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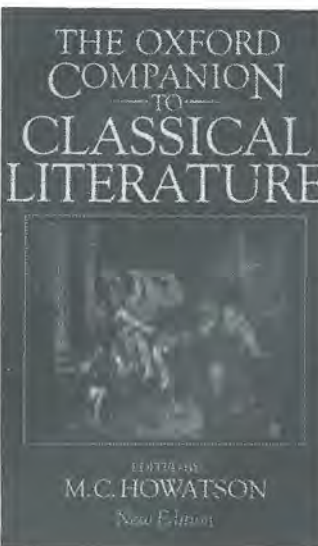
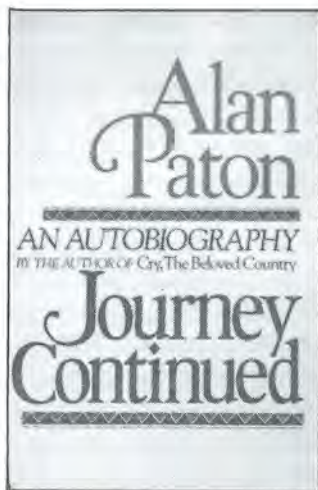
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NANCY KEESING

The Guardian Angel

from *Those 1940s*

Patrick Poleaxe had sole rights to treat Kesterven's theories of life and literature in a bantering way. This is not to suggest that Kes avoided serious argument. As a practised survivor of verbal duelling he welcomed a degree of rigorous criticism, provided he was allowed his choice of critics. He relished cut, thrust and parry, but not the pin pricks of teasing or flippancy, except from Patrick. Kes never initiated challenges to adversaries more skilful than himself or, in brutish Australian terms, didn't stick his neck out unless he had the game sewn up. His devoted admirers and disciples were, therefore, usually young. If nearer his own age they were often imperfectly or inadequately educated. Less intelligent foemen would not do, and Kesterven had a high intelligence.

Consider his long-time cronies, Elizabeth Best and Bella Fearnshaw. I call them 'cronies' because Kes neither made nor kept what I would call friends, Patrick perhaps excepted, and in my vocabulary the word 'crony' carries connotations of banding together against the world, of the thickness of thieves in their kitchens. Elizabeth was an honest, impetuous creature, though capable of calculation, but her education ceased after High School and had not fostered or developed a critical faculty. She was no threat. Bella was critical if you like, and calculating in more devious ways than Elizabeth, but she too was no threat because she lacked integrity, and criticised from standpoints that shifted as expediency dictated.

In the days when the Sydney Verse Club still enjoyed Kesterven's presidency and editorship of its magazine, *Spectrum Australia*, it advertised a lecture by Patrick Poleaxe, 'The Fiction of Poetry', and that was the first time I knew it existed. I prided myself on having acquired a taste for Poleaxe novels a year or two ahead of most of my contemporaries (I was then nineteen) and set off for the advertised address, Anvil Chambers, Anvil Lane, on a damp July evening. Astray in circles and odd angles of little streets and lanes between Bridge Street and the Quay, I dodged puddles, messes and lurching drunks. Then, at the further end of a narrow street I'd already traversed twice, I saw a group of people turning round the corner of a sooty ware-

house into an opening I'd noticed, but supposed to be a private dock. I walked back and, high on a blackened wall there was a nearly indistinguishable sign reading, Anvil Lane, and an open door, about ten yards along which proved to be set in a stone archway carved with the name Anvil Chambers. Stairs directly inside the door led to a landing from which obscure passageways branched left and right. There was a notice board on the wall of the landing readable despite the atrocious lighting, on which names of tenants had been painted, and painted over, and lettered on strips of cardboard attached with drawing pins. One name in original faded gilt read: Coralie Ivason, Elocutionist. Also in gilt, beneath that, I could just perceive 'Sydney Verse Club', although someone had tried to obliterate the three words by scoring and scratching.

There were voices and footsteps behind on the stairs, and a girl asked: "Looking for the Verse Club? Along to the right. Come with us." If the three newcomers had not appeared I believe I'd have gone away. The Verse Club room was big and half clean enough to pass muster under the light of low wattage bulbs in discoloured shades. About twenty people were already there (for a poetry workshop before the lecture as I later discovered) and the people who'd rescued me were friendly. I pulled up a hard chair and sat near them. The formal part of the evening began.

The President, a jaunty man of young middle age wearing a tweed suit of a colour to match his quizzical eyebrows (Kesterven Abercrombie) called on an obese girl with a glory of red, frizzy hair (Bella Fearnshaw) to read the minutes, and on an over-tall, dark woman to move the Treasurer's report, which she did, stooping to catch some light, and peering through owlsh spectacles (Elizabeth Best). I think this is a fair recollection of first impressions, my attention being chiefly for Patrick Poleaxe, unmistakable from photographs, though older than expected. His face was as seamed and criss-crossed as a medieval map and as difficult to read. Impossible to be sure whether he smiled at some private joke or scowled at some private annoyance. He wore a dark brown jacket and plus

fours with thick, ribbed beige socks and gillie brogues polished enough to reflect a twinkle in the gloom. He lectured holding a sheaf of notes on cards, a system I'd never seen before, and spoke in the kind of drawly English voice that makes you realise where the American accent began. His argument was not what I'd expected, being a sharp attack on the Jindyworobak movement in poetry which, he said, was well intentioned but misguided and naive and, in some of its manifestations an ironic insult to what it most wished to celebrate, the spirit of place and the ancient inhabitants of Australia. "The Fiction of Poetry" of his title was the fiction, he said, that poetry could be as much, both in itself and to all men, as some people, and perhaps they included his good friend Kesterven Abercrombie here, would like to believe. Kesterven looked mock rueful and made a comical fist at Patrick, and a rehearsed, rather dutiful laugh came from some of the audience. Patrick continued: very well, it was easy to scoff and be destructive, but it was a pretty empty approach if one offered nothing to replace what one tore down. One could, though, offer no more than cold comfort and a sincere hope that a re-builder would emerge in time. There are, he said, about fifteen good poets in Australia just now, (about five faces visible to me in the audience looked smug) and perhaps five very good poets, but Australian poetry would only find a distinctive voice when a major poet arose or emerged. Five heads nodded. He would end on an even more pessimistic note for present company, he said. It was his belief, or perhaps hunch might be a more appropriate word, that a major novelist was likelier to beat poets to the post. Call him prejudiced if we liked. With a charming, and this time unmistakable smile, he sat down.

