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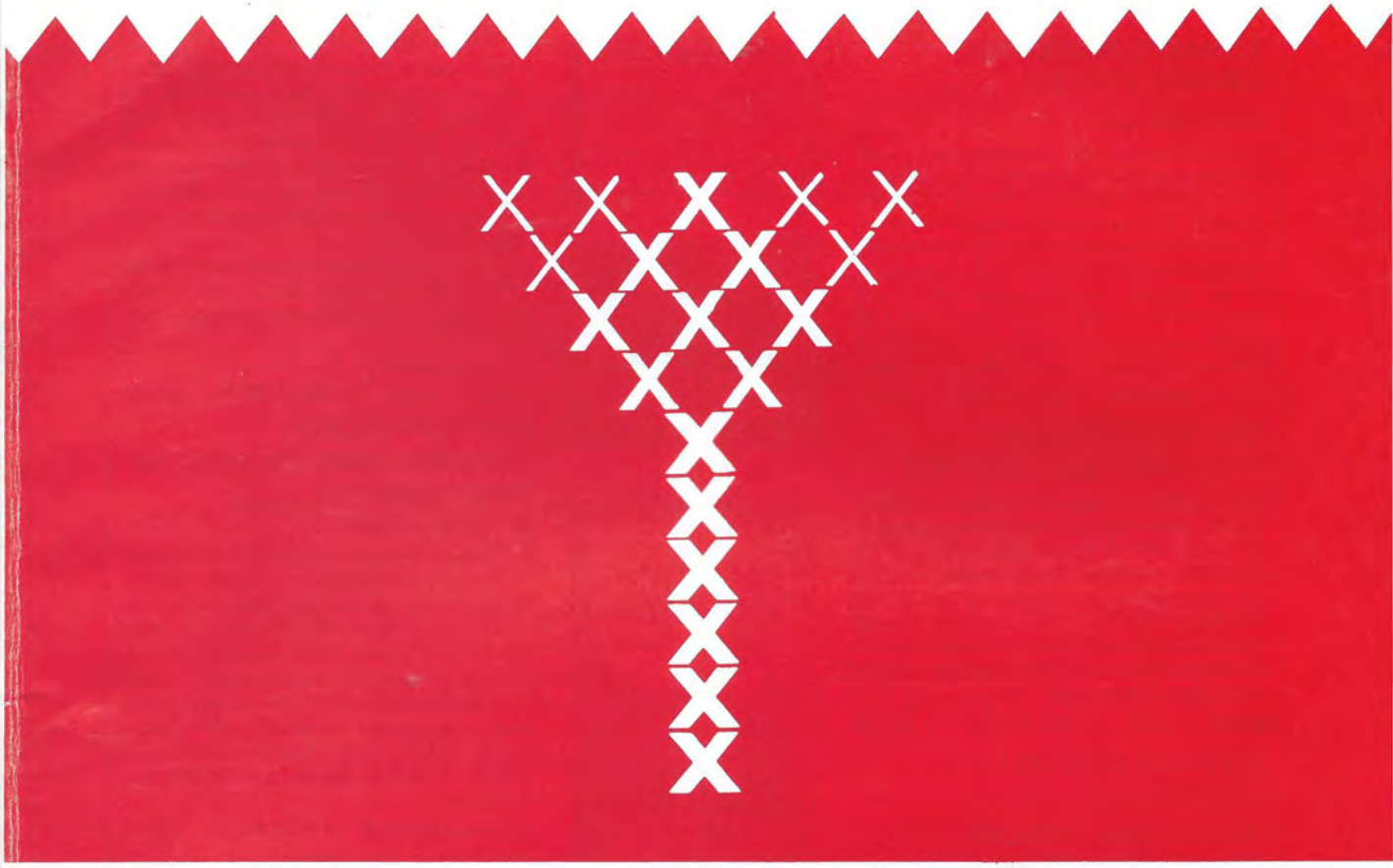

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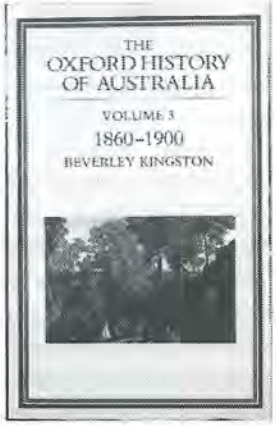

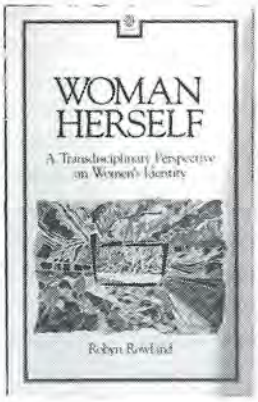

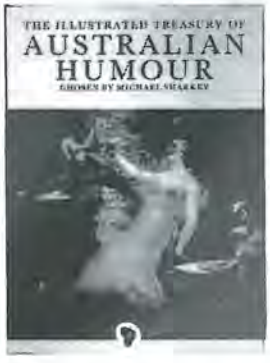

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BARRY DICKINS

The Festival Of Ideas

Mugs, the old euphemism for not being too bright, was the only real word to describe Terry and Graeme Flummery, poets.

Not only brilliant bards from Bell Street, they were well known all over greater Preston as perhaps the most innovative alcoholics on earth, certainly in Australia. Their father it was who invented the means to extract lead from aviation fuel in Rabaul during World War 2.

He strained it through bread to get the lead out of it. After one imperial pint he sprang into coconut trees and could not be enticed down.

Terry and Graeme lived at their parents' humble cottage, at the rear of P.A.N.C.H., the Community Hospital. When the horrors came, it was handy. The Flummery Bros were well liked at The Council Club Hotel, and many and strange were the dart nights they enjoyed down there. The nominee, Brian Pot, had a big dart-hole fair in the middle of his eyes; this was the only real bullseye in Preston.

They had worked for many years as apprentice chassis-strippers at Raglan Autos, but when the recession hit full-bore, like thousands of poor others, got the arse. Their world was poetry, a job you aren't likely to lose, unless the mysterious Muse had it in for you. They walked a lot, walking being free under Bob Hawke; and they spoke intimately of all there is in this finest world of all other worlds.

Their books they owned, their Drum they shared; their mother and father they shouted feeds at the Chinese in Plenty Road whenever they could.

It was raining the day Graeme Flummery ran after Ernie the Postie.

"How's it going, Pal?" cried Graeme.

"A few more bills for you," replied Ernie, and cycled off, all asthma and spokes spinning. Graeme watched the old Postie blur away. He dived his paw into the jagged tin letterbox. A gas bill and an invite.

"Whoopee!"

Inside their neat slum Terry read the gas bill with enormous attention to detail. "I wish they set their copy in Ludlow Bold, something interesting at least," he mused, pouring his twin brother a cup of half-Milo, half-water. "What's the invite all about?"

"It seems you've won book of the year at The Festival Of Ideas," smiled his brother. "Good on you, mate!"

They must have read that beautifully embossed card a million times, their bulged eyes revolving like Graeme Kennedy's autocue. "Shit, I'm glad I had it professionally typed," said Graeme Flummery. His mind shot back to "The Ladies"; a tiny typing service off Little Collins Street. It cost him over one hundred dollars to get it "right".

The lads celebrated with a drink at The Council Club. They scurried about the hideous home searching had-it coats for crumpled quids. Each pair of pants revealed a coin or two. They pinched S.E.C. money from their mother's facecream jar. Off to the pub for a blow for Madam Life.

At The Council Club they bumped, in the darkness of the greasy carpark, headforemost into one Gunny Thomas, crim. They both said "sorry" at the same time, then strode into the smoke and phleghm and boasts and disappointments and old jockeys and standover men and young girls with braces on their teeth of The Side Bar.

No man knew why it was called "The Side Bar"; nobody questioned titles much in this carbuncled neck of the woods. Terry bought triples and six icy pots with promises and future homes bubbling in each. Down they went like scythed golden marigolds.

There was a bit of a rumpus nearby; someone trying the patience of Gunny Thomas. "I reckon you're a real cunt, Gunny," sneered a weasel of a man, a business rep from Goodyear Tyres, not overliked in Preston. "Yeah, a real cunt plus a rabbit. You're yellow, get me. I could do you anytime, yeah; with both hands strung behind me back, you big homo."

It was an eternity until Gunny slid a red-hot .44 out of his coat and slung it along the bar, where it spun to rest. One hundred rainbowball eyes stared at it. "Go for your life," smiled Gunny Thomas. Apparently the weapon was warm due to several shots being fired at the public lavatory.

Later on the boys repaired to The How Flung Chuck


SIDE BAR
Brian Pot Nominee
MUM
Terry Flummery
Graeme Flummery
Rubo. '88.

Cafe in Plenty Road. Their aged parents catapulted into omelettes; much cold beer and wine was chucked back. Dad said: "Does this acceptance mean certain publication, boys?" Mum just beamed and said: "Now you can rent."

Next day on the Adelaide train the boys slept and dreamt symbiotically. They alighted in the brightness and bias that is Adelaide, and got a room at The Velvet Rest; $65 per night for three-legged coffeetable and a partially obscured view of The Torrens. A bit of nightlife in Hindley Street, then a crook Arabic hamburger with some sort of lawn in it, then true unconsciousness with the full vigour. They slept as though felled.

Around midday they found cards with their names printed in gold upon pink bleachers at the Writers' Week tent. Knowing nobody, they chatted amicably to themselves. They watched many invited writers read their identical observations of life at Flinders University; they clapped politely at the right time; they smiled and were nice to one and all. It was just dead boring.

They met a nice American, writer-in-residence at The University of the South Pole, who shouted them a beer and spoke briefly in low tones about corruption in South Pole arts funding; how rough workingclass eskimos from all over the world hardly ever cracked it for a $45,000 Literature Board Award. The boys said this was bullshit, and showed him the beautifully printed letter. The American blushed.

It was all over in a second, really; the boys, both of them, got up and said "thanks a lot" and picked up a contract and some forms with phone numbers scrawled on the backs of them, stepped down from the huge stage and strolled away to meet some fashionable overseas artists and feminist publishers with senses of humour.

None being found, the lads once again sought the rough trade of Hindley Street. In a Greek hamburger joint they read the contract thoughtfully. No mere offer, it was a "beauty"; the kind of deal every Australian writer dreams about. The Publisher, Hoonman & Hoonman, offered a $12,000 advance and 9% royalties for a poetic novel on life in Preston. They had to go home to think about it.

"Ah, the sylvan scene of Preston," whispered Graeme Flummery to his snoozing brother. "I knew if we held out long enough, it would come true!" Surely the things of the street were paramount to the sum knowledge of modern Australia. Nobody currently criticized society in fiction, or poems.

"Old Chinese marketgardens. The sun shining through drinkers' hands. Standover men like Gunny Thomas; everyone's important. See, mate, I knew if we kept on drawing from the current, the people, the battlers, the ones who have not known silk against neck or a ride in a Mercedes or a decent feed; the mugs like our Pop battling tropical ulcers and not getting a pension from the traitors who are in charge, the ones without sympathy; I knew if we kept true to the teachings of Henry Lawson and Francis Webb; I knew if we wrote with our hearts, the same red hearts beating for our country; to do it without patriotism, without flagwaving, we'd get the artistic nod!"

He then broke; it broke him, this news of Governmental approval. He smiled at his sleeping brother, chucked his Navy Greatcoat over his shoulders, lit a smoke, coughed and guzzled six cans with all the hate in him. It was late when a timid female knocking broke their boozed repose.

They were whizzed off to Government House. Forms were signed in nothing flat. They ate sudden schnapper; they guzzled automatic Dom Perignom. Drink self-opened and food self-appeared. They had their warm backs patted. They were introduced to endless professors. They threw up.

Next day at The Writers' Week tent they hung around the niner. The Festival of Ideas was launched by Don Dunstan, who mistook Graeme for David Williamson, a crazy mistake as David Williamson is two feet taller. It was a bit awkward, and they sat and listened politely, wishing they were with Gunny Thomas in The Council Club "Side Bar".

Some of the ideas at The Festival were pretty beaut, really. The 15 hinged ladder. The self-reading book. The thriller you can eat. A heap of money had certainly been poured into it, no mistake about that. Alan Bond made a comic speech thanking his own private university. The Chilean Telephone Exchange thanked Alan Bond for pouring money into that country.

Robert Holmes á Court spoke of money and the influence of money. The Honey Board spoke of the influence of honey; particularly jarred. An old woman demonstrated how to make milk from skim milk; it was pretty hard to see the connection between ideas after a time. And after the lunch, the boys had just about had enough, until a little incident put a bit of curry into the curriculum.

They bumped into an old ex-copper in the grog tent who told them who drowned the two poofters. The heat was beating down on the brothers. It was time to see the publishers and go back to Melbourne. They'd had it with Adelaide.

All afternoon they endeavoured to buttonhole important publishers. Truth was though, it was nigh-impossible to ascertain one publisher from another. All wore high and white fashionable boaters. All smoked pipes. All had a big gut. All gin and tonic'd. None of them would have a beer. The boys caught the train home.

On the train though, it became apparent just how many visiting academics visit these Idea Festivals. Millions upon millions of big guts and white straw hats and puffing pipes. Blahblahblahblahblahblahblah!

A few days later the brothers surfaced at their home-

turf, The Side Bar. You won't believe this, but there were about fifteen big guts and white straw hats and puffing pipes in there; they had migrated to Preston to have a whiff of the workingclass, to get an idea for next year's turn.

Gunny Thomas went to America and lectured in Australian Standover Tactics; for which work he received heaps, he even developed a pencil moustache. The Festival of Ideas had corrupted even Gunny Thomas!

The first advance money fluttered into the Flummery letterbox. Ernie the Postie had been run over by a load of flathead in Boundary Rd, and all in all, life wasn't the same for The Flummery Bros. Their old mates gave them the shove; it was much like the way Paul Hogan got the snub by the old Harbour Bridge Push when he hit the bigtime. Sad, sad days lay in wait for The Flummery Bros.

"Going to next year's Festival of Ideas, mate?" asked Terry. "I'm going back to Raglan Autos, mate."

KISSING IN PUBLIC

I see him lying on the footpath
with lipstick dribbling
out of his mouth
& he's yelling: I'm too young to kiss!
I'm too young to kiss!

We crowd in to get a better look.
I'm curious, I've never seen
kissing in public before.
Somebody calls us ghouls
& walks away loudly . . .

Who kissed who?
Whose fault was it?
I hear many versions
as I watch him dripping on the footpath
with someone worrying over him.

I've heard that kissing in public
causes all sorts of problems:
for many there is unresolved rage;
others become withdrawn & depressed.
Parents suffer grief.

I like to pretend I'm not afraid
of kissing
but I'm terrified . . .
Even tho I know it's natural & inevitable
& that a life without kissing
is no life at all.

But I watch him crying in the ambulance
with lipstick bubbling on his mouth
& he's saying: I'm too young to kiss . . .
I'm too young to kiss . . .

MYRON LYSENKO

LAURIS EDMOND

This is the Way the World Ends

The 1931 earthquake at Napier, New Zealand.

'Eighty in the shade' was hot by Jove. You were brave to be living through it. 'Ninety in the shade', you were verging on the heroic; 'a hundred', and you had joined a beleaguered élite. You stopped complaining; sticky all over, red in the face, you passed the news round the wilting drifters in the playground when you got back after lunch. "A hundred-in-the-shade, did you know?" "Oh. I'll tell Madge." "She says. Her mother told her." It dignified us all. Nobody asked why it was always in the shade—that seemed silly to me; if it was heat you were on about, in the sun was where you'd get it. But of course I never said so.

In February it happened a lot. The Sugar Loaf and all the other hills went brown, then lighter brown, finally almost white. It never rained. My brother Clive and his friends had bikes and after school they went for swims in the Camping Ground on the other side of Taradale. The Tutaekuri had good swimming holes there in spite of a few snags, so he told us, loftily. He did other remarkable things too—caught eels in the ditches near our place and brought them home and hung them on the fence, where he put a nail through the skin and peeled it off like a stocking. He caught them with a jag—a bent nail sticking out of the end of a broom handle, and was of course scornful to his sisters when we asked questions about how the eels felt and why they let themselves be caught. It was much the same when he shot sparrows and chaffinches—and even one terrible time a goldfinch—with his BB gun. Lindsay and I protested before we fulfilled the duties of womanly compassion and buried the victims with flowers and a cross of sticks. I was bigger than Lindsay but we were both too small to be of use or interest, to him.

The morning of the earthquake was hot, and muggy as well—strange, thundery weather. The sun didn't shine but it was all the hotter for that. It was Lindsay's first day at school; I was in the primers still and so of course looked after her. When the bell rang for playtime I waited for her at the door of her room and hand in hand we went outside to play. Within moments the world began to blow itself apart in the most extraordinary way—the roof of the school flew off in a cloud of red brick dust, the walls subsided and the roof landed again with a roar on the heap they made. The ground rolled and surged as though it had become water, waves passing over and through the asphalt playground as we sat, or rolled about, on the grass by the fence. We'd clambered through the wire—it was like an ordinary farm fence—and were gazing in utter astonishment at that red cloud. Once the school had vanished before our eyes, turning itself into a heap of red rubble and dust, it was hard to know what to do. "We'd better wait here and see what happens" I, six years old, said to Lindsay. "Oh no" said she, five (between November and April, because of our birthdays, she was only a year younger than me) "we'd better go home. It's no good staying here, it'll take too long." I nodded at this sage advice and we got up to go. We lived five minutes' walk down Osier Road, but since we kept falling over because the earth rocked so wildly still, it took time. Just over the crossing we met our mother. She looked really mad—her eyes were wild and in her hand she clutched a young lilac tree we'd had growing just inside our gate. She shrieked and seized and clung to us, crying that we must find Clive.

The pale broad figure of Mrs Pollock from next door loomed up; she had a faded cotton frock and bare feet and her face was red from crying. She left us and climbed through the fence into the paddock by the road, where she wandered off towards the trees calling "Billy . . . Billy . . ." He was about our age, Lindsay's and mine, and in the primers too, but we hadn't seen him. As it turned out Billy had stayed behind to help clean the blackboard, being a first day monitor, and was one of the three children killed by falling debris in the school's collapse. If the earthquake had been five minutes earlier we would all have been crushed and the child population of the Napier-Hastings part of Hawkes Bay almost wiped out—there were a lot of brick schools.

We didn't find Clive at first either, but he did appear among the swarms of mothers and children further down the road. He'd gone one better than us, naturally. He was leaning against the school wall eating his

playlunch apple when the wall fell back behind him and the roof came down; he had just time to scramble clear and crawl away alive. Doubtless whatever had happened to Fatty Frederickson would have been better still. I had heard him saying to Clive that if a wild bull came into our back yard and he happened to be up on the roof at the time, he'd take one leap down, land on its back and grasp it by the horns and ride it away, tamed. Boys. That's the way they talked.

Our father was a painter and paperhanger, an occupation in which we all had some share. His clients expected him to be designer as well as decorator, and we all helped to choose combinations of wallpapers and borders for the rooms he was to paper. The usual practice was to have a main paper up to about 7 or 8 feet, then a narrow ornamental border that picked up on its strongest colours, then a different paper above. Houses in the Thirties all had a 12 foot stud. The family conferences about these choices were long and satisfying, Mum and Lindsay and I all holding strong views—you couldn't for instance have a stripe on the bottom (and stripes were popular) and a floral on top. Ugh! Nor could you have blue and green together, or blue and pink mixed with orange and brown—each was a separate camp. Orange and brown was our favourite (Mum wore them a lot); in their company were yellow and cream and fawn and suchlike. A border that I loved to choose was a continuous twining garland of nasturtium flowers, yellow and orange and bronze, with the curving of the petals making its outer edge. All the papers were in large pattern books which Dad would bring home and open on the kitchen table in the evenings for us to decide. At times papers went out of stock and Lindsay and I were allowed to take the page out and cut it up to make pictures, or paper dolls' dresses (the bought ones, printed and sold in real books, were of course unheard-of).

On the day of the earthquake Dad was outside, up on a ladder, painting tanks for a farmer on the hills toward Puketitiri. As he held up his brush to dip it in the paint pot that hung on his ladder, the tank leaped off its stand into the air and rolled down the hill. He was a phlegmatic man my father, and he told us that his main thought was that if he'd been in front instead of at the side it would have taken him too.

At home we passed the wrenched hole where my mother had grabbed the little lilac tree to steady herself, and the rocking ground, opening and closing, had delivered it into her hand. Inside there was unforgettable havoc. The broken glass of preserving

Ten minutes after the earthquake at 10.50 a.m., February 3, 1931. (Alexander Turnbull Library)

Westhorpe Bridge, Napier-Gisborne highway. (Alexander Turnbull Library)

jars floated in plum and apricot pulp with soot, broken cups and bowls, the nameless mess from mantelpieces, fallen kettles, ink pots, butter and jam, mingled with spilt tea and sugar to make a ghastly lake on the kitchen floor. There were broken mirrors and windows and light globes in every room, fallen wardrobes and dressing tables, smashed ornaments and clothes and bedding mixed up in a general and pervasive chaos. But the thing that terrified us most was that the floor kept moving, it never stopped.

Ours was a wooden house, not brick, but we were so afraid of it that once we had gathered up a few things and settled ourselves outside, we cried hysterically if anyone tried to go back in. There was an open paddock next to the house where Lindsay and I played in the long grass and where some years my father grew lettuces for the market. There we sat, with a washing bowl of plums and peaches, picked from their trees in the back garden the day before—in another life—and salvaged from the wash house where there was nothing much to fall. When our mother got up, saying she wanted to look for bread and butter, we pulled her down with screams of terror at the thought of her going in *there.* Outside was the only safety, despite the fact that cracks were already appearing here and there through the grass.

In the afternoon we drove to Napier to see if our aunts and grandmother, my father's family, were safe. Or we set out. On the way we had to cross the innumerable bridges which cropped up on that road, winding as it did through five or six miles of inner harbour—a shallow lagoon that surrounded Napier and stretched out towards Greenmeadows where we lived. There were cars everywhere, jamming the narrow road, all containing families that no doubt had the same idea as us, to find relatives in 'town'—though Napier, had we known it, was already beginning to disintegrate in the fire that eventually destroyed far more than the earthquake itself. Just before one of the bridges there was a traffic jam; most of the cars were slow-moving tourers with canvas roofs buttoned down though there were a few sedans, that is they were metal all over, with windows of glass, not celluloid like those on the folding roofs; streamlining was still to come.

The cause of the congestion was that someone ahead of us had been caught in a crack in the road. It had opened with one earth movement wide enough to swallow the front wheels and closed again quickly enough to wedge them tight. We sat in the hot car for a while, Lindsay and Clive and I together in the back seat silenced by sustained shock; then Dad found

a way out of the confusion and turned back.

No telephones worked, but we found out in the next few days that Aunty Syb and Uncle Bert and Thelma, a glamorous cousin in her teens, were all safe. The other family was Aunty Grace, Uncle Will and a tribe of cousins I was to get to know much better after the earthquake because they moved to Greenmeadows and lived quite near us. Grandma lived with them; she seemed to be always in bed, sitting up with her long grey plait down her back and talking to us in a funny dry voice with a little cackling laugh. She did our family mending and when I could ride I used to bike round to Aunty Grace's with a bag of holey socks and torn dresses which she would restore with delicate almost invisible stitches, as in a perfect school sampler. I would talk to her for a while, watch her take out her tobacco tin and roll one of her thin little cigarettes which she then smoked in a tortoiseshell holder, cackling and saying she was wicked and would go to hell when she died. She told me that because I was 'good at school' I must have a career—be a headmistress of a school perhaps. At the end of the visit I would gather up the bag of completed mending and bike home, half pleased, half sorry to leave that slightly musty bedroom. She smelt, like the Christmas cake that was kept in a cupboard for months with the one bottle of port that we had in the house, of staleness, old clothes, the past. Once she did a seam, finishing off a skirt for Lindsay that Mum did not have time for, and pricked her finger so that there were minute dots of blood all down the side of the garment when it came back. "Come come Grandma, you can do better than that," said Mum in a wildly funny way she had, and Lindsay and I rolled about laughing at such delicious impertinence.

The eldest of Aunty Grace's family was Harold, who later brought our milk every morning because they had a cow and we didn't. He ladelled it into our billy in the kitchen using a dipper with a long handle and a hook to fit over his larger billy. He also, embarrassingly, fell in love with me and used to bring me presents which paralysed me with fright. He later learnt to be a watchmaker and went to Fiji where he married a widow with several children and, we always believed, a lot of money.

But on the day of the earthquake we heard nothing of these people. Only that someone else's grandmother had been in the bath in her house in Napier and the explosion of water pipes had floated her out into the street where she rode along in her white porcelain contraption, naked to the heavens, while the ruins of the city piled up around her. This was a spectacular disaster. We were glad she wasn't *our* grandmother, for people to see her like that.

For weeks the ground kept moving, off and on. None of us slept in houses at first; we had a corrugated iron garage and some neighbours came and put their mattresses alongside ours and we slept out there, huddling together and telling stories in the dark about the fresh horrors we'd heard about during the day.

Going to school changed too. For a few weeks nobody went at all; a lot of families went away for a holiday, to visit relations in other parts of the country. Then it was arranged that we should join classes at Taradale school. Greenmeadows had been a side school that only went up to Standard Four anyway, and the seniors had always gone to Taradale for their last two years before high school. Some didn't go to high school; you were allowed to stay on for an extra year in Standard Six and became known as Standard Seven. People in this class were in a strange kind of limbo; some were well into their teens and didn't even pretend to take school work seriously. They were waiting to go to work, or in the case of one girl I knew when I was myself in Standard Six, to get married. Her name was Emily Waddell (pronounced 'waddle') and she was what would now be called a low achiever; she couldn't get married till she was sixteen, and I suppose school was a sociable environment so she just stayed on. We went to her wedding in the local Methodist church, the girls in Standard Six, and gazed with a kind of shocked awe at her rouged cheeks and frizzed hair and long taffeta dress. It was as though the still remote adult world had come in and performed a *danse macabre* for us on our own ground.

We had to walk a mile to Taradale school. It was a wooden building so had survived the earthquake, but some classes had to sit in church halls because there wasn't room for us. Taradale kids were snooty and I was frightened of most of them, most of the time. One day we had a memorial service for the children who had died in our school; a teacher who had been injured but had recovered spoke about their bravery and their devotion to duty in staying behind to be monitors. She cried and was led away. I thought of Mrs Pollock going into the trees calling Billy and felt sick with the strangeness of it all. Then we sang 'Abide with Me' and I cried hopelessly too, as I did every time we sang it at Sunday School if someone's friend or relation had died.

While Napier was being rebuilt we went shopping in Clive Square, in Tin Town, a row of shops like stalls connected by a continuous wooden verandah that went right round the Square. Dr Morse's Hospital on the Marine Parade had not fallen but leaned sideways at a perilous angle and thus it remained for years, a sort of local Leaning Tower. It had been one of the few high buildings (four or five storeys) and seemed like a warning about the vanity of human ambitions. The most obvious change for us was that the earthquake lifted the whole shoreline area seven feet, so the Inner Harbour disappeared and for years was replaced by land that was said to be so salt-saturated that it had to be drained by long ditches criss-crossing it. As we drove to and fro we asked

ourselves what they did with the salty water in the drains when they'd got it; even more mystifying was the rumour that sugar beet absorbed salt so there were going to be huge crops planted. Perhaps they were at a distance from the road because I didn't see them.

We never lost our earthquake consciousness; the moment a light globe began to sway everyone went dead white; it was a kind of suffocating terror—you couldn't breathe for a moment or two. Then you would find out if it was a false alarm—that is a tremor—or if the slow beginning meant a big one was coming. Both kinds happened often, and we learnt to know the difference between the main types, the bumpers and the swayers. The swayers were worse because they began so gradually and you had longer to anticipate the worst without knowing how bad it would be. In May that year there was another severe one, in the late evening. It was nothing like the first, but it sent us all to gather in our mother's bed where we huddled, ashen faced and with teeth chattering for hours before we could be persuaded to go back to our own beds. The morning of February 3 when I had said to Lindsay "Let's wait and see what happens" was a lifetime away. We knew.

Lauris Edmond lives in Wellington, New Zealand, and is writing an autobiography. Her eleventh book of poems Summer Near the Arctic Circle *(O.U.P., $16.95) is due this month.*

JOHN TITTENSOR

The Heights of Occhinegri

It's irrelevant how I came to be talking on the phone to one of the Top Men at Occhinegri, the Paris publishers with the office on the Champs Elysées. And useless to speculate on what passing impulse motivated this Top Man to suggest that a book on France as seen by an American might be of colossal financial benefit to all concerned—ah, by an Australian, he belatedly corrected. But if ever I was up in Paris from my rural hideout in the South, he said, I should definitely come and see him.

And now here I was, outside this imposing building and armed with an appointment. Was this to be the real start to my brilliant career, as opposed to the succession of false starts that have become a kind of career in their own right?

Well, whatever, it's nice to have an appointment with a Top Man once in a while. Not that it's going to be Mr Occhinegri himself, who began life as a socialist jazz critic and now presides over an empire of soft porn, mindless magazines and forgettable books that sell without fail in their tens of thousands. Not the Tip Top Man; not yet. But the name I quote is good enough to get me past the morose security guard and into the lift; and then it's up up up to the heights of Occhinegri.

At reception I invoke the Top Man again. Just follow that orange corridor, says a friendly girl, pointing at a glaring but indisputably red corridor. Then take the white corridor and you'll find the Top Man's office off the little lobby.

At the little lobby, however, there are no offices at all, only myriad other white corridors that appear to lead off to all the most obscure quarters of Paris. Top Men are dashing by looking well-groomed and anxious. Is one of them mine? If so he doesn't have the time to stop and own up. A passing girl takes pity on me: my Top Man is down that white corridor there, that is to say he's *normally* down that white corridor there but he's unavailable today because he's suffering. 'Suffering' in French is a poetic way of being ill and my man, it seems, is not one to stint on the poetry: utterly unimaginable pain in *six* teeth, the girl declares, the dentists of France in conclave over his case, no choice but to break our appointment. However Somebody Else will see me.

She shows me to Somebody Else's office. He at least is there, but the moment I enter he gets up from his chair without a word and leaves. A sudden toothache or six? But a few seconds later he's back: so I'm the American—ah, the ah, Australian. He's very happy to make my acquaintance and where's the Plan of the Proposed Book? But before I can answer another girl comes in and hands him a piece of paper.

Somebody Else reads the piece of paper. His face darkens. "This guy is an arsehole," he announces and I realize I've been sprung again. But no, for once the offender isn't me, it's the person responsible for the piece of paper. Somebody Else thrusts the piece of paper back at the girl. "Who does he think he is?" he demands. "He's a straightout arsehole. Tell him to piss off." The girl just smiles the whole time and then takes the piece of paper away. And Somebody Else asks me again, where's the Plan of the Proposed Book?

Needless to say there is no Plan. I explain that I am simply there for an introductory chat with the Top Man—just to kick the can around or run a few ideas up the flagpole or whatever it is people do in big-money print media circles these days. Somebody Else is frankly annoyed by this sample of my commercial obtuseness. Can't I see that a Plan is vital if we're all to make lots of money for ourselves and Monsieur Occhinegri?

Before I can reply a man comes into the office looking well-groomed and anxious, walks around a bit and leaves again without saying anything to either of us. Somebody Else, plunged into depression by the lack of a Plan, appears not even to notice him.

Already our relationship has evolved to the point where we share the same intimate conviction: that I should be on my way. I'll think about a Plan, I lie, and get back to the Top Man about it. Great, he says, sparking up as he realizes he's getting shot of me, and would I like to leave him my Card?

Ah. My Card, I have to tell him, belongs on the same plane of existence as the Plan. At this his relief

gives way to a species of contemptuous disappointment But in America, he protests, people spend all their time exchanging Cards, it's practically a way of life over there. I remind him again of my native unfamiliarity with things American. He looks surprised, then sorry for me. At least he'll give me *his* card, he declares, and does so: it's the size of a vice-regal invitation, with "Occhinegri" printed in the centre; he discreetly puts his own name in by hand.

Then it's the white corridors again, the red orange corridors, the little lobbies, the lift. As I leave, the security man's look says he wishes I was a terrorist so he could do something about me.

Out on the Champs Elysées the polluted rush-hour air seems positively refreshing. Cars are driving up the middle of the footpath, people are queuing at the Marignan cinema to see *Crocodile Dundee*, four giant riot policemen are hassling an Algerian who stands by resignedly as they go through his papers with their enormous semi-literate hands. In America, I believe, this is called Life On The Street. What is my part in it? I have no Plan. And because I have no Plan the Somebody Elses of French publishing have no time for me. So I fabricate one on the spot: I'll go down to the Latin Quarter and do the bookshops.

In the metro a wild-haired guitarist gets into my carriage and sets about Jimi Hendrix's "Hey Joe". He can't sing for nuts and except for the title he doesn't actually know any of the words, but when he plays a solo with his teeth everybody relents and gives him money. At the St Michel exit another guitarist, a Peruvian Indian this time, is knocking out old surfing songs through a ragged battery-powered amp.

Finally the bookshops and an unexpected avalanche of eminent Australians in French translation: Colleen McCullough, Morris West, the life of Jack Brabham. This is more like it, even if the salesmen all have to consult a computer before relinquishing the cheapest paperback. Except, that is, at good old-fashioned Shakespeare & Co, the Australophile secondhand bookshop in the shadow of Notre Dame. And even here there's no respite from the computer culture. "Ah made thirty kilobucks in software last year," a sixtyish American is saying. "Wow!" say two twentyish Americans. Maybe they sense the germ of a Plan here. I've got to get out before they all start exchanging Cards.

Luckily I've come upon an early Peter de Vries novel that demands to be bought and another idea suddenly materializes readymade: I may be a Bottom Man, a Nobody Else, a fundamentally Planless Person, but what's to stop me taking this good book down to the terrace of the bar on the corner and reading it in the autumn sun over a beer or two? Back at Occhinegri they'll still be walking up and down their coloured corridors, in and out of each other's offices, telling people to piss off and not giving a damn if they never hear from me again. But I don't give a damn either: the sun, the terrace, the beer, the book—these are the things that count.

Melbourne writer John Tittensor has been living in France since 1983. He is the author of Year One *(McPhee Gribble, 1984; Penguin USA, 1987). His novel* Carmody Comes Home *will be published by Heinemann later this year.*

PETER PORTER

Incandescence of the Ordinary

Chris Wallace-Crabbe: I'm Deadly Serious *(Oxford University Press, $14.95).*

It can be a funny thing setting out to review the latest book by a contemporary poet who is also a friend. You begin to notice most impertinent things, chiefly resemblances in his work to aspects of your own. You would not say that he had been influenced by your performance even if you dared. Instead, you stress the convergence of interests. Wallace-Crabbe and I started writing poetry at almost the same time. At that period, in the fifties, our work was very different: he was too Yeatsian and barbered and I was too Audenesque and cumbersome. Now, since the end of the decade of the seventies, in his books *The Emotions Are Not Skilled Workers, The Amorous Cannibal* and *I'm Deadly Serious*, he has attained a myth-making ability which goes hand in hand with an easy vernacular style where words swing into and away from rhetoric across finely-gimballed arcs. It is the attempt to be lyrical while disputatious which my own recent poetry shares with his—that and the observable fact that we are townees and not pastoral writers, though Wallace-Crabbe is more at home out of doors than I am.

I was struck by this vein of thought when reading "Thermodynamics" in his latest book. It made me think of my own "Legs on Wheels" and "Civilisation and its Disney Contents", poems he cannot possibly have read when he wrote his. The subject-matter, the manner of address, the references sticking out like currants, above all the tone, made the poem very familiar to me. And proprietorily agreeable, of course. It is, in fact, a case of two poets joining the Club of Middle-Aged Anglo-Saxon Worriers. Can we prop a ladder of observation and generalisation against the wall of art? The answer, at least in his case, is yes. The opinionatedness (Didn't MacNeice say that poets should be interested in the things they read in newspapers?) wants to modulate to beauty without interrupting its speech:

> The important thing
> About intellectual systems
> Is to use them randomly,
> Playing the ball where it bounces
> And making the most of the pitch;
> Because I feel sly today
> I can look out this window and say
> All I see there furls
> A civil wilderness.

Death is the trigger of the Empsonian big gun—not just one's own fascinated anticipation of what cannot be anticipated, but the whole tradition of excited reverie which lies behind so much of our literary inheritance. In "Thermodynamics", Wallace-Crabbe hears of his father's death in Melbourne while he is living in Oxford ("New College's chewed walls"). His father was an anecdotist of the vanished Imperium; things are going to be smaller as the age of business and scholarship takes over from adventure:

> Less and less theatres of mind
> Will now rehearse his tales
> Of Gwalior, Lebanon
> (Already blown to pieces),
> Akhtur and Dicky Mountbatten
> (Already blown to pieces):
> Orient as narrative.

The poem ends with life's baton-passing—"Spirit finds queer lodging./ I am in the front line now."—but its tonal centre comes earlier when that sense which once would have been content to call itself religious and would have assented to a basket of dogmas comes out in its liberal humanist colours:

> Our dailiness representing
> The best of a bad job,
> The earth but a minor skirmish.
> We are pissing against the wind
> But with histamines in our veins.

"Thermodynamics" is not the best poem in *I'm Deadly Serious*, but it offers a four-page biopsy of Wallace-Crabbe's style. Poetry, ever since those mythical Peloponnesian shepherds, has needed to speak of large emotions and point to the sublime. But

the gods were always there ahead of the poets and, despite big guns like Sophocles, Plato wouldn't have such unreliable intoners in his government. It got worse under Christianity, when ritual added gold to the Summa, though Shakespeare with his dramatic impersonations, and the Romantics with their private names for suffering, offered ways out of the dilemma. What has such cheeky if high-flown theorising got to do with a modern poet living and working in Melbourne—I hear you ask? Quite a lot, in fact. Unless we can pinch the fire of the high style from Olympus we should content ourselves with journalism. The vast plain of twentieth-century versifying is strewn with latter-day shepherds trying to justify their calling. Critics and teachers content themselves with simply eliminating most of the cast—they give you three names you must know (choose your three from the following list—Heaney, Hill, Ashbery, Brodsky, Muldoon, Les Murray, Tranter, C. K. Williams, Walcott, Harrison, go on adding to the list). Better still, keep to the dead. I should like to point in another direction—towards making our lives and their languages poetical overall. I have come to believe that the hermetic method may not be the best. We tend to give high marks to the costive and uncompromising, to want every artist to be a version of Anton von Webern. But it is from the tangle of sounds in our head, from the unbelievably mucky Sargasso called Memory that poems must come. They must be well-made objects of course, but they should also smell of the street. Style is too big a question to be gone into here, but I offer a hint of its not being the ultimate co-ordinate by calling up the name of John Ashbery. So chic, so famous, so difficult, yet a poet whose work I can live in, precisely because it doesn't shun the extended and messy outlines of life. There is no attempt to attain a quintessence. The good poets (the ones you want to read) are going for gold, but they expect to find it in the washing of the alluvial minutiae of daily living.

This is definitely Chris Wallace-Crabbe's method. Each of his poems is a hunt for the transcendent and incandescent, but the quest takes him through a lot of low-key familiar stuff. He loves to turn his back on the heritage he teaches at university in order to give the new scene a chance. He is the most patriotic poet I know, in so far as he knows how much of the classical past he may have to surrender if he is to be true to Australia. A poem called "Stuff Your Classical Heritage" begins with a line which defines in a mouthful-of-dust sort of way the unclassical material which Australia abounds in.

> Gull, grevillea, galvo, Gippsland, grit—

(I bet he had trouble explaining 'galvo' to his OUP editor.)* But the poem concludes with a vision which is really a transfiguration.

> In a way, I preach the destruction of Europe,
> that mental Europe which I love so much.
> Cancel it. Smother it with ripe new words
>
> or old ones triumphantly misapplied,
> every solecism a seal of triumph
> as light gilds a scraggy bacon-and-egg plant.
>
> Keep Jehovah in his place with Bathurst burrs
> where things are wiry, scrabbled, porous, drooped
> for Oedipus romping through the undergrowth
>
> every bit as gaudy as
> those three dippingly quick rosellas
> or a Violet Crumble wrapper.

