wilfully contrived attempts to force his presence on to his times—McQueen suggests they are "part of a strategy to locate himself in historical . . . contexts". And again it doesn't work; his extensive labors only end up as illustrations to a private, hermetic world to which the outsider has an ill-fitting key, and whose imagery never packs a big enough aesthetic punch to engulf and convert us.

McQueen, in recounting these struggles, utters several pronunciamentos on the role of religion in society. But he seems ill at ease with the topic: "The expectation that there must be other levels to reality stimulates our attraction towards mysteries, without necessarily prostrating us before the ineffable." This is a thin and hesitant statement. He then brings in Marx's idea that religion was the opiate of the people but explains that "religion had offered some of the consolations needed to endure suffering. Hence his [Marx's] call to abolish religions was a cry to abolish the conditions that had made religions necessary". How marvellously simple! Abolish suffering and the need for religion vanishes! No mention at all of the fact that religions *also* offer a cosmology, an explanation of and goal for human motivation, and a code of ethical controls.

"God," McQueen assures us, "had been lost" by the beginning of this century. "Religion is nothing but comforting illusions", "pie in the sky" and "believing in spooks", Jesus is the "clown who . . . might yet stumble across truths." And then, having said all that, he launches, unbelievably, into a learned dissertation on resurrectionism *v.* incarnationism, somehow managing to mix in commercialism, kenosis, sunbakers on Bondi Beach; quoting John Gaden, we are informed that "Australians have exulted in a vital immanent Spirit . . . experienced in the sensuality of good food and drink". All of this on a single page.

The whole chapter on theology really reduces to nothing at all—a religious negativist describing the negativistic paintings of another religious negativist. An exercise in futility, in other words, and a waste of our time.

But whatever has happened to "the Sacred" in all this—remember, the book is entitled *Suburbs of the Sacred*? The dictionary defines *sacred* as "set aside for the purpose of God; coming from God; pertaining to religion." But of course the term *can* be used loosely, just as the word *art* can. And just as cake decoration or the way you arrange dustbins on the pavement can be called art, if some academically qualified moron in charge of an art museum says so, so too I can call my big toe 'sacred' if I want to, this being a democracy. McQueen's desire is to persuade us that *history* is sacred. History, which lexicographically is simply "the events and actions that together make up the human past" (in other words, a neutral compilation of data) becomes in McQueen's eyes not only a living, acting force but even a purposeful force: "History provides a means to transcend ourselves" (he never explains how); "history [has] powers to resist the totalitarianism of the mass market state"; "Looby has been saved from the wilder shores of primitivism by the tug of . . . history". He refers to "mankind's ability to change and transform history" (which sounds like a

tautology), and three times he uses the mystic formula "the sacred in history", which he defines thus: "the sacred in history is its promise for a tolerable future." Finally the book ends (second last sentence) with the vague clarion call: "Once a sense of history is brought into the present, its possibilities can be remade more readily as a radical future".

None of this makes any sense to me. We can draw conclusions from history, and some of these *conclusions* may be inspiring and help to build better societies: but all of that is philosophy, not history. History merely presents cold facts. And in any case neither history nor theories generated out of history can in any real sense be called 'sacred'.

What then of McQueen in his role as connoisseur of art? He quickly states his position. "Genuine subjectivity," he lectures us, cannot come from "isolated individuals" but only from "historical actors who create themselves and society anew"—whatever that may mean. He goes on to say it is "valid" to reject "the notion that art is an outpouring of inner emotion." Such an idea is "pap" which we should "excrete". Patrick McCaughey enfuriates him because McCaughey would "challenge the historical method with one based on 'feeling, morality, pleasure' "—and worse, to do so was prepared to "re-order the past." This man, grumbles McQueen, had "apolitical aesthetics."