"What about Bernard Wood, Patrick?" Kesterven asked.

Patrick snapped "A false prophet. Terribly important not to be led into the wilderness by false prophets." Some of the audience laughed and clapped. Some pursed their lips and frowned sourly.

There were thick and fast questions and usually quirky, abrupt answers, but no one satisfied my curiosity so I fought nervousness to ask why he thought a major Australian novelist might emerge before a major Australian poet.

"For one thing," he said, "she has! Christina Stead. And how many of you have read or heard of her?" The dark Treasurer raised her hand. The only one. "Capricornia," he said. "There is a novel but it isn't a body of work. Watch those names. There will be others. Where are we? 1947? By 1967 what I've said tonight won't need saying, and you'll have read the answers to your question, young lady."

The red-haired Secretary smiled across the room and when the meeting finished came to invite me to stay for coffee. Did I write? she asked. "Not really. Yet. No poetry at all. One day, perhaps a novel."

She introduced herself: Bella Fearnshaw, and I responded with Flo King. Next thing I knew I'd been taken up by that inner circle, or rather, at the beginning, by Bella. I think we were a naive generation. It took me a couple of months to even begin to discover her reason; their reason. (Patrick always excepted.) The sexual capacity of under-sexed deviants was simply not within my experience. Patrick became my guardian angel, on his own terms.

It was too hot for the beach. At dusk we'd surf, but



now, in the thick shade of the Abercrombie garden we sprawled in cane or canvas chairs and sipped chilly lemon tea with which Bobbie had filled two big thermos containers. Even Patrick was barely dressed, in shorts only. Bobbie, Kesterven's sister, wearing a sun-dress looked less feminine than in her usual tailored clothes. Her chair was beside her brother's. He finished his glass of tea and, too lazy or disinclined to fetch another, sipped from hers, not unconsciously. Bobbie put her lips to the same side of the glass.

'The scales fell from my eyes' is an overworked cliché but how else can I say it? I was beside Elizabeth, as far from Bella as possible, and Bella as usual, as far from Bobbie's dislike as she could get. Patrick, between Bella and Elizabeth, was the neutral ground. I'd avoided nearness to Bella since our surfing collision yesterday evening. Bella, for all her weight on land was the best surfer of our party and, in smooth, regular waves her pass at me was unmistakable, unaccidental. I was shocked. Shocked and revolted. All day. Now, though, I had to ask myself whether, had it been Elizabeth who'd taken the initiative, I'd have been revolted. Shocked yes. But revolted? Query. How did I feel about the Abercrombies? Did I *know* enough to *feel* anything? What *did* incestuous couples of their age *do*? I couldn't *imagine*, couldn't *see* Bobbie in anyone's bed. Male or female. OK. But at twenty I'd failed to notice Bella, or Elizabeth in a sexual way, so how naive was I?

They were all discussing a book. They were *always* discussing a book but I'd been terribly wrong to think they lived only between printed jackets. My mother, trapped in her war service bungalow among stuffed lounge chairs blooming with Sanderson prints was no fool. She had said: "Flo. They all sound awfully *untidy*. Nice enough, but not very *real*."

Patrick said: "Bobbie the tea is marvellous but, if I'm not allowed a drop of something in mine, I'll expire."

More scales dropped. Of them all Patrick is the one who must drink alcohol. Of course, that's why he's so broke. The devil, he had a flask of gin under his chair all the time. Except for me, they all added some to their lemon tea.

"As" said Patrick "I was about to say when I so suddenly interrupted myself, the only lady in *Portrait of a Lady* is Lord Warburton."

Kesterven snorted and smiled.

"That's an easy phrase and very funny. Justify it."

"Not me. I propose to abduct the only lady in this gathering and cool off in the Pacific Ocean whether or not it's too hot. Come on Flo."

I followed him silently. I wore my costume, he his trunks under the shorts. We said nothing the length of the hot road, or in the tepid shallows. Out where the waves broke, not in his usual drawl but in clipped 'Oxford' tones: "Cheer up my girl."

"Grow up I suppose you mean."

"'ts all the same—'t any rate for a writer."

Later, on the wet sand, he said: "Never expect the obvious, Flo. In life, in Art. I think you're gorgeous. Handsome, clever, talented and I shan't even pat your bottom."

I said: "Oh Patrick. I did . . . I do . . . so very much like their friendship."

"Well, why not? They're precisely the same people as this time last week, you know. If you've altered, then you're a few months nearer to that first book."

"I don't know. Whether I can. Whether I want to."

"It isn't in your hands, girl. The gods decide. Well, well. We have company."

They'd all come down to the beach.

Later. Much later, nearly dusk, still hot, as everyone got ready to go back to the house, Patrick said: "See those gulls. About to roost. I'll bring one down."

"No." Bobbie exploded. "No Patrick!"

"You can't stop me" he said slowly.

He stood, like a polished wooden statue from Benin on the silent beach, and gazed at the birds outlined against the hot, drained sky. One bird propped, fluttered, fell. At Kesterven's feet. Kesterven picked it up. "Oh Patrick. It is dead. Dead." He smoothed the white feathers. The red, dead feet pointed stiffly upwards.

Behind us the Pacific swell rolled in and crashed to foam.