It's interesting to recall that Les Murray found rosellas (though not crumble bars) an image for his version of the sublime and its intermittency, in "Poetry and Religion" in *The Daylight Moon.*

Some of Wallace-Crabbe's most serious poems maintain a pitch of whimsy which is so strong an alias it is almost self-defeating. Perhaps this is the only way to front up to God. 'His' name is the title of a remarkable poem in this collection, which is almost a joke-shop model of theology. "That is the world down there." begins the foxy Equivocator, and goes on:

> It appears that I made it
> but that was years back
> . . . . . .
> I spun my brilliant ball in air.
> Such thought was new to me
> though I had not guessed at my lack
> in the old indigo days,
> children, before you fell—
> to use a technical verb.

God, like the rest of us, wakes up pretty quickly to the realisation that he (and his creation) are living in a museum. Likewise, the party which has to be cleaned-up after is called history. His last confession follows pretty consequently:

> I thought of it as being
> a party for my son.

Poems such as "God" are our modern Protestant/agnostic equivalents of the ancient Hebrew embargo on speaking Yahveh's name. It is via these uneasy jokes that some whiff of the Old Pretender comes to us. You can recall *deus absconditus* grandly, as Stevens does in his "old chaos of the sun", but you can equally well speak to your own unquiet sense of the numinous in Wallace-Crabbe's fashion, by sharing some semantic wrinkles with it. The poem on the next page to "God" is a coda to it, with a grander title, "Whether There is Terrorism in Heaven". Satan tells God "I always felt that death/ was the

greatest of your little jokes,". (There are those of us who believe that the human urge to make love and reproduce the human race has a better claim to being a demonstration of God at his most hilarious.) Over "Satan's sooty shoulder" we are shown a few consequences of God's little joke, the most poignant being the quietest, "the poor plough twisted/ in a fruitless furrow/ not far from a bend in the highway". This poetry subscribes to the old Viennese saying that the situation is undoubtedly desperate, but not yet serious.

There is a practical urge in Wallace-Crabbe's verse to make statements about public issues, particularly politics. In *The Amorous Cannibal*, "That Radical Politics is Impossible" looked at supply-side economics and their influence with governments of both Left and Right. In that book he also composed fables of the origin of the world, and of its Distopian future. His new book includes an admirably straightforward set of ruminations on modern political blurring entitled "Sonnets to the Left". "Time burns the isms" he writes, in memory of Judah Waten. And adds:

> Now Toorak and Balmain contrive to read
> Marx as ur-text, perfect aesthetes delight
> In cushioning off him too. The game is bent
> Till we've become old colleagues with a need
> For shoring words against the tide of night,
> Praying the slow bitch History might relent.

Perhaps there is more affection for Judah in this than appreciation of the plight of liberals in the Reagan/Thatcher/Hawke age. Getting Marxism out of the factories and into the universities where it belongs has been the thin edge of a very nasty wedge. As these sonnets proceed, Wallace-Crabbe becomes more perturbed and more generalized—perhaps university in-fighting is the most debilitating of all forms of disenchantment: "The deconstructors lie down on their backs/ And let our Marxists rape them, in the end". Some old spectres acquire new aliases—Imperialism was always the other side of 'The Yellow Peril' coin, and resentment of it is parodied in easily recognized ways. Thus "the brittle courtly forms will shred away", and an injunction to "sing of the footy, sun, red wine" will replace them. I could have hoped that that old enemy of clear-sightedness 'the cringe' had not answered the roll call, but it gets a part as well. It is the land itself, a talisman for all Australian poets, not just Les Murray, which is hailed as emblematic saviour. To all of which I proffer a gesture of wimpish doubt. I am slightly doubtful, too, of Wallace-Crabbe's deployment of the sonnet form. He does it as well as most and better than some, but the sonnet remains Italy's revenge on the Northern nations. It is easy to rough out and impossible to get right.

I'm Deadly Serious is not quite as impressive a collection as *The Amorous Cannibal*, partly because its big set-piece "The Sixth Man", subtitled "a tale of the cold war" doesn't resonate as it should. Based on a fantasy of Burgess and McLean crossed with Alan Bennett's TV celebration of Guy Burgess's later life in Moscow, with a little of Anthony Blunt thrown in, it overplays the literary high camp and becomes too much of a genre piece—almost *Greenmantle* rewritten by Le Carré. Not that the funny bits aren't properly amusing, especially the selective nostalgia,

> Trouble is, you hear no Purcell over here
> just verst on verst of bloody Tchaikowsky
> like being in Hell—or practice for.

But this sort of thing misfires in poetry far more readily than it does in the extended and murky thickets of spy-writers' prose, and, as a metaphor, the spy, in or out of the cold, has become commercial and threadbare.

Wallace-Crabbe is both deadly and serious when he writes (1) about the shits and equivocators who dog our steps and who will be our companions as we slide towards the new millenium, and (2) when he enters the Freudian Planetarium, the domain of dreams. Here his allies are words and he uses them with the care of a surgeon and the flair of a conjuror. He is not a highly formal poet, or a virtuoso of stanza, rhyme and complex metre. He is, however, a dashing rhetorician and has been developing ever more fluently that 'spruiker's' voice which all Australians of his and my generation grew up with. Whatever sort of education we got afterwards, we heard at the sideshows voices which were vastly more eloquent than the hucksters' glare which assaults our ears these days. Clever and erudite poets remain shouters across playgrounds to the end. But, in his case, he entertains us because he has something to say. Look, he seems to insist, Australia is neither more truthful nor more dishonest than the rest of the world, it is just the place where we happen to have learned to be human. All the rest follows. My final urging is for any reader of this review to forget my egotistical shadowing of a remarkable talent, and to go out and buy the book and recognize a poet performing at the height of his powers.

* I'm Deadly Serious *was also published in the U.K. where it was awarded the Poetry Book Society Recommendation.*

Peter Porter's most recent book The Automatic Oracle (O.U.P.) *won the U.K. Whitbread Poetry Prize. His book with the painter Arthur Boyd* Mars (Andre Deutsch) *has also appeared recently.*

on the line

The more articulate the writer the greater the despair. That is the pervasive tone of letters to me recently which comment on public issues. Sometimes it seems as if half the people I know are actively engaged with a particular environmental issue or with other matters which, on examination, are part of a larger environment. There is concern about the anti-intellectual thrust of so much public policy, the result in part of the influence exercised in key places, such as the Commonwealth Department of Finance, by the so-called free-market economists.

Policies created in the name of pragmatism and the 'free market' will, in the long term, prove not to be practical at all but in their own hard-headed economic terms, disastrous. The pragmatic big four, Hawke, Keating, Walsh and Dawkins, have sponsored views on education, on research, on science, on media ownership among a host of other subjects, which, if they prevail, will starve intellectual life in this country.

The mind and the imagination cannot flourish where the 'value' given to them is defined in terms of perceived economic return, and return in a relatively short-term. The free exercise of policies for national benefit, proceeding from an idea of national sovereignty, has always been constrained by international contexts. To imagine sovereignty, let alone to envision its exercise has always invited a necessary scepticism. Yet this very time when the idea of Australia, even to be naive for a moment a 'free' and 'independent' Australia, seems to have gained a shallow national popularity, is the time when it is threatened in new ways. Our hard-won idea of 'Australia', at best relative and limited, is diminished daily in many areas of public policy. This at a time when the arts, and particularly literature in some of its forms, have perhaps never been more vigorous.

It may be simplistic to see the present strength of the creative arts as proceeding from a new vision of complex possibilities which began a generation ago. Obviously this suggestion needs further detailed enquiry. But if there is some truth in it then the sense of an already limited sovereignty now being further diminished has implications for the future of writing here as for any other part of life which requires a 'public'. The crises of international capitalism are hardly reported by our monolithic press, sixty percent of which is foreign owned. Our shore-line is being sold off-shore for 'developments' staggering in their number and extent. All in the name of 'private enterprise' and the 'free' market. The land is becoming a playground for international finance which sees national or public interest as myths to be handled by efficient 'public' relations. You think this is unworldly? Then perhaps you will listen to that pragmatic capitalist Malcolm Fraser. If *he* is disturbed perhaps 'idealists' should be. Noting the inroads of foreign ownership, in this case of the press, he wondered what our reaction would be if that ownership was Japanese. Japan, after all, is a democracy and a major trading partner. Mr Fraser wrote "I know of no nation with so little sense of national pride in these issues."

Of course sovereignty today, and especially for small nations such as Australia, is limited; international constraints on national policies are many. But not even to have the information of what is being done to us, not to have informed and sustained debate, to see thinking about the long-term swamped by the short-term imperatives of economists who cannot account for values, is perhaps reason enough for the prevailing despair. "Where there is no vision the people perish"; the old cry returns with as great a force as at any time in our history.

Meanwhile to depress us further the Federal Opposition returns as a principal theme behind its policies to nostalgia for a time that never was, and, in a matter minor to it but major to intellectual life, floats a proposal to abolish the Australia Council and to remove the principle of arms-length funding supported by previous governments. Presumably the Minister and ministerial advisers would be involved directly in the approximately ten thousand grants a year now made by the Council. But doubtless this future Minister will call for a review by the gurus of the Department of Finance.

Our readers and contributors in their many hundreds

quite vehemently asked, in some cases demanded, that Overland continue after the death of Stephen Murray-Smith. Little magazines should not live for ever and Overland was to a great degree the product of Stephen's extraordinary network of contacts, his wide and quirky range of interests, his undiminished, indeed growing, vitality. Two fine and well-argued letters argued the case for closure. Hundreds spoke for continuance and a particularly influential view was put over and over again: closure would leave many readers and writers without a forum. Young writers from all over the country pushed this point hard.

We have tried to answer your letters and telephone calls. Those still waiting on our reply please accept this note instead. The magazine has always been run from the homes of the editor and associates. All work is honorary; we have no staff or office. Stephen hoped that, after him, the magazine would continue. As he suggested we have formed a non-profit association, The Overland Society chaired by Nita Murray-Smith, to manage the magazine. Further details in our next issue. We thank the Literature Board of the Australia Council for its constructive enquiries and continuing support. Our thanks also for the concern and assistance of the Victorian Ministry for the Arts. Editorial policy is unchanged but vigorous planning for the future is under way.

We have established, with the support of the Victorian Ministry for the Arts, a program of giving written detailed responses to work of special merit by new writers, especially those isolated from the literary scene. We have also planned two supplements of new writing to be published next year. Overland Extra will have its own editors and designer and is supported by the Literature Board. These supplements will be included in your general subscription.

We record with great sadness the death on 12 November of Vincent Buckley (1925–1988) a remarkable poet, fine critic and inspiring teacher. Our next issue will respond more adequately.

Some notable gifts for the holiday season: *Longwater; Aboriginal Art and Literature Annual 1988* is a truly exciting anthology and beautifully designed ($17.95 from Aboriginal Artists Agency, 12 McLaren Street, North Sydney, 2060). *Brother To The Dingo* by Murray Mitchell reveals a remarkable man with powers of observation of the natural world in many countries which are unique in contemporary writing. S. M-S called him "a latter-day Cobbett". Here is a book which cries out for commercial publication. In the meantime get a copy from the author ($22.50, includes postage, from P.O. Box 151, Woodend, 3442). *The Australian Literary Calendar 1989* (University of Queensland Press, $19.95) has twelve stunning large photographs of writers by Brendan Hennessy. I especially enjoy the photographs of Peter Mathers, John Morrison and Kath Walker. Other favourites will be those of Kate Grenville, Susan Johnson and Nicholas Jose.

Barrett Reid

THREE POEMS BY CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

WORLD

Alas, the geographical cities
up and drifted away

in their bangles and ganglia
of meretricious lights

ingenious as a cat-scan
or bleeding computer game,

their patterned haemhorrages
turning the black air on.

They emerge as nameless monitors
of bleareyed self,

the argument from design
here abacussed in lukewarm freckles.

Looking down, I can see
a giant's irradiated cell-configuration

pinned out just for me.

But I am drifting out of all reach
like thistledown.

BANKSIAS

(for Evan Jones)

Handsome, their trunks rise heavily
corkish, grainy, magisterial
above the tilt of dunes;

their leafage fretted
with a musical delicacy,
undersides oddly white

as the clouds of themselves.
Cylinders of bronze
or lemon fur bedizen them,

turning in time
to childhood's Banksia Men,
coffee-dark, grotesque, multibeaked.

They adore the dovegrey sand
sharing with it a love
for various kinds of dry discrimination.

They commemorate Sir Joseph with a flair.
They represent
the merely picturesque.

TORTURE

Not, please, this creeping elaborate pain
And not slow parody of how lives end,
Not policemen in mufti playing a dirty god,
Not the stinking underside of Latin America,
Regime of colonels or generals or psychopaths,
Not the fascination with seeing just how far a body
can be made to go
Nor the treatment of survival as precisely equal to
dying.

Please, not a battering on the door at three in the
morning;
Not, I'm afraid you're going to have to come with
me.
Not the large plain dull old car
Waiting outside your front door with motor
grumbling
For the quick takeoff,
Not the bareness of a shabby room with overbright
lighting.
Not Them, moving in.

Certainly not having to take off your clothes,
The water, the truncheon, the cold, the blaring, the
slaps
And long standing still in one damned place,
Not the prodded humiliation of your nudity,
The clothed ones treating you as a slab of meat,
Not the drawn-out thickness of questioning
And not the detumescence of hope.

Not the naked genitals like frightened mice,
Not something hard inserted in the vagina,
Not pints of liquid trickled down your throat,
Not a bully's foul breath up against your face
As concentration is beaten down and goes,
Not the pummelled phonebook against your guts
Leaving no distinct bruises.

Not the electrodes.
Fuck, no, not the electrodes
And not your buttocks beaten, then beaten again,
Not something pushed right up under your
fingernails
Nor a bloody gobbet hacked off your left ear
Which you are then going to be forced to eat.
Not weeks without food.

Bodies have been designed frail, by and large, by
and small,
Ready to be tormented and taken apart.
The shit may run down your cold legs.
You may die.
You will suffer and die.
You will survive, language holding some trace of
you for years,
And the mourners, too.

Your torturers are going to burn
In whatever on earth may be
The psychic equation for hell,
Their minds crammed full of shrinking flesh.

death of a tennis player

you were fast. i remember you,
running gracefully to the net
to flick a ball down the line with
an ease which was almost disdain.

you were strong. as i crept under
the dusty timber seats the sun
sparkled parallel lines across
the first vulnerable shadows,

the teasing childhood corruption
of life's first promise as though an
overhead smash & will alone could
stop the inevitable decay.

there were no automatic tears
when the nurses joked & the woman
in the next bed wheezed & twisted
the withered vines about your past.

you were brave. you refused the false
sentiment of speech when you were
raised on a bank of pillows with
all your strength concentrated on

the next unnecessary breath
& you laughed obliteration
out of the saccharine disguise
of its white athletic body.

RAE DESMOND JONES

THE ROO

The Roo is brown
as a six-month-old suntan,
as timid as a cockatoo is pert,
as incredulous as Uluru upon a safari Sunday.

Disconcerting as a horse with wings,
it lifts its questionmark body
across the plains
in tadpole parenthesis.

RICHARD MURPHY

ONE FOR JAMES K. BAXTER

God was always there in your poetry James,
like an old friend summoned
in a moment of sadness to keep watch
and comfort you while you slept or cried.
He's there now, breathing
between the pages of your collected dreams.

They say you looked like John the Baptist
in your last days at Jerusalem:
a mad-haired bloke with honey
from the yellowbox dripping in your beard
and the rattling song of locusts on your tongue.
No doubt you'd have been impressed by that.

Beneath the hill you called Mount Calvary,
an epitaph of sonnets grew and flourished
from the psalms in your Maori bible;
each one a kind of flaming, a reckoning
with devotion—stanzas of praise for God
staked out in fourteen lines.

When you died, the leopards were fretting
in the bamboo forests of Ein Geddi,
and the sad litany of the cuckoo
made pause until you'd passed between
its song and the prayers of friends
on your way to the other side.

And the Maori Jesus came to read your poems
and to weave a wreath from Jerusalem thorn,
leaving it to take root and flower
on the tribal ground of your interment.
It's still there James, on the earth above you,
fashioned like your poetry from brambles, faith
and love.

ANTHONY LAWRENCE

FAKING IT

I.

She can't fake it. She is not
in the mood for midnight handling.
He is too far away.

Instead, she dreams of two superstars
tusking their teeth like ivory.
Oh, he is too far away.

She goes shopping for dresses
that are slinky as Monroe.
She wants to, but she can't fake it.

He is too far away after work
when he speaks to her,
when he touches her like a wrench.
She can't get in the mood.

She longs for those elephant tusks,
for hard branches rubbing,
she wants to sweat in a sauna,
she wants to get down and dirty,

but with him she can't fake it.

II.

His problem, his difficulty
is a big nest of money.
His dollar thoughts don't buy much.
She doesn't help him.

He is outside, he is full-on,
never in his easy-chair.
Schemes eat at him like lust
but she doesn't help him.

He just wants to relax
into her, not think, not talk,
but she is a closed clam.
That doesn't help him.

He just wants to shift down gears,
get the boss out of his head.
He's not into heart-to-hearts,
not any talk of moving

and she won't help him.

CHRIS MOONEY

OFF THE CUFF

Street into sky, walls into sky, his ribs
taut with oxygen unclotting, uncurdling
like milk taken off the flame,
the words
are not quite the best yet.
The question
was asked when the M.P. was
in Macquarie St., askew with morning,
his imagination unthawed,
the mike
held too close to his lips, as close
as the visible frost of his breathing
at that time of day when air was metal
and his breath rose rapid as terror
in the tender pit of his voice.
This afternoon, he rings
through answers that are ringing
out the aftermath of air-conditioned choice
hard won from meat & wine & fruit & bread
& his inadvertent playing
with some old interrogators in his head.

JENNIFER MAIDEN

SONNET 39

Those who are too scared to love, must diddle
Something or other, whatever it may be.
They're the dickheads that you'll always see
Poking at their betters, keen to piddle
On anything that's bigger than themselves.
You'll know them by the way they use their brains
To screw around with truth, and then disdain
The wisdom they can't buy or stack on shelves.

The ancients used to say that, "As above,
Then so below"—and it's a fact that they
Who fuck the mind will also find a way
To think that sex does not require love.
They're fools. Good sex, like any other art,
Won't happen when you're too damned mean to fart.

EDITH SPEERS

TWO POEMS BY BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

MOONCHILD

For Maggie

Your cheeky, pixie smile is as weightless
as air, smaller than a half rhyme
caught between
the first and the last line
of a haiku.
It turns up at the end
like an unspoken question.

And your eyes,
elfish as unblinking mushrooms,
growing out of earth—it is
a subterranean world you crave.
Not a castle, but a cave—
some place one doesn't rattle in;
a hidey hole;
the security of darkness
without neighbours, protected by
what Nature, not man, has made.
A space where you can be
a little, well-defined ball of light
awaiting only those whom you invite.

Still,
I like the way you can laugh
at your lust, mindful of the power game,
and its ridiculousness.
Your elfishness is succinct metaphor,
acute simile:
bitten fingernails spat out
like moon-shaped prayers.

MINGKULPA

(Bush tobacco)

He isn't hungry for pension cheque.
He isn't worried for kungka.
He isn't dreaming Log Cabin or flagon.
We gotta go this way, this way here
and find em proper mingkulpa.

He doesn't want to look for rabbit, wiya.
He doesn't care about photo session.
He isn't interested in fillum crew.
We gotta go, we gotta go long this way,
and find em proper cheeky bugger.

He knows that old man's country.
He knows the place we can find em.
From footwalk times to motor car.
We gotta go this way here, and pull em
proper cheeky bugger mingkulpa.

He isn't tickly for sitdown money.
He can't wait for wife or kids.
He doesn't wanna just think about it.
We gotta go, we gotta go, this way
and find em proper cheeky bugger.

Really strong one mingkulpa, palya.
Whitefella eat em, fall down.
Make em talk really rama rama.
We gotta go this way, this way here
and find em cheeky bugger mingkulpa.

We gotta leave soon, find em today.
("Tomorrow, I might be dead.")
He knows a short cut over the sand hills,
Five hundred miles out of our way.
Find em, cook em, eat em eat em—
proper cheeky bugger mingkulpa.

THE COUNTESS OF CHINCHÓN SPEAKS TO GOYA. 1800.

for David

Of course
I do not look into your eyes
except
sometimes when we have laughed
and my feelings are tempered by humour.
It is allowed then.

You paint
these circumscribed hours
quickly, without sketches,
delving deeper,
but gently, with respect.

Ah but it works both ways.
You have revealed much
of that inner self
the professional hides so well.

Your hands caressing the canvas
caress my heart;
I sit quietly,
longing for you;
you look at me—
your eyes say: I know.
It is allowed.

Please listen to me—
I'm speaking to you.

You who have been deaf
these eight years,
paint on.

FRANCES ROUSE

SHAM

My teacher wore a gaudy skirt:
pink and blue, tangerine.

My teacher was my fairy tale,
my first day Queen.

Until she said:
'Child, we never put our thumbs

in our mouths. It's not *clean*.'
What did she mean?

MARY DILWORTH

INSPIRING THINGS

It's fitting that the best song should come from
Canberra,
our capital and greatest city. For in what other
State
or Territory could you more openly praise
Australia and in turn
be praised yourself? The States bicker and claim:
The Kimberleys, yes; Stirling Range, Monkey Mia
famed for dolphins,
Kakadu and Cape York. Such lists are endless,
incomparable.
Here, with my back to the Brindabellas, I can
arbitrate, having
seen so much and say now this, now that, is the
more
inspiring. But any yard well cared-for gives
pleasure, especially
toward evening, when trees lengthen their
shadows like wings
to cover the bird that is night. Morning, too, is
independent
of border, when sun warms dry mountain
grasses, yellows
acacia leaves and box-bark on the eucalypts here
and,
in proper turn, everywhere on the continent.

TIMOSHENKO ASLANIDES

BRUCE DAWE

The Job

I suppose I'd better admit it from the start: *I need this job real bad.* That's why I'm still sitting here at a quarter-to-five after everyone else to be interviewed has been and gone. Except the secretary, she's still there. Not that she'd be missed. Bad news, that one. Eyes like stiletto-heels ready to sink right into you (like those smarties who accidentally-on-purpose back onto you with their high-heels and then take off at full speed). I can hear her cream-cheese voice right now on the phone. And through the frosted-glass top half of the office wall I can just see the blur of her body, like a fish in a fog, where she's seated at her desk outside Mr Big's office. Well, he's not really Mr Big, being only the Personnel Officer, after all, but he's Mr Big to me right now because, like I was saying, I need this job real bad.

I got here just after two, and then there was a full house, standing-room only, and I thought "Oh-oh, Sarah, you've missed the bus again!" But just then out came the secretary and in went another applicant, so I sat down in the empty place next to this girl who seemed vaguely familiar. She was wearing that kind of stale perfume they must especially manufacture in funeral parlours, and I took out a cigarette and said, "Don't I know you?" "I'm afraid not," she said, looking down at my cigarette and then up at the NO SMOKING sign over the door. "Weren't you going out with Trevor Davidson?" I said. "Never heard of him," she said. "Who's he?" "Just a feller," I said. "If you don't know him there's no point in discussing him, is there?" I said.

The conversation took a bit of a down-turn after that. A little while later I got up to go to the loo, so I said to this same girl, "Mind my place for me, will you?" When I came back my place was gone. I couldn't see anyone new there so they must have all spread themselves out and filled it up. Nice, isn't it? But that's what you're up against when you're out of work. A lot of 'em'd eat you bones and all if it'd improve their employment prospects. *And* flog off your clothes for what they'd fetch at the pop-shop afterwards . . . Well, I wasn't going to let Miss Snooty there get away with that, so I leaned over and plucked her purse out of her lap and slung it right out the door. Naturally, she got up off her backside quick-smart then and raced off to retrieve it, and when she came back there I was sitting plonked right in her place. The atmosphere was pretty electric by this—the other girls' eyes popping with excitement—but no-one game to say a single thing—not even Miss Snooty—for fear of the secretary coming out and wanting to know what was going on. So Miss Snooty had to stand there quivering like a pressure-cooker till a girl came out and another went in and made room for her.

Which was another thing . . . Every time the door opened and a girl came out we'd all look at her, wondering, I suppose, whether that was a specially happy look on her face, or was she looking like that when she went in . . . You'd ask yourself: "Is that the look *I'd* have if *I'd* got the nod that the job was as good as mine? Or could it be a cover-up? Would I put on that look just to bung-on when I knew I didn't have a chance?" Because you often *do* get that feeling when you're being interviewed for a job. 'A position', some people call it. I remember once when I was filling out an application form at the enquiries desk at Bonnington & McCandlish when this person came up to me and said, "Pardon me, but are you by any chance applying for the vacant position as advertised?" And I turned to her and said, "Who? Me? No—I'm just going for a *job* . . . Any objections?"

But I can understand why some people feel they have to bung on side. You need all the help you can get just to keep going after half-a-dozen knock-backs. And a bit of cheek does help. Anything helps, in fact, because the whole process is calculated to make you feel as if you're taking up the personnel officer's valuable time and that if you had any decency you'd just tiptoe quietly out the door.

There was this job I went for once—kitchen hand at the Continental—it was a hot January day and I sweat a bit and I'd no sooner sat down in this small office just off the main kitchen when I noticed this terrible smell—and I mean *terrible.* It was a kind of sly, *compulsive* pong—the sort that sneaks up on you,

so that at first you think it's *not* passing and it's certainly *not* imagination. But unfortunately you're sitting across the desk from a very swarthy little chap who's flicking through your references as though they're all bodgie, and looking up at you every so often as if he's trying to catch you off-guard and trap you into a confession, and you find this really keen pong wafting up at you at the same time as you're being asked potentially lethal questions like "And why do you think you'd be suitable for this job?"—and you know you're in trouble . . . On the one level you're trying to look sharp and come up with answers that are winners—at the same time on another level you're thinking: Hey, what's this horrible smell—what *is* it, for God's sake?!

Well, from the moment that smell got under way I was gone a million—the answers got lost in the sniffin' and that damn horrible smell took over. "What *is* it?" I kept wondering, and in the end I thought: Perhaps it's me, perhaps I'm like one of those people in Michael Jackson's video clip *Thriller*—one of the undead, rotting quietly away all this time. Needless to say, I didn't get the job, and it wasn't until I kicked my shoes off that night (feet seem to get tireder job-hunting than doing anything else, as you know)—it was only then that I found out the source of that terrible smell. Trapped under my left shoe where the heel joins the other part was a solid lump of . . . dog's poo. It's things like that can make you feel the world's got you booby-trapped from start to finish . . .

Well, I watched the other girls going in for their interviews and coming out again. Going in smiling, and coming out fish-faced (by that I mean as if they'd had a plastic surgery job done recently on their face and it hadn't quite taken yet). You tell yourself every morning: "Arrh, what's it matter? Don't take it personally." And still—what do you do? You take it personally . . . Miss Snooty's turn came eventually and in she went. I'd been counting the amount of time, on average, each interview took. It worked out at approximately fifteen minutes per girl. And Miss Snooty's took twenty. But that wasn't necessarily in her favour. Being the super-pushy kind, perhaps *she* dragged it out the extra time. Who knows? *And* ruined her chances of success into the bargain. You can always hope! Although I usually try not to be spiteful like that. We're all soldiers in this war, is what I reckon. Some of us get hit, and some get lucky. But we all know what it's like, and it doesn't pay as a rule to be giving the old snake-eyes to every other battler. Some could even be having a worse time than you, although you can't carry that thought too far either, or you wouldn't even try . . .

Like everybody else, I know some that aren't trying anymore. In fact, to tell you the truth, I live with a bunch of 'em in some big old rooms in Pigeon Street. You know the kind of dump . . . Locks off the doors, holes in the walls, broken-down fridge with nothing

much in it except perhaps a couple of tomatoes from a couple of years ago. And an orange nobody'd be game to eat now it's shrunk like an Indian head to a quarter of its former size.

And living there at the moment is Sammy, and Titch, and Louise, and Louise's little sister Mirabelle (which is a name that's really strange and out of place in a dump like that). One week one gets the food, and another week someone else. Nothing organized about it, it just seems to happen that way. Oh—and there's an old battered cassette recorder from when Sammy was a working-man (or 'boy', it's very hard to tell with Sammy—sometimes he's one, sometimes he's the other . . .). And some tapes—Springsteen's *Nebraska* (that's my favourite, especially "My Father's House" on that), Jimmy Barnes, and a Bette Midler (Mirabelle's favourite).

And lately, *booze*. More booze and less food. And weed. Ganja. You walk in now through the broken door and first thing you smell is the sweet smell of failure. And there's always someone flaked out on a mattress. It's that kind of thing *lately* that's beginning to get me worried. You could even say that's why I'm here, in a way. Because it's all changing, you know? I thought it never would, when I first moved in. Everything seemed very friendly and relaxed. But I don't know now why I ever thought it'd stay the way it was. Even Mirabelle, she's changing, too. Mirabelle used to be so sweet. But now—the language! Every second word—just about! And Titch, who I always thought was silly as a two-bob watch, but *nice* . . . Well, the other day I came home and there was Mirabelle and Titch . . . That got me thinking real hard. Things *do* change. We're like—the seasons. When summer's here it seems like it'll last forever. Then suddenly—it's winter. I'd have said something to Louise about Mirabelle and Titch, but Louise isn't as caring as she was at first. Then she was bright, lively, flipping her dark hair back, swinging her hips. Singing, even. She had a pretty voice. Now she's changed, too—for the worse—'gone to pot', you could say, in more ways than one. Well, actually, either going or coming back, one or the other. "Huh, huh?" and "It's cool, baby, cool . . ."—that's about all you can get out of her now. And as for Sammy—he's far too pally with Titch to tell him anything . . .

So I thought to myself: "Sarah, you've got to get a job and get out before the walls start moving in on you, too. *Now* . . ." Which is really why I'm sitting here. Waiting for that secretary to come out and tell me it's my turn. Because with a job you've got something, you're not just treading water. You can actually say: "I'll do *this*, I'll do *that*." Instead of getting it done to you.

Last night, in the kind of quiet that happens even in Pigeon Street sometimes, I lay there thinking about the kind of life I could have if I got this job. I'd find a single furnished room with a little old lady who had a front garden full of marigolds, the big orange ones that blaze away in the sun. And a big fat cat on the window-sill. And there'd be a pair of those little birds they call silvery-eyes twittering away in the early morning outside the window of my room (my room'd be in the front of the house). And there'd be a bed with a bedspread and clean pillows. And sheets on the bed. And a side table with no cigarette burns in it. And I could dress up and not feel ashamed.

But it's getting late, and I'm the very last. I know, I should've got up early and been first in line, but I had a struggle with myself to even get up at all. And yet, it's funny, but I feel I've already left Pigeon Street to have got *this* far, even if I am the last. I didn't tell Sammy or Titch or Louise that I was applying for a job, and that already makes me feel a bit of a traitor. Like someone who's been on a holiday to a better country than the one they're living in. And I know how the others think about these things. They want you stuck down there in the mud with them forever, and if you even *dream* of better things they start to hate you very quickly. But I'm going to dream anyway. Anything's better than nothing. And even *dreamin's something* . . .

But I do need this job real bad.

HELEN DANIEL

Plotting (1): A journey across Australian fiction in 1988

Plotting is a new series of quarterly accounts of recent fiction. It will be written alternately by Helen Daniel and D. J. O'Hearn.

Plotting an itinerary of Australian fiction in 1988 reminded me of Mario Vargas Llosa's talking of "the revenge of the novel". For three centuries, the novel was forbidden in the Spanish Colonies by the Spanish Inquisition: a world without novels but a world in which fiction contaminated all the other disciplines and genres. Llosa adds, fiction and reality are still merged in Latin America, still the victim of "the revenge of the novel".

Perhaps we too are subject to some kind of literary vengeance, some ancient inquisition lifting its ban, fiction breaking out, streaking across old boundaries of space and time, trafficking in quantum physics, religion, epistemology, history. At the same time, there are writers storming the barricades and staking their claim in the territory of fiction, saboteurs such as Brian Dibble in *Analogues*, Dorothy Hewett in *Alice in Wormland* and of course Brian Matthews in *Louisa*, all snaking across the boundaries, wreaking havoc in the old categories of fiction, poetry, biography, non-fiction. Crowded with crossings, the borders become mirages.

Plotting is going on all over Australia, plots subtle, crystalline, some fabulous, some intricate configurations of feeling and moral grace, some sharp and jagged, honed with acerbic wit, some within a world of correspondences, in some, small things the cipher of the large. Some are sedate, conducted with literary decorum, every comfort to hand. Others are shifty, the agenda tricky, full of riff-raff agencies, the timetables whimsical, place chameleon. But always the lure of hidden treasures, as if in our Occident, we contain our own Orient.

Every tale in this, my personal plotting of the year, I recommend. Every reader tells of different places of special beauty, times of special magic. Mine will be apparent, but this is a tale too of a vast array of fine fiction, the whole a splendid literary itinerary. I'm starting in the west, where the sun sets, just before the 'confabulatores nocturni', men and women of the night whose profession it is to tell stories, appear to begin their tales.

First to appear is one of our baroque storytellers, Elizabeth Jolley with *The Sugar Mother*, a tale about a surrogate mother and the surrogacy of fiction working out the pressing claims of the intangible world. Edwin Page plays out the components of his innermost self, through the awful presence of Leila and her sinister mother, to whom he gives possession of his life for a time. It is also a Jolley tale of wondrous comedy and dignity, a delicate counterpoint of truth and fiction in fantastic adjacence.

A contrapuntal tale too in Brian Dibble's *Analogues*, a saboteur's mix of poetry and story with a dissonance of voice and form which takes it outside conventional literary categories. As he draws on mythology and on patterns of twentieth century history, there is also a continuous sense of self spilling between stillness and agency, of change and perpetual contest across private and public territories.

Another saboteur of the old forms presents his tale as a novel-script, which keeps crossing the lines between actor and role, author and character, memory and fiction. A film is being made in Mudrooroo Narogin's *Doin Wildcat*, which is in part a retrieval of *Wild Cat Falling* (under the name of Colin Johnson in 1965). Together the two novels engage in an extra-ordinary dialogue, addressing each other across the decades, companion works but also rivals. Wildcat is at once central and marginal, on the film-set in a peculiar plight of self-consciousness. With a colloquial style, slangy and fluent, the language of the novel has a defiant quality, stubbornly at odds with its artistic sophistication.

Borges once remarked that "We know that chronology and history exist but they are primarily

Western discoveries". Discovered but never fixed, never finished, and many novels this year engage in a process of retrieval and meditation. In the west, memories linger of Nicholas Hasluck's tale last year in *Truant State* of truancy and derring-do in Western Australian history. Another tale by Peter Cowan vividly recreates the cultural life and landscape of the 1940s, in Perth and in Melbourne. Cowan's *The Hills of Apollo Bay* turns on the vast irony of cultural changes which have brought us to perilous disregard for the land itself. Across the decades, the novel measures urgencies of past and present, private and collective, challenging some of our cherished assumptions about our identity, culture and the land.

Tim Winton tells a gothic history in *In the Winter Dark* of four characters caught up in the horror of their own memories and imaginings. Poised between a private horror and a horror out there in the valley, the novel is both a suspense thriller and a fable of a creature like a feral self, flung up from the deepest recesses of the mind. Amid dark, mythic images of meddling with the natural order, here history is not a comfort, solid and unswerving, but predatory, stalking us all into the future and demanding atonement.

On the journey to the east, Dorothy Johnston's *Maralinga, My Love*, a crisp and assured tale, retrieves the history of the 1950s atomic tests at Maralinga. While exploring the devious forms loyalty can take, loyalties national, personal, intellectual, moral, the novel has a quiet anger about our collective innocence and dumb assent, Australia still Britain's colony, still the dumping ground. Maralinga is a wasteland, with an eerie beauty, a twentieth century landscape superimposed on the face of an ancient landscape.

Mine is no coastal tale, no littoral of the imagination, but a passage across the land and the inner continent. So no turn south to Adelaide, still crisscrossed by the geometric lines in Murray Bail's tale from last year, *Holden's Performance*, winner of this year's Victorian Premier's fiction award. Peter Goldsworthy is there too, telling fine-spun short tales in *Bleak Rooms*, many exploring rivalries which are played against time, the past contesting the present, the future importunate. A chance event or the sly ventriloquy of time opens up a proxy perspective on things.

No south turn to Melbourne either, where a marvellous tale is told of the future in George Turner's award-winning novel, *The Sea and Summer*. Melbourne is the home of Barry Dickins' lugubrious wit in *Ron Truffle*, and the mordant wit of John A. Scott's *Blair*, a tale of the miseries and gaucheries of Eric Blair, of loneliness and squalor, untidy events and uncouth academic life. With comic bumblings amid profound dismay, Blair wields wit like a shield, swashbuckling against the invisible blows of his own anguish.

Melbourne is also Murnane territory, but then he has laid claim to the entire hinterland. His new tale, *Inland*, is set in many places at once, all visionary landscapes. Clinging to the tale is a haunting sense of mortality and grief, played out through dialogues among a series of rival selves, like a spiral of mirrors. Crossing Australia's core, we can see Murnane out there on the plains, a distant figure in the numinous haze of his own landscape.

No time to veer south to Canberra, for most of us a haze of architectural and concentric images, but there are many tales there, in *Canberra Tales*, a fine collection by seven women writers, Marion Halligan, Dorothy Johnston, Marian Eldridge, Sara Dowse, Suzanne Edgar, Dorothy Horsfield, as well as Margaret Barbalet, who also tells in *Steel Beach* a tale of intriguing mystery of D. H. Lawrence in Australia.

If we veered further south, a fine tale in the Tatura intern camp in 1942, in Garry Disher's *The Stencil Man*, a tale of displacement and enclosure, told with deceptive quietness. Inside the German camp, the factions mirror the outer world, while Martin remains marginal. Here a range of spectral possibilities, shadowy borderlines, all told with a graceful strength.

We can linger briefly in some small towns along the way, in Olga Masters' stories, *The Rose Fancier*, a fine voice telling her last tales before her death. In another town in the 1950s, a new voice, telling her first tale, Margaret Coombs's *Regards to the Czar*, a powerful and moving work, with a string of linked sequences about powerlessness and protest, a serfdom to the czars of assent and compliance. In the trap of compliance, she becomes the accomplice, abetting her assailants, still the serf.

Reminds me of that other serfdom played out by Australia to different czars in Maralinga. But no time to look back. Onwards, to perhaps the most celebrated small town, Dog Rock, home of D'Arcy D'Oliveres, the postman-detective and investigator of Dog Rock's arcane mysteries. In *The Pale Blue Crochet Coathanger Cover* Foster again spins a delightful comic collage of small-town minutiae, as D'Arcy investigates a bizarre sequence of deaths, all the improbable clues running to the spoof denouement, in the Foster blend of parody and celebration.

Just outside Sydney, memories of a different celebration in David Ireland's *Bloodfather*, one of the great novels from 1987, the tale of young Davis Blood lit by the promise of things. In the Blue Mountains, memories too of old age, its claims on freedom amid the sly treason of time, in Nancy Phelan's fine tale from last year, *Home is the Sailor*, a tale lit by the warmth of the telling.

Light and darkness, freedom and captivity, are enemy notions in one of the great tales of 1988, set on a small farm in N.S.W. Rodney Hall's *Captivity Captive* is a powerful and gripping tale of man's sly treason against himself. The novel explores age-old

rites of succession and inheritance and the imperative to sacrificial slaughter, all within the intrigue of a murder mystery in 1898 inside one family. Suspense runs high and taut as Hall investigates the mystery through Pat Malone, the family historian, for whom 1898 is the dark eye of the world, holding him captive in its gaze. While the massive figures of Pa and Mum cast darkness over the ten children, the novel is dappled with enigmas of light and happiness, a sense of privilege and election, of family destiny.