It is not surprising then to find McQueen never dirties his hands with human feelings in this book. He is a political animal, a social historian, he has no time for the incidental poignancies of individual lives. There is no love, no warmth, no awe, no excitement in these pages. He never says he admires any of Looby's paintings. He never writes with passion, he never brings Looby alive. He remains clinical and cold at all times. For instance "Looby had moved from Italy to London to live with a woman he had met in Rome. 'It lasted a couple of months because while I was a romantic figure as an artist in Rome, in London I was just another Australian'. Looby shifted into an adjacent room from which he could hear his ex-lady and her new lover fucking." Is this what McQueen means by "the sacred in history"? Compare that recitation to John Rewald (another social historian of art) relating an equivalently abbreviated personal episode in his *History of Impressionism*: "Upon being introduced to Monet, Choquet said with tears in his eyes: 'When I think of how I have lost a year, how I might have got to know your paintings a year sooner. How could I have been deprived of such a pleasure!' " Rewald's prose enters a region McQueen's can never reach, an intuitive empathy with emotionally charged situations—the very regions, after all, out of which art itself is always generated.

This distaste of McQueen's for emotion accounts also, one supposes, for several annoying lacunae in the book. For instance on six occasions it is stressed that Looby's depictions of his wife and "x-wife" form a series which is highly significant; for instance, "His potent themes have been schooldays and marriage". Yet of the forty-seven paintings reproduced, though seven are to do with schooldays, there's not a single one about wife or x-wife.

There are other faults. During the 1950s, McQueen writes, painters such as "Jon Molvig and Albert Tucker followed John Brack's lead in denoting the typical Australian by that chiselled physiognomy which Brack had taken over from Dick Tracy comics." I rang Brack and read this out to him. "Complete rubbish!" he said. Tucker was equally amazed. "It's ludicrous!" he exclaimed. He can produce proof he developed his chiselled profiles quite independently of Brack. Neither painter had been contacted by McQueen. So much then for this author's arrogant claim on page 2: " 'Suburbs of the Sacred' confirms the view that an articulation of theory depends upon the practices of research and rewriting."

I could go on: concerning Looby's draughtsmanship he notes "his drawing technique is to move his pen through brief, straightish lines that never venture into uncharted spaces." What can he possibly mean by "uncharted spaces"? If he means the blank surface of the paper, then surely *every* line *has to* venture into it: where else could it go?

Overall there are several worrying features to the book. One is that it mixes three genres: biography, social history, art connoisseurship, and the balance between the three remains uneasy. As a consequence there doesn't seem to be any strong point of view. Though interesting issues are raised, none are carried through to a solid conclusion and there is no clearly discernible abstract edifice under the rubble of particularities. There are no clear recommendations or predictions. It is a book which promises much but doesn't deliver.

And too often argument degenerates into slogan, upon which the author becomes not so much his own source as an echo of others—others whose opinions he repeats without re-examination or rephrasing, without casting any new light on them. Statements like "the secularisation that was once an escape from superstitition and ignorance has been turned into a weapon against reality and peace" sound more like oratory than clear thinking. And "art . . . cannot exist without history"; or "certain theoreticians see art as a category constructed independently of human action" are, to say the least, too hasty and ambiguous. The trouble is, the book teems and froths with this sort of thing, making the reading very hard going.

And one final thing. As an artist I never got the feeling the author really understood the basic nature of art—in particular that the art image springs inescapably from private instinctual and intuitive sources in the

individual brain. On the contrary McQueen seems intent to establish that art is or should be a servant or consequence of social reformatist doctrines. Such programming of the emerging art image never works very well, no matter who the programmers are. And as if to prove the point, something quite extraordinary happens midway through this book. (It seems to happen of its own accord, against McQueen's overall intent.)

McQueen starts by presenting Looby as a "sufficiently" good example for his thesis. But soon he is making quite exaggerated claims for him: "his series . . . combined topics and metaphors in ways neither historians nor artists had ever attempted"; "within a decade of his return [from overseas] in 1966 Looby had explored the meaning of everyday life in suburbia"; and, even more grandiosely, "Looby set about reconciling the entirety of human experience on this continent."

Then, to the reader's amazement, the author's attitude changes completely. Commenting on Looby's painting of Anne Summers, McQueen says "neither artist nor sitter appreciated how much the portrait was becoming yet another self-portrait." Seventy pages later he goes much further and states "his work was a concealed self-portrait" (he means his *entire* work, his life's work). He is now admitting that these so-called "histories" and social commentaries are in reality introspective creations. His tone becomes increasingly derisory: he speaks of Looby as "moralising and egocentric", he says Looby has "a sense of himself as criminal" and as an "outsider on the art scene." Finally we are told that nowadays "his temperament tends to that of a hermit"; "he sees politics in terms of leaders and shows scant awareness of the proposition that it is the people who make history"; and "his satires [remain] in the realm of play".