"One day. One day" I said to myself, "I'll tell this story. But never adequately. Like it really is . . . was. How will I ever say?"

LAURIE MÜLLER

The Perils of Writing Contemporary Political History in Queensland:

An Interview with Phil Dickie and Ross Fitzgerald

Laurie Müller: Today, two writers who have been in the firing-line for several years now. Ross Fitzgerald, senior lecturer in Humanities, from Griffith University and Phil Dickie from the *Courier Mail* who has had a considerable involvement in the Fitzgerald Inquiry, not Ross Fitzgerald's inquiry but a different one altogether. Ross, himself, is well aware of the perils of contemporary political history having written a two-volume history of Queensland (UQP 1984, \$19.85 each). I suppose it's a revisionary history in that the only previous history available, *Triumph in the Tropics*, was very much one of those histories written by victors and Ross, more than anyone else, has changed many, many people's minds on what the history of Queensland is about. He had his difficulties in getting his second volume published and less than a month ago he co-authored the first history of the Labor Party here in Queensland, called *Labor in Queensland* and that's not also been without its perils. We'll discuss that aspect of it.

After Ross, we'll talk to Phil Dickie about *The Road to Fitzgerald*, his book covering four decades of crime and corruption in Queensland. Phil's own feature journalism led in part to the Commission of Inquiry which Phil then covered. He wrote the only book yet published on the material leading to the Commission and much of the Inquiry itself. So it should be an interesting discussion. To introduce Ross Fitzgerald here are some words he's used twice now in introducing his own books. One is a George Orwell quote: "In times of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act". A very apt phrase. The other is from the Afrikaner, André Brink, whose book *Writing in the State of Siege* he quotes from: "If the writer is no longer allowed to shout, he must learn to speak in another tone of voice. If that is denied him, he must begin to whisper; and if he is no longer allowed even to whisper, he must continue to signal through the flames".

L.M.: Ross Fitzgerald you obviously worry very passionately about those types of words, what's your experience been in writing contemporary history?

Ross Fitzgerald: Well, the two histories that you've mentioned, I wrote deliberately up to the present. Volume II of the *History of Queensland* in 1984 was recalled, pulped and subsequently re-issued. I am pleased to say that it is now available in paperback. Even the most recent book that I co-authored *Labor in Queensland from 1880s to 1988*, (UQP, \$34.95) was delayed in the warehouses as a result of a complaint. It has only recently been released with a quotation deleted.

L.M.: That's the practical aspects of the problems of being published and on the market. But in the work of an historian, sifting through the facts and writing, I think you'd admit it's very difficult not to be either prejudiced or personal. You've always been honest enough to state your bias. How do you approach the monumental task of writing such a turbulent and under-recorded history as that of Queensland, particularly the political side of it?

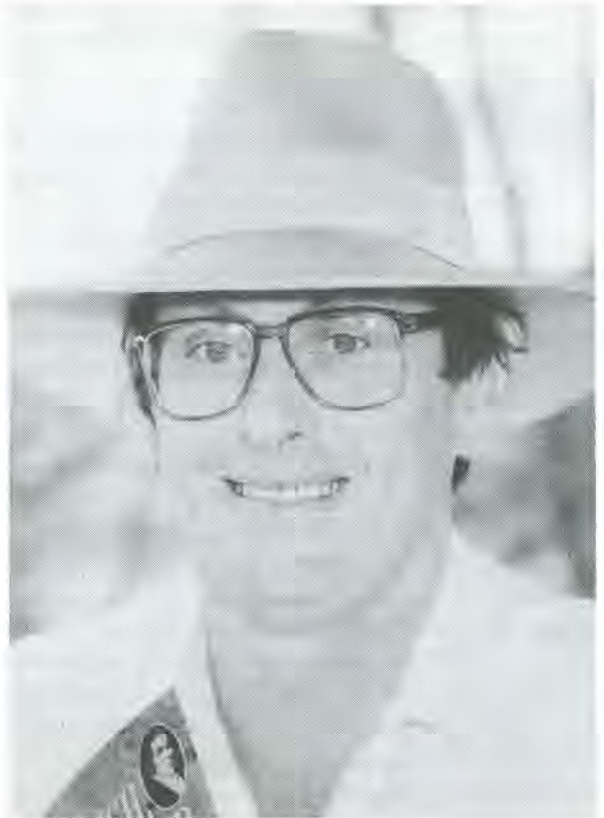
R.F.: In terms of obstacles, one has enormous difficulty with one's colleagues, because most academic historians in Australia regard contemporary history as 'mere journalism' and that's used as a term of abuse. They believe that the further one goes back in time somehow sources become purer. I think that's nonsense. All history requires principles of selection, be they archival sources, medieval manuscripts or contemporary interviews, and what I do is to make crystal clear at the beginning my point of view. But at the same time, my belief in history implies objectivity; I don't believe in a complete subjectivity of history. History isn't fiction. That's why from time to time I have written satirical fiction when I have become disillusioned with the effect that dissemination of information has. What I endeavour to do, and it's difficult in a place like Queensland when there's been such a lack of recorded history, is to place contemporary events in the context of the past. As Milan Kundera explained, "one of the few powers that the people have against the State is organised memory against organised forgetfulness". That is why people

in authority fear books. They mightn't read many books, but they certainly fear them. And here in Queensland, the only history of this place was that dreadful centenary history *Triumph in the Tropics*, written in 1959 by Sir Raphael Cilento and the publicity officer of the Premier's Department, Clem Lack Snr, in which Aboriginal peoples were actually compared with dogs. When I came up here thirteen years ago and was doing some TV work and wanted to read a general history of Queensland, I was appalled to find that book, available in all schools and public libraries in this State, was Queensland's only general history. I realised that it was one of the reasons why so many people here were so racist, so prejudiced. Thus I set myself the task of writing what I intended to be a one volume work, based on Donald Horne's book, *The Australian People*. I had hoped to write a general history of Queensland in one volume, but it extended itself and so I first published *From the Dreaming to 1915*, which caused no problems at all. Even Sir Robert Sparkes (Queensland National Party president) praised the book, as did all sorts of other people. But interestingly enough when I wrote the second volume, from 1915 until what was then the present at the time of writing, 1984, that caused an enormous furor, among more or less, living people!