We have been circling round Sydney, but it is hard to tell whether we have arrived in Grant Caldwell's *The Revolt of the Coats*. The tales in this first work are surrealistic and bizarre, skewed off at a tangent from the real world, the best those which gravely push a delicately absurd notion through to its end. In many a cycle of apparent change develops, murmuring promises, until things cheat and the old order reasserts itself obstinately. Throughout, things blur, flicker, look askance and take on fantastic shapes.

Still can't be sure where we are in Amanda Lohrey's *The Reading Group*, set in an unnamed Australian city and an indeterminate future, in the midst of public and private crisis. There is a profound sense of consciousness in retreat from the disorder of things, an age of recoil. With a montage technique, the narrative moves obliquely through the lives of eight characters, busy, marginal creatures. With the hallmarks of a futuristic vision, it is a contrary narrative which, a kind of stubborn perpetual now, tugs at its own indeterminacy of time and place.

Borges may be right that chronology and history are Western discoveries, but they still hold many secrets, many uncharted lands, many unseen faces. Last year, two tales like two faces of the same era: Keneally's *The Playmaker* and Eric Willmot's *Pemulwuy: The Rainbow Warrior*, the Aboriginal telling. But even white Australian history has a rival face, a woman's face, in Kate Grenville's major new novel, *Joan Makes History*, a tessellation of woman through a sliding, multiple figure, telling a subversive Australian history.

Sydney. Many overlapping territories here: Cliff Hardy territory in Peter Corris' *Man in the Shadows*, echoes of Margaret McClusky's satirical tale, *Wedlock*, told here last year. Of course Sydney is Moorhouse territory too, but Frank is away, mainly in Vienna and Geneva, in *Forty-Seventeen*, a moving tale I read months ago and remember with great warmth for the grace of its mysteries of ageing and yearning.

Sydney is also Carey territory and now one of the highpoints of the year, the dazzling *Oscar and Lucinda*, winner of this year's Booker Prize, a novel which shines and dances with a fascinating play of light and dark. Two gamblers on an arc towards each other, two players across hemispheres looking for a game, Oscar and Lucinda are partners choosing to be noble gamblers, playing out Dostoievskian games as they plunge into the heart of darkness. Lit by the splendid folly of the glass church drifting across an ancient landscape, painful, profound, shimmering, magical and luminous, I believe this is one of the great novels of this century.

North to Queensland: in Brisbane, Susan Johnson's *Messages from Chaos*, a fine first novel of a contemporary woman under siege of the past, and Matthew Condon's first tale, *The Motorcycle Cafe*, with the grandson in the present meditating on his dead grandfather, while Condon explores the subtle pull of one generation on another, the past elusive, tantalising. Underneath the Brisbane house is George's private territory, where the grandson senses the presence of his forerunner self, the real inheritance the mystery of the unknowable.

Further north, amid memories from 1987 of Georgia Savage's *The Estuary*, we are in Astley territory, in her splendid book, *It's Raining in Mango*, winner of the Steele Rudd award. In these interlinked stories, "Pictures from the Family Album", Astley traces the lines inside the Laffey family in Queensland from the 1860s to the 1980s. As Connie in the present looks back to her antecedents across the decades, patterns of cohesion form, "tessellations of family". Nice word that, which I borrowed a moment ago, but then Astley always has rich resources of language to offer.

Queensland is also Janette Turner Hospital territory, with one of the great novels of the year, *Charades*, an elegant work with a dizzying range of themes: quantum physics, the principle—indeed the necessity—of uncertainty, wave and particle theories of character, all combined with the traditions of tale-telling, of Scheherazade and the Thousand and One Nights. Through the tales spun for her lover, the Boston physicist, Koenig, Charade tells of her life in Queensland, her quest for her father, but also notions of Australian history, the whole an intrigue of tangled mysteries.

Hospital also talks in *Charades* of the notion of synchronicity, of coincidences clustering along some of the weird and wonderful routes to truth. The synchronicity of some aspects of *Charades* and my own book, *Liars*, I find uncanny. But this is no linear plotting that ends on the northern tip of Queensland. Time and space curve like plots and mine in reality is a circular journey, a loop around the landscape of Australian fiction and now back to the west where all this tale-telling started.

And there is another synchronicity in Marion Campbell's superb new novel, *Not Being Miriam*, about the "danger of certainty". In its composition of shifting frames about the tendencies of things, the world is "a tissue of complicated events only tending to occur". Through three women, Campbell conjures numerous images of woman, of lives compressed and defined by default. A sharp and wry intelligence plays across the intense inner dialogue of each character, the whole

a mosaic of voices and threads, which knot together in one startling moment. Watch for the splendid sequence on Katerina Kepler, mother of Johannes Kepler, "the last musician of the spheres", in a mix of a magic universe and mechanistic physics.

So perhaps this is a self-conscious tale after all, ending with *Liars*. It's nearly dawn and the last of the 'confabulatores nocturni' is a Liar too, Mark Henshaw, with his brilliant first novel, *Out of the Line of Fire*. Here reality teases and cajoles, in mirages of itself which ripple with the play of mind. Inside a shimmering structure, a fugue of themes played with grace and power, it is a gripping mystery and an erotic narrative about sexuality and imagination. Set mainly in Germany, place has a sharp realism in which events impinge and haunt but, as in the real world, do not immediately declare their place in the scheme of things. In a contrapuntal play of suspense and epistemology, it explores the quest to know anything amid the contrary testimony the world perpetually flings up at us. And the suspense holds to the last word, a final prismatic shift.

That's as far as I have gone this year. There was a time when we could read all the Australian fiction of a year. Not now, unless one abandons all other pursuits and old habits like sleeping. I still sleep sometimes, so I have not yet read Gerard Windsor's *That Fierce Virgin*, nor Leon Trainor's *Livio*, nor Martin Buzacott's *Narrenschiff*, nor Gwen Kelly's *Arrows of Rain*, nor Barbara Hanrahan's *A Chelsea Girl*, nor the new Barry Hill, *The Best Picture* nor *Broken Words*, Helen Hodgman's new novel after a long silence. All these, other travellers have recommended to me.

But already anticipations of next year are building up. New journeys across space and time and the borders of reality are being plotted all over the country right now. So what further "revenge of the novel" lies ahead? New novels by Elizabeth Jolley (*My Father's Moon*), Jessica Anderson, David Malouf, stories by Rose Creswell, Brian Matthews. A new Barry Oakley novel, the first since 1974, a first novel by Jack Hibberd, and perhaps the long awaited Peter Mathers. And these are only the few I have heard about, amid all the plots being schemed and spun out there right now.

No book, says Borges, is complete unless it contains its opposite. So this is only half the journey, indeed only half of my version of the journey. So it is best to plot your own literary journey through the year's fiction: no limits of space and time, no need to be confined by mere reality, just forgo sleep.

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Hospital, Janette Turner: *Charades*, U.Q.P., 1988, $26.95.
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Johnson, Susan: *Messages from Chaos*, Collins, 1988, $12.95.
Johnston, Dorothy: *Maralinga, My Love*, McPhee Gribble, 1988, $12.99.
Jolley, Elizabeth: *The Sugar Mother*, Fremantle Arts Centre, 1988, $19.95.
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ALMOST FINAL SOLUTIONS (No. 536) by Lofo

ROBERT DARROCH

D. H. Lawrence's Australia

When I was preparing this talk I quickly came across the idea, apparently quite voguish, that Australia was invented. Furthermore, it is, apparently, mainly the invention of the British. I give you only one example of this idea. Last year in America the Australian poet and writer Rodney Hall gave an interview in which he complained about the "small and carping and mean" reviews his work had received in England, and he went on to say:

> I think the English as the one-time colonising power regard themselves as having invented Australia, so they feel they know all about it already, and unless you confirm their ideas on Australia, they don't believe you. [They think] here's an Australian writer trying to be worldly.

Australia as a false construct is a theme in a growing number of post-Menzies-era books and articles of which probably the most influential is Richard White's *Inventing Australia*. His special point is that the various images of Australia propagated in the past 200 years or so were invented to serve the interests of pressure groups . . . authors like Dickens needing to kill off bit players, etc. He alleges that there is no "real" Australia, rather a collection of perceptions that reflect primarily the prejudices and motives of those who made them up, that they tell you more about the inventor than the invention. White has a good point, though perhaps he overstates it a trifle. But it is an idea for its time and clearly serves a present purpose. Maybe it will help Australians to shake themselves loose from the trammels of British culture, perhaps leaving a vacuum that might be filled in by a more nationalistic or home-grown version of past and present. (I hope I would not be accused of being British in pointing out that Mr Hall's most recent novel was panned pretty heavily in Australia, too.) Yet all this is probably a good thing, particularly given an increasing non-British make-up of our populace. But for me it has its negative side.

Currently a group of us back in Australia is trying to save Wyewurk, D. H. Lawrence's holiday cottage in Thirroul, on the New South Wales south coast. It's owned by a local estate agent who acquired it a few years ago from the family who let it to Lawrence originally (and who had preserved it in approximately the same condition described in *Kangaroo*, the novel Lawrence wrote there in 1922). Having an expanding family, the estate agent wants to add a second storey to the bungalow, which was hardly big enough to hold Lawrence and Frieda, especially when, as locals in Thirroul remembered, they were experiencing one of their frequent Good Ship Harriett and Lovat storms. In canvassing support for our cause we encountered an unexpected amount of hostility. One perhaps might excuse the locals (a South Coast historian, W. Bayley, wrote in 1960: "The contribution of D. H. Lawrence to Thirroul is nil"), but it *was* surprising to find a dismissive attitude extending even to people like Donald Horne, head of the Australia Council. One other well-known Sydney critic wrote a letter calling *Kangaroo* a "third-rate novel" (could anything Lawrence wrote really be worse than second-rate?), while support from the Literary Arts Board was most grudging. Why worry about a foreign writer like Lawrence, seemed to be a common response, when we have excellent writers of our own, some with very serviceable homes to be preserved. I won't here enter into a dispute about the relative merits of Wyewurk and Gum Nut Cottage, but I do want to defend *Kangaroo*, Lawrence's picture of Australia, from being put down by some need to combat the cultural cringe.

At this time it would be a particular pity, for it is only fairly recently that we started to more fully understand what J. D. Pringle in the mid-fifties called "the most profound book written about Australia" and about which Anthony Burgess thirty years later wrote: "No novel, not even by a native Australian, has caught so well the spirit of a place whose magic has been virtually denied by the inarticulate culture that has been dumped upon it." Not all would agree with such fulsome judgements (A. D. Hope called *Kangaroo* ignorant, slapdash, sloppy and a travesty, "a poor work", while Katherine Suzannah Prichard decided it contained "yards of fatuous drivel"). Nevertheless,

appreciation of this strange novel is growing. Even in Wollongong the author's stocks are rising, the local Professor of English, Professor R. G. T. Southall, recently being quoted as saying that Lawrence was not only the pre-eminent novelist of this century but possibly of any century. (I would be misleading you, however, if I did not add that, in this respect, Dr Southall holds very un-Wollongonian views.)

It is interesting that the two British judgements cited above base their praise mainly on the evocative passages in *Kangaroo*, particularly on Lawrence's capacity to observe and describe nuances other, lesser writers do not so readily apprehend. Lawrence did seem to have this extra perceptive ability. Aldous Huxley remarked on it, saying that Lawrence was privy to things that other mortals weren't. And, as Richard Aldington and others have pointed out, it is in *Kangaroo* that Lawrence's uncanny knack of capturing the spirit of a place is displayed to particular effect. I am not sure, but it may be that this famous phrase of Lawrence's, 'spirit of place', was conceived in Australia; certainly *Kangaroo* is furnished with one of the most extensive examples of the concept, one of the main themes of his literary work. In a letter written from Wyewurk in June 1922 to his German publisher, a letter printed for the first time last year in volume 4 of the Cambridge *Collected Letters*, Lawrence says: " . . . here the earth and air are new, the spirit of place untouched."

The spirit of the place Australia is something many writers, British and Australian (though perhaps Anglo-Australian is the more accurate term), have attempted to capture. But I think it is true to say that Lawrence made one of the more determined efforts. The above-mentioned volume 4 of the letters show this. Lawrence's correspondence is a vital tool to understanding him (and he *is* a devilishly difficult writer to understand, as *Kangaroo* amply illustrates), so it is instructive in this context to look at his Australian letters, particularly as so many are now published for the first time.

Lawrence's pre-arrival impressions of Australia seem to be much in line with the standard British image of Australia. To him it was, if not Arcady, then at least a distinct improvement on the Midlands he grew up in. When in 1912 a close childhood friend was 'pluckily' contemplating emigration, Lawrence told her Australia was "a new country, with new morals: it is not a split from England, but a new nation". Yet when in 1920 he put an Australian into his slightly pot-boiling novel *The Lost Girl* (the only book he wrote that won him a prize), the character was far from attractive. Dr Alexander Graham, an Australian medical man gaining practical experience in Britain, was 'creepy', with a body that seemed to move inside his clothing. He also had a strong mouthful of cruel, compact teeth. (These were the days before Australian dentists in London.) It is of interest to note that this reptilian allusion was to recur, with devastating effect, towards the end of Lawrence's Australian visit.

Just before catching a boat from Naples eastward, Lawrence was still displaying a patronising attitude to Australians. Possibly basing his prejudice on acquaintances like Australian expatriate pianist, Elsie Stanley Hall, and her concert-singer friend, Florence Wood, at whose salon in Chelsea Lawrence was an occasional pre-war visitor, he confided to his American friend Brewster, whom he was going to stay with in Ceylon, that shipboard Australians seemed "two-legged organs" who thought they were "most awfully IT". He promised to "tune them up" when he came east.

But when he got on the boat, first to Colombo and then to Perth, he found the numerous Australians he encountered "quite simple" and "rather nice people". Australia had returned to being "a good country, full of life and energy". After arrival, he discovered that the air was beautiful and the sky pure, fresh and high. Yet there was, almost immediately, a puzzle. Australia, he told a friend, was weird and queer. The people were not "dug in". The endless, hoary, grey bush reminded him of an English moor—only there were trees.

By the time he reached Sydney, three weeks into his thirteen-week visit, Australia was a great, free land with room to be alive. By the time he began *Kangaroo*, around the middle of his first week in NSW, he was fully won over by the environment. "Australia is a wonderful country," he wrote to a friend, "so new, and without that weight of anxiety and weariness in the air which weighs on us in Europe". A few days later it was an extraordinarily subtle, yet unknown country. He wondered what was behind its apparent monotony. He decided that Australia had a "folded secret". This interplay between the apparent flatness of the landscape ("like a Japanese painting") and its hidden secret continued to intrigue him, and both in the novel and the letters he returned to it again and again. "Australia has a hoary, weird fascination," he told another of his correspondents. "Often I hate it like poison, then again it fascinates me and the spell of its indifference gets me. I can't quite explain it [it is] as if one resolved back almost to the plant kingdom". He began to visualise Australia as some sort of primeval creature, with a live energetic body and a weird face.

Curiously, his initial fascination with the land was in contrast with his reaction to the people. In Perth he found Australians too free and democratic (then a term of disapprobation in Lawrence's vocabulary). They were for always cooking yet another mutton chop. They were friendly but slow, and almost imbecile, "as if everything was a bit too much for them". They were also raw and crude. Moreover, they thought they were the chosen ones and seemed to proclaim: "There is nothing better than me on earth".

Their homeliness and gormless longing for "conveniences" reminded him unfavourably of his childhood in the Midlands. They were almost too healthy, always on the go, and seemed, the men at least, prone to legginess. ("They run to leg, these people," he remarked, half admiringly.) Indeed, it might be said he presaged Richard White, observing that there were no such people as Australians . . . "Humanly, they are not existent."

Yet as time went on his picture of Australia and its people changed: the people for the better, the land for the worse. By the start of his sixth week in Australia the people began to return to their "simple, easy-going, nice" ways. In one late passage in *Kangaroo*, he and Frieda, as their alter egos Harriett and Lovat, are on a bus returning to Thirroul from a day trip to Wollongong. Lawrence observes his fellow passengers: "real careless Australians . . . careless of everything except their happy-go-lucky democratic friendliness . . . They were really awfully nice. There was a winsome charm about them. They none of them seemed mean, or tight, or petty . . . so gentle . . . the strange, bright-eyed gentleness."

On the other hand, the spirit of the place began to turn threatening, even evil. At about this time he began to write letters about Australia's "Sleeping Beauty terrors". Now he confessed himself frightened by Australia's mystery. He decided that the spirit of Australia was something that went back into prehistory, into the fern age, the age of vertebral fishes and reptiles, when non-human Dark Gods trod the earth. In perhaps his most chilling passage in the novel he wrote:

> Then gradually, through the silver glisten of the new freedom came a dull, sinister vibration . . . untamed, evil winds could come, cold, like a stone hatchet murdering you . . . Sometimes a heavy, reptilian hostility came off the sombre land, something gruesome and infinitely repulsive. . . it was as if the silvery freedom suddenly turned, and showed the scaly back of the reptile, and the horrible paws.

Australia and Australians still retained a degree of surface attractiveness, but this change, this reversal of attitude, reflected both in the letters and the novel, seems to me to mark a genuine reaction to, and be the result of deep thought about, the setting of his seventh major novel (eighth, if you count *The Lost Girl*). It is a reaction, I would argue, that was neither imported nor especially invented.

A reason for this change can be traced to the Nightmare chapter of *Kangaroo*. It splits the novel in two, dividing the largely positive reaction at the start from the more negative one in the later chapters. Much has been written about this famous chapter, in which Lawrence recalls his wartime persecution. Its place in the novel has always seemed, to many critics, a puzzle if not an intrusion. Before *Kangaroo* was published Lawrence was pressed by Frieda and his American agent to take it out, but Lawrence staunchly resisted. I think we can now see its relevance and why he wanted it retained. For it was a genuine part of his experience, his fictionalised diary, of Australia. We now have every reason to believe that it was based on a real nightmare, dreamt in the Carlton Hotel in Castlereagh Street, the result of a terrifying revelation one Saturday evening in the heart of Sydney's Central Business District.

Since it was published in October 1923 (in two variant editions, the more correct of which went out of print over twenty years ago), *Kangaroo* has been mainly interpreted as one of Lawrence's three leadership novels. The idea here has been that his major novels can be divided into four eras: the juvenilia, the mature masterpieces of *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, the leadership trilogy comprising *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo*, and *The Plumed Serpent*, and the final erotic work, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The received interpretation of *Kangaroo*, and of Lawrence's period in Australia, an interpretation reflected in literally scores of critical works and untold numbers of theses and articles, is indeed of an invented image of Australia, brought with him on the boat from Europe. "Where did Lawrence get his vivid scenes of clashes between the Diggers and the Socialists?" asks the current introduction to the standard English and American editions. Not from reality, it avers, for at that time no such political violence occurred in Australia. Lawrence made them up or borrowed them from Italy. And the leadership aspect? That was Lawrence imagining himself, or his characters, playing politics. In this respect White and others are correct in the matter of interpretation. Because this analysis of *Kangaroo*, like, I regret to say, much Lawrence criticism, tells us more about the critics and their opinions than about Lawrence. As his letters show, and Lawrence himself states quite clearly, the break in his literary career is not between *Women in Love* and *Aaron's Rod*, but between *Aaron's Rod*, the final working out of his English upbringing and experiences, and *Kangaroo*. "*Kangaroo*", to use Lawrence's own words, is "a new show".

From Lawrence's letters it is plain what he intended *Kangaroo* to be. It was to be his novel of Australia. Earlier he had intended to write an Indian novel, but his short and rather unpleasant time in Ceylon put the kibosh on this scheme. And he left Australia intending to write his American novel. In fact he wrote a Mexican novel, *The Plumed Serpent*, though perhaps by that time his ideas about novel writing had moved on.

Before he reached Australia, Lawrence seems to have evolved the idea, possibly as a result of his tortured effort finishing *Aaron's Rod*, to try to write

a novel of place. And he had worked out a technique for it. The form was going to be, as he implied in a letter to fellow novelist Catherine Carswell, that of a diary. And in a conversation with Mollie Skinner, the West Australian nurse who was to become the co-author of his other Australian novel, *The Boy in the Bush*, he enlarged on the idea. Talking about technique, Lawrence urged her in her writing to lean on reality, adding: "write bit-by-bit the scenes you have witnessed. . . Write and build up from day-to-day (and when) you've done 80,000 words, throw down your pen." It is now certain that this is almost precisely what Lawrence did in *Kangaroo*. After he arrived in Sydney he decided to fill in the time before he could leave for America by turning his day-to-day observations and thoughts into a work of 'fiction' (perhaps 'faction' is the word some might use today). Thus when in the novel he describes, say, Harriett and Lovat's trip to Mullumbimby, he is merely fictionalising the real train trip he and Frieda made to Thirroul. And so on. Yet this is all very well for the descriptive passages. What about the plot?

Early reviews of *Kangaroo*, and many critics since, have tended to avoid talking about the plot of the novel, for it is very un-Lawrentian. It tells of an English writer who comes across a secret army in Sydney which is plotting to take over Australia and impose a right-wing dictatorship on the country. The spirit of this image of Australia turns out to be rather unpleasant, particularly when it shows its ugly, miniatory side to Lawrence's fictional hero, Richard Lovat Somers. He is threatened with death. "I could have you killed," says the secret army leader Benjamin Cooley, a threat that leads immediately to the Nightmare chapter. We can now show, sixty years on, that the basis of this plot, as indeed much, if not most, of the plot of *Kangaroo*, is based on fact and real events that occurred to Lawrence in Sydney and Thirroul in May, June and July of 1922. Lawrence did run across a secret army in Australia, it was only too real, and his account of it is disconcertingly accurate. *Kangaroo* turns out to be the best account historians have of the nature and structure, not to mention the leadership, of this proto-fascist movement. As will be made clear in the soon-to-be-published book by Australian historian Andrew Moore on the 1930-32 Old Guard and its associated predecessors and successors, there is an aspect about the real Australia, and a very significant aspect, that until the last ten years or so had been largely hidden, and for obvious reasons.

From research carried out by Moore, myself and a number of others we now believe that there was a continuing Australia-wide organisation, probably founded in 1918, which threw up shadowy battalions of mainly ex-Diggers whenever middle class conservative fears were heightened by threats of left-wing militancy. This organisation lasted at least into the 1950s. (And here there is a nice little literary joke in *Kangaroo*. The main organiser of the 'fictional' Maggies secret army is Jack Callcott whom Lawrence portrays, oddly, as a garage proprietor. Apparently, the clandestine euphemism for the real secret army was, because of its reliance on motorised mobilisation, "the garage").

I will not go into how Lawrence, of all people, came across Australia's greatest secret, except to say he met someone on a boat on the way to Sydney who introduced him to one of the leaders of the real secret army, a gentleman called William John Rendall 'Jack' Scott. It involved a combination of several coincidences and a lot of luck, plus some spectacular—dare I say it?—journalism and deception on Lawrence's part. Nor will I disguise the fact that Lawrence almost certainly neither perceived nor pondered on what he had in fact stumbled upon and written about. He was utterly naive about this, writing to his American publisher in October 1922 from Taos, New Mexico: "Do you think the Australian Govt or the Diggers might resent anything?" They certainly would have minded, and Lawrence was lucky to be out of reach of them, the secret army side, when those involved read what he had revealed about them and their movement in *Kangaroo*. It is, by the way, interesting that Lawrence was aware that the Australian Government and the diggers, or rather Maggies, secret army were connected, one of a number of points that had escaped most people in Australia for over half a century, though the evidence of *Kangaroo* was staring out from the bookshelves.

In fact it is Lawrence's willing naïveté, his deliberate putting aside—for the exigencies of an experiment in technique—of his imported, interpretive faculties that makes Lawrence's picture of Australia so significant. *Kangaroo*, already admired for its descriptive passages by the likes of Pringle and Burgess, must now be reassessed. The process has already begun. In a recent issue of the D.H.L. Review, New Zealand academic Murray S. Martin, in the course of an article entitled "Kangaroo Revisited", said: "The previous critical position is no longer tenable". Incidentally, there is a plus side to all this. *Kangaroo* now provides a useful tool to check the relevance, indeed, correctness, of something like sixty years of literary criticism, some of it by very distinguished pens.

So what should be the new interpretation and judgement? Certainly that *Kangaroo* is a much more remarkable book than has hitherto been recognised. Certainly also that Lawrence's picture of Australia has now to be looked at in a different light. But what does Lawrence, now that we are closer to a proper understanding of what he was talking about, say about Australia? He says many things. On virtually every page he says something of interest. But one overall impression does emerge, for me at least. It is of a country with many surface attractions, but one which

also has a deep, underlying mystery. I am not sure Lawrence ever did unfold the secret that he discerned in Australia. I don't think he did quite put his finger on the spirit of the place. Yet he saw, one way or another, more deeply into our land and society, the good and the bad, than perhaps anyone else has.

But that is not the place to end. The one thing that Lawrence is justifiably renowned for, and which I have not really touched on, is the power of his words and his ability to conjure up apt and startling images. This he did in plenty in *Kangaroo*: his evocation of a moonlit walk in the West Australian bush, the lovely wattle sequence, the description of a kookaburra ("like a bunch of old rag"), the scenes of Thirroul and the South Coast, and so on. No talk on *Kangaroo* would be complete without a taste of his descriptive genius. I hope you will permit me to quote his description of an environment I know well, and which I now look on with different eyes. He writes of the sea:

> He liked the sea, the pale sea of green glass that fell in such cold foam. Ice-firey, fish-burning . . .

And of the rocks:

> Strangely sea-scooped, sharp sea-bitter rock-floor, all wet and sea-savage . . .

And the moonlit beach:

> In the nearness a wave broke white and high. . . the snakes rushed forward, in a hollow frost hissing at his boots. Then failed to bite, fell back hissing softly, leaving the belly of the sands granulated silver.

I would point out, incidentally, that the holograph of *Kangaroo* at the University of Texas shows that these words were penned in Thirroul without correction. Like most of the manuscript, they came straight out from Lawrence's mind without need of further polishing.

I submit that Australia owes a lot to Bert Lawrence, the Nottinghamshire miner's son. Such a person comes our way only once in a couple of centuries. We should not try, for whatever reason, to diminish his contribution to our literary heritage. Nor should we contenance turning Wyewurk, the bungalow he immortalised, into a modern Australian family home, equipped with double garage, inside toilet, and all the other 'conveniences' Lawrence so detested.

ANDREW MOORE

The Historian as Detective

Pursuing the Darroch thesis and D. H. Lawrence's Secret Army

In the mid 1960s an unlikely trio sat down to enjoy lunch at the Union Club in Sydney. One of the diners was the doyen of left-liberal journalism, Tom Fitzgerald, an editor of Nation. The second was a Melbourne architecture student, John Haughton James. Encouraged by progressive intellectuals like Ian Turner and Brian Fitzpatrick, James had spent several years researching the history of the New Guard, Sydney's proto-fascist citizens' auxiliary of the Depression years and had published several exploratory articles on the New Guard in Nation in 1961 and 1965. These articles brought the third diner to Sydney. He was the former head of the New Guard, Lieutenant-Colonel Eric Campbell, at that stage a solicitor residing in semi-retirement in Yass. Campbell made no attempt to disguise his reservations about James's articles. The young researcher found his appetite waning when Campbell hinted that he might sue. James never put pen to paper on that subject again.

Tom Fitzgerald, however, was intrigued by an offhand remark Campbell made over lunch. It was a reference to the long background of counter-revolutionary organisations in Australia preceding the formation of the New Guard in 1931. It triggered his memory of the then highly unfashionable novel, *Kangaroo*, written by D. H. Lawrence in the course of a brief Australian visit in 1922. Some years earlier Fitzgerald had visited Thirroul, the south coast town where Lawrence spent most of his time in New South Wales. He had sounded out several local residents who remembered the British author's visit. The results were not especially gratifying, though the local barber did remember Lawrence's weekly visits and his curiosity, but did not recall ever talking to him about politics.

For Fitzgerald other projects assumed greater importance but he never forgot the possibility of a *Kangaroo* connection. Some years later he mentioned the matter to the author and journalist, Robert Darroch. Australia's most famous literary puzzle was about to be confronted for the first time. Such lines as "we're mostly diggers back from the war—we've joined into a kind of club—and we're sworn in—and we're sworn to obey the leaders no matter what the command, when the time is ready—and we're sworn to keep silent till then" no doubt puzzled many readers over the years but no one had bothered to investigate systematically the relationship between fact and fiction.

In a series of newspaper articles beginning in 1976 and in his 1981 book, *D. H. Lawrence in Australia*, Darroch built upon fleeting observations that had been proffered by other writers like Don Rawson, J. A. Alexander and Curtis Alexander. The result was a significant piece of literary detective work, though Darroch was at pains to stress that he was only developing a "provisional hypothesis". Two arguments can be identified. First, that the anti-Communist secret army Lawrence describes in some detail did exist in 1922. Second, that against all the odds—principally the brevity of his stay in Australia and the isolation in which he and his wife Frieda lived—Lawrence did encounter the leaders of this secret army and then proceeded to write a major novel which outlined their activities explicitly. More than that, Darroch argued, apart from the thinly disguised Lawrence and Frieda, Lovat and Harriet Somers, the novel's central characters, 'Kangaroo', the Jewish solicitor Ben Cooley and his sinister lieutenant, Jack Callcott, were based on real life characters associated with an empire loyalist organisation known as the King and Empire Alliance. The former was the prominent architect, Major-General Sir Charles Rosenthal, one of the celebrities of the A.I.F. The latter was Major W. J. R. (Jack) Scott DSO, an insurance broker with élite (Street) family connections.

The response to *D. H. Lawrence in Australia* was sceptical. Several reviewers criticised Darroch's tendency to alternate between literary and historical evidence and suggested that at times the argument was marked more by assertion than the careful assembly of evidence. Nevertheless, commentators as politically diverse as Edward St John and Bernard Smith have enthused over the book. In the years since its publication, however, a distinct cleavage has

emerged between literary critics and historians about both Darroch's book and interpretations of *Kangaroo*. Historians like Lloyd Robson who are more than familiar with the mindset of the soldiers of the First A.I.F. were less than amazed at Darroch's propositions. Manning Clark has recently described *Kangaroo* as "one of the most illuminating books ever written about Australia" and Lawrence's observations of the Australian condition are elegantly interspersed in the final volume of Professor Clark's *History of Australia*. With the exception of Keith Sagar literary researchers have been less receptive.

This article tests the waters of the Darroch thesis, presents three new pieces of evidence that may assist our understanding of *Kangaroo* and canvasses a new line of interpretation about the circumstances under which D. H. Lawrence may have encountered the leaders of the secret army. It also attempts to impart some impression of the work place of the researcher who ventures to write about Australia's 'secret history', aspects of Australian history which never made the newspapers and which have often been deliberately buried by the powerful and the wealthy.

Clue No. 1:

One of the major strengths of the Darroch thesis is its argument about the characterisation of Cooley and Callcott. Darroch's detractors have never been able to explain how Lawrence was able to provide such vivid portraits of two extremely distinctive individuals—Charles Rosenthal and Jack Scott—whose track record was so inextricably bound up with empire loyalist counter-revolutionary movements of the inter-war years. And as every Lawrencian scholar knows it was standard practice for Lawrence to avoid conjuring up a character from his imagination if an acquaintance or a friend fitted the bill. Thus Rosenthal, the massively built architect in his forties, with a long, lean, pendulous face, forward-leaning stance and paunch, is unmistakeable as Cooley. And Scott's peculiarities—his lean, delicate features strangely mismatched to a solid frame with broad shoulders, his laconic facetious manner, his capacity for indiscretion, in particular the streak of violence which underpinned his outward bonhomie, even his interest in all things Japanese—all these things were faithfully reproduced in Callcott.

It may be argued that these attributes were not specific to Rosenthal and Scott; the latter's mental instability was certainly not an isolated instance, and for all the extended debate about conduits between Lawrence and the secret army based on exhaustive research of shipping lists, there has never been any empirical *proof* that Lawrence *did* encounter Scott and that Scott *was* the model of Callcott. The following piece of oral evidence enhances these possibilities.

In March 1985 I interviewed Mrs Nancy Jeffery now dead. Sprightly and perceptive, Mrs Jeffery was the widow of a Communist Party functionary, Norman Jeffery, whose writings on Australian labour history I was collecting. But Mrs Jeffery's class origins were rather unusual for a woman married to a professional revolutionary. The daughter of a physician, Dr Guy Griffiths, she came from a wealthy Killara family and met her future husband at the time of the Spanish Civil War when Norm was working for the Spanish Relief Committee. Her small house in an ungentrified area of Balmain gave evidence of a life-long interest in English literature. The conversation drifted from her late husband's political career to books and writing. Somehow D. H. Lawrence and *Kangaroo* came up and on this subject Mrs Jeffery had an interesting story to tell.

Her father knew Jack Scott well. Dr Griffiths and Scott regularly lunched together at the Imperial Service Club. And Mrs Jeffery was friendly with Andree Oatley, Scott's second wife. Jack Scott, an engaging, flamboyant man with a fine tenor voice, became a regular fixture in the Killara bridge and social circles in which the Griffiths family moved. Mrs Jeffery remembered three things about Major Scott. The first was that he was a lousy bridge player. The second was that his right-wing activities were well known in this little social circle. The third stemmed from a small paragraph in a literary paper which alluded to the factual basis of *Kangaroo*. At one bridge party in the early 1930s Mrs Jeffery remembered Scott being chided about how he had managed to be immortalised in print as the sinister Callcott. This tallies with the remembrances of a step-son of Scott's second marriage. He told Robert Darroch that Scott always kept his copies of the works of D. H. Lawrence under lock and key. At the time the boys assumed that it was their 'unsavory' content which Scott was trying to secure from impressionable minds. But perhaps it was the politics of *Kangaroo* rather than the sex scenes of *Lady Chatterley* which Scott wished to hide.

Clue No 2:

On 26 January 1924 Professor Archibald Strong reviewed *Kangaroo* in the Melbourne **Herald.** Strong had been part of the initiatives to form the Australian Protective League, arguably one of the first manifestations of the secret army which Lawrence would encounter in 1922. At a high level meeting in 1918 Strong warned of the "big wave of Bolshevism" which might engulf Australia after the war, as well as the need to organise a "counter wave." Strong's review may have reflected the embarrassment, perhaps apprehension, which many experienced when the first copies of *Kangaroo* began to arrive on Australian shores. Strong felt that the novel failed on the basis of the character of Kangaroo, Ben Cooley, "one of the least living characters I have encountered

in modern fiction". Further Lawrence, Strong considered, had little "idea of the politics or sociological background of Australia." From Strong to A. D. Hope in 1974, and Bruce Steele in 1987, literary academics have repeated the charge that Lawrence was awry in his political understanding of Australia, though even the most cursory reading of the contemporary newspapers disproves this.

It has been my experience that many people outside academia have known what *Kangaroo* was really about for some time. In 1978 I corresponded with the late Ulrich Ellis, the Country Party historian. The focus of my enquiry was the political work of his brother, M. H. ('Ek Dum') Ellis. M. H. Ellis's anti-communist tracts *The Red Road* (1931) and *The Garden Path* (1949) are but the tip of an iceberg of a life dedicated to stifling socialism in Australia. Like Strong, Ellis had been associated with the counter-revolutionary plans from their outset, performing 'special service' for the Commonwealth since 1915. He knew Jack Scott well. In Ellis's papers there is a cryptic reference to "Jack Scott and the garage", which may be, given *Kangaroo's* reference to Callcott's initial occupation as a motor mechanic and the contemporary practice of disguising Commonwealth intelligence agents as traffic inspectors, an insight into the 'milieu' which Scott and Ellis inhabited. In any case I wanted to see if Ulrich Ellis remembered anything about his brother's associations with the Australian Protective League. Documents in the papers of that organisation's principal instigator, Herbert Brookes, showed regular payments the Melbourne businessman made to M. H. Ellis for reporting on 'the enemy in our midst'.

At this stage I could see no point in confusing the issue by pursuing any *Kangaroo* connections so I did not mention the matter at all. Mr Ellis replied:

> You ought to consult Sherlock Holmes! . . .
> I can't comment on the Australian Protective League. In my youth I did not know that such an organisation existed. Later on, I heard rumours about it. Years ago I read a novel which tells of a group who formed an organisation along the same lines as the A.P.L. I have found it again this morning in the Tamworth library—D. H. Lawrence's "Kangaroo", published in 1923—the only book he wrote in Australia. (sic) You might be interested [in] Chapter X: "Diggers". The leader of the group was a Lt. Colonel and each group had a committee of five or six members "sworn in to secrecy and to absolute obedience to any decision". It would seem that Lawrence knows the A.P.L. story.

Clue No. 3:

Given that the Lawrences spent only four nights in Sydney and the rest of their eleven week visit at Thirroul, it seems logical to infer that historical detectives interested in *Kangaroo* may have been looking in the wrong place; Thirroul, not the lower north shore or northern peninsula area of Sydney is the likely venue to search for a paramilitary connection. In this respect the papers of the New Guardsman, Francis de Groot, throw up an interesting possibility. Following his melodramatic 'opening' of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in March 1932 de Groot received a large number of congratulatory letters, among them one from the Thirroul-Austinmer locality of the New Guard whose seventeen members wished to express their admiration of de Groot's "skill, bravery and fearless devotion to a high ideal."

This raises an intriguing question: were any of these residents of Thirroul at the time of D. H. Lawrence's visit? Scrutiny of the electoral rolls shows that twelve of the seventeen *were.* Lawrence could have met any number of them in one of his long walks around the town. One was a real estate agent (not A. F. Callcott through whom Lawrence rented Wyewurk but doubtless in a small town they were well acquainted). One, however, was Callcott's son-in-law who in 1922 lived in very close proximity to Wyewurk. Among the others were a shopkeeper, a telegraphist (Lawrence had to visit the post office on several occasions), a railway engineer and guard (among the most brilliant passages of the novel are its descriptions of the South Coast railway journey) and perhaps most interesting of all, in view of the Defence Department's subsequent 1931 prohibition of its personnel joining the mushrooming 'law and order' auxiliaries, a staff sergeant major.

None of this resolves the puzzles of *Kangaroo* though if there was a right-wing organisation in Thirroul in 1922 these empire loyalists would surely have belonged to it.

Yet on balance the Darroch thesis has much to commend it. The traditional literary explanations of the parallels between fact and fiction—coincidence, the transference of Lawrence's observations of developing Italian fascism to Australia or the prophetic insight of an unusually sagacious intellect which enabled Lawrence to anticipate the emergence of the New Guard nine years later—all are unsatisfactory. Yet there are many unanswered questions. The following addresses one of them. *Why* did Lawrence come to be privy to Major Scott's secrets?

Kangaroo: a bungled intelligence operation?

Over the years the sections of *Kangaroo* dealing with the activities and structure of the Diggers Clubs in Chapter 10 have been pored over by numerous scholars. Yet near the end of Chapter 12 there is an unexplored passage where Lawrence explains Somers's reasons for leaving Australia. Somers wonders, "Perhaps the secret service was making investigations about them." This quizzical statement

may provide an insight into the circumstances surrounding the Lawrences' visit.

As is well known, and as Lawrence himself describes in the 'Nightmare' chapter of *Kangaroo*, during the Great War the Lawrences had been the subjects of intense security surveillance. A friend of Bertrand Russell, Lawrence had drifted into pacifist and radical-liberal circles. Suspected of spying for the Germans, in October 1917 the Lawrences' cottage in Cornwall was raided. As part of a related campaign of intellectual suppression *The Rainbow* was banned and its sequel, *Women in Love*, suppressed.

While Lawrence was experiencing this trauma, twelve thousand miles away, parallel apprehensions about political radicalism were drawing the antipodes into an international intelligence club. At the behest of the British authorities, who also sent an MI5 agent to Sydney, Australia's first civilian secret service, later known as the Commonwealth Investigation Branch, was established. Australia became part of the 'Imperial Civil Security Intelligence Service'. The first head of the Australian secret service, Major George Steward, the Governor-General's official secretary, communicated on a regular basis with the head of MI5, Sir Vernon Kell, through one of the Colonial Office cyphers and the Colonial Office bag from Government House.