In other words, as far as McQueen is concerned, this artist has become a complete apostate. No longer an historical actor creating himself and society anew but a virtual exile from "the people", an exile from political engagement, an exile from the art world, an introvert and a hermit. And McQueen turns on him and condemns him. This makes for very uncomfortable reading.

Altogether this is an unsatisfactory book. Looby is treated somewhat shabbily and deserved better. The main topics addressed in the text deserved better. And we, the reading public, deserved better.

John Yule is a Melbourne painter and author of The Living Canvas *(Melbourne University Press).*

Baudin the Man

Greg Dening

Frank Horner: *The French Reconnaissance. Baudin in Australia 1801-1803* (Melbourne University Press, $47.95).

The French lost scholarly interest in their Pacific and Southern Ocean discoveries more than seventy years ago. Frank Horner's *The French Reconnaissance. Baudin in Australia 1801-1803* might help revive them, although it is the way of the world that kanak rebellions are more likely to resurrect a sense of old glories. Such revivals need heroes, and Horner, if he does not make a hero out of Baudin, at least will persuade most to be more honest in their prejudices against him.

Nicolas-Thomas Baudin led a "Voyage of Discovery to Southern Lands" in the *Geographe* and *Naturaliste* 1801-1804. He mapped the west coast of Australia from Cape Leeuwin to the Bonaparte Archipelago east of Timor, and the southern coast from Cape Leeuwin to Port Jackson. His expedition brought back to France more than 200,000 botanical, zoological and geological specimens, enough to furbish a zoo, several museums and herbaria. Sad to say, it did not bring Baudin back. He died on the way home. "Baudin did well to die", is Napoleon Bonaparte's unauthenticated comment, "on his return I would have had him hanged." The remark gives something of the flavor of Baudin's reputation, although Napoleon had not much time for scientific expeditions, especially ones with an anthropological perspective. He had trouble enough with natives at home. Anthropology was too much the breeding ground of *ideologues*, too much a 'mirror for man' for Napoleon's political comfort. Even the slightest whiff of cultural relativism troubles emperors and dictators.

With Bonaparte against him for a start, Horner had the task before him to say it wasn't so. His revisionist narrative is long and full. Every scat of corruption, incompetence, imprudence, error, gossip and bad temper is precisely measured in every aspect of the voyage, its preparation and its publication. If Baudin was unlucky in the man, Francois Peron, who wrote up his voyage of discovery, and in all the 'experimental gentlemen' who were his scientific companions, as well as in all his nasty naval colleagues, he has been very lucky in the careful scholarship of Frank Horner. Horner's history is a model of exhaustive empirical research. There is nowhere else to begin now on Baudin, than with Horner's account.

With the enigma of Baudin the Man now out of the way, however, Horner owes us another volume on Baudin the Expedition. The last chapter is not nearly enough to know what all the scientific collecting,

observing and representing meant. What did it mean, what would it mean for France and the rest of Europe to possess the world in this way, to put the world on the shelves of libraries and museums? This was the beginning of the nineteenth century, and much of the pain of possessing others in this way was still to come. Now at the end of the twentieth century one would like to know not how much but why so little was learnt of such a science. Melbourne University Press have published a fine book. Keith Mitchell's many precise and uncluttered maps are a delight and a marvellous aid. And a man as careful with words as Frank Horner could not fail to produce a text as precise and uncluttered. The French, so unsure as to what to celebrate of their Revolution in a bicentenary way, might well be inspired to look south again.

Greg Dening is Max Crawford Professor of History at the University of Melbourne. He has recently published History's Anthropology—The Death of William Gooch, *dealing with the Vancouver expedition of 1792-1796, and* The Bounty—An Ethnographic History.

Ern Malley's Children

Dorothy Hewett

The Poems of Ern Malley, with commentaries by Max Harris and Joanna Murray-Smith (Allen & Unwin, $34.95).

It is forty-four years since the charismatic Ern Malley was invented to trouble the stagnant cultural waters of Australia.