What I attempted to do in terms of selection is to establish some criteria of significance, having worked out some general themes. The basic theme of that two volume history of Queensland was the way in which a particular European idea of progress and development has radically affected, not just the institutions and the peoples of Queensland, but the land and the flora and fauna. I think it's important to spell that out at the beginning. Many of my historical colleagues still believe that the writing of history can somehow be cleared of values and I just don't believe that. Even in narrative history, such as mine is—I believe in telling a story—all selection of facts is value-laden. I think it is incumbent upon the historian to make that clear at the beginning, so that the reader can make up his or her mind.

LM.: Ross, in writing the contemporary part of Queensland history, your second volume, *From 1915 to the 1980s*, the material you worked over there, which is obviously sensitive to many people because they are still alive and memories are recent and much of it covers some of the period that Phil has also covered in the four decades embraced by his book, you appear to have found a recurrence, irrespective of political parties in power, of the same approach to government and both a mistrust of the intellectual view of life, coupled with this hellbent orientation towards progress. Would you share with us the material that you uncovered and whether it confirms that Queensland has a peculiar approach in politics irrespective of party?

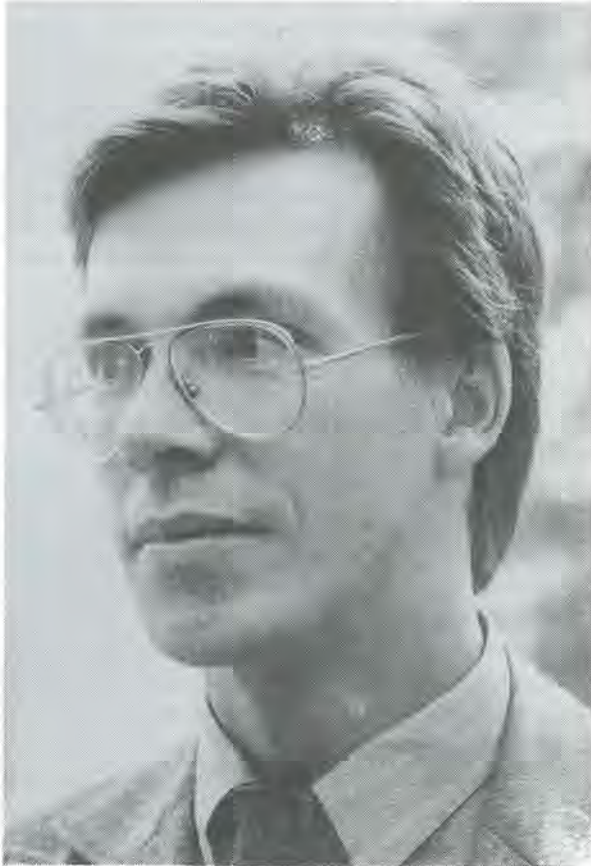
R.F.: At the beginning—in 1915—Queensland had a radical reformist government under T. J. Ryan, but fairly soon after that, especially after the government of E. G. Theodore, the Labor Party which ruled this State was authoritarian, populist and above all, a rurally oriented party. A lot of the areas that are now National Party areas were Labor Party areas. It's important to note that where we're sitting now, the city of Brisbane, has never been the centre of anything. It has never been the centre of the economy or of politics. That's fundamental to understanding this place. Because of our lack of manufacturing, there's never been a large professional class concerned with civil liberties and censorship, and that means there's never been a large intelligentsia. That's one of the keys to understanding contemporary Queensland.



Ross Fitzgerald

Also, traditionally, Labor placed an enormously small emphasis upon education. One has to realise that Queensland was the most Catholic State in Australia—over 25% of the population. During the almost forty years of Labor Party rule, there was a very close tie in between the Labor Party, a very conservative Australian Workers' Union and the Catholic Church led by Archbishop Duhig, who was in power for all of that time and beyond it until 1965. This meant that there was virtually no concern for the

environment, no real concern for civil liberties. Many people think that the Bjelke-Petersen regime was peculiar, but it wasn't. It's in a direct line from those Labor Party governments led by people like Forgan-Smith, Ned Hanlon and Vince Gair—hardly sophisticated liberal-democrats! They were concerned above all with power; they were not concerned with culture or with education. It was Hanlon who in 1949 introduced this awful zonal malapportionment, what people wrongly called the 'gerrymander'. But also it was Hanlon's government that introduced all those states of emergencies and repressive civil liberties legislation. If it hadn't been for the split in 1957, Labor would have still been in power. "Honest" Frank Nicklin (Queensland Country Party leader) was one



Phil Dickie

of the most surprised human beings in the world, when he became Premier. And even though they got more of the votes, the Liberal Party didn't mind being second fiddle, as long as they were in government. What has happened since, is that the Country, later on National, Party manipulated and 'refined' the zonal electoral malapportionment in such a way as to make it virtually impossible for them to be voted out of office. Plus you had an enormously inept, male-dominated Labor Party, ruled at first by the Australian Workers' Union,

and then by the Trades and Labor Council, and most of these people—virtually all men—weren't concerned about regaining office, they were concerned with their own factional advantage. And so I think it is important to put things into perspective.