As emerged from the research involved in the 1981 film 'Priest of Love', elements in British security never forgave Lawrence for his transgressions and looked askance at his purported disillusionment with former pacifist comrades. A particular Scotland Yard solicitor, Herbert G. Muskett, who was responsible for the banning and burning of *The Rainbow*, seems to have made Lawrence's domestic and international movements one of his special interests in life. So the question is: *were* the Lawrences being spied upon while in Australia?

There are a number of reasons to suspect that this was the case. For at their first social occasion after arriving in Western Australia the Lawrences were seated next to a young couple whose intellectual inclinations deemed them suitable dinner party companions for the visiting genius and his aristocratic wife. They were Eustace and Maudie Cohen. Only a few years earlier Eustace Cohen had been an officer in the Australian Intelligence Corps and while he had not followed many of his colleagues into the Commonwealth Investigation Branch, the small and close knit intelligence community in Australia after the Great War hardly recognised who was on the payroll and who was not. It is entirely conceivable that Lawrence's dinner table banter was relayed back to MI5 in London.

Nevertheless there is no solid archival substantiation of any such surveillance. For the inter-war years the records of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch and its Sydney office in particular are meagre. But it is useful to contemplate the career of the inspector in charge of the Sydney office of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch at the time of Lawrence's visit. He was Major E. Longfield Lloyd, like Cohen a former Military Intelligence officer, a capable agent who found his metier in the Investigation Branch after the war. A terrier in tracking down 'obscene, offensive and seditious' literature before it had a chance to pollute the malleable minds of the Australian working classes, Lloyd was clearly sufficiently philistine to have regarded Lawrence as subversive. He was also quite capable of making detailed inquiries about passenger movements and conversations on board ships arriving in Australian ports. In September 1922, when the *S.S. Hobson's Bay* docked at Fremantle bringing the radicals 'Jock' Garden and Tom Payne on their way to Moscow, Lloyd could elicit precise details about who had been seen talking to them, and if similar machinery had been activated four months earlier on the *R.M.S. Malwa*, no doubt equally interesting information could have been gleaned about Lawrence's shipboard contacts. It so happened that Father Maurice O'Reilly, rector of St John's College at Sydney University whose fiery anti-conscription and anti-British outbursts during the war had caused him to become known as the 'Dr Mannix of New South Wales' was also on board. So Lloyd had more than one reason to keep close tabs on those who arrived at Circular Quay on the *Malwa* on 27 May 1922.

Despite the paucity of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch archives, there are two files which warrant a mention. The first is from the name index cards of security files 1919-1947 held by Australian Archives, Canberra. Housed in many rows of boxes the sheer physical dimensions of this collection afford a profound insight into the range of interests of the chiefs of security in Australia. To flip through any box is to be acquainted with a *Who's Who* of Australian radicalism. And it transpires that a certain 'D. Lawrence' was sufficiently notable to have inspired the opening of a file.

Encountering Lawrence's name in this connection is one of those rare, adrenalin-charged moments which only a devoted archive rat could understand. But was this *the* David Herbert Lawrence or was it some other radical or pacifist? The problem with this set of files is that while its scope bears handsome tribute to the apprehensions of the likes of Longfield Lloyd this testimony is largely mute. All that is entailed are the index cards themselves, usually but not always a corresponding file number and occasionally cryptic comments. For instance in 1931 a certain C. H. Simpson of Brunswick wrote to the Commonwealth authorities complaining about the influence of communism and offering any 'assistance'. Since Lieutenant-Colonel C. H. Simpson, a Brunswick pharmacist, was Jack Scott's Melbourne counterpart, chief of staff of Victoria's right wing secret army, the League of National Security, it does not take a great

deal of imagination to appreciate the substance of the 'assistance' he had in mind.

Regrettably the 'D. Lawrence' entry contained no such explanatory comments. But the handwriting on the card did look very old and at least there was a file number that could be requested. There was an exciting half an hour when it seemed possible that the solution to one of Australia's great literary and historical mysteries was about to be brought to my desk. For if the file was complete and unexpurgated was it not possible that Lloyd had shadowed Lawrence around Sydney—or Thirroul—and the names of Lawrence's contacts with the secret army were disclosed?

Of course the inevitable happened. The file was not in the possession of Australian Archives. After briefly reflecting that in similar circumstances Peter Corris's Cliff Hardy would have befriended the little ASIO man who sits in the back of the archives building vetting all requests for access to spy files, poured 20 or 30 schooners of reviving ale down his throat, and won him over, I chose a more orthodox line of proceeding. This was to fill in a Freedom of Information form requesting access under the Archives Act of 1983. For the historical detective FOI gives new meaning to that old Australian expression of being 'as useful as a hip pocket in a singlet'. Four months later the stock word-processed reply arrived from a detective-inspector in the Australian Federal Police to the effect that a "thorough search of its file holdings throughout Australia . . . [had] been unable to identify any material in the open period relating to . . . D. H. Lawrence."

But all was not quite lost. In the Sydney office of Australian Archives there is a report compiled by Longfield Lloyd in 1922 which clearly sums up his political position. Lloyd was asked to comment on rumours that the Ku Klux Klan had been established in Australia. He was not at all aghast. If the Klan had established a foothold this reflected "a wide train of thought among people, who, fired by the exploits of the Fascisti in Italy, are rather keen on clearing out the poisonous elements in our midst, which the law, although fully adequate has not been made to do". Clearly organisations like the Ku Klux Klan could expect a fairly sympathetic hearing from Major Lloyd. And as it happened there was an organisation in Sydney that freely admitted to being inspired by the exploits of Mussolini's Fascisti. It was the King and Empire Alliance of Major Scott and General Rosenthal.

Because of the depleted state of the Investigation Branch records we know little of the relationship between Majors Scott and Lloyd until the 1930s, but as this solitary report suggests we can assume that they were not adversaries. By the mid 1930s Scott had joined formally Lloyd's world of mirrors. In April 1935 he became a Military Intelligence officer and was appointed leader of a civilian sub-group which worked in close collaboration with the New South Wales police commissioner, W. J. MacKay and the head of Military Intelligence, Eastern Command, Lieutenant-Colonel J. M. Prentice. Scott's authority and power was considerable and belied his apparently new chum status within the intelligence community. He employed an agent, the rather inept adventurer Henry Freame, to infiltrate Sydney's Japanese community without the knowledge of his superior officers. In 1937 Scott made representations to Attorney-General Hughes to protest against the undermining of the position of Australian trade commissioner in Japan. This was not mere presumption or arrogance on Scott's behalf. He was looking after the interests of an old friend. The Tokyo-based Australian trade commissioner, doubling as an MI5 agent, was Longfield Lloyd.

It is probable that the working relationship between Scott and Lloyd extended back to the 1920s. Their offices were only four city blocks apart. In the narrow social milieu of Sydney's business district they were inevitably well acquainted and both, in their own ways, were obsessed by the exploits of the 'poisonous elements in our midst'. Seen in this context a whole new interpretation of *Kangaroo* opens up. Quite possibly the spy master Lloyd had Jack Scott on the books as a part-timer in the early 1920s. And if Lloyd received a cable from London via Melbourne instructing him to keep an eye on the notorious Lawrence, it is conceivable that he contacted Jack Scott to do the leg work.

If this is so it would clear up one of the major puzzles of *Kangaroo*. The existing explanations for Scott's interest in Lawrence—that Scott was sounding out Lawrence in relation to assuming the editorship of *King and Empire*, the journal of the King and Empire Alliance, or that Scott was a bibliophile interested in cultivating the acquaintance of a major literary figure—do not ring true. Scott had some credentials in the area of bibliomania though the only extant volumes from his library suggest that his taste in books did not extend beyond travel and adventure. So why should a World War One veteran with a reputation for gung-ho bravery and unalloyed philistinism seek out a sensitive intellectual with a German wife? The answer is, quite plausibly, that Scott was spying on Lawrence at Lloyd's behest. Scott had friends who lived in Craig Street, Thirroul so he could carry out the surveillance at minimum expense to the Commonwealth. Seen in this light, *Kangaroo*, with its explicit exposure of one section of Scott's activities—organising counter-revolutionary armies—can be seen as an intelligence operation that went awry. If so it was simply a fairly typical episode in Scott's career as a spy. Indiscretion and incompetence, together with suspicions about his loyalties regarding the Japanese, led to his services being terminated in 1941.

There is a final curious literary echo to this hypothesis. In 1927 William Freame, the father of Scott's intelligence agent, published a poem called 'The Man from Kangaroo'. The poem is about how a "squibby sort of fellow. With a red bow on his coat" tries to convince the polity of the hamlet of 'Kangaroo' to vote Labor. The local citizens are none too impressed. Led by 'The Man from Kangaroo' they expel the 'comrades' from their town. The malicious pleasure the poem expresses in vigilantism was clearly far more to Scott's taste than Lawrence's wimpish reservations about the use of violence. But then Scott had more than one reason to prefer Freame's literary endeavours to those of D. H. Lawrence. *Kangaroo* had consolidated his reputation for indiscretion.

In 1985 a set of previously unpublished postcards and photographs pertaining to Lawrence's visit found their way into the possession of Robert Darroch. Understandably elated, in an article in the *Bulletin* he speculated that "lying in a family trunk or drawer somewhere in New South Wales . . . (there) may well be another, far more vital cache." This may be the case. But for this historical detective there is a particularly evocative scene in Tim Burstall's 1987 film of *Kangaroo*. In a rare but perceptive departure from the text Burstall has Somers tendering a written complaint about Callcott's murderous behaviour to the police. The police officer concerned defends Callcott and waits until Somers has left the room. He then sets fire to the document. It seems highly likely that any archival material relating to Lawrence's visit has met with a similar fate. Not even Cliff Hardy could solve the mysteries of *Kangaroo*.

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The Union Club lunch was described to me in an interview with Tom Fitzgerald, Sydney, July 1981. See Fitzgerald's article "The beard of the prophet", Nation, 11 October 1958, for his experiences in Thirroul. John Haughton James's research notes are lodged in the Mitchell Library (ML), uncatalogued MSS 2057.

The major works on Lawrence in Australia by Robert Darroch are: "The mystery of Kangaroo and the secret army", Australian, 15 May 1976; "So many of the best people join secret armies", Australian, 15 January 1977; "The man behind Australia's secret armies", Bulletin, 2 May 1978; "The man behind Australia's secret army", Bulletin, 2 May 1980; *D. H. Lawrence in Australia*, (Macmillan, 1981); "Lawrence in Australia: the plot thickens as the clues emerge", Bulletin, 20 May 1986; "The man who was Kangaroo", Quadrant, September 1987.

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In August 1987 the source of 'Clue No. 1', Mrs Nancy Jeffery, died. A moving tribute to her life and dedication to the causes of socialism and peace appears in Tribune, 19 August 1987.

D. R. BURNS

Vague Vision and Savage Substance

POOR FELLOW MY COUNTRY *AS THE SUM OF OPPOSING PARTS*

In terms of size, Xavier Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country* is a colossus. In terms of sort, it is partly a visionary novel, of a kind with other long, acclaimed narratives by Patrick White and David Ireland, and partly an epic without parallel in Australian fiction. In terms of quality, it is a monster more than just a composite. There is total discordancy between the careless, pedestrian visionary part and the splendors of the other, epic portion which has its roots in old, settled things far removed from the field of visions.

The vision which colors, or discolors the whole picture of Australian society in the late 1930s and early 1940s is the possession and the obsession of the book's central character, Jeremy Delacy. Jeremy, in his early fifties, is lessee of the inland, far-northern property Lily Lagoons, a recluse except for his annual appearance, with entourage and competing horses, at the Beatrice River races, and those other occasions when he wishes to hit the grog and spin "the bullshit". He is a skilled amateur vet, and a passionate carer for the maimed, the outcast, the downtrodden, both human and animal, including his own Aboriginal second wife. Conversely, he is the bitter-tongued opponent of the white despoliation of Australian nature and the Aboriginal culture it nurtured. Of this he has the most profound and involved awareness. The havoc in this vast, northern region has occurred through the continuing cattle raising activities of "Vaisey's" (read "Vestey's), a company he also detests for being alien, meaning, here, English. As part of this detestation, he is completely alienated from the two adult sons of his first marriage. They both manage for Vaisey's, their mother having married the regional controller. Jeremy's paternal feelings find an outlet when he rescues and nurtures his natural grandson Prindy, totally disregarded by his father, Martin Delacy.

Prindy is a golden-haired, grey-eyed, creamy-skinned quarter-caste, complex within his simplicity, instinctively attuned to the rhythms of Australian nature, and of classical European music as soon as it comes within his ken. Outwardly always tractable Prindy, as Jeremy comes to know, has only one real and unyielding allegiance. This is formed in the wonderfully detailed opening pages of the whole chronicle. Here, Prindy is assisted, in catching a large fish, by the incantations of Bobwirridirridi. A wizened, cackling, brandy-begging lurk-man, living on the fringes of white settlement, old "Cockeys Bob" is also the "Pookarakka", the "wise one", a witchdoctor of the cult of Tchamala, the mythic Rainbow Snake and, so, a figure of great secret power.

In terms of Jeremy's unrealised vision of Australia Felix, Prindy is representative, though Jeremy never points to him as such, of the "Creole nation" that "might have been if the pioneers had succoured their hybrid offspring instead of letting them starve." "Creole" means "created" and these mixed bloods would have comprised "a created people, a new people, a largely rural population, true peasants . . . There'd have been no need for immigration because, as hybrids, (they) would have bred fast."

Jeremy ignores, or just doesn't notice, the objections to this Creole nation vision. Finding a ready enough model in Portugese-Catholic-South American beginnings, it takes no account of the prejudices which would have prevented an immigrant British population, with puritan, insular, racially distrustful traditions, from ever making the necessary acknowledgement. His sexual chauvinism is certainly an ingredient in the proposal of a visionary state which would have no place for the white women, the pioneers' wives, the hybrids never being their children of course.

Such omissions, gaps of one sort or another, a dissociation between parts, is painfully obvious in both Jeremy's vision of what-might-have-been and his anti-vision, his fiercely contemptuous view of the Australia which is. One quite obvious gap is Jeremy's failure to see that his disdain for the (Anglo) Australians has its roots in the English class attitudes he affects to despise. Totally nationalistic, in his peculiar one-man-band fashion, he proclaims himself an enemy to "that all abiding curse, the English landlord" and contemptuous of the "English system of society". Yet his equally strong contempt for the local whites takes a rather obviously English form. The living white Australians have, as their "noble ancestors, thieves,

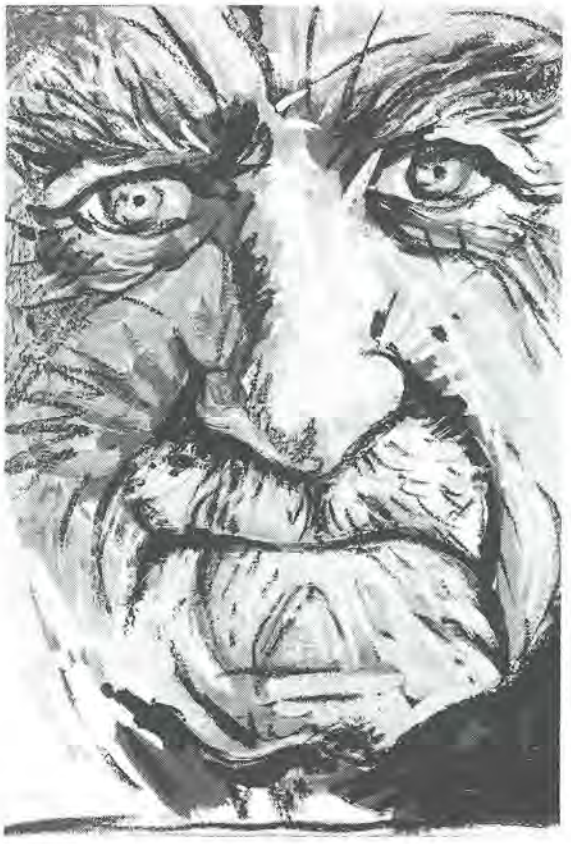
murderers and gutter-snipes". Theirs is "a low class white society" which began as one made up of "gutter-snipes and hucksters". This is Jeremy early in the chronicle. Towards its conclusion, he declares that he must "keep clear of the common herd, especially the commonest of the herd, those who call themselves Australians". His attack throughout, this is to say, is couched in the language of (English) class prejudice.

A further gap yawns between what were his early aspirations for the young nation and what he pronounces its diseased state, its palpable lack of potential from the very beginning. He had possessed "a dream of a nation (he) could be proud to belong to . . . a grouping of people who, by the example of their own honest and dignified living, could be an inspiration to the world, a contributing factor to the high destiny "he hopes for his own species". However he has to tell members of the newly formed Free Australia Movement that his experience of seeing contemporary Sydney and Melbourne has been to make him feel "it is too late to realize the dream of Australia Felix, that the rottenness the whole thing started with has become gangrenous, cancerous, impossible to stop". The grounds of Jeremy's fervent hopes never actually existed, then—the disease has been organic to the social body from its very birth.

The puzzle of how Jeremy came to possess such a vision fair, in spite of the apparently quite palpable cancer-gangrene working through the Australian people's moral genes, is possibly solved when a further dissociation is taken into account. This is the one between Jeremy and the mob, the white population generally. As he tells one of the several young women who come to adore him in the course of events, he built up his own small kingdom "while there was still hope, while I and a few fools like me could still dream of Australia Felix."

Vision equals dream it seems, something conceived by turning from rather than towards. And if what he envisions moves ever further from what was or is or could be, so too does Jeremy himself in the whole narrative advance. His dissociation from his fellow Australians is proclaimed, aptly enough, by a top-ranker in the English scheme of things. This is General Sir Mark Esk, of the British Army, but, during the immediate pre-Second World War period, Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Army. Full of contempt for the local politicians and brass hats, he refers to Jeremy as "the one just man in Sodom." In his expert opinion Jeremy, who was a major in the First World War, would make "a perfect commander for the Northern Region." When, later, Jeremy decides against taking that job, the general is desperate. "Without you," he tells him, "I can do nothing." These words encapsulate a further dissociation which has been suggested already in the closeness of Jeremy's first name to that of the prime Old Testament prophet. The sentence is modelled on the one spoken by Christ. Lurking in the words, so to speak, is the tendency to dissociate the sacred healer of the halt and the maimed from the profane mob.

Australian society being the most secular one on Earth, however, the ultimate seat is not the one on the right hand of God the Father Almighty but in The Lodge, hard by Parliament House. Politically, there are loud demands in the later pages of *Poor Fellow My Country* from founding members of the Free Australia movement that Jeremy should become their leader. They are confident this will be his springboard to the prime ministership. The disassociation manifest here is between all this enthusiasm and Jeremy's observable characteristics. He is actually



reclusive, irrascible, provocative, confrontationist, given to public put-downs, particularly of argumentative young women (who might just be asking for this treatment), unable to compromise, absolute in judgement, really at home only with dependants.

Interestingly this gap, between what Jeremy is and what his admirers think of as his potential, might be a symptom of the times through which the characters are living, a sign of *their* urgent need to discover and

promote a *Führer*. Far from making any such qualifications, however, the narrative commentary and its general arrangement support all claims made for him by the characters. This failure of the narrative to cast a critical light upon Jeremy means that the central psychological contradiction, between the inturned recluse, master of a remote, happily self-sufficient inland station, and the expansive visionary who takes all Australia since 1788 as his province, is never explored. His two *personae* are allowed to stand in a state of continuing contradiction.

A further dissociation is apparent in the two ways the social narrative addresses its material. This is more than just a separation of parts. There is the deadly serious intent, propagating the anti-vision of a stricken, urban white society operating inside the sad Western state of affairs; and there is the often much-less-than-serious execution of this task, particularly in the presentation of main public characters as clowns or monsters. The sense, through much of the narration of public events, is of farce taking over as the simplest way to manage the great body of quasi-historical documentation which is rolled out, quite indiscriminately, to provide a suitably squalid surround for Jeremy, the anti-visionary, the one just man in Sodom.

This debasement of the historical material is sometimes accompanied by the resort to 'popularisation' in the manner of presentation. There is total dissociation, at these points, between what one is reading and what could be thought of as even the beginnings of literature. The Australian Women's Weekly, circa 1940, might figure in the feelings towards Jeremy with which Lady Lydia Lyndbrooke-Esk finds herself fired:

> She swallowed first, then in a strangled voice said, "I've fallen in love with you!"
>
> He stiffened, swallowed, stared at the rushing road. A moment of staring at his dimlit profile, the craggy, manly beauty of it, then she leant against his arm and wept again.

Much later, Jeremy finds himself, in early 1939, in the Sydney office of the German consul. The narration recalls the prose of the Champion or the Triumph, those adventure story weeklies for genuinely British boys:

> "There's your latest madman!" Jeremy flung a finger at the picture of Hitler.
>
> Smack! The consul's palm smote Jeremy's cheek. His voice came, grating with fury. "Pig-dog—you vill not insult the Führer!"
>
> For a moment Jeremy blinked on the tears the sound smack had started. Then he, too, grated, "Hun bastard!" and shot out his left in his usual style . . .
>
> Soon they had him overpowered, sat on him, spat in his face.

There is a total contradiction here between the seriousness of the intention, to reveal, in a spirit of grave dismay, the historical state of things, and this persistent early adolescent non-seriousness (a pissing contest between two female characters is part of the fun) evident in so much of the narrative.

The dismal truth becomes clearer and clearer. The enormous sweep of intention, to reveal all which is, in the crowded years, 1939 to 1942, as contrast, implicitly, to what *should have been*, has loaded the novelist-seer with far more than he has the knowledge-ability, or even the feeling, to handle. And so the use of stereotyped, throwaway characters, situations, turns of language. This is both an evasion of the nominal subject's complexity, and a rather baffled, angry denial that it has much.

All the sorts of dissociation described can be traced back to the visionary aim which gets this part of the whole enterprise rolling. It is so over-arching, all-inclusive it clearly makes for over-confidence. To shape it and to follow in all those directions where it seems to lead is to walk in a cloud of all-knowing, to have the confidence that comes with knowing all, in a general way. And nothing very much in any close-up, detailed, specifying way.

To point up these faults of dissociation and their visionary source is to begin to shape the terms of appreciation of this monster novel's other, quite amazingly different, part. Here, Herbert's genius is manifest in a prose which, at its best, renders, with complete authority, what lies out beyond all that turgid, socio-historical stuff—the tremulous, excited, mingling response of human, animal, bird and insect to any sudden event in the great amphitheatre of Australian nature. This reverberant alertness signals the participants' collective apprehensiveness, their shared sense of the momentary stirring of what the narrative, edging a way into Dreamtime matters, simply refers to as "the Unknowable".

In contrast to the *allknowing* account of contemporary social affairs, inside and outside a blighted white Australia, the awareness manifest here is no deeper or wider than the sum total of the squawks and flurries, earthy stirrings and breathy aboriginal whispers of "Eh, look out!" These the prose sets forth with complete authority, manifest in the sharp-edged specification and, equally, in the way a fluid, complex and quite integral whole emerges from the sum of various, sometimes quite antipathetic parts. A vibrant panorama is offered, of ease and plenty, of wariness and sudden death, a paradise which is, without contradiction, a vast killing ground. The virus of dissociation, deplorably at work in all to do with the social vision

of what might have been, and the anti-vision of what is, has no hold here.

The totally memorable sequences of *Poor Fellow My Country* occur as Prindy and his kind move across country. The association established in them, between human and non-human life, is a source of poetic and narrative richness. In the haunted vastness, a watchfulness operates, even in the long, quiet morning when "the wallabies would be asleep . . . in nooks and crannies in sheer rock faces inaccessible to the rock pythons . . ."

> The pythons were keeping out of sight too, not because they were sleepy . . . but from fear of old Watagarra, the Wedge Tail, sailing up there in the violet, so peacefully, and minding his own business . . . but ready to drop out of the sky like a stone and strike dead with a blow of his mighty shoulder anything that moved. One thing did move, disturbed by the intruders [Prindy and his tribal mentor, Njorjinga, "King George"] that must have filled the eagle with chagrin enough to come down and take it out on them, only for their spears. It was a large python, the best of twenty feet in length, with a couple of bulges in its middle that wouldn't have gone in a bran sack.
>
> As it went sliding awkwardly down a steep slope of rock, George called to it. "No more fright Jullungall . . . me two feller Tchinek [snake] man!" The huge snake, with blue tongue flickering to pick up the sound, looked back as if in acknowledgement, then slid over the lip of the rock, the last of him running in a cleft, like a sluggish stream of oil-streaked water, rainbow hued in the blaze of the sun.

Morning somnolence is prelude to afternoon panic and slaughter, eagle's easy grace holds the power of sudden, hurtling strike, human kind claims a fellowship, of sorts, with monster reptile. Opposing qualities and kinds associate, opposing sorts of occasions occur in sequence. A process is at work, both outwardly, through space, and temporally, backwards and forwards, from past to present to future, composing a narrative of great ironic force. On this particular expedition, the savage killing of a terrified goanna, a *prindy*, stomach whacked out with old Queeny Peg-Leg's crutch, body carried off by the swooping Watagarra, acts as a (sort of) comic prelude to the murderousness with which Queeny, the mixed-blood Christian, and King George, the full blood Tchamala devotee, shortly set about each other. The third adult, Prindy's mother, Nellyeri, is to be accidentally and fatally caught up in this exchange.

Human violence finds release as response to, and part of the whole surrounding predator and victim scheme. But, in an equally associative way, human recovery of spirits, of equanimity can be as swift as the return to halcyon calm after any loud, alarmed flurry across the natural face of things. So it is that, following *this* particular piece of very bloody business, leaving behind him three corpses, one disembowelled and another his mother's, Prindy, totally responsive to the flowing restorative natural force all about him, goes on alone, in happy, eager inquisitiveness. His explorative zest is rendered in a prose of sustained lyricism and easy, Aussie playfulness. This flow-on into delight, after he has witnessed, transfixed, all that bloody, entrail-ripping horror, is convincing for the wealth of specific detail, of mingling bird calls and darting shapes, all offering a continuous welcome. The associative process operates at its most delicate in this eagerness of natural response to the beautiful boy's excited presence:

> . . . they came to take a look at him, in flocks, in pairs, in families . . . surely struck by the sight of the small lone figure whose hairless skin glowed in the sunlight and windblown topknot glinted, and who could speak their language, joining them in the carolling, whistling, cawing, croaking to each other about him . . . The parrots showed him the kapok trees he would otherwise have to hunt for. The crested bellbirds showed him where the grasshoppers were lurking, ringing their tiny bells of voices. Crested wedgebills showed him pods opening to shed seeds that made good nutty munching. Red quandong cherries were the spotted bower birds' offering . . . a *prindy* came scuttling along to take a look, nodded when given the sign they were mates, and led [the boy] to a clump of bushes . . . and, while those sitting the eggs chased him away, gave his two legged mate the chance to do a nice bit of thieving.

To read this delightful passage as the simple expression of boyish innocence however, is to disregard the powerful associative force always at work drawing humans into the natural scheme. To witness Prindy as one playful, untamed creature among others is to comprehend that he, like anyone of them, has the instinctive readiness to kill without compunction. But being still human too, this can be the readiness to kill one of his own kind. In this chronicle of many murderous deeds, one of the most chilling, death by slow drowning, in fierce rapids, witnessed by the perpetrator, close up, in sight of the suffocating victim, is perpetrated by Prindy upon Police Sergeant Dinny Cahoon. Having coupled once with Nellyeri, Cahoon assumes the boy is his son, and "probably loved him".

The drowning of Cahoon and of Jinbul, his faithful blacktracker, is a crystallisation of the fearsomely ironic narrative power released in all to do with Prindy as tribal novice and child of Nature. The roots of his murderous deed lie quite beyond him, spatially in the

pent force of the river waters which create the velocity of the rapids and the legendary spread of the Rainbow Pool below these, spatially-psychically in the emanations from the surrounding limestone caves, sacred to Tchamala, the wrathful, destructive Rainbow Snake. To match this spatial clasp upon the boy there is a temporal one as well, a vivid, pressing memory. In even more tender years, he witnessed his mentor in all magic matters, old Bobwirridirridi, attempt the feat or, perhaps set *him* the present task, by throwing Cahoon dangerously off balance in these very waters, as, bound on a pole, the "wise one" was being carried to captivity.

Now Cahoon, benign escort, self-styled "Daddy-o" to a handcuffed Prindy, comes again to the river bank. An apprehensive Jinbul points out that their helpful, cooperative young prisoner has led them to the same crossing where Old Bob tried his trick in earlier years, "that wide expanse of water, the merging of all the streams flowing out of the Limestone and Sandstone country, into the vast, tide-like sweep towards the Rainbow Pool; to the long shelf of marble above which were the treacherous shallows and below the murderous deeps, but itself completely safe . . . unless someone tried tricks. Coon-Coon only scoffed at first: "Old Cock-Eye Bob didn't get away with it, did he?"

Cahoon's confidence is that of the white intruder who cannot catch the associative force operating in everything about him, in the way the momentum of the water, for one thing, is also the momentum of past episode pushing into present. He certainly cannot comprehend the power of Tchamala, the "Old One" to which Prindy, still the golden-haired, mild-mannered pre-adolescent, is bound through Old Bob. Cahoon is blind "as he ever must be to the realities of the Unknowable". The prose itself conveys the warning, for those who will take heed. It holds quite contrary elements in association. It emphasizes the sylvan peace, which is both real and delusory, as the fated ones approach the place of execution. The quiet river among trees parallels the equally pliable quietness of their "young executioner", as well as the swift run of his thoughts, of his calculations, back through time, one may take it, as well as out into the moving water surging over the slippery marble shelf, and on to the all important lip of rock centred above the rapids, soon to "quiver as though with suppressed laughter".

> There was much less mist this morning; at least hereabouts, where the atmosphere was warmer. Down towards the Rainbow Pool it was well enough blanketed. Here, it was only in rags, ripped out of pockets by the racing water, touched by the rising sun into shreds of rainbow that went swirling away, no doubt to build the solid rainbow of the pool. Jinbul, dismounting to do his master's bidding, looked away towards the pool, warily it seemed. Not that there was anything sinister about the scene. The sound of the water was like laughter, in which was faintly mingled music, which was the carolling of butcher birds somewhere back among the limestone masses.

The prose is at its most complex here as contrary elements are brought together. The "racing water" contributes to the open-ness, the innocence of it all, but is also a source of some unease. Water and butcher (!) birds, laughter and music offer a reassuring but slightly disconcerting conjunction. The "limestone masses" are actually pitted with the art-gallery caves of the Snake men, "the solid rainbow" is a swirl of water vapor, the narrative assurance, "not that there was anything sinister . . .", is lulling yet somewhat intrusive, like the speed and strength of the water.

The following rapid sequence closes with Prindy attached by handcuff and long chain to a lifeless arm either side of the "laughing" rock. The intervening physical accidents have been of a chilling, fast-slow, super-real sort. Prindy has played an active-passive role, jerking his captor chains as his pony is abreast of the rock then moving with the waters towards it, all at the direction, the suggestion is always there, of the Pookarakka, the magic maker, and thus of *his* master, the terrifying Tchamala.

This whole episode may come to be seen as one of the great set pieces of the Australian novel. Certainly it is of a sort, as a passage of slow, near-ceremonial violence, with the death of Palfreyman in *Voss*, and of Henny in *The Man Who Loved Children.* Narratively, through a coalescence, an association of specific objects, forces and actions, it declares the omnipotence of what brings all this about as well as every other detailed, reverberant multi-event in nature, the never-to-be-specified "Unknowable". This power is at odds completely, indeed it is at war, with what inspires Jeremy Delacy's vision and his anti-visionary view of white Australia and European history.

Jeremy's view of European-Australian social and moral patterns is vague and contemptuous; logically and aesthetically, the pieces fail to fit closely together. Yet, in contrast with the force that works through all nature, his view is dissociative in an ethically proper way. His contempt is based on the firm distinction he makes, the dissociation he sees between strong and weak, aggressor and victim, despoliation and conservation, what is and what was, the squalid actuality and the pure vision. But, in the drowning of Sergeant Cahoon, aggressor becomes victim, weak becomes strong, the white authority figure goes down before his "inferior". To the liberal European awareness this is an appropriate moral outcome, the slender, appealing child of nature triumphing over the bulking, unappealing despoiler. But the narrative is rich in Dreamtime intimations. These reveal, with poetic

force, how the young executioner's actions are directed by a far greater and more ferocious power than Cahoon is or represents. Tchamala, the Rainbow Snake, holds dominion over all this country. He is a source of terrible threats, the arranger of deaths through violent natural causes. Preceding Cahoon and the Vaiseys and all their white kind, *he* is the original interloper; it was he who moved in on the idyllic domain, established for all her children by Koonapippi the earth mother. Through hurricanes and insect plagues he has despoiled the original scheme of things, with its "gentle breezes and soft showers" sent by her "to make living sweet". His eternal, abiding presence in "Australia Felix" contradicts Jeremy's neat ethical antithesis.

Members of the Snake cult inherit Tchamala's illegitimacy, leading to the view of some anthropologists that "it's only a lurk worked by heads, as smart ones are called." They also inherit "the Old One's" cold ferocity. This is seen, in small, in apprentice Prindy's murderous action at the river. It is seen, in large, in the most terrible episode of the whole bloodstained chronicle. Prindy's Indian child wife, graceful little Savitra, follows him on to the sacred ground where he is undergoing initiation at the hands of the Snake men under the aegis of Bob-wirridirridi. She is seized by the adult male group, the bones of her limbs are smashed, she is raped by all in turn, stabbed in the neck; the sexual parts are then sliced from the still quivering body. These are burned and the body is buried in an anthill, "the customary place for burial of such as whose remains held no sanctity." The narrative here is quite objective. It registers no horror, only a concern with fine detail which parallels the assailants' precision. The defilement they practise on the unwitting little girl is an extended and exact ceremony of purification. In the dissociative European scheme, the basis of Jeremy's moral indignation, such an association between unspeakably horrid deed and unquestionably worthy motive would be unthinkable. But the cult of Tchamala, enforcing taboos that come from the Dreamtime, has its roots in nature where contrary kinds, qualities and occasions associate, run together, occur in rapid sequence.

At the last, a distinction is explicitly declared, by the narrative itself, between the two sorts of awareness, the associative and the dissociative, and the inadequacy of Jeremy's clear-cut moral views is demonstrated. Going out in search of Savitra, he finds Prindy engaged in a trial by ordeal, placed in position to evade or ward off, as best he can, the directed spears of the Snake men. Coming to his defence with a rifle, Jeremy causes the agile boy to stumble and to be fatally speared. Jeremy immediately suffers the same fate at the hands of the indignant Pookarakka whose magic powers have been protecting Prindy.

"You whiteman, you do wrong t'ing . . . you come . . . finish *Mahragi*."

Nature, swayed by both the gentle Koonapippi and the havoc wreaking Tchamala, is the place of primal impurity, of rich dramatic mix, of comedy and tragedy changing into each other as they do, here, at those high points where *Poor Fellow My Country* moves into the company of *Moby Dick*. Nature provides, for the richly associative portion of the (split) chronicle, both a source and an inspiration. Thus inspired, the narrative, denying the rigid division Jeremy proposes between the land and the ways of the white despoilers, places in the dramatic forefront the by-products of that encroachment, the mixed-bloods and the fringe-dwelling blacks. They are there not just as victims, but as actors of force, passion and substance. Their responses are both tragic and comic. Not confined to either mode, they are wonderfully unrestrained.

Such unrestraint is what the controlling whites all lack. They practise the dissociative way, keeping the coloreds in their place, social disorder at bay, nature under control, the written law as clear guide. They allow for no fluidity in affairs, no sudden and total changes as there are in nature and the Aboriginal awareness of it: from order to disorder, from peace to violence at the whim of the Unknowable, by some called Tchamala. Such whites include not only legalistic autocratic officials but also visionaries such as Jeremy Delacy, who make the distinction, invalid in the natural scheme, between white oppressor and black victim.

Some whites in this far North do not practise this dissociation, and some do not practise it all the time. Billy Brew, the donkey man, is one of the first sort and so, of course, is Red Rifkah, the passionate Jewess who feels the powerful associative pull of the Aboriginal way. Jeremy himself, in odd, sneaky moments a sort of unvested visionary, is one of the second sort. Certainly he is aware of the great power the Pookarakka represents.

In sheer literary terms, the victory of all to do with the black man's ways and his terrain is overwhelming. Here Herbert's narrative powers operate panoramically, torrentially like the vistas and the weather they answer to. They tolerate no pauses, no gaps of the sort seen in the visionary and the anti-visionary prose. Comedy intensifies to the point where words become blows, and bloody tragedy erupts. This ebbs to become, in its turn, the prelude to a peace full of bird calls and leaf movements, all tremulous, all feelers out for the next alarm. Events occur which are in keeping with the unrestricted sweep of the land, the narrator's poetic, knowledgeable reach across it, and the fact that it is the stamping ground of dark and godly powers. The sense of these is created by reverberance, allusion and the way that the godlike narrative itself works through a controlled flow of uncontrollable events. For one third of the whole untidy chronicle, *Poor Fellow My Country* is the work of a great epic poet.

The whole vast thing, though, is finally seen as the one enterprise with two parts. These comprise opposing sorts of narrative, the visionary novel and the epic. The first is concerned with moral and social first principles, an expression of liberal and humane awareness, reader manipulative, human scale. The second is the most ancient of narrative entertainments. It tells of present events by placing them in the time scale of the heroic past as happenings at the whim and in the sight of the gods who precede time. It celebrates the strength and cunning needed to survive and to triumph.

These two forms embody contrasting views of "this ancient land". The visionary view stresses the humanity required to redeem the white past, to guard the land and to restore the dignity of the original inhabitants. It is a projection of White desire, guilt, awareness. The epic view assumes the land to be a power which is inviolate, arbitrary, savage *and* consoling, a power manifest in the secret practices of those who feel its thrust. Europeans may hold the epic view of the land but only at the cost of most of their carefully acquired intellectual and moral equipment.

D. R. Burns, author of The Directions Of Australian Fiction 1920-1974, *is writing an exposé of that antipodean aberration, the Visionary Monster Novel.*

OSIP MANDELSTAM
1891–1938

It is fifty years since the great Russian poet disappeared. He was last seen alive on the way to a labour camp in Siberia. His last letter was sent from a transit camp in October, 1938. His brother was informed that the poet had died—of 'heart failure'—on 27 December, 1938.
His poems are now recognized and loved in many countries and in many translations. In Australia the translations of Rosemary Dobson and David Campbell with Natalie Staples, Moscow Trefoil *(ANU Press, 1975) are well-known. To mark the fiftieth anniversary of Mandelstam's death we publish the following new translations by R. H. Morrison of five untitled poems.* Poems From Mandelstam, *ninety-one poems translated by R. H. Morrison, will be published by Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Madison, N.J.*

FIVE POEMS TRANSLATED BY R. H. MORRISON

I.

A flame is destroying
my dry life, and now
I sing not of stone,
but of wood.

It is light and rugged;
of one piece are
the heart of the oak
and the fisherman's oars.

Drive the piles in harder,
hammer away, hammers,
about wooden Paradise
where things are so light.

II.

The rabble slept. The square gapes in an arch.
The moonlight has been spilt on the bronze door.
Here Harlequin once sighed for brilliant glory,
and here a beast killed Alexander.

Pealing of chimes, and shades of former
sovereigns . . .
Russia, you stand on stone, you stand on blood;
give me your blessing that, though through a
burden,
I may take part in your last punishment!

III.

Light vapour was melting away in the frosty air
and, oppressed by the sadness of freedom,
I'd have liked to be lifted up in a cold, quiet hymn,
to disappear for ever, but I was fated to go along
the snow-covered street in this evening hour. A
dog's
barking was heard, and the sunset was not
extinguished,
and I came across passers-by heading my way.
Don't talk to me! What will I answer you?

IV.

I saw a lake, and it was standing sheer.
Fish, having built a house of freshness there,
were playing with a sliced rose in a wheel.
A fox and lion were struggling in a skiff.

Inside three parking portals there were staring
ills, foes of other still unopened arcs.
Across a violet span a gazelle went running,
and suddenly the rock there breathed as towers.

And honest sandstone, drunk with moisture, rose,
and in the midst of the artisan town-cricket
the urchin-ocean rose out of a river's freshness
and hurled cups of water into the clouds.