And now his recalcitrant ghost rises once more amongst us: "The valiant man who withstood/Rage, envy and malignant love" is reprinted in a handsome, hardback edition in plum and silver, with a full-color reproduction of the Nolan painting of Ern on the front cover.

Nolan chose to paint Ern Malley's suffering face under a digger's slouch hat, thus marrying two famous archetypes, the Anzac and Malley.

The actual poems that make up "The Darkening Ecliptic" number only sixteen, but the waves that long-ago hoax created in the Australian literary scene are still breaking on the beach. As Max Harris comments: "After twelve editions of his collected poetry in the intervening years, Ern Malley is alive and well and living as an Australian legend."

Why was it that a drunken jibe entered into by two young poets, with considerable literary gifts themselves, should have created such an extraordinary furore, eventually rebounding on the perpetrators themselves?

This book does much to answer these teasing questions. It reprints Max Harris's introduction to the 1961 edition of the poems, adding his comments forty-four years on and includes a lively commentary by one of today's generation, Joanna Murray-Smith, "Angry Penguins as Cultural Gesture." Joanna Murray-Smith's play, based on the Angry Penguins story, had a successful season at the Church Theatre in Melbourne last year.

Angry Penguins, with Max Harris as editor, was launched from Adelaide University in 1940. James McAuley and Harold Stewart masterminded the Ern Malley hoax from Sydney in 1944. Four years for Angry Penguins to divide the culture and infuriate or enthuse the literary mafioso of Australia.

The magazine became, in Joanna Murray-Smith's words, "part of the war which raged between the forces of tradition and 'modernity' in Australia", when the Director of the National Gallery in Victoria could attack modern art as "the work of perverts" and "totally foreign to this relatively happiest of countries."

The Penguins nailed their colors to the mast—reinterpreting European modernism for Australian conditions, resolutely setting themselves against a whole mindscape of established literary canons: Bulletin Red Page bushwhackery, Marxist-influenced social reportage, Meanjin neo-nationalism, the self-conscious Aboriginalities of the Jindyworobaks and the culturally stagnant concepts of the Royal Australian Academy of Art, founded by R. G. Menzies in 1937.

The range of their interests extended through painting, literature, the arts generally, and ideas. Their main strength was in the painters they nourished, and the ideas they argued.

But, like all young and fervent evangelists, they were egocentric, angry, tactless and sometimes absurd. Yet for them the times *were* ripe, and they became the catalysts of change. They appeared, as they had to do, at a time of great cultural, political, social and national upheaval, at a time when Australia was changing her traditional allegiance from Great Britain to the United States, a time when she could no longer afford to be an isolated and innocent Antipodean outpost of Empire. Part of that change was to be dragged into modernism.

It was the time of the young, and we were determined to make our mark and, in making it, change the world, particularly our own corner of it.

Some of the conflicts in my own history coincide with the emblematic story of the Angry Penguins, and may help to give some of the particular, restless flavor of the times.

In 1941 I was an eighteen year-old Arts student at the University of Western Australia, and had just won a poetry competition in Meanjin with a lyric poem,

probably inspired by Edith Sitwell and Ezra Pound's 'translations' from the Chinese.

In my autobiography, still in progress, I have written thus about that time:

> What were we like, my generation of 1941 . . romantic, idealistic, fiercely partisan about politics, equality of the sexes, determined to change our world, we were very conscious of being a radical, intellectual minority in a little Australian backwater.
>
> The Yank invasion had revolutionised sex. All the old values were in the melting pot. The war had changed our lives forever, everything was in question, even our survival. If it was unlikely that we'd live out our allotted span then we'd live for the moment. If our boyfriends were unlikely to survive the holocaust then it was up to us, the girls, to enjoy our youth while we had it. "Live wildly today/forget tomorrow", I wrote. We were existentialists without knowing it.
>
> Angry Penguins, an avant-garde literary magazine, had published a poem of mine, and introduced me to the artists Nolan, Tucker, Vasilieff, Gleeson, Boyd, Perceval and the European dadaists. They had published Rimbaud (in translation) so that I could understand it, and new work by Dylan Thomas. They had been responsible for my first 'overseas' publication, a poem, "Australian Sunset", in Harry Roskolenko's magazine, Voices.
>
> When vague rumors of a Melbourne struggle between the avant garde, led by John and Sunday Reed, and the Marxist artists led by Noel Counihan, drifted across the Nullabor, all my natural sympathies had been with the modernists, rather than the socialist realists.
>
> When the Ern Malley hoax broke in the papers and Max Harris was charged with obscenity in the Adelaide courts, I was scathing against the philistines.
>
> But then I joined the Communist Party in 1945, and changed my coat.
>
> Whatever secret heresies I still harbored in my middle-class, intellectual consciousness, my conversion soon became absolute. Like any good convert who needs to repudiate past allegiances, I was soon attacking Angry Penguins in the Communist Party newspaper, the West Australian Workers' Star.
>
> (Ezra Pound was awaiting trial in Washington for broadcasting Axis propaganda from Rome, and had just been indicted for nineteen overt acts of treason.)
>
> Under a headline, "Penguins won't grow up", I wrote that: "The Angry Penguins", emotional godchildren of Ezra Pound, have let forth another strident squawk, consisting of 179 pages", and I go on to describe the poetry in the magazine as "a boring and particularly messy bit of amateur, mental surgery."
>
> How could this have happened in only four years? Had I abdicated my conscience? The answer was that I wanted so desperately to believe in my new religion, and I was so afraid of backsliding, I had to attack what I had most loved and admired, for my conversion to be complete.

Thus four years of my own life personified the bitter struggle between two opposed ideologies of the period, the radical modernists and the radical socialist-realists, the latter uneasy bedfellows of the cultural Right. History had pushed the socialist-realists into a hard-nosed, old-fashioned conservatism, while the radical modernists continued their struggle into the late 1960s, when the young poets and painters, influenced by American modernism, grouped themselves around the Sydney magazine New Poetry.

But in 1944 every philistine in the country flocked to the standard of McAuley and Stewart, and this, in its turn, was their tragedy. As fervent in their traditional classicism as the Angry Penguins were in their modernism, they could never have foreseen the brutal forces their hoax would let loose in Australian society. For they were brutal forces, the forces of the police state: bookburners, gaggers, Grundys and illiterates, with their terrifying ignorance and pathological terrors.

As for the poems themselves, their actual literary worth has become the least of their reasons for survival. Looking again at them forty-four years later, they remain much as they always were—the uneven work of a young poet (or two young poets) who exhibited a certain felicity and energy of language in a phrase, or an image or a verse, or sometimes in almost a whole poem, a freshness and irreverence that catches at the imagination.

> It is something to be at last speaking
> Though in this No-Man's language appropriate
> Only to No-Man's-Land.

This can be read, of course, as a McAuley-Stewart in-joke against the Angry Penguins, but it works much better as a statement about the struggle of the young poet to create a new language in a new land.

Living, working, reading, writing, painting in Australia, we all owe a debt, usually unacknowledged, to the Angry Penguins, Max Harris, Ern Malley and the rest. As for me, once an apostate for more than twenty years, I still see myself as one of Ern Malley's children.

Dorothy Hewett is working on her autobiography. Her collection Alice in Wormland *appeared recently.*

Dransfield: A Revaluation

Kevin Hart

Michael Dransfield: *Collected Poems*, edited by Rodney Hall (University of Queensland Press, $14.95).

There is all the difference in the world between a *Selected Poems* and a *Collected Poems*. When a writer prepares a selection of his or her work for the press, we see a process of self-understanding at work: the past is ordered by the present or sometimes by the future—all those poems the writer wishes to compose. A *Selected Poems* is a book of choices: decisions to include or exclude may be baffling or infuriating (think of Auden), but at least they give life to what we read. A *Collected Poems*, though, is invariably marked by the absence of choice and a sense of finality. Even when a writer is very much alive, a complete collection of the work cannot help but read like a monumental inscription. If reading a selection is like following a river and its tributaries, reading a collection is more like exploring a lake.