LM: Let's talk about the ALP history that is covered in your very extensive book, *Labor in Queensland*, co-authored with Harold Thornton. In the safe early part, from 1880 to 1957, I suppose it's hard to get into the business of either defamation or upsetting sensitivities. Yet in Part 2, the book covers in considerable detail, nearly barbeque by barbeque, all the matters following the '57 split in the Labor Party and the thirty years in the political wilderness that's followed. In Quentin Dempster's review of *Labor in Queensland* in the *Bulletin*, he concludes that "Queensland Labor does not want to be reminded of its past in an election year, particularly one as promising for the Party as this. The authors will not be thanked". Now, given that Queensland Labor has had a proud and an extraordinary history in one sense, one of the strong things in that history is the T. J. Ryan period of government, well and truly analysed and praised by you for what it was. I found it interesting that Wayne Goss chronologically has been compared with his age and election to Parliament and to the leadership of the Labor Party and his potential chance to be Premier this year to T. J. Ryan. Do you think Goss perhaps may have learnt something from reading your history, that perhaps the big opportunity is to have a philosophical approach like T. J. Ryan and get away from everyday opportunism?

RF: I think that probably Wayne is not particularly pleased that the book has come out at this time, because the Labor Party, especially in an election year does not want to be reminded of its repressive history. Wayne is a very articulate person who is a good leader, but he doesn't have much talent in the backbench. The fact remains that the actual membership of the Labor Party in Queensland, which is extremely small—about 7,000 people—has actually declined by 5% to 10% in the last two years. That is because, in my opinion, the Labor Party does not appeal to women and to people under thirty. Wayne's made some inroads: you have to realise that the ALP in Queensland is now the richest political party of any state, because of the sale of its radio station. That means they're able to promote him as leader via a number of very effective TV ads. But there's a big difference between popularity as a leader, and getting votes. I keep stressing the zonal malapportionment. I just can't see that Labor has any real chance of being voted in this time. There are some encouraging signs that talented candidates like Peter Beattie—despite entrenched opposition within the Party—have been pre-selected. But there's still a notorious lack of women, and of

young people. So in effect Wayne Goss is running a one-man band. Therefore I wouldn't be surprised when the State election comes, that Wayne Goss is mentioned heavily and the Australian Labor Party does not feature much at all in the advertisements.

LM.: To shift away from the immediacy of Queensland politics and go back to the business of writing about history and contemporary history. I had the good fortune of publishing Russel Ward's second go at his history of Australia. He published a version back in the 50s called *A Short History of Australia*, principally for the American college market, and in it he virtually neglected Aborigines and women. He had a chance to do a new edition of it in the late 70s and he retitled it *Australia Since the Coming of Man*. Ward rewrote it, to include Aborigines and women, and I can still remember in his Preface he used the words, not unlike your own, that "Try as I might I cannot disguise my prejudices, I am for the weak not the strong; for the poor, not the rich and for the many, and not the select few". Have you found a similar tendency being a male, European historian to neglect those areas of Aboriginal history and women's history and the other groups?

RF.: Yes, of course. I think it is important to realise it wasn't just Russel Ward. In Volume One of Manning Clark's great six volume history of Australia there wasn't one reference to women in the Index and Aboriginal peoples were afforded scant recognition. But Manning is honest enough to admit that, of course, he was the product of age, as I am. The fact is that I'm a 44 year old, Anglo-Celtic man, who lives in Brisbane and who was educated in Melbourne. It is extraordinarily difficult to write from an Aboriginal perspective. John Malony's *History of Australia* copped a lot of flack, because there was only fleeting reference to Aboriginal peoples. I happen to think Malony made a mistake. But his defence is interesting. He says quite openly "I am a white Anglo-Saxon person. The people to be writing Aboriginal history are Aboriginal peoples themselves". In my own history I do the best I can. There are a number of chapters in Volume 1 dealing with Australia before human habitation and then "Queensland" in the 50,000 or more years that Aboriginal peoples were here. But because Aboriginal peoples have a very different sense of causality, and of space and time, it is very difficult for a European historian to write that history. In terms of women, again one has to consciously be aware that women have been written out of history in the same way. Unfortunately very few are aware that the underclass have also been ignored. While a lot of historians dislike contemporary history, they also dislike the sort of general history that Russel Ward and Manning and I write, because they somehow think it's unscholarly. One has to remember that until quite recently, the

only sources historians used were written sources and, of course, the people that wrote were the educated. That, by definition, wiped out all sorts of people in Australian history. Yet historians somehow believed that archival sources were sacrosanct, refusing to understand that this denied what one might call a 'people's history'. Fortunately people like Jenny Lee and others are redressing the balance. But the quick answer Laurie is that yes, of course I find it difficult to write about Aborigines. In fact I cannot get inside the minds of Aboriginal peoples, many of whom are very different. Aboriginality is a European concept. I often begin my first lecture by saying "You probably don't realise there were no Aborigines until Europeans came". What that means is that the word Aborigine and Aboriginality is a European construct. Actually, there were about 450 very different clans that didn't have all that much in common. Some had intercourse and communication with each other, but a lot of Aboriginal peoples were as different as Russians are from Londoners.

LM.: Ross, after the music break we'll come back to Phil Dickie. Apart from the contemporary issues, such as the Fitzgerald Inquiry, I intend touching on one that is very alive at the moment and that's the censorship by terrorism involved in the Salman Rushdie novel, *The Satanic Verses*.

LM.: Right in the firing line of writing contemporary history is Phil Dickie from the *Courier Mail*. Phil won a gold Walkley Award for his journalism that was published in the *Courier Mail*. The culmination of all those features, plus the "Four Corners" program by Chris Masters, caused the Fitzgerald Inquiry. There has never been a more revolutionary inquiry on the workings of crime and corruption in government in any State, let alone in the State of Queensland. Phil's *The Road to Fitzgerald*, which covers the four decades of the background leading up to the Fitzgerald Inquiry, itself is a testament to the vital importance of fearless investigative journalism, which unfortunately in this State has been somewhat lacking. The two reporters, Phil Dickie of the *Courier Mail* and Chris Masters succeeded in uncovering widespread networks of corruption and organised crime in this State and in the words of the former Police Commissioner, Ray Whitrod, "The honest people of Queensland, and indeed of Australia, are under an obligation to Phil Dickie and his journalist colleagues". Phil Dickie won his gold Walkley Award the hard way and his story is the story of the decade. Phil, when you started out on those feature stories did you have any real idea where it may all lead?