V.

More sluggish is the snowy hive,
more limpid is the window's crystal,
and on the chair a turquoise veil
lies where it has been carelessly thrown.

The fabric, heady with itself,
and pampered by the light's caress,
feels it's experiencing summer,
as if it were not touched by winter;

and if, enclosed in icy diamonds,
there streams the frost of endless time,
here is the palpitation of
ephemeral, blue-eyed dragon-flies.

AFLOAT

I knew a father once
who when I said "I want to fly a kite"
became for me a child again,
pretending not to know.

His fingers fumbled with the string
so mine should move more freely,
and everything was airy
blue and light.

In just such ways he taught my arm
a gentle arc in water, laughed me
into dead-man's float
and porpoise flip.

Each day I waited for the toy-box
called an "Austin"
to rumble down the street
between the elms towards a
grey-green Melbourne sea,
jumping the running-board
to ride that little strip of freedom
called 'our drive' before our mother
collared us to silence:
"Be quiet. Don't disturb your father."

Would it disturb you now
to know I know what duty let you in for?
Or to tell you how, each day,
I wait that day's-end glimpse
of the whispering sea?

FAY ZWICKY

BOY SWING

When you are fourteen years old in Wagga,
you buy a slab of beer
and sit beneath Hampton Bridge,
drinking and shouting until the Magpies
and Cuckoo-Shrikes join the call.

Then you swing from dead gums;
jumping out across the Murrumbidgee
on a frayed rope,
and returning on a screaming
arc of talent and alcohol.

MATTHEW SCHULZ

FROM SCRATCH

site

Where the lake neglected
to protect itself with swamp,
a tea saucer of a bay meeting
pine scrub—hardly a skirt
of sand. Before the saws could,
a fire bristled through the stems
sparing only thickest trunks,
girding these with charcoal
like a circumcision. The gaps
freshened with wild rose, rye
grass and blueberries before
bulldozers set them to square
so footings could take proper
root. Our space was the last.

Do we call them lots because
we chance across them,
casting silver for their title?

clearing

When I smeared the trees beyond
his stakes with red, did I hope
to save them like first-born?

The builder mocks me. "*You'll*
bring them down once they split
the shingles over your ears!"

concrete

A pit so deep the ground water
bleeds in, so they pump to keep
the footings dry for the slurry.

It's always a slow skin you want
to beat off the pressure cracks,
to give the best shoulder for wood.

prefab

Such dreams suffice an attendant
lord bitten by flies. Up in a day,
shelled in a month, though a few
nails might cough in their joists.

Something rebels between the design
and its expression, spilling perfection
like a ticket one digit off the prize.

We pout for more windows.

finish

the cabinets, carpets, and carport
the stippling, skylights and tub surrounds
the drainpipes, dryer vents and heat ducts
the wallpaper, wetbar and waveless waterbed

Under such makeup, who admits the wrinkles?

DAVID REITER

POEM

Already the sky slides cars
Across screens. Morning breaks—
"This is the News,
From the Central Inspection Tower".
And all the petty angels
Flock and glow on Regio's patio.
The poem of the day is served with tea
While three grown men
And the bent trees promenade
In the absent beauty of the sky.
Even light drops in windows
On laminated counters, in transference
Into the tables' recollection of the street—
The unfinished space between the hand and
eye.

THOMAS ROGERS

THE GULF

I.

That's the illusion
I suppose,
skirting around the edge
of some greater meaning for ourselves,
the way the road skirts the sea
by the small fish towns
and caravan parks—

our castles
are silos
and their tapestries
composed of chaff and wheat dust
gilding internal walls—

our long arms stretch out into the sea,
and the mudcliffs fall away forever
and the shops are always waiting
as though each single customer
reminds them that they exist,
in the quietness
the shop bell rings
like the tug of a fish

II.

The gulls
flecks of dandruff
fall from the air—

would you say
those flashes of silver
are tuna
kissing the water
with sour lips—

and the shape
shadow enormous,
a whale perhaps,
grazing shallows?

the littleness
of our bigness,
a road from here
white and straight
to there—

red pools
catching a cessna

III.

The gaps between words
suit this place better—
on the mudflats
footsteps are narrative,
the crab sideways,
the gull discontinuous,
and two pair human
so purposeful
leading out to a rusty swing—
when we finally speak,
the scrape of our words in the air
tells us
we're on the fringe of things.

MIKE LADD

PHOTOGRAPH: ME & MY DAD AT THE FAIR

he's 48
I'm 3
he's got a slouch-hat on
cause he's bald
he wears it everywhere.
he's been carrying me through the crowds
since I started crying
sick of being pushed around
& feeling the effects of dagwood dogs & fairy floss.
it's the first memory I have of him.
he looks handsome in the photo
6 foot, strong & brown
with hairy arms & bow legs
like some Gallipoli myth.
but that's not what's significant
about this photo.
it's a record of the only time
he touched me
except the occasional backhander.
from 3 till 30, me & my Dad
we've been apart.

STEVEN HERRICK

AT THE ALBION

How many lost years
Of a one and only life did we waste
There at the Albion?
  In that Bar where the well-read
Insulted the half-dead and the beer
Gurgled night after night
Down insatiable gullets
  We grew old, we grew old
  In that mausoleum of crippled souls.

There, where mispronounced names
Of Hegel, Marcuse, Althusser
Popped like temporary bubbles
In the icy Fosters
  There was no hope without dope
  And the blue smoke fuddled
The passionate, dialectical drivel
Of the fifth-generation Irish drunk.

There, where out-of-work actors
Projected belligerently into tiny minds
And the last of the Beatniks
Combed grey dandruff from his patriarchal
Beard as he expounded Ginsberg
Gruffly to his yawning duffelcoat.

Where have all the bottle noses gone?
Do Darky and Curly still chew the War
While broken-down academics
Spout Latin or Structuralism?
And do the rat-faced detectives
In their porky-pie hats
  Still provoke a feeble cry
Of "Fascists!" from that hippy tribe
Trapped at the pool table since
The last great Moratorium?
Old Pistols, old Bardolphs
Maintain your rage!

Ah, but how the flowers have faded
Along with the denim since '68

As the Men of the Sixties
  Great futures all behind them
Brag hopelessly of unwritten epic novels
At the corner tables

A hundred torn-up dole envelopes
A dozen unsuccessful Grant Applications
A thousand cigarette ends floating
In puddles of beer.

In that cosy alcoholic womb
Between Being and Nothingness
We must have learnt something
  But whether it was
The vanity of Existence
Or how to smoke butts in poverty week
A horror of steady work
Or just that it takes all sorts
To make a funny old world
Is difficult to tell.

The Aquarian Age is fading fast
And the beards are going out
All over Carlton
  We shall not see them grow again
In our lifetime.

PETER McCONNELL

JEFFREY GREY

Australia and the Vietnam War

What the Books have Told Us

Over ten years ago the late Professor L. C. F. Turner wrote that "in the serious approach to the study of war, Australia lags far behind the leading universities" of the rest of the English-speaking world.[1] Today an examination of historial writing dealing with Australian involvement in the Vietnam War, in all its facets, serves only to confirm the correctness of his view.

In the United States the weight of serious historical writing on the Vietnam War threatens to overwhelm the student of the subject, and the point has probably been reached when it is no longer possible to keep abreast of all the books, monographs, articles and graduate dissertations which the war has spawned. In Australia, the fifteen years since Australian servicemen were withdrawn from South Vietnam in 1972 has seen the publication of around a dozen books, and approximately the same number of articles, primarily concerned with serious examination of Australian involvement in Vietnam. The paucity of the literature is related to Turner's strictures on the quality of Australian 'war studies' generally.

Military history is viewed with suspicion in the universities. It is not popular, and never has been. The tide of what some call the "new military history", influential in Europe and North America for over twenty years, has largely passed Australian historians by. In a widely-read article in Australian Literary Studies in 1985, David Kent claimed that the traditional lack of interest in the importance of war in history was due largely to the "negative influence of the official histories".[2] By this he meant that the sheer size of these works, and the long periods which elapsed between commissioning and publication, had served to inhibit others from tackling these themes.

The evidence for this appears slight. The official history programs in Britain and the United States after 1945 easily dwarf both Bean's and Long's official series. Rather than ignoring scholars, these programs sought to harness their talents in the production of individual volumes. Sir Michael Howard, Sir Keith Hancock and Dr Noble Frankland in Britain, and Professors Alvin Coox, Martin Blumenson, Stetson Conn, Forest Pogue and Maurice Matloff in the United States, were involved in bringing the skills and training of the historian to the production of official history, and both parties benefited from the process.

In Britain and the United States, academic interest in military history waned in the first decades of the twentieth century, and the current level of activity in this field overseas represents a renewal of interest. The study of Australian history itself is a relatively recent phenomenon, and there has never been much interest in Australian military history among academic historians of Australia. It should be noted that, apart from the home front volume in the first world war, and the economic volumes in the second, no academic historian was involved in the production of the major Australian official histories. The smallness of the university sector, especially before 1945, is a contributing factor, but I suggest that there are two principal reasons for this lack of interest. First, as Robin Higham pointed out nearly twenty years ago,[3] many historians this century have concentrated upon domestic politics, the rise of labor, the impact of depressions, and other socio-economic factors in the history of Britain and the United States. The same process can be traced in Australia also, through the influence of the labor and other social historians around journals such as Labour History in the 1960s and 1970s.

Of greater significance is the tendency towards parochialism in Australian history, and the concentration upon an explanation of Australian national identity. This, coupled with the fact that the projection of power has never been central to Australian domestic or international affairs, has led to a history which is essentially inwards-looking. Australia's subordinate status in wartime alliances, for example, offers some important material for the study of the role of small and middle-ranking powers in world affairs, but these questions have not interested most historians, except perhaps as ammunition in the sterile debate about how Britain and the United States have supposedly done us down at every opportunity. There is also an attitude, not widespread but more prevalent

than one might think, which tends to equate the study of military history with the endorsement of militarism, and which sees no value in studying the role of defence and the armed forces in the development of state and society in war and peace.

It must be added that the Australian military establishment has not helped in this process, for its general lack of scholarly reflection on past and present issues is in marked contrast to its American counterparts also. (One cannot imagine an Australian officer writing a detailed strategic analysis of any war which promptly becomes both the centre of considerable debate between historians and a minor bestseller, as happened with Colonel Harry Summers' book, *On Strategy*, in 1984.) The armed forces have done even less than the universities to foster interest in the serious study of war in general, and of this war in particular.

If the climate within the historical profession has tended to discourage serious research in Australian military history, what then can be said about the small corpus of work dealing with Australia and Vietnam? The material discussed below has been divided roughly into three categories, combat operations, domestic events in Australia, and diplomatic and strategic policy. I am concerned here with books and articles on Australian involvement. For this reason the distinguished work of Australian residents such as David G. Marr, on Vietnamese nationalist and revolutionary movements, Robert O'Neill's work on Giap, or Denis Warner's account of the fall of the South, have not been included.[4] The recent account of Hugh Lunn's experiences as a correspondent for Reuter's in Saigon is a memoir rather than history as such, and has been excluded also.[5]

Although the state of Australian-American relations has been a source of fascination to defence journalists and some academics, little serious or detailed work has appeared on the strategic climate or diplomatic processes which propelled us into Vietnam between 1961 and 1965. Michael Sexton's *War for the Asking*,[6] with the portentous sub-title "Australia's Vietnam Secrets", advanced a conspiracy thesis to the effect that Australian involvement was the outcome of Australian pressure upon the United States which aimed to get the latter involved militarily in Indochina; that Australian pressure upon the USA may very well have led to heightened US involvement at a time when some in the US administration were seeking alternatives; and that Australian decisions were made without reference to, or with any regard for, the South Vietnamese in whose interests we claimed to act.

There are a number of problems with these arguments, many of them deduced by reviewers at the time. To begin with, the burden of proof lies with the author, and Sexton produced virtually no evidence for the existence of 'Vietnam secrets'. Nearly all citations were to newspapers and Hansard. He entirely ignored the domestic political situation in the United States which influenced Johnson in his decisions to increase military involvement in Southeast Asia, and which was scarcely affected by the alleged promptings of minor allies in the Southwest Pacific. While it is true that the specific request for Australian troops in 1965 was contrived, Sexton here ignored the undoubted and genuine requests from Saigon for Australian assistance going back to at least 1961. Finally, many of the details of Australian involvement had already been revealed in 1975 when the prime minister of the day, E. G. Whitlam, had tabled the Neale Report in the House of Representatives.[7] Sexton's wilder claims were, and remain, unsubstantiated while much of the rest of his account was scarcely new.

In contrast, Dennis Cuddy argued in an article soon afterwards that throughout the 1960s the United States applied pressure upon Australia for combat forces, and that Australia felt compelled to contribute them. Australian foreign policy, in short, was strongly influenced by American policy and pressures. This is the familiar pattern of alliance relations between greater and lesser powers; there is no question here of the tail wagging the dog. The importance attached to the maintenance of the alliance relationship by the two Pacific dominions is reinforced by McCraw's examination of New Zealand's entry into the war.[9] Despite its reluctance to become involved militarily in a situation in which a military solution seemed unattainable, the New Zealand government committed forces in the interests of good alliance relations with both the USA and Australia. Australia's greater willingness to provide Johnson with 'more flags' left the New Zealanders little room for manoeuvre, but American pressure for support in Southeast Asia left them little enough of that in any case.

Although it has received more extended treatment, works on the combat role of Australian forces in Vietnam are also uneven and leave large gaps in our knowledge. The Royal Australian Navy played a small role in Australian operations and this, such as it was, has been covered in an official Defence department publication.[10] Despite the claims of successive defence reviews that the navy's role in Australian defence is paramount, RAN activity in war since 1945 has been increasingly peripheral, and Vietnam was no exception to this. Vietnam was also the war in which the military potential of the helicopter was finally realised, and the RAAF played a closer role in operations there than it had done in Malaya in the 1950s. The three squadrons committed more than fulfilled expectations but, as in Korea, were only a tiny part of a much larger American air effort, and were unable to meet all the needs of the Australian ground forces from RAAF resources alone. A good popular account of RAAF operations exists, written by George Odgers, who also wrote a volume in the air series of the official

history of the Second World War.[11] As with the RAN, however, little attempt has been made to relate air-force activities in Vietnam to the role of airpower in Australian defence. This is partly because the role of the RAAF in the post-1945 conflicts has been tactical, not strategic as in the Second World War, and because hardly anyone in Australia has worked on the projection of air and sea power as historical problems.

The overwhelming number of Australians who served in Vietnam did so in the army, the vast majority of these in Phuoc Tuy province. The first Australians to arrive in Vietnam were members of the Australian Army Training Team, and they have been well served by Ian McNeill's *The Team*.[12] Advisers served all over the country in small groups and with limited contact with the Australian Task Force. From an initial deployment of thirty officers and senior NCOs, the unit had grown to a hundred men by 1965. Its small size and considerable military reputation allowed McNeill to deal extensively with the experiences of individual members, in a manner reminiscent of C. E. W. Bean. The larger questions generally did not suffer as a result of this approach, but clearly it will be impractical for any single author to examine the experience of the Task Force in the same way, and care must be taken not to regard the service of the Training Team as typical of the majority of Australian soldiers.

At its height in 1968, 1 Australian Task Force numbered 8300 men, organised in three battalions plus numerous supporting units. Initially, the army commitment of conventional forces had comprised a single, entirely regular, battalion, brigaded with the US 173rd Airborne Brigade and operating in Bien Hoa province, adjacent to Phuoc Tuy.[13] This was not altogether successful, and a two-battalion task force was despatched in 1966 and given its own area of responsibility. Contrary to some claims at the time, Phuoc Tuy was not a backwater, and the military/political task faced by the Australians was a difficult one. In the course of the six year period in which they operated there, 1 ATF won the military contest for control of the province, but because of the refusal by the Australian government to provide political as well as military support in the province, the more difficult task of identifying and destroying the VC infrastructure was never really faced.

The first full account of the Task Force has now appeared, arising from the long-overdue publication of Frank Frost's 1976 PhD thesis and superseding his earlier published article on the subject.[14] Australia's most distinguished military historian, Robert O'Neill, wrote a book based on his own experiences as a battalion intelligence officer, as well as a perceptive article on the problems facing the task force with the advent of Vietnamisation and the winding-down of the American military effort.[15] A more senior Australian officer, Brigadier E. G. McNamara, published a general lecture on the conduct of operations by Australian forces which complements O'Neill's analysis,[16] but security considerations at the time, and the general disinclination of Australian commanders to publish their views subsequently, means that little else has appeared from this source.

The year 1986 marked the twentieth anniversary of the action at Long Tan, and produced two book-length accounts of the battle[17] which complement each other well and which may be a foretaste of a wave of accounts of individual actions or unit histories of the kind which appeared in the 1920s and 1930s. Of the two, Burstall's is the more personal, written from the perspective of a former private soldier who fought in the battle he writes about. True to the Bean tradition, however, both Burstall and McAulay write at the level of the individual participant and are really concerned with actions from the battalion level down to the companies and platoons. The same cannot be said of D. M. Horner. Widely known for his work on the Second World War, he has extended his concentration on the subject of command to include a monographic treatment of command policy and relationships between the army in Australia and the higher Australian headquarters in South Vietnam.[18]

Two aspects of the books on Long Tan deserve comment here, and lead into discussion of the nature of the forces Australia sent overseas. Both authors comment upon the equipment shortages which the battalions faced in 1966, and Burstall makes the point that many of the officers and NCOs had been promoted just before being posted to his battalion. The lack of boots, tents, radios, and even some weapons clearly outrages Burstall still—as indeed it should. From an historical perspective, however, it should hardly surprise us. Australia follows the British practice of going to war chronically unprepared and short of everything. The 1st Division of the AIF which left Australia in 1914 arguably was the worst-trained formation ever to leave Australia's shores. Systematic and realistic training for the Light Horse regiments only really commenced in Egypt after the evacuation from Gallipoli. The 6th Division of the Second AIF sailed to the Middle East in 1939 short of virtually everything, trained through 1940 with various weapon and other equipment deficiencies, and cannibalised captured Italian equipment to make good these deficiencies after going into action in Libya in 1941. The Australian battalion sent to Korea in 1950 was held back in Japan to complete unit training at the insistence of the Australian commander-in-chief, Lieutenant General Sir Horace Robertson, but nonetheless went into a winter campaign in north-east Asia without winter clothing or equipment. Shortages in Phuoc Tuy in 1966 should surprise no-one.

The second aspect involves the question of self-image. The sub-title of McAulay's book, "the legend of Anzac upheld", is in fact a quotation from one of the soldiers of 6 RAR, used to describe his feelings

about the action. Burstall makes no such comparison, but emphasises instead the predominantly national service character of his unit. Indeed, the Anzac comparison is deeply misleading, although not uncommonly made. The AIF of 1914-18 were civilians in uniform, volunteers to a man, with a very small core of regular officers and a few NCOs. The Australian regular army of the 1960s was a regular standing army of long-service professionals, the presence of some national servicemen notwithstanding. It is not generally recognised that over sixty percent of the soldiers in Vietnam were regulars, not national servicemen, nor that the proportion of each in the infantry battalions was deliberately maintained at fifty percent, (although it must be stated that these proportions were not necessarily reflected in the rifle platoons). Nor is it generally appreciated that national service was a political, not a military, solution to a perceived problem, and that the Army and the Department of Labour and National Service opposed its reintroduction in 1964.

To date only Jane Ross has done any serious work on national servicemen in the army, but her lack of familiarity with technical military matters, and her inclination to stress the negative sides of national service, make some aspects of her work difficult to use.[19] A useful counter is the recent book by Gary Mackay, a young national serviceman commissioned at Scheyville and badly wounded in Vietnam in 1971.[20] His book has much to say about attitudes to the army, and about the 'nasho's' experience of combat, but further work needs to be done to establish whether the views he presents, coming from the end of Australian involvement in 1971, are representative of the earlier period as well. Further study of the origins and composition of the army as a whole is needed, not only for the Vietnam period but for Australia's other wars also.

A consideration of national service must bring us to the question of domestic opposition to conscription and the war, and to the 'home front' generally. To date, published literature has concentrated on the 'anti-war, anti-conscription' movements, with little consideration given to other social issues, or to economic or policy questions.[21] Home-front dissent is one area of Australian involvement which has inspired a reasonable body of research theses, but the majority of these remain unpublished. Several articles have examined the relationship between the political parties, especially the ALP, and the protest movement,[22] but only one book, by the American Henry Albinski, has looked at the questions of conscription and Vietnam and their relation to both public opinion and government policy.[23] The principal shortcoming of Albinski's book is that it was completed before the withdrawal of Australian troops, and therefore gives only partial coverage of the subject. Additionally, he had no access to official material. No-one has studied the groups which supported the involvement in Vietnam, and it should be remembered that the Coalition parties won elections in both 1966 and 1969, and that opinion polls (for what they are worth) showed majority support for involvement until late 1968. Nor has any attention focussed on the dark side of the protest movement—the harassment of servicemens' wives and children and the ugly, sometimes violent, confrontation of returning soldiers, many of them young national servicemen.

I have observed that the serious study of war has lagged in Australia. It is only fair to add that there is a tradition of military historical writing in this country, albeit one that has grown up outside of, indeed largely independent of, academic, scholarly history. How does historical writing on Vietnam relate then to Australian writing on earlier wars?

The influence of Bean is all-pervasive. He is largely responsible for the mini-industry erected around the 'Anzac legend', but his example has extended to other wars and later historians. Bean wrote 'democratic histories', in which the personal experiences of hundreds of ordinary men held centre stage while issues of policy, strategy, logistics, and administration formed a backdrop, if indeed they appeared at all. When Gavin Long came to oversee the official history of the Second World War, he looked to Bean as mentor and example, as their correspondence and Long's own diaries make clear. David Kent notes of O'Neill's official history of Australia in the Korean War that he too "follows the traditions established by Bean and presents a meticulous reconstruction of events . . . while capturing the experience of the front-line soldier."[24] But it is not only the official historians who are firmly in Bean's grasp. Publishing houses continue to produce military history for the popular market which, by and large, stresses individual dramas within the tightly circumscribed confines of a single campaign, or even a single battle. When capably handled, works of operational analysis are always valuable. Too many, while sometimes rich in narrative detail, add precious little to our understanding of the larger issues surrounding these complex events. In some cases, they do little more than paraphrase the official histories. It is in this area that the neglect of the subject by the professionally-trained historians shows itself most clearly.

The treatment of home front issues has suffered least in this regard, perhaps because in the minds of historians it is the furthest removed from the "brutal and licentious soldiery." Given the attention already being paid it by research students, it seems reasonable to assume that this aspect of our Vietnam experience will be the first to benefit from broader and more detailed treatment. The resurgence of interest during the 1960s in the conscription referenda of 1916-17 may lay the basis for comparative studies of support for,

and opposition to, conscription of the type hinted at, but not pursued, by John Barrett in his book on the first national service scheme of 1911-15, *Falling In.*

As a revolutionary guerilla war, the fighting in Phuoc Tuy was a different sort of conflict from that with which Australians are familiar, and the familiar treatment of it may not prove possible. The number of large-scale, set-piece engagements like Long Tan is limited and, presumably, the market for books on them will be quickly exhausted. An approach similar to O'Neill's, in tracing a unit through its entire tour, or in studying a thematic problem over a period of time as Horner has done, may prove more valuable. Any study of the soldier himself is going to be severely hampered by the decline of letter-writing and the profusion of the cheap, re-usable cassette tape. Studies of inter-action with the Americans and Vietnamese also pose problems.

The serious study of Australian history is a relatively recent phenomenon. Much Australian history has been characterised by a narrow parochialism, eschewing comparative, thematic or international approaches to the subject. Australian military history has displayed this tendency as much as any other sub-branch of the discipline. Australian involvement in the Vietnam War was at one and the same time the most divisive event since the First World War, and a small part of a very much wider picture in which the principal actors were American and Vietnamese, not Australian. The task facing historians is to analyse and explain that involvement with greater sophistication than has generally characterised our treatment of earlier wars.

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GREG LOCKHART

The Trunk: An Australian Memoir of the Vietnam War

T. S. Eliot once said that the whole point of a journey was to come back to the place you left and see it for the first time. I left Canberra in 1968 when I graduated from the Royal Military College Duntroon. I returned in 1986 to take up a temporary lectureship in the history department at the Australian National University. In that eighteen years the gum trees hadn't changed. However, the government had, largely because the Liberals had lost a generation because of the Vietnam War. This is the generation now aged between 30 and 45, my generation. And since I began my career as an Army Officer in the 1960s who supported the Liberal Party, it is fitting that I indeed have come back to Canberra to see much of it for the first time.

My journey cannot be separated from Vietnam and the Vietnam War. But it didn't begin there. It began in a shed up the backyard of my parents' war service home in Dapto on the south coast of New South Wales. Here, when I was about twelve, I became interested in a trunk full of my father's old army kit: a moth-eaten American Army issue rucksack, a battered slouch hat, and the badges of the First and Second Australian Imperial Forces. There was also a post-card from Uncle Angus in France dated 1917.

I did not know then that my great grandfather Simpson had been a signals sergeant in Malta and Singapore, before he resigned from the British Army and became the post master in Ingham in Queensland. Nor did I know he died from pneumonia caught at a bonfire he organised in the town to celebrate the lifting of the siege of Mafeking. Another fragment of family history I was unaware of concerned Great Uncle Jim who got a bullet in the head at Gallipoli and died in Brisbane with it still there at the age of ninety four. Nevertheless, I could not help but sense that my father's war relics meant something dark, and, because he had actually worn them, this moved and disturbed me more deeply than I knew.

But what I did know before long was the war section in the Dapto Public Library which had *The Moods of Ginger Mick, I Flew for the Führer,* and *Reach For the Sky.* Also, when I asked my teacher how one became an historian, I somehow knew not to be put off by his dismissive reply. Thus, over twenty years later, in Paris researching my thesis on the People's Army of Vietnam, I had an insight that made me think again of the trunk. In the Metro on my way to work I was reading George Johnston's novel *My Brother Jack* and I discovered the strong effect of reading a book about one's own country, in another country. For me, the first hundred or so pages about the impact of the First World War on Johnston's family, which includes the subtly disturbing detail that his mother, an army nurse, and his father came home from the war on different ships, was a revelation of the wreckage that lay at the heart of Anglo-Imperial-Australia: the crutches, the gas masks, the vomit and blood. Suddenly I was certain that there were army trunks in almost every old Australian shed, and that the spray of bayonets and moth-eaten rucksack I had seen in my father's trunk *was* our national consciousness.

I did not train to become an historian when I left school, and even forgot I had asked the teacher how one went about it. I went instead to Duntroon. I wanted to see how my father had filled his trunk, and so I now have a bayonet to sharpen pencils, a mosquito net, a pair of excellent boots, and other trophies from the Vietnam War locked away in the garage.

Duntroon was not what I expected. Any boy from the banks of Lake Illawarra will tell you that there was something odd about the oath of allegiance we had to take to the British crown. Moreover, while it is true that I had played 'rugby' at school and had had my share of fights, I learned that military training is free of in-group physical violence so that it can be stored up in frustration for later projection against the enemy. Military training is, and may have to be, coldly sado-masochistic, psychologically brutal, and generally demeaning. "Time on our hands, always in the shit, never let the bastards get you down"; that

was the appropriate motto of the fourth class cadets at Duntroon.

I did not like standing under a cold shower at 6.30 on winter mornings in Canberra whistling 'God Save the Queen' before I was permitted to turn on the hot water tap. Nor did I like having to run to the top of Mount Pleasant to learn the inscription on the grave of the first commandant of the college, who Australian nationalists now sometimes describe as a 'British agent', although for my troubles I can still tell you what it was:

> Major General Sir William Throsby Bridges, KCB, CMG, died on the 18th of May 1915 from wounds received on Gallipoli Peninsula whilst in command of the Australian Imperial Force.
>
> A gallant and erudite soldier he was first commandant of this college, where in recognition of his faithful service, his remains were publicly interred on 3rd September 1915.

The grave is dominated by a polished granite slab. Its crushing mass is reminiscent of the War Memorial just over the hill, and set on top of it is an iron sword, reminiscent of a crucifix for the broken bodies of young men. In the homo-erotic tradition, and at what you may well think of with some accuracy now as the Anglo-Australian-Imperial Seminary, Duntroon, girls were not allowed in our rooms.

This was a pity, for it was around the mid 1960s that Australian girls were going on the pill. The erosion of male and parental authority that some say went with oral contraception, may also be related to a wider revolution in our society against the totalitarian conformity and poofter-bashing of the Menzies era, when there was no political alternative. St George always won the Sydney grand final, and Richie Benaud always captained the Australian cricket team. More relaxed child-raising regimes, less regimented theories of education, and a breakdown in the rigid denominational divisions of the churches were all a part of this revolution. A fundamental reorientation of the economy from England to America and Japan, the end of White Australia, were also a part of it. As the issues of the Vietnam War cut across these changes in Australian society, they were barely noticed at Duntroon where rugby and a rigorous routine claimed all our attention.

I don't even remember the introduction of conscription in late 1964; I was not aware of the debate about it until I came into contact with national service officers after I graduated. Not even in my last year

Members of 7RAR, Phuoc Tuy, South Vietnam, 1967. Australian War Memorial

at Duntroon in 1968, when I was posted to a recruit training battalion at Kapooka for practical experience in a real army unit, did an incident in which one conscripted soldier cut his wrists have any impact on my complacency. However, in the ten years I was in the army I never once heard of a conscript actually being sent to Vietnam against his will. So many soldiers wanted to go to the war once they were conscripted that the units earmarked for Vietnam, especially the infantry battalions, could afford to be selective.

At any rate, the day after Mr Menzies, who did not go to the First World War, announced the commitment of Australian troops to Vietnam in April 1965, there were cheers at the Duntroon mess parade. We had a war and the reasons for it were irrelevant. My next move was to run for an atlas to find out exactly where Vietnam was. Then, as scraps of news about those who had graduated before us began to filter back, they were organised by the military-mental reflexes that are necessary to keep a soldier's thoughts superficial. Alphy Jensen had led a counter-attack when the forward pits of the mortar platoon were overrun at fire base Coral. This was inspiring. Another graduate had been shot while carrying out a reconnaissance for a platoon attack and bled to death before anyone could get to him. This was tragic, but if looked at clinically we could learn from his mistake. His death could increase our chances of survival. Meanwhile, news that may have been inaccurate about two graduates in the years just ahead of us, one who became a doctor in Sydney and the other a grazier in northern NSW, who had resigned saying they disagreed with the war, was received with sympathetic interest and then dismissed. It was only in Bush Week 1968, the week of institutionalised student rags at the Australian National University, when I participated in the Duntroon raid on Bruce Hall, that the underlying tensions in Australian society over the Vietnam War momentarily surfaced.

Yet there were other contradictions at Duntroon which I sensed, and even though I did not confront them they never let me settle down. Because of the higher standard of education by the mid-1960s, degree courses were being introduced at Duntroon. So while screaming, blue-nosed drill sergeants and opinionated officers hurried us along to the day when we would become fully-fledged boy-bastards, the academics were pushing intelligence and sensitivity. I still have no idea how Scott Fitzgerald's beautiful novel *The Great Gatsby* was supposed to gel with machine gun practice and military law. But, while my academic work made me decide I wanted to do more one day, I still wanted to see how my father had filled his trunk, and I graduated from Duntroon in December 1968.

My first posting was to the Second Battalion of the Pacific Islands Regiment at Wewak in Papua New Guinea, a unit established in 1964 in response to the Indonesian takeover of West Irian and confrontation with Malaysia. Here, far from Gallipoli, I enjoyed life immensely, explored remote parts in the course of many patrols, such as the one along the West Irian border in September 1969 after Indonesian commandos allegedly fired shots in one New Guinea village. I also received excellent confidential reports from my battalion commander, until in late 1970 I wrote a letter of resignation saying that I disagreed with Australians being sent to Vietnam because Ho Chi Minh was a nationalist.

How I got this idea into my head is not entirely clear. Since Wewak is not noted for its library it couldn't have been my deepening knowledge of Vietnam in the four years since I had run for the atlas. Conversations in the officers' mess with an intelligent friend, conscripted fresh out of Oxford and who disliked the army, probably had some slight impact. But I think it was news that a Duntroon class mate, who had been a fine athlete, had his legs blown off by a mine, that made me think seriously about the war for the first time. And the more I thought about it on lazy, sun-drenched Sunday afternoons in Wewak, the more mad it seemed.

The next phase of my career was confused and complex. My resignation was not accepted on the grounds that I had not served the five years necessary to repay the government for my expensive military education. I was banished to a Base Ordnance Depot near Liverpool. The second-in-command of the Base Ordnance Depot suggested I might like to see a psychiatrist. But army people were generally sympathetic and there was never a hint that my views would cost me the friendships I had formed at Duntroon. Anyway, because I was still in the army and the army was at war in Vietnam, I was left finally with a simple choice. I could manufacture a dishonorable discharge, or I could go to Vietnam and have the experience I originally joined the army to investigate. Not being able to go through with a dishonorable discharge, my attempted resignation thus became a token gesture and I went to Vietnam with the most 'gung ho' unit possible at that late stage of the war in 1972. It is remarkable that the army was big enough to let me change my mind.

The 'gung ho' unit was the Australian Army Training Team. However, by September 1972 when I arrived it was a shadow of its former self. With the American withdrawal, Australian advisors had been pulled out of all the most dangerous areas, and with a general lull in hostilities after the Easter offensive our advisors were pulled back to Phuoc Tuy province, the home of the Australian Task Force until its withdrawal in 1971.

Here I was commander of a Mobile Advisory Training Team. I spent most of my time living and working with local regional troops of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) who were paid rarely, if at all, and I distinctly remember some of

them patrolling in thongs. I experienced some desultory enemy fire on a couple of occasions, but only once in the four months I was in the province did I think I was in danger. On this occasion what saved me and two others was the amateurishness of the village guerillas who ambushed our jeep about a kilometre from where the Task Force had operated for some five and a half years.

There were other signs that the little piece of 'people's war' that hit our jeep was part of something much bigger the Task Force had not come to grips with. Two skirmishes I was not involved with, one of which caused the deaths of seven ARVN soldiers, occurred in the province while I was there. One night a story went around that an ARVN officer had been shot dead on his way home after a drink in our bar at Baria. There were almost certainly double agents in the Headquarters that authorised our patrols, and in retrospect I think that a number of the units we worked with included Viet Cong sympathizers. However, I never got the bullet in the back I might have, and, when the Whitlam government came to power and immediately signalled the end of our involvement in the Vietnam War, I was among the last thirty or so members of the Training Team to make the final Australian withdrawal from Phuoc Tuy province in December 1972.

I remember a lonely parade near Baria, the sun, dark rumours that the Vietnamese might try to stop us leaving, the drive to Saigon in a gun-jeep, and drunken havoc in a bar that night. In the early hours of the next morning Viet Cong sappers attacked a big ammunition or petroleum dump on the outskirts of Saigon. A ball of fire rose in the sky and, in the Hotel Majestic, the windows shook around us. Australia's ten-year military engagement in Vietnam had ended with an unexpected fireworks display and a premonition of the fall.

However, I did not leave Vietnam with the rest of my unit the next day. I became the officer commanding the Australian Embassy Guard in Saigon until I left the country in March. Not once in Saigon did I feel threatened, even though evidence of government corruption, encouraged by huge infusions of American aid, was so rampant the only sensible thing to do was to treat it as black farce. 'Napalm', who came from a burgeoning class of people in the city, was thus a notable figure around the back of our billet. He was a boy with an extensively scarred body known for his skill at scavenging in wet garbage.

Meanwhile, my interest in Vietnam, its history and culture, began to grow as I got to know some Vietnamese people through contacts in the Embassy. I became close to the family of an old northern Vietnamese mandarin who had fled south when Ho Chi Minh's government was re-established in Hanoi in 1954. The family lived in an adequate house in Phan Dinh Phung street and always seemed to have enough to eat, but I never felt they were hopeful about the future. One night we were having an unusually quiet dinner when gunfire in a distant suburb rattled the windows of the house and someone made a joke about cyanide. Yet such quips were unusual and, as I shared in their concerns and learned to play Chinese chess, what impressed me about these people was their dignity in the face of doom. Nine years later when the new regime made it impossible for them to live in their own country I had a sad reunion with the old man and his wife in Paris, and sent some money to one of the sons in a refugee camp in Malaysia. Even today Saigon makes my heart feel heavy.

By February 1975 the army had accepted my second resignation, and I went to Sydney University. Yet after Duntroon, New Guinea, the first resignation, Vietnam, and then of course the fall of Saigon in April which stunned me despite the doom I had felt there, I was by no means sure that Sydney University was real. I now realise I felt a general sense of alienation from the world around me, although most people I knew wanted to be supportive. When even my father tried to talk to me I could give him details of my experience, but for some time I couldn't communicate fully with him or anyone else who hadn't experienced Vietnam.

With academic credits from Duntroon I could have finished a degree at Sydney in one year, but I wanted to start again. I thought for a while I might read English. However, I drifted aimlessly or fatefully into history, which I had also liked at Duntroon, and concentrated on Southeast Asian courses. When, in the fourth year of my BA, I married a Vietnamese girl stranded in Australia, it was inevitable that I would go on and do a doctorate in Vietnamese studies. With the money I had saved in the army dwindling, virtually no income for ten years, and an uncertain future, this leg of the journey was the most tortuous.

My thesis was about the origins of the People's Army of Vietnam. On the basis of some Vietnamese I learned in the army I did some limited reading in Vietnamese for my escapist BA thesis on the rise of the first major independent Vietnamese dynasty, the Ly dynasty, in the eleventh century. I therefore had to learn a great deal more Vietnamese. I also had to learn French. Meanwhile, my wife's family disintegrated slowly. Her brother died in a re-education camp. She was not permitted by the new authorities to visit her father before he died. Other members of the family took to sea in small boats and we had no news of them for eighteen months. They eventually turned up in France with terrible stories to tell.

Sometime about four years into my thesis (it took me six) my savings were spent. I failed to get a number of jobs I applied for. There was also an occasion when I asked a professor of history to help me keep a roof over my head. My thesis was taking so long we overstayed our welcome at one of the university colleges, which thought it fair after five years to give

our married accommodation to someone else. The professor said, "I want to be sympathetic, but I don't want to start a war with the college. Surely they have by-laws about this sort of thing."

Yet I survived with the help of my wife, Monique, my supervisor at Sydney University, Craig Reynolds, old friends from Duntroon like Greg Dodds, and the headmaster of the International Grammar School in Sydney, Reg St. Leon, who eventually gave me a job teaching English. And in this context of alleviated desperation I finished my thesis in 1985.

The impact of the Vietnam War on me was to change my career and produce a thesis on the Origins of the People's Army. The thesis had the further effect of crystallizing the contradictions in my first career so clearly that when I first understood them fully in 1983 I couldn't believe them myself. My surprise at this time is apparent in the punchy style I used to review Peter King's *Australia's Vietnam*, which was probably the first serious post mortem on the subject. The opening passage from that review also gives an idea of how my perceptions of Duntroon had changed and sharpened in the fifteen years since I had graduated:

> The Australian Army's Vietnam involvement was strange. Let me begin the story as a final year cadet at Duntroon in 1968 when I remember sitting down to long military history lectures on the D Day landings in Normandy. This was six years after the first Australian troops were committed to Vietnam, and twenty three years after the Vietnam War had begun.
>
> True, we did hear a bit in potted lectures about old French military failures, the Street Without Joy, Hoa Binh, Dien Bien Phu. Our army had also learned much about jungle warfare from the Japanese and then had enough practice in Malaya and Borneo to ensure that our infantry minor tactics were proficient. Yet it is odd that no one at the Royal Military College ever told us to read the most influential military book of the century, Mao's *On Guerrilla War* written around 1937. Perhaps even odder was that the book *People's War, People's Army* by the Vietnamese general Vo Nguyen Giap was not prescribed reading. After all, this book had been available since 1961 and it was the one in which Giap explained his philosophy of guerilla war. No. Decades after the war had begun we were still in Normandy.