Michael Dransfield did not live to prepare a selection of his poems, and so we have a number of individual volumes, a very partial selection in *Drug Poems*, and two posthumous titles. This thick *Collected Poems* represents the majority of all he wrote and, until there appears a complete text which includes those poems not included in the posthumous volumes, this is the Dransfield book to buy. Doubtless those manuscript poems will be unearthed one day, for Dransfield now represents something of an industry in Australian literature. After all, no other Australian poet has fulfilled so many bourgeois myths at once. Alive, he seemed to incarnate the figures of the bard, the rebel and the free spirit; and in dying young (at twenty-four) it was an easy matter to associate him with Romantics like Chatterton, Keats and Shelley. Yet Dransfield did not have to die in order to be mythologised: his entire career was already a process of self-mythologising, and the lustre that death would confer upon his poems was something he knew all too well. There is a sense in which he was killed by a particular reading of literary history.

High claims have always been made for Dransfield's verse, yet paradoxically Rodney Hall's monument to Dransfield may occasion a revaluation of his reputation. And not before time: all too often people have responded to the Dransfield mythology and not to the poetry itself. More generally, Dransfield is commonly taken to stand for that rush of energy which overtook Australian poetry around 1968. It's important to distinguish between what that energy *enabled* to be written in Australia and what was actually *achieved* by those who were writing at the time. With the benefit of twenty years' hindsight, it seems pretty clear that writers such as John Forbes and John Tranter are (and were) in many ways stronger writers than, say, Robert Adamson and Michael Dransfield. Yet without Adamson and Dransfield it is quite possible that David Campbell, for example, may not have come to write those piercing lyrics in his last four books. The most permanent achievements of 1968 may well turn out to be written by poets who took no active role in the literary movements of the time, who were either too old or too young.

That Michael Dransfield had a very considerable talent is obvious to anyone who opens this book, though whether he fulfilled his promise is far less certain. Doubtless his work changed markedly from the first poems, written in 1964, to the final poems of 1973. He was always young and always writing under pressure from various sources; he absorped influences at a great rate, some benign and some dangerous, perhaps the most damaging being the influence of his own early success in the literary world. Yet just how, and in what directions, he developed is hard to tell in any detail from this collection, since the editor has (not unreasonably) decided to follow the sequence of published titles, from *Streets of the Long Voyage* (1970) to *The Second Month of Spring* (1980). Reading the collection from beginning to end one comes across two brief periods where his talent shines: one, early on, which includes "Deuteronomy", "Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man" and "Fix"; and another, towards the end, best characterised by "Imports", "A Strange Bird" and "we are the freaked out".

The opening poem of this collection, "Deuteronomy", shows all of Dransfield's style and promise. Here are its closing stanzas:

> Wooden wheels
> roll down the shallow lanes
> beneath lime-tinged orange trees, each
> so alone.
>
> An hour ago,
> dawn—the painful mysteries
> await explanation
> but already the kill is salted and stored.

Perhaps the most impressive thing here is all that is *not* said—a lesson Dransfield learned from Quasimodo. The penultimate stanza may be a little clogged with adjectives, yet the whole poem has a tight economy of word and gesture. The same tightness can still be found in a later poem, "we are the freaked out", though in the service of a rather different tone. Here is Dransfield looking at "the painful mysteries" from the other side, from within:

> we are the freaked out
> capital's strange suicide team

helping each other out of life
or tentatively saving

each other from the razor
from the big question

. . .

let those who want to ride it out
help those who are past caring

who crave
only oblivion's

swift perils

Between the beginning and the end of this collection there are, of course, a number of poems worth reading. Some of them are occasionally moving, some of them have good lines or winning images. By and large, though, this collection is filled with poems which never fully realise their potential. Dransfield's single best book remains his first, *Streets of the Long Voyage*, with its tension between the romantic (the long voyage) and the everyday (the streets). By the time we reach the second book, *The Inspector of Tides*, the tension has relaxed and a good deal of the book is little more than dead weight. Dransfield's strength was always the lyric. Ventures into satire, such as "Prosperity", now seem a mixture of heavy-handedness and sentimentality. More is won, I think, when Dransfield turns to humor: "Letter to People about Pelicans" has several nice touches (especially the idea of "a new school of poetry//something to do with temperature"), and there is always that hilarious three-liner, "Flying":

i was flying over sydney
in a giant dog

things looked bad

True, there are moments of genuine recovery in Dransfield's second book ("Geography III" and "Ryokan", for example) but after 1970 or thereabouts he seemed to have drowned in his own poetic voice. In just a few years his freshness became a matter of technique. And in many cases, it is only Dransfield's technique—especially a knack of achieving poetic closure—that saves poems from utter failure. This is saddest in those poems that approach success, such as "I Tell Myself I'm Through with Love", and annoying in the many others which are little more than "a lysergic acid rave" with moments of flair.