Phil Dickie: I had no idea whatsoever. I started at the level of the street and it wasn't until much later

that, having discovered various networks of crime in progress, that all the classic hallmarks of what we call 'organised crime' with all the attendant evils that go with that, that I then went back into history to see how this had all arisen and how it had come about. That work was basically my book. The newspaper articles were the on-the-spot descriptions of what is actually going on in our streets.

LM.: The business of writing a feature which appears in today's paper and becomes next day's fish and chips wrapping is a different task to writing both a structured book and a book that carefully canvasses the whole period and the details in it. How did you find writing the book after you had done all the research that created your series of articles?

P.D.: Not as difficult as you might have thought. The basic skills of writing are there and writing very quickly is something that journalism gives you. *The Road to Fitzgerald* involved changing perspective, but the largest difficulty both in the newspaper articles and in the book, was to steer my way through the laws that virtually prohibit telling the people what's really going on.

LM.: Having been your publisher I know how much work was required in the legal area to ensure the book was not only accurate but could remain published, so that no one could have it off the market because of the draconian defamation laws in which we all have to operate. In fact, we haven't had any writs, but you, as a journalist in your newspaper on exactly the same material in the early stages of it, copped 16 writs. One of them was from an inspector of the police, Mr Parker, who ultimately confessed himself. How intimidating is the issuing of writs for both your newspaper and you as an individual and as a working journalist?

P.D.: If you have the material there and you know what you're saying is true and you have enough behind you to defend it, you can weather receiving writs. There is an expression 'a stopper' and that's precisely the case, a sort of a writ thrown into the public arena, because writs are always reported to put a stop to what's being published or to discourage publishing. In the paper we had the material behind us, so we'd disregard the fact that we'd received a writ and blithely mention it in our next story, that for example Graham Parker had issued us a writ, but that we were going to keep publishing articles about him. It was quite a significant turning point in Queensland legal defamation history, when after Parker confessed his corruption, he also had to turn around, discontinue the writ and pay our costs. That's the first time that happened. The stated purpose of the defamation laws is to protect the individual from the excesses of the

media or book publishers. But when you look at the range of people who sue for defamation, it's not ordinary people who often are abused by the media, who issue writs for defamation. The largest category of people who sue is politicians, the second largest category is police, and the third largest is businessmen accused of dubious practices. That tends to reinforce the view that the laws of defamation as they currently exist are a favourite recourse of villains. While obviously that doesn't apply to everyone who issues a writ, we've all heard about the politician who takes people around his house and says "Here's the Fairfax swimming pool, and the *Herald and Weekly Times* sauna, and the Packer extensions to the front room". There's something seriously wrong with a situation like that.

LM.: In *The Road to Fitzgerald* and the lead up material you used an interesting writing technique. It's a very good narrative and a racking good yarn. I guess if you had submitted it as a fiction manuscript, we would have thrown it out in disbelief saying it wasn't credible. But you had the advantage of not only having done your own research but being able to use the daily revelations of the Fitzgerald Inquiry to corroborate your early material. Did you find that, as both a writer and as also a journalist, there were many threads of the story that was evolving in the Fitzgerald Inquiry that were actually tucked away in the files of newspapers and elsewhere?

P.D.: One thing that amazed me was this could have been done much earlier. It was quite a pleasure for me to sit back in the Inquiry and say "Right here's another thing corroborated, I know that already, but I haven't been able to get away with saying it until now. Here we go again—it's been said by this person in sworn evidence". In terms of getting something into a newspaper and safely into a book it's tremendous to have someone say it in a privileged context. But the knotting together of a mass of jigsaw puzzle, picking out what is significant and what's barely important or distraction, that's fundamental in putting it together in a book, in trying not to lose the historical importance, but also to keep the pace moving. Being able to bring myself into the book in a personal way in some of the events, helped keep that thread of narrative running and even built up the pace of it, just as the Inquiry was about to burst.

LM.: I'd like to compare what you've done with what Ross Fitzgerald did in writing his second volume. Ross didn't have the advantage of a Fitzgerald Inquiry to verify the threads of history he was pulling together. Do you think you could have written *The Road to Fitzgerald* even if you had all of those facts and threads without that corroborating public information that was the Fitzgerald Inquiry, where people at least were

obliged to tell the truth as much as one could get it out of them?

P.D.: It would have still been possible to write a book, but it would have been very different, probably a lot shorter and leaving a lot for people to guess at. You can only say so much, then rely on the reader to make the necessary jump to understanding, but hopefully not the person who's being written about! It's immeasurably easier to write about people who've passed on, even with a Fitzgerald Inquiry.

LM.: I'd like to bring Ross Fitzgerald into the discussion.

Ross, having written your second volume covering that contemporary period and having seen what Phil has written and what he has explained here now, what are your comments on what Phil has said?

R.F.: Fundamentally, the material in *The Road to Fitzgerald* follows on from the sort of things I was saying in 1984. I admire Phil's book and his work enormously. But because Phil's a journalist, if he gets a defamation writ, the *Courier Mail* will cover him. The problem with individual authors is that we're absolutely powerless. Phil is absolutely right that the sort of people that take out writs are almost always the rich and powerful, or those who have institutional backing. Given the incredibly draconian laws of libel and defamation, with different laws in each State, so that those people can say "Oh well, we'll get him or her in Victoria and Tasmania this time", it means that as an individual one is entirely without institutional backing. One has to take considerable risks and that puts enormous pressure, if one is married, like I am, upon one's wife and family. I was very pleased to see both the Fitzgerald Commission of Inquiry and *The Road to Fitzgerald*. One of the great unanswered questions is how come Mr Gunn (Queensland National Party acting leader during Sir Joh's absence overseas) chose Tony Fitzgerald Q.C. As an historian I'd like to find that out, who advised him to select Fitzgerald. I would be surprised if the name came out of Bill Gunn's own head, but it is good to see that the sort of things I was talking about in my history, and actually a lot of things I knew I couldn't say (in volume 2, I was as circumspect as a person like myself could be under the laws), but it was very, very pleasing.