Well, I no longer think it odd we hadn't read Mao or Giap. Rooted, like my family's history, in the age of British imperial expansion, white Australian political structures have colonial foundations. Once Japanese expansionism in the Second World War toppled Western colonial powers in Asia and assertive nationalist movements emerged in the region after 1945, the crisis in Canberra was acute. With the waning of British imperial power, the desire of conservative Australian governments to stifle Asian nationalist movements and to encourage an escalation of American power in the region was in fact as strong as the memory I have of my father's American sympathies. As he built the house in Dapto from plans he found in 1952 in an American magazine, he would say, "Never forget that the Americans saved us at the battle of the Coral Sea." We were against reading Giap at Duntroon because his book gave a fair idea of how American power would eventually be defeated in Vietnam.

Being now in a 'history' department at the Australian National University I am aware of dark mutterings that come confusedly from the past. For example, I noticed recently in the Canberra Times that an apologia for the Australian government's Vietnam War policies written by a retired public servant tried to justify the involvement by saying that in the 20 years that "Vietnam held" the rest of Southeast Asia had the time it needed to stabilise itself against "the downward thrust of international communism." But his argument is based on the illusion that got us into all the trouble in the first place: that all the Asian communist and nationalist movements were part of a monolithic movement to extend the Asiatic dominion of international communism.

From my historical perspective I have also been disappointed by the treatment which Frank Frost's book *Australia's War in Vietnam* has received from some reviewers. Frost shows skillfully how the contradictions in government policy reverberated through the Army's operations in Phuoc Tuy Province. However, when it was reviewed by a War Memorial historian he avoided comment on Frost's central arguments, and resorted to alliteration to uphold the expeditionary Australian military tradition from 'Lone Pine' to 'Long Tan'. The only helpful thing in this review was that its weakness indicated the main impact of the Vietnam War on colonial conservatism in Australia.

For Australia and me the Vietnam War has probably done more than any other single factor to break the colonial foundations for thought and action that got us into it. By confusing the colonial conservatives the final victory of the People's Army in Vietnam has also helped to give Aboriginals, women, and ethnic groups new voices in Australian society. It has made it harder for our national character to remain bound up in the bloody rags of Gallipoli. One of the things a positive view of the Vietnam War as attempted in my thesis can show, is that the fall of Saigon has made Australia a more interesting, complex, and humane place.

But the figures are roughly these. Some 496 Australians were killed, and 2,398 wounded in Vietnam. Some 50,000 Americans were killed, and

another 200,000 wounded. On the other side, at least a million Vietnamese were killed by the Americans and their allies, and millions of others have been maimed and displaced as the result of a war they did not initiate. And while the effects of the Vietnam War have run deep in the Western world—in Australia it took fifteen years for the society to collect itself sufficiently to welcome the troops home at a public parade in 1987—this is no less true for Vietnam.

So deeply has the idea of war penetrated Vietnamese society that I've heard gangsters in Hanoi divide their areas up into 'Quan Khu' or 'War Zones'. So isolated has Vietnam become from commonplace intercourse in the region since 1975 that its people live at a level of intellectual and economic poverty barely imaginable in Australia. Cultural exchanges are extremely limited, foreign books in any language other than Russian do not circulate, and I've also heard that one apparently lucrative form of corruption is to buy cigarettes, take out half the tobacco, and sell twice the number stuffed with sawdust.

Since 1975 the policies of the Vietnamese government have certainly contributed to this poverty. But so too have the at least partly vindictive policies of the American government which have made it hard for the Vietnamese to believe that the war is over. Thus, in 1977, when the Indian government tried to send one hundred buffalos to Vietnam to refurbish herds depleted by American violence, Noam Chomsky noted that the American government responded by threatening to cut off 'Food for Peace' aid to India. This was at a time when the American press was publishing photographs of people pulling ploughs in Indochina to illustrate 'communist barbarism'.

So yes, there are ways in which I have come to see Canberra for the first time. On a recent trip to the War Memorial, for instance, I had a thought that would never have occurred to me in the 1960s. I thought I would have felt more comfortable in this shrine of the national heritage if its curators could face up to the horror that lies behind almost any one of the tens of thousands of names inscribed on the inner walls of the memorial. The dioramas of the First and Second World Wars are far too glossy to reflect the death and destruction they glorify, and the Vietnam display makes it difficult to repress a comparison with other displays in shop windows. Indeed, standing under nets in simulated tropical foliage, are models dressed in loose jungle green outfits, sweat rags, and bush hats; less a representation of warwear than the summer creations of some wild Japanese fashion designer. Then, after this incongruous encounter, beneath the massive dome that crowns the Hall of Remembrance, I still could not feel the heartbeat of a robust national myth while blood, sweat, and tears dripped sweetly through the filtered light.

The Vietnam War has ripped the lid off the trunk, split it at the seams. The jungle now grows in the wreckage of Anglo-Imperial-Australia. Yet with middle age some fundamental things remain: the gum trees are the same and Duntroon friendships survive, despite the fascist tendencies inherent in that institution. As the war recedes in my memory I still have the utopian feeling that comradeship is for life.

Greg Lockhart teaches at ANU. His Nation in Arms: The Origins of the People's Army of Vietnam *is soon to be published by Allen & Unwin.*

Comment

PETER MANSFIELD

Public Libraries and Australian Literature

Victorian public libraries have recently been subjected to a series of Reviews by the Ministry for the Arts. The two most significant findings were to do with money. Libraries must become more accountable and must demonstrate improved performance. At the same time public libraries are being 'encouraged' by Australian publishers to give more support to local creative writing in particular and the promotion of Australian culture in general.

These two forces are not necessarily compatible and how your local library balances the issues will have long term ramifications for all Australians. Bicentennial and media fascination with Australian culture assume some basic agreement about meaning but in fact the definition of culture remains elusive. Similarly the public library role in this area is difficult to define. The following comments give a few hints:

> Patrick White. The public library has a duty to provide wide and independent reading. Librarians are in a position to give a lead to the youth of today. Suburban and country librarians hold the balance between hope and despair for the starving intellect.[1]
> Max Harris. The safely bad books will drive out the good. Only prefabricated blockbusters and recycled standard fiction titles will survive. Australia is not a country rich in intellectual curiosity. The well washed are happy to be mass-minded and media-manipulated.[2]
> Mark Rubbo. I still have customers who refuse to buy or read Australian books.[3]

Another perspective can be gained by looking at a few statistics. Victorian public libraries issue 30 million books per annum. (100 million is the national figure). To acquire new stock, Victorian public libraries spend about $7.5 million annually. This is a pathetic amount in terms of expenditure per capita ($2.60), expenditure as a percentage of total library running costs (16%) and expenditure as a percentage of gross publishing output (4%).[4]

Contrary to the pronouncements of information technologists and video shop managers, public library usage is growing steadily and more people use a library than public transport or go to the football. The library in your city or township is restricted by the fiscal constraints of the 1980s at the very time when it is expected to maintain broad-appeal collections and yet also meet specific needs. But libraries are also being hamstrung by the local publishing industry in terms of lost or wasted opportunities.

The promotion of a handful of prize-winning books is not enough to solve the problems. I believe that several distinct issues must be examined.

1. Libraries and local publishing.

The call for libraries to buy more Australian literature—as a patriotic duty—is about as regular and predictable as Melbourne's weather. Recently Laurie Muller (University of Queensland Press) said that, as a condition of future funding, all libraries should be obliged to buy a copy of every new Australian book.[5]

This suggestion usually gets an airing at conferences and in trade journals. After agreeing with the broad sentiment many of the publishers have to agree that they don't always know a great deal about the public library. Compulsory buying of new material raises more issues than it resolves. Libraries already acquire significant amounts of Australiana but the argument which seeks to link Australian culture with last year's publishing output is spurious.

Industry data shows that Fiction only accounts for 12% of all new titles and that Religious titles are greater than the new Computing Science titles. In 1987 there were only about twenty five books on Women's Studies and about sixty on Cookery.[6] Does anybody seriously expect the public librarian to spend money in these proportions? A blanket ordering system would be unable to cope with other long term factors such as public demand and balanced collections. Finally there's a question that is never asked in polite circles or by trade practices bureaucrats. Who is an Australian publisher and what is an Australian book?

Instead of looking at gross publishing and acquisitions figures, I have studied a specific group of books to identify library buying patterns. The emphasis is on cultural and creative writing and the sample consists of fifty one books which have been shortlisted for the following Awards:

Fellowship of Australian Writers (1986)
'Age' Book of the Year (1986)
Booker Prize—Aust. Nominees (1986)
National Book Council (1987)
N.S.W. Premier's Prize (1986)
Victorian Premier's Prize (1986)

An additional group was included. It consisted of titles which had not been nominated for any Award but had been well reviewed during the survey period. Very few titles appeared on more than one list and it is possibly significant that no book on the N.S.W. list appeared on the Victorian list. Or vice versa, depending where you live. In more recent years there has been some overlap in the Adult Fiction section but, for the most part, the incidence of duplication in all categories has been

very low. This is not peculiar to Australian lists. The U.S. Library Journal's 'Best Books of 1987' list awarded forty eight books a superlative rating. The American Library Association also surveyed the thousands of new titles in all categories and listed their 'Notable Books of 1987'. 27 received the top rating. What was the overlap between LJ's forty eight and the ALA's twenty seven? Five.[7]

Public library catalogues were searched to identify holdings and preliminary figures show that Victorian libraries acquired 75% of these titles. Rejected titles were usually too local in content and shortlisted poetry was seldom purchased. Regional libraries bought multiple copies (usually three to six) of the books under review but no library had a standing order for one copy per branch. Some Australian titles do appear in every branch but they were not on these shortlists.

My library acquired 84% of the shortlisted books and this represents $4,700 of taxpayers' money. I have often wondered how much of this money found its way back to the author but having read a few copies of The Australian Author I am even more confused. Since undertaking this survey my Library Committee had agreed to give Australiana even more favourable treatment. This is now a publicly stated Goal of the Library and our holdings of the more recent shortlists would now be 95%.

Orders are placed at the pre-publication stage whenever possible and it is likely that many of the books will be available for loan up to six months before the book is shortlisted. This has several ramifications in terms of publicity and promotion. In Britain many of the nominations for the Booker Prize are not released until a few weeks before the closing date of this Award. This results in a saturation media coverage, television coverage and real life suspense.[8] The opposite occurs in Australia but results in a few new books getting the benefit of two media releases—the first when the book is launched and again when it is shortlisted and judged. Either way it means that a select group of lavishly praised books get a marketing bonus.

Public librarians have, in theory at least, been given the opportunity to evaluate these and many other books before they are nominated. These same librarians will admit that they are not always successful as tipsters but they aren't the only ones.

The monetary value of some of the newer prizes has been criticized because it does not even keep up with inflation and because many people object to this one night of generosity being followed by another long, long year of fiscal drought. These comments appear reasonable on face value but they should not hide the fact that the public recognition of a few books must have an impact on book sales. The Booker people say that they look at a 50,000 copy boost but no such estimate has been made in Australia. What should be beyond doubt is that more readers are aware of new books than ever before and Prizes must help this process.

This publicity becomes very important to the local library which does not have a publicity budget and must rely on the spin-off from the publishers, the TV appearances, the book reviews etc. Publicly praised books are also important within the Library at a time when performance, efficiency and output measures are seen as both short and long term goals at a state government level.

Book circulation figures are the most basic output measures available to the library. They don't say much about literature or culture but they can give some direction in the area of public awareness and acceptability of some books. Library patrons would not be conscious that these local books were sold at world prices, that many of the authors were subsidized via the Literary Arts Board, or that some books had a larger publicity budget than the next book's printing costs. But library users are far more discerning than is generally believed and this raises a fundamental question. Should critically acclaimed books also be popular with readers?

Information, ideas, laughter and tears do not flow out of a clean book sitting patiently on the shelves. I don't know if culture moves or flows but I am sure that books must move if they are to be of any use. So, how many of these shortlisted books would be retained in the library if strict output measures were applied?

My library has an average turnover rate of seven loans a year, ranging from twenty loans for fiction to three for non-fiction. If an average circulation rate of five a year across the entire adult collection were applied, 50% of the shortlisted titles would not retain their place on the shelves if turnover was the only output measure.

One librarian said, "I have come some awful croppers in the past and find that many of my clients are singularly uninterested in prize winners, *Schindler's Ark* being one of the few exceptions." Another said that the Miles Franklin Award was like "the kiss of death."

Books are either sprinters or stayers. I found that these fifty one books were on loan 35% of the year over a twelve month survey. Tim Winton, Helen Garner and Peter Carey have steady followings but over the survey period they averaged 25%. Colleen McCullough, Nancy Cato and Robert Hughes were averaging 80%. Additionally I found that some of these books were in demand for about as long as the publicity lasted and never recovered. This, however, is where the wise ones would say, "Further research is required."

I am convinced that all public librarians give strong support to the local publishing industry. But to suggest that all last year's literature must be acquired with no consideration for its readability is to seriously misjudge the role of the public library.

2. Public Taste.

Libraries are frequently called on to explain why they purchased a particular book. Whatever the public explanation the most likely and unofficial comment is, "You should see the awful stuff we rejected." The range and scope of the local industry is remarkable for a country of sixteen million people, but Australian publishing has a more incestuous relationship with merchandizing than with culture. It appears that libraries and bookshops have their own clientele and that there is *some* overlap.[9] The markets are different and there is no evidence that the pubishers are aware of library needs unless they desperately want our business.

The Great Australian Novel competition looked more like a library's list of old favourites. The emphasis is on 'old' because, as John Hanrahan noted, many of the contemporary authors who were enjoying the benefits of good media coverage were not always popular with readers.[10]

This conservative trend would also be demonstrated if Public Lending Right figures were made public. A

handful of dead authors are doing 'better' than hundreds of living writers. It makes you wonder doesn't it; some authors will get subsidies when they are alive and PLR when they are dead![11]

There is plenty of support for all things Australian but it appears that the gap between published output and literary taste is widening. Print runs of 2500 relegate culture to the fringes at a time when it is obvious that people have plenty of time and money to devote to a book. To look at one microcosm, Bicentennial publishing, *Australians, a Historical Library* (Fairfax, Syme and Weldon) has sold 13,000 sets. Not bad when you consider that this $695, eleven volume set was published without the support of the A.B.A. Compare this to *The Workers* by Blanche D'Alpuget. The recommended retail price was $39.95 and the special, remaindered price of $10 failed to move this book.[12]

Why does the market get saturated after years of literary drought? Do we really need three biographies of Christina Stead?

Is crude language in so much modern fiction compulsory or strongly recommended?

Why is 'kitchen fiction' so important at the moment? Sandra Hall said that "The domestic is so well celebrated in Australia that the kitchens of Helen Garner, Tim Winton and David Malouf are readily recognisable shorthand symbols . . ."[13] Do we assume that this genre spontaneously occurred? At a time when Australia is fascinated with nostalgia and epic tales it seems to be a deliberate attempt to defy the cultural tide and must make the marketing of such material just that much harder. I look forward to the day when our best authors get stuck into in-vitro mysteries, Pine Gap, Poor Fellow my Rainforest and so forth.

I also look forward to the day when authors who seek grants are obliged to demonstrate a working knowledge of reading tastes within the broader community. It seems a contradiction in terms to argue that creative writers are indeed creative if nobody reads the book.

3. Book Reviews.

Book reviews have real potential for bringing authors and readers together but all too often the opportunity is wasted because the frequency and timing of reviews doesn't complement the release of the book. A few titles get multiple reviews and dozens never get a mention. Library research shows that most staff and many readers pay great attention to reviews. As much as we all say that newspaper and journal reviews are better than a television appearance by the author, I think that we know that the opposite is often the truth. One mega-mention on telvision is vital because it is current and topical. But there are real problems awaiting librarians who wait for printed reviews. One example, The Australian newspaper (Jan.-Aug. 1987) allocated space to the following titles:

Australian fiction	8%
" non-fiction	25%
Foreign fiction	30%
" non-fiction	37%

Half the Australian non-fiction was history which is to be expected but the most obvious feature is the high number of overseas books. These figures are typical of the newspaper reviewing process in general. I wonder what would happen if money was allocated to the promotion of Australian literature at the review and promotion stage instead of being concentrated at the 'struggling author in the garret' stage? All those syndicated reviews which we dislike so much at least coincide with the book launch and author tour.

At no extra cost the book review could also be a preview. Most literary journals are slow with book reviews. Using Australian Book Review (Jan 1988)[14] as an example I found that on the day the ABR landed on my desk fifteen of the twenty titles mentioned were already in my library. One was in transit and four rejected. This situation is even worse with the quarterly journals. Surely such an influential person as a reviewer can get pre-publication copies.

The most expensive book mentioned in Australian Book Review was the *Oxford Literary Guide to Australia.* The review was far from complimentary and the $60 price tag probably created some buyer resistance. But with hindsight it didn't. The *Guide* had been ordered months earlier. Libraries often give favourable attention to such books precisely because of cost and in any case the reviewer said very little about the content.

The book review is rapidly becoming a device by which the librarian confirms his or her earlier decision. (It is ironic that if blanket ordering systems are introduced the book review becomes even less relevant).

4. Literary Prizes.

We know that change is occurring when a newspaper headline tells us who didn't win. "Carey misses out on top literary Award", said the Sydney Morning Herald.[15] The article explained that *Oscar and Lucinda*, Carey's most recent novel and "one of the most extravagantly praised novels of recent years" was shortlisted in both NSW and Victoria. It missed out in both States and only after this breathtaking news are we told who actually won.

Notwithstanding the merits of this particular book, the article does show a changing emphasis and it is one with which many commentators do not agree.

Jennifer Johnson told the audience at the recent Spoleto Writers conference that the business of the sponsor often meant that the prize was given as a marketing exercise as much as literary acclaim. Humphrey McQueen in ABR said, "Despite the stated aims of most prizes, quality is taking a second place because judges are being pressured to interpret their tasks as a cross section between public relations and relief for distressed gentlefolk."[16]

Both comments are a bit harsh given the way in which committees usually make decisions but the authors indicate a high degree of dissatisfaction with the system.

5. Availability.

One topic which is seldom mentioned by publishers or Public Lending Right officials is the question of access to Australian stock. Readers are familiar with the buying power of the larger retail chains but these organisations tend to specialize in current titles or remainders. Such retailing is beneficial to city readers who also have the advantages of nearby academic collections.

When library service means a branch with less than 8000 volumes or a fortnightly bookmobile visit to meet the needs of an entire population, you can see that access takes on another meaning. Again using my survey of shortlisted books, it was found that in a city of 15,000 people the library had about 60% of the titles.

In those same cities it was unlikely that the local bookshop (i.e. newsagency) had more than 15% of the books. I do not mean right now, I mean at any time in the last two years. And yet it was only a few years ago that these books were being lauded as an integral part of our culture.

We have already been warned that life was not meant to be easy. Australian society teems with people who despair that nobody else recognises their problems or true potential. So why be hesitant at this stage?

The public library has many options before it and promoting Australia's contemporary literature is not one of the easier ones. As long as book reviews miss the publication date by weeks or months, new stock is not available to all potential customers, hardback stock is discounted within months of release etc, the library will look to other areas to demonstrate relevance and efficiency.

Creativity need not be stifled but the following promotional steps should be taken:

(1) The money allocated to literary prizes and writers' grants should be centrally pooled for one year. This money would then be used to ensure that a collection of the Best 200 books of the last twenty years is allocated to every population centre with more than 1000 people. The entire collection should be promoted accordingly as was done in the United States in a similar exercise funded by the Carnegie Institute.

(2) Book reviews should be seen for what they really are, lively, challenging, informative, but a sorry tale of wasted opportunities.

(3) Contemporary literature should be promoted because it is the best, not simply because it is Australian.

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1. Australian, 2 February 1980.
2. Australian, 3 June 1981.
3. Australian Book Review, September 1985.
4. *Annual Statistical Bulletin of Public Libraries in Victoria*, 1986-7.
5. Australian Book Review, January 1986.
6. Australian Bookseller and Publisher, August 1988.
7. Library Journal, Conference News. New Orleans, 9 September 1988.
8. V. Cunningham, British Book News, December 1987, p. 792.
9. Australia Council, *The Reading and Buying of Books in Australia* (1978).
10. Australian Book Review, January 1985.
11. G. Gordon, "I counted them all out . . .", Punch, 8.1.88.
12. D. Plater, "Booksellers have mixed year", Sydney Morning Herald, 17 September 1988.
13. Bulletin, 15 December 1987.
14. The study of book reviews is a project in itself, e.g. preliminary research shows that the Canberra Times has more fiction reviews than the Age and the Sun combined. *Winter in Jerusalem* was reviewed 28 times in Australian newspapers. 63% of all reviews did not occur within one month of the book's release.
15. Sydney Morning Herald, 17 September 1988.
16. H. McQueen, "Literary Prizes", Australian Book Review, September 1988.

floating fund

BARRETT REID writes: Thank you for your Christmas presents which will help our continuing appeal, launched in our last issue, to meet our large current deficit. Thank you, in anticipation for your New Year greetings. The brief period between the Stephen Murray-Smith Memorial Issue, no. 112, and this issue would have meant a small total to report but a truly splendid donation from New South Wales changed that to a magnificent $5776.09. Specific thanks to: $5000, Anon; $424.09, L.W.; $50, D.N.; $30, R.C., T.P., B.S.; $20, D.D., D.O'H., F.W., B.A.; $10, S.C., D.& K.W., G.B., B.S., W.P., D.B., J.B., K.M., B.L.; $5, A.P., G.P., D.R., G.M., P.A., J.A., D.T., P.S.; $2, D.W.

KEN LEVIS

Audition

1

In his window seat of the 747 to the West Coast sits Andrew, Director of Acting for the Conservatory, en route to Perth to interview advanced students of Acting for next year's class. Twenty places. He will visit Adelaide, Melbourne, Hobart, Brisbane, Townsville and Sydney, in turn. At each city he'll be handed a list of those nominated by responsible institutions and companies. He'll audition in the few weeks several hundred young people, each hoping for selection. Rejection rate is, has to be, well over ninety percent. High hopes or heartbreak. As always.

How does he, as TV interviewers love saying, "live with this"?

"You give each a fair go," he explains to friends. Then remind yourself, from Western Australia, four or perhaps five. Depends on what shows up. Eighty may try out. All recommended by someone. The few really good stand out. Easier than you think.

"The personal disappointments? Well, of course, I'm sorry for each, would like to help, but . . ." He shrugs his shoulders.

What he *must* do, he knows, is recruit a team that has talent, will stay the three-year course, can work together. One he can work with. Otherwise we're all in trouble.

He sits waiting for the trim hostess to free him of his tray. He looks at the terrain 35,000 feet down. Horizon to horizon stretches the desert, rumpled and ridged in the afternoon sun. At middle distance, 10 o'clock, as in a model, a watercourse is finely grooved, dry but for soak and waterhole under a cliff overhang. It's a big waterhole to register at this height. Trees lean about it. A lonely chance of life in all that waste. He hopes for the odd oasis in the desert of talent he will journey through in the next few days, dismisses the parallel as whimsical. The hostess with a cheery "Here we go!" whips away his tray.

Andrew thinks now of the local rep. who'll help him. He's worked with her before. Somewhat impulsive, somewhat subjective, shrewd and kindly. They'll make a fair enough team, will tease out differences. He won't be talked into another Jamie, poor lad. A difficult choice two years ago. He'd given Jamie benefit of doubt, urged out of sympathy by Maysie. Big potential, she had thought, perhaps a little unstable, but with maturity . . .

No, No, No! No more Jamies. The lad had come close to ruining that group. One psycho can do it, catalyst for discontent. He'd walked out on them, on a high, in the midst of production. Unstable. It took only a stop-gap part in a soapie for him to dump them. And no-one, just no-one in the great world of theatre, had snapped him up to stardom! How's his taxi-driving going, wondered Andrew, has he been able to stick at *that*!

Yes, misguided sympathy was a trap. This time, no one slightly doubtful. And he must get a couple of really good males. How hard, it seemed, for strong males to show up in audition.

2

BIRTHS

O'DONOHUE. Solomon and Mel announce ecstatically and lovingly the arrival of Miriam Thalia, a hasty little lady, 6 lbs 15 ozs. Thanks to God, helpful parents, doctors and the St Chad's delivery team.

Little Miriam was lucky in her choice of parents. They solved for her bewilderments of regular or demand feeding, potty training, when to start solids, when and how to walk. Mel, with her love of reading, continued to read to the little girl. *Continued*, for during pregnancy she thought it good to read aloud to her embryonic daughter. From *Paradise Lost*, so the little one would have innate response to Miltonic rhythms, somewhat muffled it is true under her diaphragm. She read Swinburne aloud for emotional parameters, Hopkins to accustom the little thing to syncopated rhythms, Shaw Neilson for delicacy and Judith Wright to encourage fidelity.

Mother Mel played music too, choosing widely. Music, she felt, was less significant than reverberations of the spoken word to the babe unborn who, as a human being, would use words and speech-rhythms for the best part of a century. Music was limited. Piped

into hothouses it had plumped out tomatoes. Mel wanted her child intelligent and sensitive in speech, not a fleshy ponderosa.

Smile as you may at Mel's theories, admire her motives—to mother a being sensitive, robust, attuned to language. Proof came as the years passed. Even by the post-nappy and après potty period the little one was singing to herself tunes, nursery rhymes, and what is more, making them up! Effortlessly.

"See!" cried Mel to Solomon, "My efforts work! So happy, so intelligent!" Black-bearded Solomon agreed. His eyes shone.

Miriam, when time came, was put to the Convent rather than to the Public. The holy sisters would nurture her sensitive growth. And indeed they did, tapping her knuckles in piano lessons, supervising her studies, even arranging 'extra tuition' (paid for by the O'Donohues), an hour of vowel distortion and misshapen rhythms called "Elocution".

"Miriam loves elocution," Mel told her friends. "Miriam dear, say 'Quackie Ducks' for the ladies."

Members of the class had preference in school plays, which was only fair. By the end of Primary, Miriam had been Mary in "The Three Wise Men", the Princess in "Rumpelstiltskin" and the Wattle Fairy on horseback in the August 1st concert. In High School she scored as Good Deeds in "Everyman", Yum Yum in the school "Mikado" and as Chekhov's widow in "The Bear", an ambitious choice you will agree for a convent, and perhaps a little beyond the abilities of the Advanced Elocution Class.

What now? Beyond school?

Miriam became receptionist in nice old Dr James's surgery—the elocution had paid off! She'd joined the Strolling Players, the town's theatre group where she did all the required things—took 'lessons', did time in the box office, served coffee and carrot cake at intervals, sometimes ushered, worked 'behind the scenes', was given walk-ons and, at last, a real part, Bubba in "The Doll". How she'd worked away at that part, making it 'hers'.

"You fit the part perfectly," her friends told her, "You've got it altogether. Totally!"

Exhilarating, this life of the theatre. So much to learn, to read, to master. Her receptionist's job was time out—apart from the little dialogues she mounted with talkative patients whose lives she liked to imagine. Under her desk she kept a book for slack moments but patients interrupted the plays she tried to read. Biographies were better, books on the theatre she could pick up and put down.

The years slipped away leaving her with her credits which she 'scrapbooked'—Ruth in "Blythe Spirit", Miss Proserpine Garnett in "Candida" and, most spectacularly, Kate Mason in Williamson's "Removalists", a play which the local sergeant almost had thrown out of town.

Miriam, that slender, dark-haired young lady, actress of promise they all told her, came to feel she'd outgrown the group. And of course she had. How long could she really afford to wait and wait for big parts? Not in this company where people stayed on and on, no inclination to do better.

"They've nothing more to give me," she thought bitterly. "What next?"

What next was sitting in the big Pioneer Coach that hissed along the black-top. She glanced from time to time at the landscapes sliding away. She read from Peter Hall's Diaries, a fascinating book, easy to read. She imagined *herself* in the National Theatre. It fitted her present state of mind as the Strolling Players' nomination for this year's Conservatory audition.

3

The taxi-driver is a young, black-haired man with heavily accented, accurate English. He is driving Andrew from the airport to the Hall of Residence that will house him and the applicants. He is friendly, his face lively with humor. His bumper-sticker says: W.A. HOME OF THE AMERICA'S CUP.

"Visiting Perth?"

"Right!"

"There was this poet," says the cab-driver, side-stepping traffic, "Australian. Wrote 'In the midst of life, we are in Perth!' He roars with mirth. "Not really like that! Not any more."

Andrew takes his turn.

"Where you from?"

"Guess!"

"Yugoslavia? . . . Italy? . . . Turkey?

"Guess again. Warm."

"Albania? Russia?"

"Right, mate! But where?"

"Black Sea area?"

He nods. "But where?"

"Odessa?"

"Right, matey! Spot on!"

They share their laughter, this moment of the improbable. Imagine! Driving through Perth peak-hour with a cab-driver from Odessa!

"I've married here," says the Russian. "Three kids. All Aussies!"

Andrew feels the tip he gives is worth it. The taxi-driver's given him light-heartedness, optimism that goes well with the excitement and anticipation of auditions.

4

Miriam registers at the check-in desk in the Withdrawing Room and is given her stick-on name-tag. Groups of young people sit about on chairs, lounges, on the carpet. They appraise new arrivals, talk, whisper, gesture. An atmosphere has formed of

nervous strain, almost hysteria. They exchange stories, pass on rumours.

"Is it true they're taking only three? Last year they took five."

"That's Andrew Todd, now," says a whisper. All look at the tall man walking across the room to the lift with Maysie, whom of course they all know about.

"They say he's tough!"

"Hates Australian plays?"

"Go over the five minutes, you've had it!"

The loud-mouthed blonde in the centre of a small group, already a failed actress, speaks through controlled cigarette smoke:

"If it takes going to bed with dream-boy, I'll be in that!" She doesn't get the laugh her remark calls for.

Miriam, fumbling hand-out sheets of welcome and advice, checks the call-board. Her name's listed on the second day. She'd have preferred to have it over and done with. But this gives her time to revise, to practise her pieces, one Shakespeare, the other 'modern', given back to back. Meanwhile, there's the welcome tonight. The Talk. Afterwards 'time to get to know each other'. Tomorrow the Union Refectory's open to them, the swimming pool, club facilities. Make themselves at home. After all, everyone's here for the same thing!

Miriam finds her room, a vacated student's room, now stripped of posters, pictures, books. A bare cube until next semester brings life to it. She stretches out on the strange bed, picks up Peter Hall's Diaries to calm herself and at once goes to sleep.

5

Andrew is pleased to see Maysie, genial good-natured Maysie, twenty years in the theatre, organizer, dramaturge, director. Now with her own little theatre. Standards really good. Said to have been a good actor. Why give it up, he wondered. Well, how many parts are written for chubby ladies under fifty-five? And Maysie had certainly fleshed out. Had she, really, eaten her way out of an acting career? he speculated amusedly. Have to diet her way back? Meanwhile, she produces, directs, can choreograph a show, knows what lighting should be, recognizes a workable set from a plan. Brings the best out of a cast.

Lucky to be working with her and not with some over-blown committee-nominee certain to find genius flowering in the most unlikely places and blind to it elsewhere.

These thoughts are in his mind as he crosses the lounge, his over-nighter bulky and heavy (must cut down next time), aware of Maysie's welcome and the room's nervous excitement.

"What have you for us this year, Maysie?"

"Should be one or two good ones," she smiles.

"Couple of might-bes. Plenty of also-rans. High hopes and little enough else."

"This year," she says as the lift whines upwards, "This year will be no different."

They sit a while talking in his room, someone's neat office. She satisfies herself he is comfortable, has her inter-com number.

"See you 7.30," she says. "In the Hall."

6

At eight o'clock Miriam sits with the seventy others, all of whom try to appear nonchalant. Most have behind them a tiring journey, the check-in, a refectory dinner, making contacts with others no less on edge. They are anything but nonchalant.

Miriam joins the polite clapping as the chairman introduces Maysie and Andrew ("come all the way out here to meet you . . .") Andrew speaks. They listen to catch any hint that will help when they're alone in front of him. (What's he looking for? What does he like? What's he hate?). So nervous are some, in this situation, his words blur leaving no impression. They might as well pack up right away, shoot through.

The words come to Miriam: "You want to act above everything else? You've been recommended. Someone has faith in you. Have you faith in yourself?"

"What do I offer you? A limited admission program—twenty apprentices from the whole of Australia. Three years of hard work. And I mean hard work. The Conservatory doesn't settle for the second-rate. How well you take advantage of the three years is up to you. Competition is tough. The profession is tough. You'll be part of a team, learn to work together . . ."

"You'll be apprentice actors, learning your profession. Able to act, sometimes, with a Sydney Company. Three short years I offer you . . ."

Miriam yearns for this to happen. To her. Just give me the chance, dear God!

"Tomorrow," the cadenced voice of Andrew is saying, "we get to know each other. I'll be sitting down there. You'll be the one up here. Five minutes to show how well you're working, the actor you are. Five minutes for the two pieces, the Shakespeare and the Modern, split as you like. Walk on, introduce yourself, name your pieces; the pieces you've chosen as ones you do best. There'll be one chair on the bare stage. You may sit, stand, use the chair as you will. No need for props."

"Good luck! Do the very best you're capable of doing!"

They clap politely in the echoing hall. The handsome boy seated next to Miriam, wearing frayed jeans and a T shirt that says KALGOORLIE SURF CLUB, mutters "all right for *him*!"

Miriam returns a thin little smile.

7

Maysie and Andrew meet next morning for a working breakfast, to check procedures. Their table is a little apart from the refectory benches.

"Organization," says Maysie, "looks good. Here's your clipboard. Stack of Rating Sheets. They've typed in the name of applicant, recommending body or persons, have listed credits. If any. The format we agreed last year, remember?"

NAME	NOMINATOR	SCHOOL RECORD DEGREE, ETC.	COMMENTS

"And," says Maysie, handing across another sheet, "here's the code we worked out."

Andrew remembers. A device to relieve tension, to save sanity. A code for shortcomings in piece after piece. So much easier to jot in the Comments column T.I.V. or R.B.

T.I.V. reads TEARS IN VOICE, for false emotion.

R.B. for the, oh so common, RHETORICAL BULLSHIT. There was N.T.T.A., far too frequent, for NOT TALKING TO ANYBODY; the subtle S.F. (SANS FEELING) and, for complete rejection, N.W.J. (NO WAY, JOSÉ), their best creation Andrew thought.

8

Auditions are under way. At a table one-third down the auditorium sit Maysie and Andrew, a secretary assisting. At ten a.m. sharp she calls the first applicant, big John Capistrano from the Albany School of Voice. He lurches out of the wings and, before he manages to stop centre-stage by the chair, introduces himself:

"Hello! I'm John Capistrano from the Albany School of Voice. I've chosen a speech from 'The Merchant of Venice', and Old Deuteronomy from 'Cats' by Andrew Lloyd Webber. He breathes the name, Webber, with the approval given to saints and cult heroes.

"God," groans Andrew, "Why 'Cats'?"

"They're showing how with-it they are."

John speaks his Shylock in his Shakespearean 'voice',

Old Deuteronomy in a metrical monotone.

Andrew writes his first comment: *Badly coached. No sense of word-play.*

Maysie whispers, "Seventy to go!"

9

The day wears on. Each entry brings its chance of discovery. At some time must come that thrill of recognition when someone has real understanding, the potential to convey the part. It's hard work, this concentration. The frustration grows.

"What a fraud's been practised on these kids," thinks Andrew. People, failed actors, set themselves up as experts, take their money. Kill what native ability they may have had. Not all, of course, but overall it's abysmal. His morning's Comments tell the story:

Slick and predictable.

Tasteless, for one who's proving she's sophisticated beyond her orange punk hairdo, can tackle 'tough stuff'.

No point of view.

He glances at Maysie's sheet. She's just written,

Why are you talking to a chair? Stop pulling faces!

Andrew smiles grimly. He has just written *What do you WANT? I can't follow!*

And in desperation,

Read the play! N.T.T.A. + S.F. + T.I.V. = N.W.J.

Their formula works well, he thinks: NOT TALKING TO ANYBODY + SANS FEELING + TEARS IN VOICE = NO WAY, JOSÉ. He shows his equation to Maysie. She nods approval.

There's the usual crop of those who've failed to choose pieces they like and understand, who fall back on the weary old books of set pieces. After your first thousand auditions, thinks Andrew, you know at once if the piece is the actor's choice—they make it their own with their discovery of it. He feels angry for the kids so badly misled, pieces imposed on them.

10

Late afternoon in the Withdrawing Room. The air swims with the tremulous blue of cigarette smoke (why do beginning actors so much need to smoke?). The secretary pins up the Call-Back list. Five only from the day's auditions. The young people jostle to see the names. They glance quickly and walk away. Even the ones whose names appear hide their feelings. They don't want to flaunt themselves. They know, too, that the fifteen or so call-backs from the three days will shrink to five, or four, or three.

From the little glum groups about the room the odd comment:

"Well, that's that!"

"Thought Daisy at least would have made it. She's *so good*!"

"Back to the bush," says the boy from Kalgoorlie, "I'll have to do it the hard way!"

"It's an awesome experience," explains a short girl wearing a black leotard and bright leg-warmers, "Totally awesome!"

"You made it!" says one girl enthusiastically to her friend as she enters the room. "Good for you!"

"And you?"

Miriam observes the scene. Tomorrow night she'll be part of it. She sees some kids are already pulling out, calling a cab. She goes off to a meal she knows will be tasteless. A phone call from home cheers her. "Miriam dear," says her far-away mother, "Sol and I want you to remember we'll stake you for the three years. We just want you to know that!" Her heart reaches out to them, but the chances of their staking her seem slim.

11

The five call-backs note the time of tonight's interviews in Room 307, think how they'll make a good impression on the two interviewers. They make up answers to questions:

"Why do you want to act?"

"How can you support yourself for three years in Sydney?"

"Why go to Sydney? There are opportunities here!"

"Can you settle to three years' school again, even if it's an acting school?"

They get together, discuss such questions and the best ways to answer them.

12

Next morning at breakfast (cereal pkt, eggs and sausages today, coffee) Andrew and Maysie review yesterday. Andrew laughs over the girl whom he'd asked why she wanted Sydney. She'd answered promptly:

"For the more promiscuous theatre."

"What?"

"The theatre I'm told is more promiscuous there!"

"They do mix words," says Maysie. "A local paper wrote up a party: 'Through beautiful grounds promiscuous groups wandered and indulged themselves!' Same mistake."

Andrew is well aware Maysie is softening possible criticism. Good old Maysie.

"How many do we have?" asks Maysie.

"One or two, perhaps. The promiscuous girl is hardly ready for it this year. Two I'd classify as tourists—are 'dying to get to the east coast.' I'd say one male, one female stand out."

13

Day two of auditions. Andrew feels as if he's afloat, apart from the world. Anyone who has reduced seventy-one human beings to a list of five knows the feeling. You are aware of the fallen hopes, fears, unfounded dreams passing by you, the disappointment, bitterness and misery that soon come. You shut your mind to these things. You have to, or your judgement will warp. You remind yourself of your job—select the best. *They* mustn't be penalized. Remember, Andrew, you'll have to work three years with the choices you make. You and your staff.

14

The first girl has a speech from "Antony and Cleopatra". She wears a sequined veil, a belly-dancer's gear. She speaks the lines magnificently, unhurried, every nuance thought out and mastered. With a swish of her veil she leads out of Shakespeare into a Tennessee Williams hysteria from "Street Car". As she exits Andrew calls:

"Where did you get that gear?"

"Oh! Belly-dancing. I deliver singing grams."

"How long you've been doing that?"

"Two years."

"Why?"

"It's the money."

"Sing us a gram," suggests Andrew. "A dance?"

"O.K. For twenty bucks." She sweeps out, laughing.

This glimpse of the life behind the players is refreshing. Maysie murmurs: "Some talent's still with us!"

The day grinds on. They're varying their introductions, Andrew notices.

"Hi!"

"Morning! I'm Betty Higgins." Betty reads from her Shakespearean husband a letter denouncing her supposed adultery. She is to be killed by the servant. Far too difficult for this kid to handle.