For one reason or another, Dransfield wrote and published far too much. It's too late now to wish that he had taken more care with each poem or that he had prepared a *Selected Poems* when he was alive. I very much doubt whether, considered purely on the evidence presented here, Dransfield deserves a *Collected Poems*. Dransfield's success answers more to a large-scale wish fulfilment in Australian literature, especially by its academic and publishing managers, than to a positive literary achievement. Even so, there would be some reason now for a slim *Selected Poems*, edited by someone sympathetic though not indulgent, and it may well do more for Dransfield's reputation than the ampler volume we now have.

Kevin Hart's last volume of poetry, Your Shadow, *won the NSW Premier's Prize for Poetry. He teaches at Deakin University.*

Murnane and Mooney

David O. Matthews

Ray Mooney: *A Green Light* (Penguin, $12.95).
Gerald Murnane: *Inland* (Heinemann, $24.95).

By following the achievement of *Landscape with Landscape* with *Inland*, Gerald Murnane has shown that he is a writer at the top of his form. Ray Mooney's novel is a startling and powerful debut by a writer who began his career writing plays in prison. Though the first section of *A Green Light*, which relates the upbringing of a young boy and his relationship with his bookmaker father, could almost be Murnane country, in fact these books go in vastly different directions.

In *Landscape*, each of the narrators (who are probably best viewed as versions of one narrator) introduces the successive stories as his own work, about himself as he might have been if his life had been different. There is something of this narrative regression in *Inland*, Murnane's most complex work to date. Again, it appears to be the case that there are several first person narrators. The book opens as the work of a man writing in his native Magyar tongue, in Szolnok county. Though of course we read in English what he says is his own heavy-hearted language, we can assume that what we see is the translation of the Hungarian's words by his editor, Anne Kristaly Gunnarsen. She works in the Calvin O. Dahlberg Institute of Prairie Studies, near the town of Ideal, in Tripp County, in South Dakota, so the writer has never met her. Gradually, he comes to suspect that his letters to her are being intercepted by her jealous husband, Gunnar T. Gunnarsen. Next, he considers that the letters he receives from her are actually forged by her husband, and that Gunnarsen may forge a letter to Anne Kristaly, in which he will say that the writer has died. The writer then writes his own obituary. Further on, he thinks of his editor as thinking of him as dead, and wonders if this is what some writers do before they begin to write. At the end of this teasing

section the writer decides that Gunnar T. Gunnarsen does not think about him after all, and that the person intercepting his letters is a new nameless enemy.

When the next section begins, the writer appears to be no longer in Szolnok County, but just when the reader may be getting confused, the writer accuses the reader of having deceived *him*, by pretending to be his editor.

The narrator's position slides to the seemingly more familiar terrain of Melbourne County, but the relation between writer and reader is never made more comfortable. The reader cannot be a voyeur, peering in at the window of the novel; accused of being an enemy, the reader of *Inland* must engage with the fiction, or be lost in the strangeness of it.

Forcing this kind of reappraisal of fiction is of course a feature of Murnane's writing, whose whole enterprise could be said to be the uncovering of the foreign in the familiar, of otherness in what we think we know. As writer and reader are shown to be fragmentary, disparate beings, what emerges clearly from *Inland* is "that no thing in the world is one thing." Murnane's narrators learn to look out of the sides of their eyes, to see the other things that exist in one thing; his readers are invited to do the same.

A Green Light falls into three parts, the first detailing Johnny Morgan's boyhood, the second his stretch in prison for rape, and the third his burgeoning career in crime after his release. There is also a short Prologue, which in retrospect can be seen as a remarkably neat parable summarising the whole novel.

This is a Penguin book desperately trying to look like some other book. It has a flashy cover, and pages made small so that there are a lot of them, and it looks just like the blockbuster that it wants to be. It is, however, rather more than a tale of prison brutality and underworld evil-doing.