LM.: Back to Phil, Ross made the point that, powerful sensitive people often don't like books, because they're organised memories and they fear those more than the daily newspaper. Do you have a view of that? Do you think newspapers can have a lasting enough impact or does that depend on an accumulation of a newspaper following an editorial line over an extended period?

P.D.: Newspapers in Queensland have sacrificed a lot of their potential impact through not doing the job properly. Books tend to hang around in the public memory. But, I think it is the act of telling the truth as far as you can, in some form, that's the damaging thing to people in authority. They fear the revelations of a newspaper like *The Age* in terms of "The Age Tapes" just as much as they fear the impact of a book. What gives them great comfort is newspapers that never place current events in the perspective of what's gone before, and that's partly what newspapers in Queensland have done. Yet there's no reason that putting contemporary events in perspective can't be done in newspapers.

R.F.: Indeed. It is no secret that I've consistently attacked what used to be Queensland Newspapers Pty Ltd, especially the *Courier Mail*, when it was the only State morning newspaper. I suppose it still is in a way. I think that they bear a great responsibility for what's happened here in Queensland, when they could have engaged in meaningful investigative journalism, instead of cowering to authority. One of the reasons that people in power fear books, even if they don't read them, is that as Phil said books hang about. It's not an accident that here in Queensland we have our own State censorship of books and films. And do not be misled, it's not essentially about morality, it's about political power. It's about control. So censorship is rife. Unfortunately what then happens is that this feeds back into self censorship and a lot of writers and journalists and some editors engage in activities that I would call censorship. That means that it becomes increasingly difficult still, in a place like Queensland, to tell the truth. People think that things have changed here under Mr Ahern, but I keep saying, "How have things changed fundamentally?". We've still got our own State censorship, we've still got the Special Branch, we've still got what I would have thought are the most supine educational institutions in Australia. Mentioning censorship, there's a book that's just come out that I've written a prologue to, which I've titled *The Case of the Fainting Typist*. It's a book of writings by the Brisbane College of Advanced Education Writers' Club. There's a story in which the word 'semen' appears. When she came across the word 'semen', a college typist allegedly fainted. I've got all of these amazing letters going back and forth from bureaucrats saying things like "Nothing prepared me for such filth, nothing prepared me for the terrible situation of the poor woman who fainted". If the criterion of 'The Fainting Typist' was applied to world literature, including my own, it would be absolutely decimated! One can laugh, but it is typical of the supine attitude of educational institutions, they're constantly worried about offending vested interested groups, be they people like Rona Joyna, who was in fact mentioned in some of these letters, or other groups.

The case of Salman Rushdie is an extreme example, but assassination is only, and I use the word *only* syntactically, the extreme form of censorship.

L.M.: Let's talk about Rushdie. There's probably never been a more extreme case of censorship. But censorship by terrorism is a new thing to us. *The Satanic Verses*, a work of fiction, legally is able to be published and legally able to be distributed. Yet the implied terrorism for anyone selling it or distributing it, is actually inhibiting the public's access to it. Where do we draw the lines on what is a fair go? Amanda Lowrey's novel *The Reading Room* is off the market because a person claimed that he was defamed in it. In a work of fiction! Back to Rushdie, Phil have you got a view on the extraordinary circumstances where a writer is sentenced to death for writing fiction?

P.D.: It's a very extreme case, but I think in terms of defending freedom of speech, which is one of those inalienable rights, not just of the author who wrote the piece, but also book publishers and sellers and distributors who must have the courage to say "Well, do your worst". I know from my own experience, a lot of threats are bluff. Now this is more serious, it's got all the strength of religious fanaticism behind it, but it's like other forms of terrorism, if you bow down to this threat those who propose these extreme threats say "Oh it works in this case. We'll apply it to something else". The world has got to stand up and say "This is abhorrent, we're not going to be black-mailed in this fashion".

R.F.: Actually, that's one of the reasons that Harold Thornton, co-author of *Labor in Queensland* and I recently wrote a letter to Australian newspapers saying that "While we understand the concern for their employees of those major book selling chains that are refusing to stock the book, it is so fundamental to take a stand on freedom of expression that we beg of them to be aware of just how important it is". As Norman Mailer said "If we bow down to this sort of pressure, there'll be similar sorts of pressure from Christian fundamentalism". While you say this is new, it's only new in the twentieth century. In places like Calvin's Geneva, writers of fiction and non-fiction, got burnt to death along with their books. It's not new in world history. It is new in terms of twentieth century history and it's something that people need

to stand up to. While Phil talks about freedom of expression being an inalienable right, my sad experience has been that very few people actually believe in freedom of expression. They believe in freedom of expression for themselves, but they tend not to really encourage freedom of expression for others, except of the most bland sort. The problem is both with the laws of libel and defamation and with the sorts of pressures that are brought to bear upon newspapers and publishers, that this means that it is very difficult to write anything that is not offensive. It is not an accident that I wrote two works of satire after volume 2 of my history of Queensland got pulped, in the hope, following the example of Tom Sharpe in South Africa, that if by the dissemination of information you can't change attitudes, you might be able to do so through political and sexual satire. And a lot of people here in Australia found those works (*Pushed From The Wings* and *All About Anthrax*) offensive. The answer is "Of course they're offensive". If they're not offensive, if they don't offend entrenched sensibilities, they're not doing their job.