Another, from the School of Mime, acts out Tamara's eating of the pasties made by old Titus from her sons' flesh and bones ground to paste. Not a word spoken. This she matches back to back with a long excerpt from "The Long Christmas Dinner". A culinary program! A big girl with mafia-type hat, cigarette drooping as she plays imaginary cards, updates Isabella from "Measure for Measure". A boy named George is very funny in his "Comedy of Errors" speech, but flops as Willy in "Salesman". How seldom are the glimpses of promise, Andrew thinks. His Comments column fills up:

What on earth are you aiming at?

Phony voice, false cadences.

Effect-oriented.

He accuses another: *You are hiding behind your voice!*

More desperately: *The Voice Beautiful.*

A cry from the heart, pencil-point piercing the paper: *Pain! Pain! Pain!*

15

"Number 49," calls the secretary and Miriam jumps. She's rehearsed and rehearsed her entry and intro. A casual-determined walk-on, a not-too-formal-nor-too-casual "Hi! I'm Miriam O'Donahue, Strolling Players. My pieces: from "Othello", act four, scene three, and Becket's speech at the end of act three by Jean Anouilh."

Remember? Emilia and Desdemona speak. Miriam indicates them separated by the chair. She moves from side to side for contrasting speeches:

EMILIA: How goes it now? he looks gentler than he did.

DESDEMONA: He says he will return incontinent:
He hath commanded me to go to bed.
And bade me to dismiss you.

EMILIA: Dismiss me!

DESDEMONA: It was his bidding . . .

Miriam feels confident. This piece was chosen for the contrast between the bawdy and worldly Emilia and poignantly pure Desdemona, a contrast she hopes to bring out by clever voice-work. Moreover, it includes the sad, sad willow song, "The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree", with which she feels she can fully identify. These days, they'd told her, it's not enough to act. Show you can sing. And move. Dance when called upon. All these things and more today's actor must do!

But as she sits on the chair singing her plaintive melody, doubt moves in on her. The echo of the song in the empty hall, the two people watching her, the urgency of the situation, all suddenly conspire against her. Is she really, she wonders, projecting what the lines call for:

I call'd my love false love; but what said he then?
Sing willow, willow, willow
If I court moe women, you'll couch with moe men.

Has she really made these lines context for the exchange that follows, between the innocent wife and Emilia's cynical view of vows and husbands? She hopes so.

And now for Becket on his knees. The chair suits admirably as she, the priest, kneels and wrestles:

"Saintliness is a temptation too!" Miriam declaims in anguish:

"Oh how difficult it is to get an answer from you,

> Lord! . . . I am only a beginner and I must make mistake after mistake, as I did my Latin translations as a boy . . ."

This speech was one Sister Beatrice advised Miriam she as a beginner would understand. It would let her penetrate the mind of a great man under stress. Would show her sensitivity, her perspicacity. Becket had seen God not as the God alone of the poor, but of the rich and powerful (i.e. himself):

> You do not turn your eyes away from the man who was given everything from birth. You have not abandoned him . . .

This line of reasoning leads to confrontation. The voice of Miriam the priest rings out:

> It has pleased you to make me Archbishop and to set me like a solitary pawn, face to face with the King, upon the chessboard . . .

The audition is over. Miriam extracts herself from the world of the turbulent priest, rises and leaves the bare stage. From the wings the secretary calls clearly, "Next. Number 50!"

16

Miriam walks alone by the pool with its late-afternoon sun-bathers. She feels she hasn't done justice to herself. Just as Becket had his moment of perception, her ordeal has given her hers. She sees it clearly. A terrible rejection of all that had brought her to this point fills her. The silly elocution; the nuns; the Strolling Players' years. Well, yes, they'd given her something she supposed, but had missed the essentials. Provincial hams, she thought in her bitterness. She'd been right to see she'd outgrown them and their bickerings and pretended sophistication, their fantasies of 'theatre'. Their Methods, their Technique, their Organic or Inorganic Approach! Acting, she told herself, was *her* way of life. You chose the methods and techniques for what you did. Why hadn't it been so clear before she blew her chances? Oh, how stupid she'd been. Stupid! Stupid!

No surprise to find her name omitted from the bulletin board.

17

Miriam lies in self-torment on the narrow student bed. She will catch tomorrow's coach back home. Everyone will know she's missed out. Well, too bad. They'll all be kind, avoid talking about it, let things slide. She had really felt she could carry everything before her. She tries to imagine Maysie's life with her own theatre. Maysie had 'made it'. And Andrew everyone said was the best Acting teacher in this country. Imagine his work with actors, young actors, watching them grow, seeing their careers. Tomorrow night he'd have flown off, out of reach. A sudden sense of loss, of abandonment, took possession of her. Hope, it seemed, would go with him.

The thought comes, Talk with him! While he's here. See if he'll talk to you!

On the impulse Miriam picks up the intercom. Room 307. She listens to the phone ringing, the tired voice saying "Yes?"

"Mr Todd," she bursts out, "I've made a fool of myself today. I know now. Really know now. In the morning I'll be going home. Could I see you for a few minutes? Can you spare a little time?"

"Who's speaking?" Hand over phone he says to Maysie, who is with him going through the night's interviews, "Hysterical female!"

"Who?"

"I know, Mr Todd, how busy you are. And tired, I guess. But could I have just a word?"

Andrew shrugs his shoulders. How to deal with this? It happens now and then. Desperate people in hysteria.

"Please!"

The urgency disarms him.

"Just a moment." He grimaces at Maysie. "Number 49. Miriam O'Donohue. Asks to talk. Can you stay a few minutes? Don't abandon me!" She smiles.

"O.K.", he says into the phone. "Come straight up, 307. Just a few minutes."

18

Miriam bursts through the door he's left ajar. Maysie, in the armchair, shuffles her papers.

"Miriam Thalia O'Donohue?" he says, glancing at his notes. He reads his comments: *Elocution product. Hurting her voice. Tension. Something perhaps there. Raw. Potential?*

"Mr Todd, forgive me. I just have to talk. Perhaps you remember my pieces? 'Othello' and 'Becket'?"

"Why choose them? Why Becket?"

"They said they'd show my range. The people who advised me."

"But *you* didn't choose them?"

"No. Weren't they all right?"

"Don't you see? Had you chosen ones you'd made your own, you'd have been so much stronger. You were *demonstrating*, not *being*. You indicated emotion, rather than a *connected* life."

"I know! I know! Now. Coming down here's been worth while. Just to discover that. Four years I've been given a bum steer! But, you try to learn from those who know. Profess to know. You do what they say. And all the time you've all missed the point! I've wasted

four years to find out what's now obvious. Four good years. I had to talk. Just had to."

Andrew smiles, says "Take it easy. Of course you needed to. I'm glad I'm here to listen!"

Then, after a pause, he says kindly: "You want to act?"

"Oh, yes. I'll act. One way or another. I know how to go about it now. It took this, this debacle to show me."

"Not *debacle.* Opportunity, perhaps. *Insight.*"

"Look," he says, standing. "You're calm now. You've a future to work on. A process of growth, not a recipe for results. Understand?"

It's midnight. Another day of auditions tomorrow. Less heavy as some kids have cancelled out. Maysie, now that Miriam has gone, from the door looks back: "By the way, Andrew," she says, "You might do worse. My comment on the kid says, *Can't believe there's not talent there!* And, she didn't ask you to change your mind, did she?"

Maysie at it again! He grins goodnight.

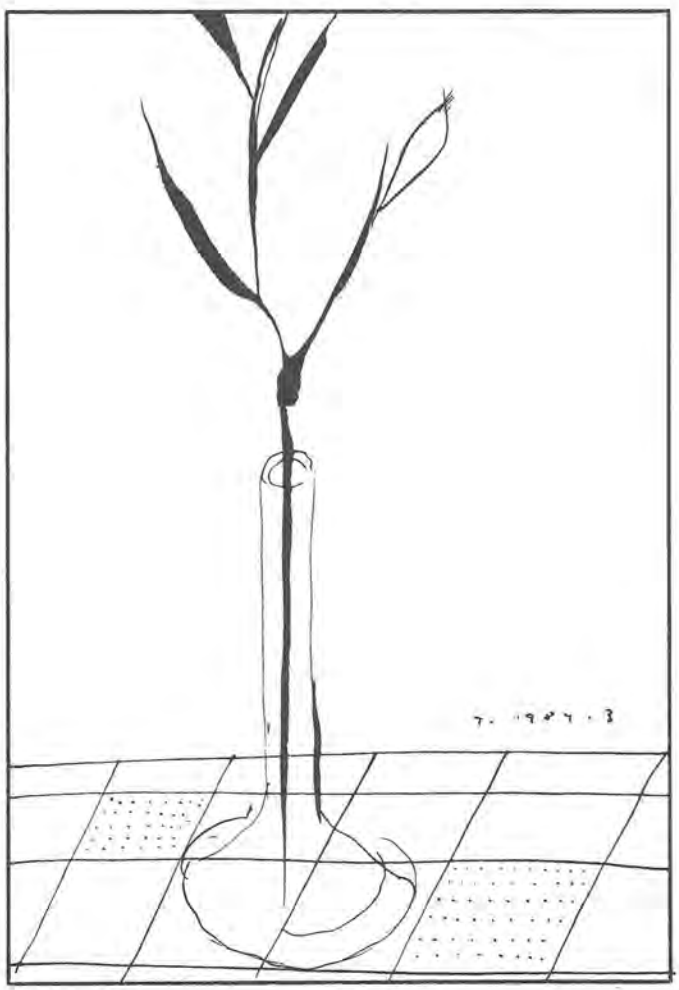
19

Next evening, en route to the airport, the man from Odessa (who had given Andrew his card) says "How was Perth? Did you get what you wanted?"

"Sure."

"Great!" says the taxi-driver, having no idea what Andrew wanted from Perth.

But Andrew, thinking of the three to whom he'd be making firm offers, also thought of a risky, possible fourth—depending of course on what Adelaide, Melbourne, Hobart, Brisbane, Townsville and home-town Sydney might throw up.



Jiri Tibor Novak

books

Renaissance Man in Antarctica

Gillian Triggs

Stephen Murray-Smith: *Sitting on Penguins: People and Politics in Australian Antarctica* (Century Hutchinson, $29.95).

The late Stephen Murray-Smith's *Sitting on Penguins* is no scientific treatise nor, as he says, is it a "disinterested history" or "study in repose". Rather, the work tells us what we really wanted to know about Antarctica. What happens to the men and women who winter over in the claustrophobic Antarctic night; do they read books, fall in love, dislike each other? Is Australia serious about its claim to 42% of the Antarctic continent? Why do Antarctic stations look more like building sites on the moon than scientific research laboratories? How do the army Larkies get on with the Ph.Ds and Antarctic Division bureaucrats? What do 20 degrees centigrade below freezing feel like?

The strength of *Sitting on Penguins* lies in the personal, idiosyncratic experience of a humanist, an educator and a reporter who has been able to ask the awkward questions and who has the independence of mind to conclude that the 'emperor has no clothes'. Stephen Murray-Smith was a 'round tripper' to Antarctica—"a contemptible species of Antarctic traveller"—on the German ship *Icebird* on its resupply voyage in 1985-6 for the Antarctic Division to Commonwealth Bay, Casey and Davis stations.

The tale begins with the ship's return to Hobart where, after six weeks on the dryest continent on earth and of endless daylight, Stephen Murray-Smith welcomes the rain and the dark. The voyage is described in diary form, which provides a linking tension and narrative to a pot pourri of newspaper articles written for the Australian, doggerel in German for the ship's captain, details of organisms that can live without oxygen and whimsical diary impressions of Antarctic life.

It is one of the paradoxes of Antarctic life that while people are isolated thousands of miles from home on the glistening grandeur of the continental icecap, preoccupations are often inward-looking, probably banal. While the eye is on the surrealistic icebergs or the vast horizon, the mind will be on the latest ship's gossip or imminent 'slushy' duty in the Station's kitchen. Stephen Murray-Smith captures the accommodation of the majestic and the prosaic. As a poet he describes the "ice castles" and "windless days"; as a reporter he notes the environmental squalor left behind by decades of expeditioners. He has a finely-tuned ear for conversation on the bridge, in the bar or in helicopters; "If I had to choose between Casey and Davis I'd choose Venice." As the 'dieso' (diesel mechanic) bemoans the superior brain power of his girlfriend back home, he argues, as proof, that you wouldn't be here if you had any brains. As the chap from Foreign Affairs wonders about the class war in Antarctica, the man from the Bureau of Minerals and Energy warns against too many Australian warships in one place: "they tend to run into each other."

Stephen Murray-Smith reminds the reader that he is no objective data-gatherer. In a moment of loneliness he remembers his wife and daughters; he makes a startling analogy between his first iceberg and a Fred Williams painting; he recalls Shakespeare's "letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would' " as he sends off another wyssa (telex) to The Australian and wistfully rues his belief that Australians do not read.

The book provides a rich source of information concerning the need for Australian owned ice-strengthened ships, details of the science programmes, problems with preservation of Mawson's hut and the legal and political background to Australia's territorial claims in Antarctica. He ventures an opinion on most issues relevant to the future of Antarctica, the 'people problems', women in Antarctica, environmental waste, the Antarctic Treaty system, regulation of fishing and mining in Antarctica, the prospect of an aircraft landing strip at Davis Station, the new summer bases and the politics of the Antarctic Division. On the international legal questions Stephen Murray-Smith

presents an accurate and fair summation of the interests of nations and their respective juridical positions. He concludes that nations are in Antarctica "because of greed, because of fear and for national aggrandisement". There are many who will agree that the pursuit of science in Antarctica is but a cloak for State interest and that Antarctica should be conserved as a World Park for the benefit of mankind. Whether one accepts such views is not to the point, for this well-written book is, above all, a personal story told with honesty and thoughtfulness.

The work is complemented by the quality of its production and by the endpaper maps of Antarctica and the sectors which describe the seven territorial claims. The photographs illustrate our role in Antarctica such as the building works at Casey set against a horizon choked with icebergs and the seal carcase left behind by Mawson's party. So too, Jan Senberg's charcoal drawings and splendid jacket painting emphasise the cranes, containers, powerlines and equipment as testimony to our impact on the Antarctic environment.

Sitting on Penguins is a timely work, being published just after the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties completed negotiations in June, 1988, on a Convention to regulate mining in Antarctica. Nations have yet to decide whether to ratify this Convention. Stephen Murray-Smith's book will make a significant contribution to informing a wider general public about Antarctica. An informed community will be better able to contribute to decisions about the future of this beautiful and once pristine environment.

Dr. Gillian Triggs teaches Law at the University of Melbourne. Her publications include International Law; Australian Sovereignty in Antarctica *and* The Antarctic Treaty System. *She was a 'round tripper' to the Antarctic on Voyage 6 of 1986-7 as a Ministerial Adviser to the Minister for Science, Mr. Barry Jones.*

Convicts and Crime

John Hirst

Marjorie Tipping: *Convicts Unbound, The Story of the* Calcutta *Convicts and their Settlement in Australia* (Viking O'Neil, $49).

Stephen Nicholas (ed.): *Convict Workers, Reinterpreting Australia's Past* (Cambridge University Press, $39.95).

Which of these two approaches is more likely to shed new light on convicts and their world: an examination of the life story of every convict on one ship or a computer-based study of a sample of the convicts sent to New South Wales? An established author with literary flair to do the first; a group of economic historians with a statistical bent to do the second—and you have *Convicts Unbound* and *Convict Workers*. I must confess that my prejudice makes me favour the first approach. Certainly *Convicts Unbound* is the more attractive book. It is beautifully presented and illustrated and is written for the general reader. The 'illustrations' in *Convict Workers* are statistical tables. The exposition, though, is clear and only rarely troubles us with the technical jargon of statistics.

The ship's company which Marjorie Tipping examines was a special one. The *Calcutta* brought convicts to the short-lived settlement inside Port Phillip Heads in 1803 and when this was abandoned the convicts and their guards became founders of Hobart. Tipping has been most assiduous in collecting every shred of information about her people. There is a large biographical appendix with entries for every convict and lists of surnames of their descendants. Much of the interest of the book is genealogical. The *Calcutta* was the *Mayflower* of Victoria and Tasmania and Tipping explodes some old claims of the old families about their origins.

There is no doubt, as the blurb claims, that the book reveals much about the complex and intimate interchange between felon and free, and the fates and fortunes of the convicts, but these are themes which are left too much to the reader to develop. There is frequently too much detail and in a few places the text descends into lists. Much of the information on these voyagers comes from the officials—Collins, the governor, and Knopwood, the chaplain with a fulsome diary—and in drawing on these, the book becomes too often a chronicle of the doings and rationales of officialdom with the convicts merely as extras. I would have liked to have learnt more about convict life and work. There are glimpses of this, enough to suggest that much more could have been teased out from the sources. In the final chapter Tipping does draw some broader conclusions, the chief being that "those convicted of the worst crimes became the most prosperous settlers." But with that wonderful data base one feels that more could have been done. Perhaps even some statistics!

The economists' book does not hide its conclusions; they are very helpfully proclaimed in a series of propositions at the beginning. Stephen Nicholas and Peter Shergold, the principal authors, describe these as "new hypotheses and major revisions." Overall they amount to saying that the convicts were good human material who were organised very effectively to speed economic growth in the colony, where they were not overly oppressed and enjoyed better conditions than working people in Britain. A good deal of this did not come as a surprise to me. That convicts ate better and did less work than the British working class has long been known—ever since the British administrators of the system had to grapple with this annoying feature of New South Wales life in an effort to make transportation more of a deterrent. David Meredith reminds us of this in one of the book's essays

'Contemporary Views on Transportation' whose subject, approach and conclusions are somewhat at odds with the rest of the volume. On the convicts' living and working conditions the authors are not so much making novel claims as extending the analysis, giving it a statistical basis, and making systematic comparison with other situations of forced labour. On food they count the calories and nutrients in the official ration and find it good even by modern standards and much superior to the contemporary diet of the British working class. Health and medical attention also rate well. On punishment they assess the probability of a convict being flogged each year of his sentence as very low—one in a thousand. Sixty-three per cent of the convicts on this figuring would have been flogged only once or never during their sentence.

To highlight the effectiveness of the convicts as a labour force they compare them with the free migrants of the 19th and 20th centuries. These were much less effective in crude economic terms because they include more dependants. The convicts were overwhelmingly male, young, fit and unlikely to go home. Why the authors insist that the convicts be called migrants (this is one of the new hypotheses or revisions) I do not understand—it breaks down the useful distinction between volunteers and conscripts. To model alternate scenarios to prove that Australia's economy would not have started so well without convicts is demonstrating the obvious and well accepted.

The novel claim of the book is this: "The convicts transported to Australia were ordinary British and Irish working class men and women. They were not professional and habitual criminals, recruited from a distinct class and trained to crime from the cradle." This claim rests on two supports, one sound, the other completely rotten. Previous writers have doubted the worth of the convicts' occupations in the official records—wouldn't convicts put down anything or what they thought advantageous? These authors demonstrate that we should take them seriously. The jobs are described with great particularity—a fish hook maker for instance; the trades claimed by the convicts related well to the specialist industries of the regions in Britain from which they came; and in the colony, according to the 1828 Census, the great majority of the convicts were working at the jobs they had been recorded as pursuing in Britain. It is on the basis of the occupation records that the authors argue that the convicts were a well skilled workforce broadly representative of the British working class. They do not bother much with how complete convicts' training was or how disposed they were to exercise their skill, but on the whole I found this the most persuasive and useful section of the book. The attempt to show that female convicts were also skilled is much less convincing—77% of them were in the vague, general category 'domestic servant'.

This still leaves open the question of whether some

Marjorie Tipping

of the convicts had given up their trade for a life of crime and much might be hidden behind the vague term 'labourer', the largest category in the male occupations, and 'domestic servant'. To prove that the convicts were all ordinary workers the authors rely on the findings of three recent historians of British crime. Each of these stress that most crime was casual and not committed by professionals, but all conclude that in the towns and especially London professionals were operating:

> Perhaps ten per cent of offences . . . were committed by professional burglars, professional pickpockets, experienced thieves (David Philips on the Black Country).
> There were undoubtedly families in the town which remained criminal for generations, and there were young organised gangs which existed mainly by robbery and pickpocketing (David Jones on Manchester).
> Coining and embezzlement . . . attracted men and women who, on occasion, became professionals at the game. The pickpocket, too . . . tended to become professional and belonged to a class of young thief of superior skills and intelligence (George Rudé on London).

These historians are the props for the claim that convicts could not have been professional and habitual criminals because such creatures did not exist!

No scholar has ever claimed that all convicts were professionals. Lloyd Robson and A. G. L. Shaw, the established experts who are damned in this book, were very conscious of the diversity of the convicts. By sifting all the evidence, not just the official records of age, occupation, offence etc, they gave us a composite portrait which included the urban professional and the first offender from the country. Their work is certainly not superseded by this book. Robson's statistics are confirmed, except for prior convictions which come in lower because this study does not include Van Diemen's Land which took more second offenders.

Australians still live with the evidence that there was a criminal underworld in Britain around 1800. Flash talk, used by thieves to keep their doings secret, came here on the convict boats and was in such wide use that some of its terms passed into the language. 'Swag', well known to **Overland** readers, is one of them.

Setting the question of the professionals aside, the statement that convicts were ordinary British and Irish working class men and women is singularly unrevealing. The authors do not appear to be saying that all working people were casual pilferers and thieves; so the convicts were ordinary people except for their propensity to rob—but this is an exception of extraordinary significance and interest to the historians of Australia. What was different in the experience, values and attitudes of these people? Ordinary working people may have had few possessions but they believed it was wrong for other working people to pinch them. Most crime was casual and petty which meant that working people were quite likely to be victims of it. The distinction between the honest and dishonest poor may not have been clearcut, but to obliterate it hobbles our understanding of crime in Britain and Australia's first settlers.

The doctrinaire approach on the origins of the convicts casts a long shadow over the book. Having satisfied themselves that all convicts had formerly been in regular, honest employment, the authors reach conclusions about their employment in New South Wales by abstract reasoning from this premise. Convicts, they assert, would have readily adjusted to work in the colony because they had been "disciplined to stable work patterns at home." Forget you ever heard that convicts failed to show up for work, ran away, and shouted defiance at their overseers. Employers frequently complained that assignment of convicts was a lottery because the convict they got might turn out to be a no-hoper. Disregard this, say the economists, because bosses always complain—our calculations show that convicts were fair average workers. The employers who said after bitter experience that most female convicts were worthless as domestic servants are gently chided by our authors for not knowing their own best interests—these girls, they say, were actually highly skilled. The pity of this is that the authors do have something new and useful to say about the level and range of convict skills; they spoil it by taking an extreme position.

One of the advantages of Tipping's approach is that it brings home the very different paths which led people onto a convict ship. Where she has good information on an individual convict or a group they are given a chapter to themselves and their subsequent careers in Australia are followed closely as the book progresses. Tipping's convicts are both ordinary and extraordinary and she has a proper respect for the mystery of crime. One of the *Calcutta's* convicts was James Grove, a skilled worker in Birmingham. Once it had recorded his skill, *Convict Workers* would take no further interest in him. But Tipping asks "Why should he, with a good job and good prospects, succumb to the temptation of engraving a set of plates for forging a quantity of Bank of England notes, which were easily traced to Birmingham?" It is a difficult question to answer, but we must go on posing it.

John Hirst teaches history at La Trobe University and is the author of Convict Society and its Enemies, a History of Early New South Wales.

Nothing To Lose

Beverley Farmer

Greville Texidor: *In Fifteen Minutes You Can Say A Lot* (Victoria University Press, distributed by Allen & Unwin, $14.95).

The name could be that of an electrical appliance. Her portrait by Mark Gertler is on the cover, all muddy browns but for her blue jewels, or you would not even know what sex she was. A wanderer, a perpetual outsider, beautiful if that counts for anything, she was a writer, in the 40s in New Zealand, under the aegis of that most generous of fellow-writers, Frank Sargeson, and in Australia later. New Zealand has some claim to her, and asserts it in style with this new volume of her published and unpublished fiction.

The editor, Kendrick Smithyman, sums up her life in the Introduction. Born Greville Foster in London in 1902, she drifted in Bohemian circles, then became a professional dancer in variety, in Europe and North and South America. She married and discarded one husband and in 1929 married a Catalan, Manuel Texidor. They separated soon after moving to Spain in 1933, to Tossa de Mar on the Costa Brava, an anti-Fascist rallying point. There a German, Werner Droescher, became her lover. When the Civil War began and he joined the POUM militia, Greville married him Anarchist-style and joined him on the Aragon front until, hope lost, they left for England and did propaganda and relief work from there.

At the start of World War 2 they sailed—now conventionally married and therefore both enemy aliens—to New Zealand. Clearly she hated it. But she began writing and was published: in New Zealand in 1942, England in 1943 and Australia (in Angry Penguins) in 1944. They moved to Australia in 1948 where she wrote three novels, all still unpublished, and worked on her well-known Lorca translations, recently broadcast by the A.B.C. Then they returned to Tossa. Many years later the marriage broke up. She returned alone to Australia, where in 1964 she killed herself. She had two daughters.

Her best-known work is *These Dark Glasses*, told in the voice of Ruth Brown, a Communist. Her lover has died and she has fled wartorn Spain with "the debris of our Spanish dreams" in a notebook, to take refuge in Calanques (Cassis) on the French Riviera, with its summer shallows of socialites and artists. Calanques glows with the prismatic clarity of hatred. The mistral is maddening, the town as tawdry and corrupt as the parasites it harbors. There being "no gas ovens in Calanques," Ruth announces:

> . . . I am going to climb to the top of the rock that has *Vive le Parti Communiste* written around it, and a frightfully sheer drop on the sea side.
>
> It would be symbolical, Jane said rather wearily.

Jane is the harried wife of a neurotic artist, Julian (based on Mark Gertler): they make Ruth far from welcome. She finds herself a room, and drifts into squalid sex with Emile, a strutting hairdresser who thinks she is the *femme du monde* of his gigolo dreams. Like Ruth, Calanques simmers with spleen and ennui, disgust, despair: "Everyone had a wound and people were waiting to pour out acid." Seductions and betrayals flourish. Oh yes, the Left is fashionable: "But really, Jane said with a touch of dismay, the Left Movement isn't going to be *démodé*—why Auden and everyone . . ." Ruth is a spectre at the feast. No one knows or cares about Spain.

> But don't you write? Now [Julian] felt better he could laugh at me. Don't your things have a dreamlike quality?
>
> I hope not. I write for the Save Spain Committee.
>
> Do you really? he said. I gave a picture to it. I gave a picture of mine to some committee. Picasso had given one.

At the end a boatload of them dwindles away while Ruth, cynical, jaunty, prepares for her "long walk to the rock." ("Tell the proletariat not to grieve. This be my requiem. You have nothing to lose. . .").

All Texidor's stories make capital of her breadth of experience. "Maaree" is about an English dancer's precarious life in Spain: her stabs at respectability, her abortion and suicide attempt, her fixation on making her mother die, all drily observed. There are also vivid stories with a Spanish point of view, like "Jesús Jiménez", told by a little refugee who witnesses blankly one of those sordid treacheries that civil war spawns.

In the title story, a woman making her first visit to her husband in gaol sees that his resistance has hardened into a fanaticism which nothing she says can penetrate. "The pride of the persecuted" is the prison within the prison: he no longer wants freedom.

New Zealand in her stories is another prison of the mind—stagnant, a backwater, drab and smug, entrenched in the past. In the unfinished novella "Goodbye Forever", Lili, an exquisite Viennese refugee, can find no foothold there. To an invalid writer feebly in love with her she relates her stages of derangement: desperate to die, she is constantly prevented, a reluctant Lady Lazarus relishing the grim slapstick of it. In "Anyone Home?" Roy, a young returned soldier, finds his hopes of a new life dashed and his fiancée, Lily, no more than a pallid shadow of the older generation. Nothing will change here, nothing loosen their stranglehold.

Where did Texidor belong? Where does she fit, as a writer? Her work has a ring of Jean Rhys, without Rhys's anguished subservience to love—the Rhys of *Good Morning, Midnight.* A touch of Jane Bowles: as anarchic, but not so bizarre, not insouciant. Who has Texidor's political conscience, her sweeping scorn? Never mind: she forged a voice of her own, clipped and bitter, and lost it. Why? Perhaps what turned to gall and wormwood in *These Dark Glasses* and the New Zealand stories was fire in Spain, blood and fire. Perhaps it poured unimpeded into her translations of Lorca, said to be magnificent.

Beverley Farmer lives in Point Lonsdale, Victoria. Her most recent book of fiction is Home Time.

Three New Fictions

Mary Lord

Rodney Hall: *Captivity Captive* (McPhee Gribble, $29.99).
Janette Turner Hospital: *Charades* (University of Queensland Press, $26.95).
Gerard Windsor: *That Fierce Virgin* (Penguin, $11.99).

Gerard Windsor, with a fair amount of literary journalism and two short story collections to his credit, enjoys a reputation as a serious writer whose work deserves serious attention. *That Fierce Virgin* is his longest published work of fiction though, at 131 pages, it is better described as his first novella than his first novel. And a fiercely nasty, at times repugnant piece of work it is though, as one who generally enjoys Windsor's writing, I take no joy in saying so. It is a little unfortunate that his book landed in the same shower with the most recent novels from Rodney Hall and Janette Turner Hospital, both practised novelists and both writing at the height of their powers. Windsor is a talented writer, at present more at home in the narrower confines of the short story; the greater freedoms possible to the novelist have not, in this first attempt, provoked him to make good use of the broader canvas but have, rather, led to his undoing.

The 'fierce virgin' is Maura, an Irish doctor, born out of wedlock and, because of it, a social outcast. On or about the twentyfifth of March each year she finds a man to take to her bed with the intention of conceiving a child. The annual ritual, performed in parody of one of the classical paintings of the conception of Christ, is followed by an annual visit to London for an abortion. This year's hapless man is an Australian whose business is selling religious accessories. He takes his pleasure carelessly but subsequently becomes resentful about his peremptory dismissal and the way he has been used while, at the same time, he hopes that this 'one night stand' may not be his last. His Australianess is not visible in the story or in his character; he represents a crass modern culture which lacks a mythological past and which sees religion as an area to be exploited for financial gain.

The symbolism associating Maura, named "in honour of the Blessed Virgin" and her obsessive annual travesties of Christ's conception are of central significance to whatever it is that Windsor is on about, but just what that is cannot be easily determined. In Yeats, the "fierce virgin and her Star" signal the collapse of an empire, the destruction of the old Gods and the ancient myths, the birth of a new religion and a new civilisation. Is Maura, in repeatedly aborting the new life within her, signalling the destruction of the old order in Ireland (or the world) and its collapse into chaos? She is undoubtedly a liberated woman, educated, a woman of science, financially independent and having no use for men in her scheme of things except as manifestations of the Angel of the Lord who annually impregnates her. Are we to regard her as a metaphor for the aggressive sterility Windsor sees in Feminism taken to extremes? Or is she contemporary Ireland perverting the religion of her ancestors? Or is she simply a madwoman rebelling against her illegitimacy?

I confess that I find Windsor's descriptions of a drawing of a gravid uterus of a woman recently hanged almost at the end of the ninth month of her pregnancy, which Maura has framed behind her desk in her surgery, extremely repugnant not because the woman is headless and the foetus dead, but because of the almost lascivious pleasure Maura takes in her patients' reactions to the drawing and her protracted musings on the more macabre and horrific aspects of its existence.

The act of childbirth itself is described in terms which accentuate its animality and in which the woman has no significance other than as a bestial vehicle, at best a "giant sow". Or, to look at it another way, as a temporary carriage which has an impregnating man (or angel?) at one end and a human infant (dead or alive) at the other. This is to take the writing at a literal level where it must function logically no matter how resounding its symbolic resonances may be, or may be intended to be. And they need to be more powerful than they are here to render palatable the wallowing in gory physiological detail but I think it unlikely. Maura's description of her annual abortions offer an example which demonstrates my objections:

> . . . The mother waits there, supported, and the grim remnants of her child are allowed to brush against her on their way to the grave. The shaft has gone right up through the trunk and the blood is still gushing as the body is prised away from its station. The skull has been crushed, but it is the untidiness of the hair that is most

subhuman. A head whose faculties seem unmarshalled, in disarray, a head entirely without control or direction. The intact limbs follow the banjaxed trunk; they flop and swing, jangled and useless. They could have done things once, they were a growth of hope, the sudden extension of their mother's reach, her access into a life beyond her own. Ah yes, the blessed fruit of her womb . . .

None of the characters engages our sympathy which may be neither here nor there if there are other compensations, but neither do they come to life except as ciphers. There is the feeling that the writer declines to engage with his characters emotionally, that they exist only as intellectual constructs. For the reader this makes them bloodless, however interesting in terms of action and circumstance. Yet, as I suggested earlier, the writing is fierce and passionate, angry even. But the feeling which informs the book is inspired by ideas or abstractions, not the human condition. And neither the ideas nor the abstractions are debated or, to put it bluntly, clearly displayed. At the literal level, the novella compels us to contemplate the idea of woman as mindless animal. Maura the woman is also seen as a parody of the Virgin Mary as woman and as mother but to what purpose? Obviously social, moral and religious issues are being raised but they are not explored, much less resolved.

That Fierce Virgin fizzles at its climax and the writing, often emotionally powerful, becomes diffuse and vague as the character of Maura takes on the added weight of ancient Ireland, "the creation of old Druids . . . what an ancient religion will fashion." It is as though the book carried Windsor along to a certain point and then collapsed under the weight of the symbols he loaded onto it, leaving him not knowing where to go. The structure he invented for his work cannot carry the burden of meaning he would impose on it resulting in an irrevocable loss of impetus and, more's the pity, sense.

Insofar as the family may be regarded as a microcosm of society, *Captivity Captive* can be seen as reflecting a view of nineteenth century Australia, self-contained, morbidly inward-looking, fiercely proud, contemptuous of the outside world yet needing its respect just as the Malone family does. There are twelve of them in the family, farming their property, Paradise, somewhere on the coast of New South Wales. They are dominated, perhaps ruled is the better word, by their giants of parents (Pa is six foot ten and Ma two inches shorter), both of them taciturn and humourless titans, both intent on building a fiefdom for their tribe.

The family is held together by the iron will and the physical force of Pa who beat the brains out of the one who tried to escape. Patrick, who tells the tale is the clever one and is sent to school because "to celebrate our little world, the family needed a historian, a law-man, a clerk, an accountant." But the family, turned in upon itself, is destined for large-scale tragedy involving multiple murders and the breaking of the incest taboo.

The story is based on an unsolved crime committed in 1898 and from the few facts recorded about it Hall has created a brooding and powerful story of pioneering Australia, of the pathology of a family carving out a place for itself in a country ancient and primeval. The writing is admirably assured, its rhythms deftly controlled to produce the sombre, ominous effect which is essential to the terrible climax of the tale and to locate it as a tiny event in a miniscule fragment of historical time and pre- and post-historical time:

> We stood in a drifting grove of macrozamia palms which had most probably been alive when Captain James Cook first sighted the land, and even a hundred years earlier, when Dutch traders quit these shores are unlikely to offer any treasure worth taking; alive when King Henry VIII outraged all credulity by naming himself head of the Church for a whole nation despite every article of believable faith—yes, that is how ancient these stumpy tufted trees were, these same individuals, being among the longest-living things on earth, elders of all plant life and animal life, now alert as a committee around us, passing in review, fans of leaf sprouting elegant headdresses, a convocation of weirds, hiving their huge phallic seedcases which would break apart on ripening raw red, rot and collapse in the hope of tempting flocks of pterodactyls to feast at them, to come gliding on leather wings beneath the spotted-gum canopy, wheeling, settling, crocodile jaws busy and ponderous lizard bodies shuffling over bark-mulch, feasting right to the foot of two tall rocks which stopped the heart, rocks solid like our parents yet a hundred times bigger, brooding, moss-grown judgments, heavy as the moon, knowing as the heart.

It is not enough to say that this is the writing of a poet, it is the writing of one in superb control of the language, one rightly confident of his power to bend it in the service of his imagination. *Captivity Captive* offers enormous pleasure to the reader who still rejoices in such things. Hall recreates a world and a way of life which disappeared finally and forever with the First World War by which time "our worn-out heraldries had mouldered to a dumbshow of tatters" to be superseded by "the new man, in tranquil offices, signing yet another promise with his executive pen, speaking by telephone or buzzing secretaries." This is a magnificent achievement from a great story-

teller, a witty book too and one with comic moments which serve only to heighten the drama so skilfully unfolded. In the way it mythologizes our past without glamorizing it, it immeasurably enriches our literature.

Charades, as its title tantalizingly suggests, is a multi-layered and multi-faceted work for which words such as 'dazzling' and 'brilliant' spring to mind but must be discarded only because they have been overworked and often misapplied. At the level of story it is concerned with the quest of its principal character, Charade Ryan, for her father, a golden boy, desired lover of the important women in Charade's life, fallen aristocrat, university teacher, successful writer etc. etc. While this may make *Charades* seem to resemble those novels once described as 'true romances' the resemblance is only skin deep and only one of the many threads of romance which run through the novel.

Elements of mystery are there too in abundance, not merely in the tracing of Nicholas Truman, the lost father, but in unravelling the past and present of the enigmatic Verity who constantly recurs in Charade's life. There are other romances and other mysteries; in fact, there are interlocking webs of both but these by no means exhaust the enchantments of this wonderful book. There is a galaxy of richly-wrought characters of whom the most unforgettable is the prostitute, ex-barmaid Bea, Charade's mother, with her tribe of kids and her zest for life, a Dionysiac figure who is contrasted with her childhood friend, Kay, cerebral, Apollonian even, though in love with Nicholas as Bea is. There is much word-play (B and K obviously providing the basis for some) including some clever punning, many obvious and not-so-obvious literary allusions, references to outstanding storytellers like Chaucer and Henry James, the latter obliquely brought in with a throw-away line about 'the beast in the carpet'.

Much more obvious, but not without its own subtleties, is Charade's wooing of the physicist, Koenig. Each night she tells him a story which is a fragment of her own story, imitating Scheherazade (her own name is pronounced Shuhrahd—get it?) and inviting comparisons with *A Thousand Nights and One Night*. It should be clear by now that, in *Charades*, Janette Turner Hospital is developing the narrative arts as they have evolved through the literatures of the western world and welding them together for her purposes which, at this level, surreptitiously discourses on the art of narrative.

If this were all, it would be enough to satisfy both the greediest and the most critical reader. But it is not all. That Charade's lover, Koenig, is a physicist is by no means accidental. Through him the reader is given a surreptitious and very palatable lesson on Particle Theory, on matter and anti-matter, on 'the grand unified theories' of the creation of the universe. Janette Turner Hospital demonstrates that as these theories disturb all preconceived theories relating to time and space by their postulations about the existence and non-existence of sub-atomic particles and the creation of holograms from them, so, assuming that a unifying theory would similarly embrace the behaviour of human beings, she constructs her narrative to move freely and, such is her magical craftsmanship, seamlessly in time through various stages of the past and the present and, in place, between Melbourne, Brisbane, Tambourine Mountain, Boston, London and Toronto. Not scientific, I am on dangerous ground here but only in relation to current theories in physics and not in relation to what is achieved in the novel.

The more profound aspects of this novel are subtly imbedded in the novel along with much that it is beyond the scope of this article to attempt. I have extracted some of them here merely to show some of the intricacies which underpin the relatively simple and, to a degree, straightforward story which holds it together. There are, for example, some delicious comic scenes, a brilliant satire on English gentility, sexual encounters, moments of high drama, of suspense, of pathos; in short, everything the most hard-to-please reader of novels could wish for. All of this in prose as clear and as seductive as crystal:

> Bea was obsessed with the high school, though she herself did not expect ever to go there. "Too dumb," she would shrug, not at all embarassed. "In *some* ways," she would add, rolling her eyes. Already, while only in the tenth grade (Kay, eleven months younger, trailing behind her in the sixth), Bea earned ten shillings a week working in a shop near the high school; she slipped cigarettes under the counter; she was very familiar with the high school grounds.
>
> It was a new high school on the edge of Brisbane, where the rainforest came down from Mt Glorious in long slender lizards' tongues and licked at the edges of the city . . .