This kind of book is often billed as an indictment of the 'system' and the way it treats wrongdoers, and turns out to be a glorifying of honor amongst thieves. *A Green Light* is neither of these things; though the complete inhumanity of the prison system as it is portrayed in the central, and perhaps strongest, section of the book is very believable, the judgmental finger is not pointed at anyone. Although the author got his inside information the hard way, not a trace of bitterness comes through in his writing. The authorial voice does not make any judgment either way on Morgan, or the gallery of criminals, bent cops, sadistic screws, prostitutes and standover men who populate the book. It does of course imply that it doesn't make much difference which side of the wire you're standing on. This detachment is reinforced by the fact that there is very little description, and a lot of dialogue in the book, perhaps due to the author's background in drama. This means that, rather like a director facing a script without many stage directions, the reader has to make the difficult decisions. Is Morgan an amoral hero, a vernacular Tamburlaine? Should we be looking forward to his Faustian comeuppance? *A Green Light* makes these decisions difficult because it offers no clearly positive position to identify with.

The Elizabethan dramatists knew that they had to mix in plenty of gore with their philosophical considerations, and Mooney has done the same. This novel is on one level a straightforward, suspenseful yarn, the brutality and violence of which should satisfy all those who like their thrillers hot.

David O. Matthews is a postgraduate student in English at Melbourne University.

THE RIGHT TO DIE

Since I did not ask
to be born, may I
at least ask to die

Particularly if one
day I would be un-
able to make such

A request.

JOYCE PARKES

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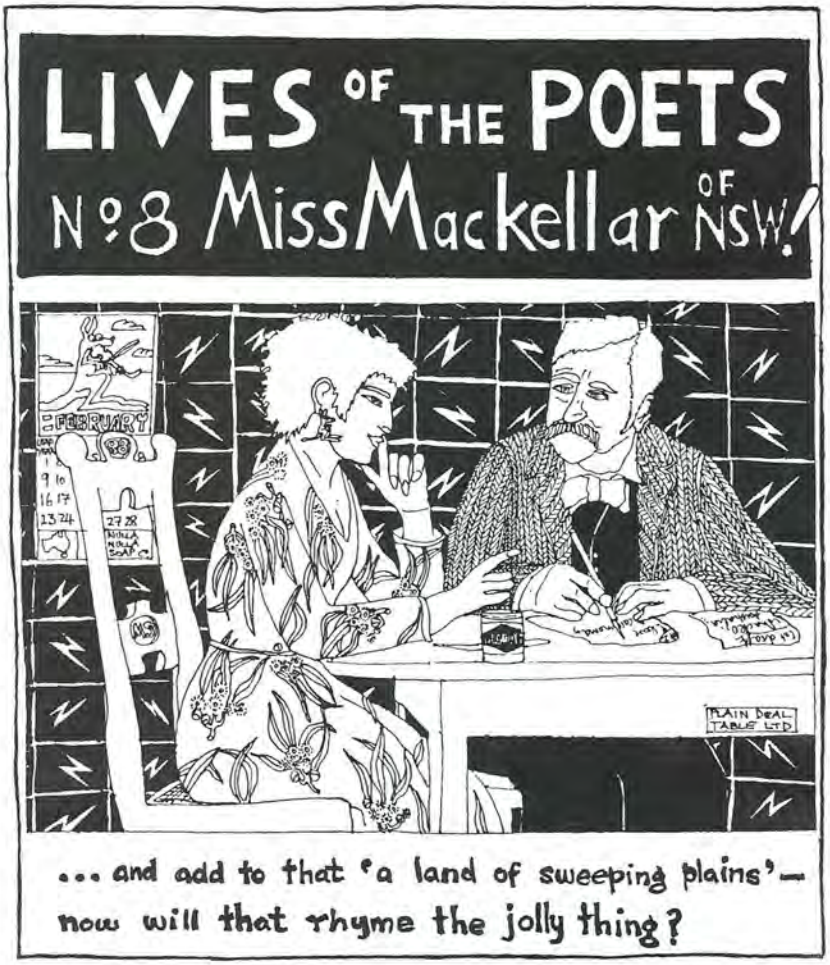

Michael Sharkey