Charades, in a year which I have heard described as 'a bumper year for novels in Australia', is a richly deserved success, an outstanding and triumphant literary achievement.

Mary Lord is a Melbourne freelance writer currently working on a biography of Hal Porter.

Socialist History Revealed

John Sendy

Raymond Evans: *The Red Flag Riots, A Study of Intolerance* (University of Queensland Press, $24.95).
Edgar Ross: *These Things Shall Be! Bob Ross, Socialist Pioneer—His Life and Times* (Mulavon, $19.95).

For most Australians today the red flag, if it is seen or thought about at all, symbolizes Stalinist oppression, Maoist madness, anarchistic rabble-rousing and trouble. Yet the red flag once had popularity, ardent defenders and was the focus of public controversy and furore leading to governmental bans, street battles and bloodshed.

For example, in February 1919 the eyes of local farmers bulged when a score of navvies arrived for a new construction job at Samsonvale in the Brisbane Valley: the navvies held aloft an enormous red flag and sang the "Red Flag" anthem. Scuffles and hullabaloo followed. The red flag flew over the Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney Trades Halls in those years and at workers' meetings and marches throughout the country. Queensland's labor Daily Standard claimed the red flag "has ever stood for freedom as against tyranny," symbolizing "the discontent of the downtrodden, the revolt of the discontented." It represented, too, the recently-successful Bolshevik revolution in Russia and widespread working class revolutionary actions which startled all Europe after the end of the 1914-18 war.

These books tell much about the supporters and opponents of the red flag in the early part of this century in Australia. Under regulations of the War Precautions Act the flying of the red flag became an offence. The regulations were defied and a series of arrests in Melbourne resulted in gaol or fines for Bob Ross, Dick Long, Jane Aarons, Jennie Baines (the former English suffragette), Bella Lavender (the first woman graduate of Melbourne University), and others.

The Russian community in Australia numbered thousands in those times. Ironically, many Russians were refugees from Tsarist oppression and the aftermath of the defeated 1905 revolution. They hailed the 1917 revolution, established Russian Workers Associations in several states, produced a paper called Knowledge and Unity, set up libraries and a Field Naturalists Club. The Russian communities strongly supported the Bolshevik government. They aroused the prejudices and ire of those who hated both reds and foreigners.

A Brisbane march of 400 people protested against the War Precautions Act in March 1919. The One Big Union Propaganda League and the Russian Workers Association organised it supported by the Trades Hall. Huge red flags unfurled and sparked skirmishes with police and some arrests. This demonstration provoked sections of the press and the RSL into frenzied panic and opposition. The following night thousands, led by returned soldiers, tried to storm the headquarters of the Russian Workers Association. It was a violent night with shots, missiles, bayonets and blood. Many police were injured by the mob. Other wild scenes occurred the next day. Later, thirteen of the red flag demonstrators received gaol terms averaging six months and Alexander Zuzenko, the acknowledged leader of the Russian Workers Association, was deported with several of his comrades.

In his Introduction Raymond Evans says:

> Three nights of violent rioting, several weeks of intermittent showcase trials of local leftists, as well as the more furtive internment and expulsion of Russian spokespersons occurred—and explosion of organised intolerance, where action was sustained by equally aggressive anti-radical, anti-alien propaganda. Although the conflict was centred in Brisbane, its repressive ramifications gradually spread statewide. An examination of how and why such events could occur in Queensland in the aftermath of World War I is the purpose of this book.

The painstaking study of these little-known events has resulted in an analysis which both holds interest and provides enlightenment about our past and present.

I first heard of the Brisbane Red Flag Riots from Norman Jeffery, one of the organisers of the original protest against the War Precautions Act who was sentenced to six months gaol as a result. Forty-five years after the event he still talked enthusiastically of the huge Russian, Alexander Zuzenko, who was deported. Another old communist, Tom Payne, told me about how he stowed away in Zuzenko's cabin on his way to attend the Fourth Congress of the Comintern when Zuzenko was being deported for the *second* time in 1922.

Then, Zuzenko came to my attention in the writings of the distinguished Soviet author, Konstantin Paustovsky. He figures prominently in several of the early chapters of Paustovsky's *The Restless Years*, the sixth volume of the famous autobiographical *Story of a Life*. Paustovsky and Zuzenko were friends and neighbours in 1924 when working on Na Vakhtye (On Watch), a seafarers journal, together with Mikhail Bulgakov and Novikov-Priboy. Paustovsky described Zuzenko as "a fearless man of immense physical strength," stubborn and kind, "a man with no doubts," widely read, "somewhat rude and sarcastic." They travelled to work together searching for cigarette butts along the railway line in those hard times. When Lenin died they filed past his bier in the Hall of Pillars in

Red Square. Zuzenko was on the reserve of the Soviet merchant navy and later became a captain.

My half-hearted efforts to find out more about Zuzenko yielded little, so imagine my delight to find *The Red Flag Riots* brimming with the Australian part of his story and containing several fine photographs. It reveals, too, that Zuzenko became yet another victim of Stalin's bloody purges.

Like others of various political strains, Edgar Ross was crudely caricatured in *The True Believers*, portrayed as a churlish, furtive, foolish fanatic. Yet his family was cultured and talented; his father and brother had distinguished careers and Edgar has been a notable figure in the Australian labor movement and is the author of several books.

Bob Ross, the subject of this book, whom John Curtin described as "brave, lovable, tolerant, majestic," was a prominent labor movement journalist and writer in the first decades of the century. He became the leading propagandist and organiser of the Victorian Socialist Party which had among its members the important poets and playwrights Louis Esson, Bernard O'Dowd, Marie Pitt, Frank Wilmot, Mary Fullerton and Dick Long. He played a prominent role in the anti-conscription campaign and as a leader of the Australian Peace Alliance. He edited The Socialist and Ross's Monthly and established Ross's Book Service. He helped found the ACTU, became a vice-President of the ALP, served on the Council of the University of Melbourne and was a trustee of the National Art Gallery in Melbourne.

Edgar Ross describes his father's association with leading literary figures:

> He often called on Wilmot at his counter at Cole's Book Arcade . . . I can remember Frank complaining bitterly about the lack of government assistance for the fostering of the arts. We travelled to the Dandenongs to visit Bernard O'Dowd in his humpy perched on the mountainside among the tree ferns and shrubs, where he worshipped the muse with his 'soul mate' Marie Pitt. E. J. Brady with his lanky figure and ginger thatch of hair, somehow resembling more of a bullocky than the popular conception of a poet, was a frequent visitor to the Socialist Hall, where he was often joined by Le Gay Brereton. A staunch friend was Kate Baker, Joseph Furphy's mentor. In recognition of the 'services of the Ross family' in keeping Furphy's work alive, Kate Baker arranged with the publishers of a reprint of *Rigby's Romance* for the royalties to be shared with me.

Jack London sent Bob Ross copies of his books and Ross corresponded with Upton Sinclair.

Bob Ross was of that unfortunate mixture not uncommon in those days: a socialist who stoutly espoused the White Australia policy. Yet he was a considerable socialist theoretician. In 1920 he published the booklet *Revolution in Russia and Australia* in which he welcomed and supported the Russian revolution but argued that the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Russian methods did not suit Australia; the local movement, he said, needed to concentrate on democratic methods. Democracy, he claimed, was an integral part of socialism and socialists must champion liberty of thought and free speech, more democracy rather than less. It is a staggering world tragedy that the communist movement spurned such advice.

There are some minor mistakes in the book. For example, it was not Joe Hill but Bill Casey who wrote **"Bump Me Into Parliament"**. There are some irritating assertions about the 'triumphs' and 'universality' of Marxism-Leninism, but my main criticism is that the author concentrated too much on his version of the vicissitudes of the socialist movement of the times and too little upon the life of Bob Ross. As a result, Bob Ross tends to remain too shadowy a figure despite useful facts and anecdotes. Generally, as a man, father, husband, friend, he hardly gets a guernsey. While a most valuable book which reveals fascinating episodes about events and people it still leaves room for a more concentrated biography of an important Australian.

John Sendy is the author of a forthcoming biography of the communist veteran, Ralph Gibson.

Craftsman and Happy Warrior

Rod Moran

John Morrison: *The Happy Warrior* (Pascoe Publishing, $9.95).

The Happy Warrior is a marvellous cross-section of John Morrison's literary opinions and advice. It also contains vividly drawn portraits of writers who were his friends and who are important parts of Australian literary history. In addition, there are memoirs, pastoral pieces and essays on natural history and ecology.

This is also a volume generously studded with finely focussed vignettes of compelling personalities and of encounters with the Australian landscape. Morrison tells, for example, of the swagman, ageing and alone, who lived for many years on a property near Eltham where Alan Marshall lived. Marshall had met the swaggie on the road while travelling himself and, so moved was he by the man and his sad story, that he invited him to settle, for as long as he liked, in a small hut on the land. The swagman was a Swede who, as a very young man, had missed his ship when

it left port. He was stranded in a strange land, with no papers, no legal identity and unable to speak the language. Someone managed to convince him to go harvesting. Thinking that 'harvesting' was a place where he might find help he struck out along the road. So began a lifetime's wandering. Morrison's account of the way in which Marshall managed to get Albert the swaggie the old age pension is a heartening part of this account of human compassion, full of sadness, humor, strength and hope.

Morrison also provides a moving autobiographical account of the night he "fell in love with Australia":

> It was a Riverina night, warm and still, with a diamond-studded sky, water black as ink outside a ribbon of gold cast by a full moon, and a silence broken only by the occasional cry and shuffle of a startled duck. It was a wet season, and in that flat country there were many places where the course of the creek was hard to follow among the partly submerged trees. We got lost, rowed all night through the dreaming bush, and made it back to the homestead just as dawn was breaking. There was something in the tranquil magic of those hours . . .

In passages such as this, in pieces such as "Pastoral" and "Blue and Yellow Macaw", as well as in extended essays such as "The Big Drink", Morrison displays his sensitivity to and love of delicate wildlife and the landscape, evoking and expounding on their textures, beauty and vulnerabilities.

Like his dear friend Alan Marshall, he has also had some acquaintance with the Australian swagman. One of them, Leo the Liar by name, once told Morrison his theory that the only possible god was the triumphant God of Evil:

> The basis of his theory was that He had given us a house (Earth) of limited size and resources to live in, and at the same time made the act of procreation the greatest ecstacy of which the human body is capable. To make sure that we succeeded in setting up a sweet little hell on Earth for ourselves He'd built in an incontrollable lust for possessions and power. Finally, and just for the heck of it, He'd reached out and connected the organs of sublime joy with our drainage systems. Leo thought it a scream, [dwelling] with fiendish glee on such a simple explanation of the Great Mystery . . .

Various of Leo the Liar's notable quirks of mind and character provided Morrison with the raw materials he used in works such as "The Sleeping Doll" and "Port of Call".

The portraits contained here of Australian writers such as Frank Dalby Davison, Alan Marshall and Judah Waten are fresh, humane, informative, with touches of wry humor that reveal a keen eye for the foibles and incongruities of great artists. For example, writing of Waten he notes:

> He loves the Bush—when he is in the City; when actually in the Bush he can rarely be prevailed upon to keep silent on Flaubert or the situation in the Middle East long enough for you to hear what the Bush itself is saying.

I only met Judah Waten once, late in his life, but Morrison's profile rings true to my memories of that occasion.

Another notable feature of this collection is its general tone of generosity to fellow writers, honesty and critical acumen. It all reads with a feeling of having a cold beer with good friends while engaging in amiable conversation on issues that matter. It is entirely bereft of literary bitchiness and the intellectual pretension and malice that so often pass for wit in some circles. Overall, the book is knitted together by skeins of gentle passion for the subjects and the people written about, as well as by a consummate style.

Rod Moran is a freelance writer. His second book, a collection of poetry is Against the Era, *(Fremantle Arts Centre Press).*

Commonwealth Accommodations

Peter Sekuless

C. J. Lloyd: *Parliament and the Press: The Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery 1901-88* (Melbourne University Press, $22.50).

The late Ian Fitchett, then political correspondent for the Melbourne Age, basked in Canberra's winter sunshine on the steps of Parliament House and in the glory of having written most of the details of the Budget to be brought down in the evening in that morning's paper.

"I'll make you eat crow for this," said Menzies alighting from the prime ministerial car.

"Provided it is garnished with the sauce of your embarrassment, Prime Minister, I will gladly eat crow."

That story is not contained in *Parliament and the Press.* Neither is the one about the journalist who fell out of the Press Gallery into the Chamber below. Full of aplomb and liquor, he bowed to Mr Speaker and made a dignified exit. Reviewers of this book have criticised the lack of such anecdotes.

But do we really need another book of parliamentary anecdotes? The political memoir as exemplified by Fred Daly and Barry Cohen is simply a string of more

or less funny stories. This book is an expanded master's thesis and still bears the hallmarks of academic endeavour, but where oh where did the bibliography go? I suspect the publisher but more of that anon.

Nonetheless this up-dated and expanded thesis reads well. Lloyd rarely departs from his brief "to describe and account for the distinctive relationship that has developed between Australia's Federal Parliament and the press that reports it."

Basically, the story is one of Parliament grudgingly conceding privilege and space. The politicians had little option but to accommodate the press within their walls when they moved from Melbourne to the virtual isolation of a House in a sheep paddock on the Limestone Plains. Politicians need and want their deliberations to reach the people. Their own efforts to publicise their activities—Hansard and parliamentary radio broadcasts—have been manifest failures. They have had no option but to rely on the press.

Therefore the highpoints of the relationship have been those occasions when the press has pushed its luck and Parliament has been prepared to assert its authority. Naturally the Browne and Fitzpatrick case where two men were gaoled for breaching parliamentary privilege features in the chapter "Ming's Dynasties 1949-1965". Similarly the chapter on the Scullin period concentrates on the cables from London leaked to Joe Alexander of the Melbourne Herald. This incident was important because the Speaker of the House of Representatives took the action of denying Alexander access to that part of Parliament under his control. Other famous press gallery incidents such as Alan Reid and the "Thirty-Six Faceless Men" which influenced the outcome of the 1963 election do not feature because the Parliament was not involved.

Lloyd does depart from his brief to describe the relationship between various prime ministers and the press. From hard-won experience he details the differing tactics adopted to manipulate the media. One of the failures of this book attributable to the publishers is the lack of information on C. J. Lloyd. The blurb gives the impression of an academic with but fleeting acquaintance of the Parliament.

Do not be misled. In the years leading to the Labor victory of 1972, Lloyd was to Barnard what Freudenberg was to Whitlam. His first book, with Professor Gordon Reid, *Out of the Wilderness* recalled the pre-Whitlam years; his second, with Andrew Clark, *Kerr's King Hit* was arguably the best of the post-1975 election quickies.

Lambasting publishers is fun but I am at a loss here because there appear to be two publishers. The book is published under the joint imprint of MUP and "Commonwealth Parliament Bicentenary Publication" (one of the last gasps of the Ryan era). The latter bears a strange logo most reminiscent of the orb of the British royal family, but which I suspect is supposed to be symbolic of the Speaker's Mace in the House of Representatives and the Black Rod in the Senate. Nowhere is MUP's role made explicit, nor are we told that *Parliament and the Press* is one of four books commissioned by the Commonwealth Parliament for 1988; the others being *The People's Palace* by David Solomon, *Acts of Parliament* by Gavin Souter and a scholarly work by Gordon Reid yet to appear.

Publishing limitations, however, do not detract from the value of this book. Its usefulness will outlive the hagiography and cobbled anecdotes which usually pass for political history in this country. Not surprisingly the book is already in a second printing, and the extensive chapter notes tell why. Although we all know that the media is all-pervasive and exerts an all-too strong an influence on political life, there is a dearth of primary and secondary sources.

Scholars will applaud this book, researchers will treasure it; mind you, I would have relished the opportunity to re-read the story about the elephant on the steps of Parliament House.

Peter Sekuless has worked as a Canberra lobbyist for ten years and has written a number of books.

Reading Australian Culture

Andrew Bear

Graeme Turner: *National Fictions: Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narrative* (Allen and Unwin, $14.95).

John Fiske, Bob Hodge and Graeme Turner: *Myths of Oz: Reading Australian Popular Culture* (Allen and Unwin, $24.95 and $15.95).

These books are the first two in a new series, Australian Cultural Studies, edited by John Tulloch. They are contributions to what Turner calls the "developing discipline" of cultural studies in this country.

National Fictions offers analyses of recent Australian novels and films in order to generalise about Australian culture. It is "based on the conviction that narratives are ultimately produced by the culture; thus they generate meanings . . . that are *articulations* . . . of the culture." Turner is therefore concerned with interpretation, not evaluation. From the stated point of view, all narratives are of equal interest, regardless of quality. Thus among films discussed, *The Man from Snowy River* receives more attention than *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Popular television narrative is excluded, however, on the grounds that it "seems crucially different". By contrast the novels discussed are all by authors who have received critical acclaim. Successful

popular novelists such as Shute, Corris, and McCullough receive no mention, even though they deal with themes that seem central to the concerns of the book.

The approach to Australian popular culture in *Myths of Oz* is to take aspects of ordinary life as 'texts', and then to 'read' them in a manner that is reminiscent of what used to be called 'close reading' in university departments of English. Some of the texts chosen include the pub, the beach, unemployment, tourism, monuments, shopping and houses. The readings are intended to reveal the cultural meaning of the chosen aspects of Australian life. The authors argue that there is no single or monolithic culture, but rather that "richness of meaning" can be found in the variety of ordinary life.

Both books deal with material that is obviously of wide interest, and both avoid the impenetrable prose that has characterised so much work in cultural studies and semiotics. *Myths of Oz* contains many insightful analyses of aspects of common life, and much that will provide the reader with pleasurable moments of recognition or opportunies for disagreement. *National Fictions* similarly provides interpretations of films and novels that are sometimes interesting or stimulating.

Both books also claim to make significant contributions to the study of Australian culture, but at this more serious level the achievement is quite modest. Turner's book, despite the trappings of cultural studies, is actually old-fashioned. It rehearses tired old debates about the bush, convictism, national character, individualism and Australianism without reaching any conclusions that differ significantly from those of the literary and film critics with whom he disputes on virtually every page. The four most quoted authors are John Docker, H. P. Heseltine, Brian Kiernan and John Tulloch, with whom he spends an inordinate amount of time in agreement, disagreement, or minor modification. It is to Turner's credit that he corrects much of the naive nonsense that has been written about Australian culture, but less to his credit that the following is not untypical:

> Our versions of nature and society are, then, fictions which prefer certain meanings, generate certain myths, and produce certain ideological results. Cunningham quotes Marx's assertion that . . .

Myths of Oz is good at the level of observation, but otherwise hard to take seriously. All too often the connection between the detailed reading of the 'text' and the cultural meaning it is supposed to reveal is lost in verbal posturing. For example, the chosen text for the analysis of Australian tourism is the Sheraton Hotel at Ayers Rock. The authors note that tourists take photographs of the rock, and write:

> The camera is like the international hotel: it contains the contradictions of the unique strangeness 'out there', with the conventional familiarity of 'in here'. Looking through the camera lens is like looking through the hotel's plate glass window: it is a way of standing inside culture observing nature.

Elsewhere we read that "The beach legitimates the display of the body and the pleasure of the voyeur." This insight is illustrated by a photograph of a bare-breasted woman on a beach. The trouble is that it is not an insight at all, but more of a commonplace. There is a slickness about *Myths of Oz* that fails to obscure an essential hollowness.

Reasonably we might ask of two new books in a new series on Australian Cultural Studies whether we learn anything new or useful about Australia from reading them. We might also ask, with reason, whether the approach, claimed to be new, convincingly demonstrates that the methodology is more revealing than those of other disciplines such as history and sociology. To both questions this reviewer can only answer no.

Andrew Bear teaches literature and communication at Flinders University, S.A.

In Admirable Contrast

David Matthews

Neilma Sidney: *Sunday Evening* (McPhee Gribble/ Penguin, $9.99).

As almost no-one needs to be told, the short story is firmly established as a dominant form in our literary culture. Under the influence of the requirements of the literary journals and short story competitions, the fashion is for short, snappy stories of about two to five thousand words, perpetuating the idea that terseness and laconicism are vital characteristics of Australian fiction.

Considered according to these criteria, Neilma Sidney's new collection, *Sunday Evening*, is not a fashionable book. Its five stories average about thirty or forty pages in length; neither the individual stories nor the book as a whole shape towards pointed narrative closure. The setting is not the fast lane of postmodern youth, but the deepening twilight, as the title suggests, of its characters' later years and their often languid lives. But these emerge as positive attributes of the book. In combining an 'old fashioned' focus on event and character with the introspective first person narration characteristic of much recent fiction, Sidney has produced a refreshing book, an admirable contrast to current vogue.

Joanna, a woman in her fifties at the outset, is the first person narrator of these linked stories. Her closest friend is Anne, though the two of them live in different continents. They once were married to brothers, but both are now long divorced. For them, relationships are encumbered with all the responsibilities of women who have children, grandchildren and former husbands to think about, and lovers with families of their own.

In the first story, "Gift for the Children", Joanna and her lover Chris, Anne and her companion Henry have managed to get away from their commitments long enough to spend time together in Italy. The story dwells on the changes occasioned by Anne and Henry's decision to marry, after years of a less conventional relationship. "A Stranger in the Dordogne", focuses on another holiday, though by now, further on in time, Chris is no longer with Joanna. In this story, there is a disruption of carefully laid plans with the unexpected visit of Bernard, a student of archaeology in his early thirties. "The Skirt" completes a triptych of closely connected stories about Joanna, Anne and Henry. The final two stories, "Families are for the Birds" and "The Fountain of Tbilisi" are later still in time; Joanna is older, and some of her relationships and friends are dead. The first of these is the only story set in Australia, charting briskly and affectionately the last two decades in the life of an oddball friend, Vic Keating, who lives to be over ninety. In the last story, by contrast, Joanna is travelling in Russia with a much younger man as a guide.

Though the chronological span of the stories covers many years, the interest is not in a broad sweep but the minutiae of individual incidents. The overall effect is of a series of closely examined portraits rather than one large canvas. It is this kind of detailed, close observation that Sidney's prose, on the evidence of this book, suits best. It is straightforward, with little in the way of ornate description; she conveys a sense of place and the texture of important events in her characters' lives through the vividness of Joanna's impressions rather than brilliance of descriptive technique. The real strength is the dialogue, which though plentiful doesn't attempt to say too much, nicely balancing the inwardness of Joanna's narration.

This is a book of cosmopolitan breadth. Reading the first few pages provoked two impressions, almost simultaneously. The first was the pleasure of an encounter with an original voice in fiction; then the worry surfaced that the welter of place names from Europe to North America and Australia, and the emphasis on apparently limitless travel, fine food and the cocktail hour was the sign of a book that would become a window onto an impossibly rarefied milieu. The initial impression of unreflective hedonism is gradually alleviated, to be dispelled utterly in the shock of the opening of the third story. Joanna's real concerns are humane ones, as the last few pages of "The Fountain of Tbilisi" affirm. It is largely a story of alienation, as opposed to the camaraderie of the earlier stories, and Joanna has become a lonelier figure later in the book. Frustrated by the emotional repression of Dimitri, a model Soviet son, she eventually abandons respectability, pulls off her sandals and climbs into the fountain, encouraging him to join her and acknowledge that authority is not as important as the overcoming of the barriers imposed by age, distance, language and race. Joanna's story is a compassionate attempt to find the positive aspects of the growing smallness of the world.

David Matthews is a postgraduate and part time teacher in the English Department at the University of Melbourne.

Including a Radicle

Elizabeth Riddell

Harry Windsor: *The Heart of a Surgeon: The Memoirs of Harry Windsor* (New South Wales University Press, $29.95).

You can tell a lot about the author from the audience at a book launching. These lively memoirs by Harry Windsor, the celebrated cardio-thoracic surgeon who in 1968 performed Australia's first heart transplant would have enjoyed it, or at least have been at ease among his family, some patients, a great number of formidably mature medical men and women, many of them older than he was when he died in 1987 aged 73.

In the lift descending from the foyer of St Vincent's Private Hospital in Sydney to its all-purpose conference/entertainment centre I was the only 'civilian', tucked in with balding, beaky, spectacled, pale or ruddy-cheeked cheerful men wearing their best bedside manners, on their arms wives who had the confident bearing of Ward sisters. There were also Sisters of Charity, who run the hospital, in their post-Vatican II uniforms of pastel blouse and skirt and pendant with a little gold cross. I am one of those who sentimentally regrets the passing of the soaring headdress, the oversize clanking rosary swinging from the leather belt clasping the black/brown habit.

In a few minutes everybody was drinking champagne, eating chicken sandwiches and buying the book from a table-top. Trade was brisk. The several writers present, including Harry Windsor's son Gerard, were quite impressed. This is no way to go about reviewing a book. I have to confess an interest. The first time I met Dr Windsor he told me, in not quite these words but plainly enough, that I would have to have my cancerous right lung removed. That was in 1963. In the event I think two-thirds of it went.

I was amazed at the man—his authority, straight-

forwardness, a kind of stillness. Even his good looks were somehow reassuring. I was putting trust in him, of course, but he was also putting trust in me. When he saw me off from the Cameron Wing (his territory) at St Vincent's he gave me a short pep talk and then admonished me, "Be good."

Doctors do not enjoy a good press though they still have a high rating with people who need their services. A lot of things, including the setting up of a national health system in Britain, and then in Australia have happened since Harry Windsor graduated in medicine at the University of Sydney.

His kindness to individuals did not imply sentimentality.

Some quotes: "There are many misconceptions as to the value of World War II as a training ground for young Australian surgeons in the AIF. The fact is, it was of very little value. The campaigns were for the most part short sharp affairs involving relatively few men. Most of the surgery was done by established surgeons who had completed their training before the war."

On smoking: "The government after years of prodding eventually banned television advertising of cigarettes . . . so the vested interests saw to it that every time a try was scored or the cricket ball hurried to the boundary the camera focussed either under the posts on Winfield or on the fence and Benson and Hedges."

On his Catholic education in Brisbane: "In the ten years I spent with the Brothers I never met one like the caricature in Ron Blair's play, The Christian Brother."

On his visits to south-east Asian hospitals: "Chinese surgeons unhesitantly admit mistakes and display great willingness to learn from them."

On conflict: "Every advance (in medicine) has been a pain in the neck for governments. In recent years we have seen the arrival of computerised axial tomography (the CAT scanner), nuclear magnetic resonance and digital subtraction angiography . . . everybody wanted a new machine but the government in a mysterious process of selection decided which hospital or community should be favoured. The ordinary citizen understands neither the doctor nor the bureaucrat. He fails to appreciate that there is a conflict between the doctor who wants to make everything available and the bureaucrat who finds it economically impossible to provide it."

On euthanasia: "I often wonder where are all the people who want to be put to sleep. In forty years of doctoring none has ever asked me to oblige." They would have been very foolish to have asked him since he was a practising, possibly devout, Catholic. The woman in the bed next to me, who used to be visited regularly by her favourite priest—the Mon, she called him, affectionately short for Monsignor—was not Windsor's patient, but she had it on good authority from a nun that he used to "pop in" to St Joseph's in Albert St, Woollahra, between operations and say a prayer for the patient.

The book is full of strong opinions, some history, family affairs and good stories. A formidable head sister at St Vincent's was heard to tell her girls, "Never smoke. Nothing inflames a man's passion more than smoke coming out of a girl's nostrils."

The Windsors were and are a medical as well as a writing family. Harry's father and two brothers were doctors. The family is of Irish stock, medically trained in Scotland and Australia. Harry was conceived in London, born in Cork and reared in Brisbane. His account of that growing up takes its place alongside the richest stories of growing up in Australia between the wars. Other chapters—Patients and Doctors, The Privilege of Working, Internationalism and the two on cardiac surgery and transplant—are equally absorbing if not quite as zestful.

Chapter 10 is headed End Things and it is about the doctor who could not heal himself. In 1982 Harry Windsor was diagnosed by one of his colleagues as having cancer of the bowel. He was operated on and within two years suffered two more recurrences, both successfully removed. Then there was another operation, and another. As Windsor might say, you have to laugh. "I had to learn how to manage a colostomy. I knew about other people's, my own was different . . . accidents are all right at home, but not very funny in Martin Place."

The last time I saw Harry Windsor was at the launching of Gerard Windsor's collection of short stories. Everyone told him how well he was looking. And so he was.

Windsor writes (wrote) beautiful English, no jargon, no buzz words, no cant:

> It was not my association with cardiac surgery which resulted in this book being called *The Heart of a Surgeon.* It was an association with the Chinese language. The structure of each Chinese character includes a radicle. The radicle, the key to the use of a Chinese-English dictionary, often signifies some basic feature of the character . . . the radicle meaning heart is incorporated in thousands of characters, the meaning of which cover almost every emotion and thought. Most of the emotions and reactions in this book would, if written in Chinese, incorporate the radicle for heart.

Elizabeth Riddell's most recent book of poems was Occasions of Birds. *Her forthcoming* Selected Poems *will be published by Angus and Robertson.*

Presentation and Representation

Kevin Hart

John Forbes: *The Stunned Mullet and Other Poems* (Hale and Iremonger, $9.95).
Philip Hodgins: *Down the Lake with Half a Chook* (Australian Broadcasting Commission, $12.95).
Philip Martin: *New and Selected Poems* (Longman Cheshire, $6.95).
Alison Clark: *Ananke* (*Scripsi*, $5, or free with *Scripsi*, v. 54, no. 4).

There are those who think of writing as representing their thoughts, feelings, or the world at large; and there are others who see the task of writing as questioning the very concept of 'representation'. Whereas the first group tends to judge poetry by its clarity, sensuousness, and involvement with ultimate human concerns, the second group prizes poems which resist reduction to simple meanings, unsettle the reader, and celebrate the play of surfaces. Like all ideologies, these are seldom found in a pure state. But while some people will steer a middle course between the two, or try to weave together strands of both, all writers know, deep down, where their true allegiances lie. Whatever is concealed in one's theory will soon leak out in one's practice: we are all Platonists or Aristotelians at heart, all Whigs or Tories, all drawn to representational or non-representational art.

John Forbes is a model non-representationalist: he wishes to treat poetry as a game, but to play with impeccable skill. And we can never forget that this is a game played *against* someone else, very often the reader. One poem, 'Afternoon Papers', begins:

> The city fits the Harbour
> the way a new suit
> fits a politician like applause.

First of all, the image of the suit and the politician debunks the reader's desire for a sharp visual image which would confirm the intrinsic poetic nature of Sydney Harbour. Then, before the moment has gone, the very structure of the image is shaken by "like applause". That final simile disregards the convention Forbes sets up, and that is the point: the poem is about the lack of correspondence between reality and language.

At the same time, though, a number of Forbes's poems arise from a conflict within the speaker. When a poem begins "I want to believe the beautiful lies" we know, full well, that we're dealing with someone who values the aesthetic over the moral and the religious, yet someone who *wants* to believe those 'lies', those powerful systems of representation within which we live and die. No critique of religion or humanism, however acute and searching, can suspend the everyday longings and problems of being human. And nowhere is this more clear than the beginning of 'Death, An Ode' where Forbes's wit concentrates rather than deflects the ultimate human situation:

> Death, you're more successful than America,
> even if we don't choose to join you, we do.
> I've just become aware of this conscription
> where no one's marble doesn't come up;
> no use carving your name on a tree,
> exchanging vows
> or not treading on the cracks for luck
> where there's no statistical anomalies at all
> & you know not the day nor the hour,
> or even if you do
> *timor mortis conturbat me . . .*

How can one criticise a poetry which allows itself to be legitimated by the writer's certain tragic death? That is the question which circles around everything one reads by Philip Hodgins, whether directly about his cancer or not. One reason for Hodgins's remarkable success has been that people tend to read the myth of the doomed young poet rather than the poems. Another reason is that his poems represent reality in an acceptable way; they offer no difficulties, no problems, other than the purely existential: the fact of death, the fear of death, and a resistance to both. It is secular humanism in all its pathos.

In this book—Hodgins's second—there is a movement away from the details of his cancer. From hospitals we pass to the country, and from dying to killing, as in these lines about visiting a schoolfriend's dairy farm in Gippsland:

> We got into a few bottles of Tassie's beer,
> then wandered round for a bit
> looking for something to do.
> The bull was in the paddock by himself
> head down
> having a good feed.
> His ballbag was hanging there
> nearly as big as a footy
> and the same shape.
> When Tassie shot it with a slug gun
> it shrivelled up like mad
> and the bull went charging and kicking
> and roaring round the paddock.

An ear for colloquial speech, an economy of gesture, and a quick eye for detail are all evident here. Yet the section of the book from which these lines are taken, 'Boarding School', shows Hodgins at his least impressive: so much tends to the prosy and the merely clever. While *Down the Lake with Half a Chook* is a lighter, less ambitious book than *Blood and Bone*, there are, thankfully, several poems—'The Effect',

'The Deadline', 'Tight Shorts' and 'A Farm in the High Country'—where Hodgins is as strong as ever and perhaps more assured in his rhythms. These are poems to savour.

Like Hodgins, Philip Martin is committed to representational art. The opening section, 'Preserved', sounds a theme which carries throughout the book: that the poet's task is to preserve all that is valuable in the past. Hence Martin's insistence on lucidity, ritual and form, and his continued interest in those ancient people recovered, perfectly intact, from a Danish bog, described so poignantly by P. V. Glob in his now classic, *The Bog People.* In a poem dedicated to Glob, 'Copenhagen: The Dead, The Living', Martin explores the significance of these tanned bodies through the themes of sacrifice and resurrection. The last section shows Martin at his most memorable:

> Outside in the March cold
> I see through a café window
>
> A tall girl, dignified,
> With blond hair in a coil.
>
> After two thousand years
> The flesh has come again
>
> Over the mound-girl's bones.
> What's this, what's this I'm doing?
>
> I shiver, turn away
> Before she sees me stare
>
> At the living as at the dead.

The only problem here is that, at some level, we must be reminded of Seamus Heaney's poems on the bog people in *North* or, more formidably, Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns.* Like Hill, Martin is attracted by seventeenth-century civilities as well as the chthonic north. Yet if Hill fights an anguished battle between the rival claims of a radical conservativism and a postmodern love of play, it is an anguish that does not find its way into Martin's work.

Some of Martin's best poems are his shortest. It is hard to forget this one-liner from a sequence of love poems, "Tonight's cold wind can't touch me: you have touched me". Passion and wit: it is a familiar formula, one which looks back to John Donne amongst others, yet one that is still very much a part of Martin's work. And like Donne, Martin feels no contradiction in being both sensual and religious. Or rather, his poems continually negotiate that apparent contradiction. 'A Certain Love' puts it well:

> There's no gainsaying this:
> We're blessed. We know it.
> And if God came up to me today and said
> 'You must give her up', I'd answer
> 'Ridiculous. Why contradict yourself?'

Alison Clark's *Ananke* is the most difficult of these four books to discuss in a short space. One of the most recent additions to the *Scripsi* canon, Clark works between and around the dogmas of representation and non-representation. That she has a distinct and valuable talent is clear enough from any of her poems. One of the best is 'Respecting the Mysteries':

> Walking at night beside the lake
> you note the haunting face trees
> and tracks wear in moonlight and mist—
>
> as when, speaking alone with someone,
> we might sense another presence
> in the room: a veritable being, and not
>
> (just) the high degree of our own attentiveness;
> nor old friend Pathetic Fallacy
> who paints the world with our features—

These lines show how Clark sets up clichés only to dismantle them. The question is, though, whether Clark's displacements are sufficient to give energy and point to the poem. The whimsical tone tends to become cloying, as do the parenthetical remarks which, by the time one gets to the end of the pamphlet, seem like nervous ticks. If several of Clark's lyrics tend to blur into one another, there is no denying the signs of charm and force in every poem. At the moment it seems as though Clark were stuck in second gear; but I rather fancy that she will find third and fourth gears soon enough.

Kevin Hart's most recent book of poetry was Your Shadow. *He teaches at Deakin University. His* Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction Otherwise *is to be published in England in January by Cambridge University Press.*

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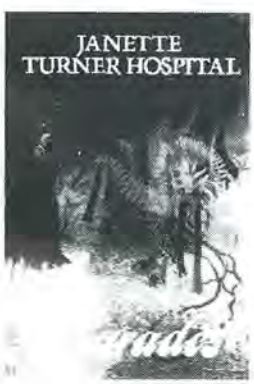

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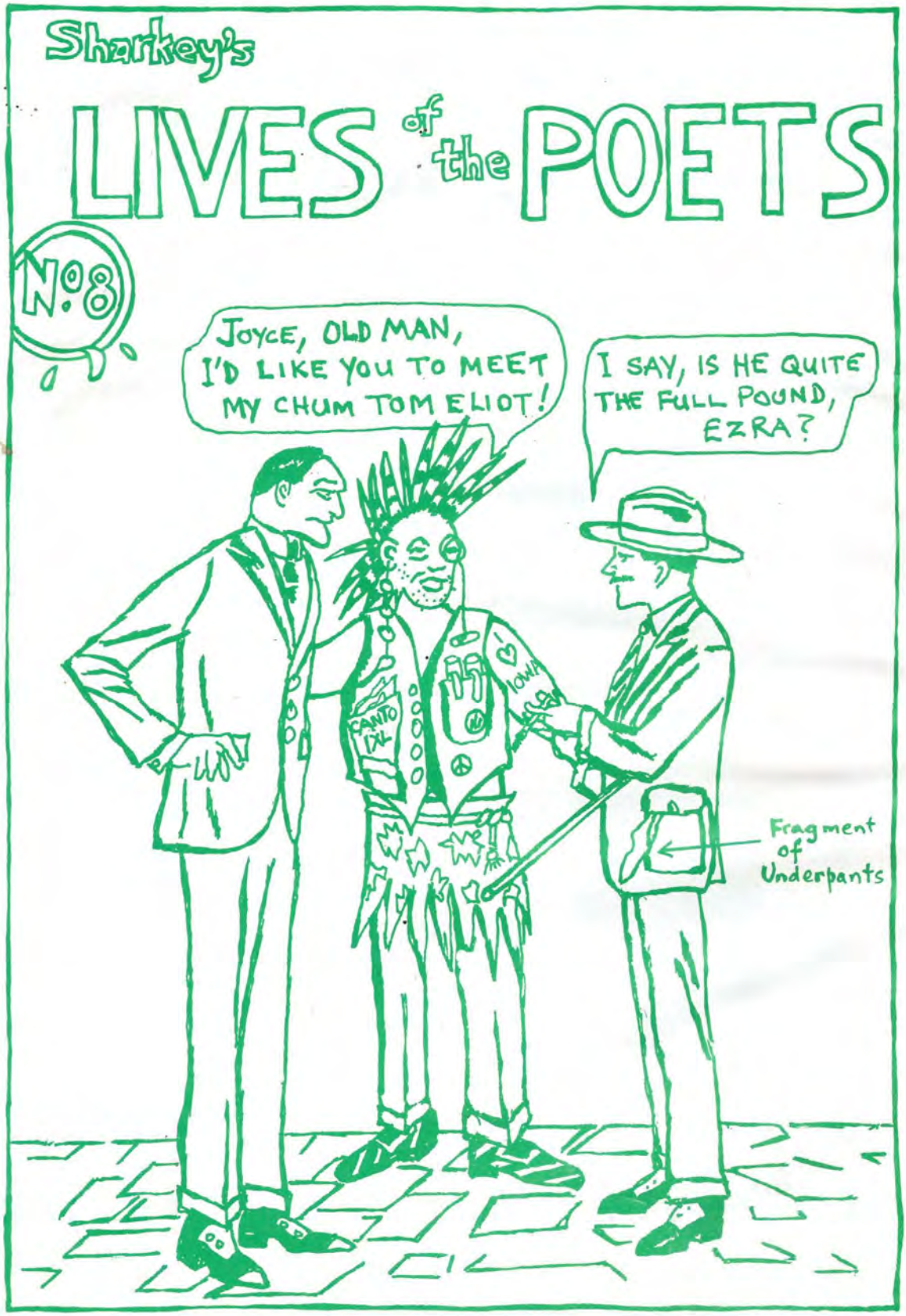
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