L.M.: Well there you have it, two people who have had to put both their writing careers and their own individual lives and their possessions at risk to place in front of us the truth and to link those threads of history that were always there. I think Ross Fitzgerald and Phil Dickie with the work they have already done in Queensland are owed considerably by the public of this State for making things clearer and I hope the pair of them continue writing this type of work. It takes a lot of courage to do it, and I think they're both very courageous writers.

I'd like to finish on the Salman Rushdie point by saying that many booksellers are not at all cowed by this threat of terrorism. There is a groundswell of people understanding that the ramifications of censorship by terrorism, the lack of freedom of expression and the threat to the freedom of the imagination is a very, very dark threat indeed.

This interview was broadcast by Brisbane radio station FM 92.1 on 4 March, 1989.

Laurie Müller is publisher of the University of Queensland Press. Phil Dickie is a journalist with The Courier-Mail, Brisbane, and author of The Road to Fitzgerald.

Ross Fitzgerald teaches history at Griffith University. A historian and novelist his most recent book is reviewed in this issue. His Grafton Everest novels All About Anthrax and Pushed From The Wings were recently re-issued in London by Black Swan.

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SALLY MORGAN

Wanamurraganya: The Story of Jack McPhee

This is the title of Sally Morgan's new book to be published in October by Fremantle Arts Centre Press. Readers of My Place will remember Jack, the impressive cousin of Sally Morgan's grandmother who helped her to reveal the long-held secret of her aboriginality. (See Chapter 28). The new book tells the full story of his life in Western Australia beginning in 1905. We print here the Introduction and Chapter 9.

INTRODUCTION

I met Jack in May 1983 when I was researching my first book, *My Place*. I had gone to Port Hedland not knowing anyone but hoping to make contact with older people from the Port Hedland/Marble Bar area who remembered my grandmother and her brother. My grandmother had originally come from Corunna Downs Station, near Marble Bar. She was taken away as a child and brought down to Perth, as were other members of her family, in the days when black women weren't allowed to raise children fathered by whitemen. We had been given Jack's name and address by a friend of a friend who was working in Hedland at the time.

We felt very nervous just turning up and asking questions, but there was no other way for us to go. Fortunately, when we arrived at Jack's house he was sitting outside in the shade. He must have wondered who the vanload of strangers were. There was my husband Paul and I, three children and my mother, Gladys. Jack proved to be very friendly and we were immediately impressed by his strong character and sense of humour. He was the first person we approached and the first to tell us he knew exactly who we were talking about. In that moment, he became very special, because he confirmed the reality of our search for our extended family. The way he talked of my grandmother's sister brought home the fact that it was all real. These people had existed and were known, and through hearing people like Jack talk, we could know them too.

After we returned to Perth from the North I began writing to Jack. A friendship developed from that correspondence and he decided he would like to spend Christmas with us. It was 1983, and this first stay proved to be a turning point. Jack was very interested in my writing and told me he had done some recording

Jack McPhee, 1987



with various people over the years but that it had never amounted to anything. He wanted to know my reasons for writing and how I went about it. We had many talks where we discussed why it is important to record the lives of older people. Jack had a natural sense of history, he believed we should know the past and learn from it. He also felt it was important to communicate to young people what their older relations had been through. Once we decided to write the book there was no turning back.

Writing someone's life story is not a simple task. There are always expectations and reservations on both sides. For me, writing Jack's story meant doing his washing, ironing, cooking, taking him to the bank, post office and on social outings, arranging for him to catch up with people from his past, and of course introducing him to the delights of the Burswood Casino, for which I thank Paul and my mother.

For Jack, sharing his life meant putting up with hundreds of questions, going over the same incidents and experiences time and time again, discussing difficult areas that he had never talked about before, putting up with three cats (he hates them!), three noisy children and my cooking.

The point I'm trying to make is that the writing came as a natural outcome of the relationship that was unfolding between us rather than being the result of a more academic exercise. I recall when we were out once and Jack told someone I was writing his story. I quipped, "Yes, I know more about him than he knows about himself!" Jack thought this was really funny, he said. "You know that's true, now when I forget half a story I get you to finish it off because you know it so well!"

The first rule with this kind of writing is to begin where the teller wants to. We began by recording the names of every Afghan camel driver in the North-West that Jack could remember. Then we went on to railway sidings and windmills. It was only after that that Jack decided he would like to talk about his childhood. Most older people are reasonably comfortable with childhood because they are distanced from it and to some extent have come to terms with it. There will still be sensitive areas and this requires patience on behalf of the recorder. At first I never interrupted Jack with any questions because he was still becoming comfortable with the process. Instead I would make the occasional note, knowing that I could come back and ask him later when he was more relaxed. Jack took to staying with us for three months at a time. After his first stay we had recorded thirty one-hour tapes. When he returned home I set about transcribing them. In our times apart we would ring each other.

From these tapes I had a very rough outline of his life. Jack was particularly good at recalling dates, so from photocopies of my transcriptions I was able to cut and paste all the information he had given me

into a rough chronological order. This process itself led to another set of questions. When I next saw Jack I showed him what I had done and proceeded with my questions. It became a format which we now fell into easily and happily. The answers to these questions were then transcribed and fitted into the first text. This meant that the text was changing, growing and being corrected and rewritten continually.

Over a period of three years, Jack and I went through this process six times. It was very laborious but absolutely necessary. In the later stages I would get Paul to ask him questions. Jack and he were great friends by then and he enjoyed having a man to converse with for a change.

Once the book was getting towards the final stage I worked in the J. S. Battye Library of Western Australian History, checking spellings, dates, people, stations and photographs. At the same time Jack and I were able to get his personal file from the Department of Community Services. This consisted of some three hundred pages and, while it told me nothing new, it was very useful in confirming dates, movements and the general attitudes of the times. Jack of course took a great interest in all these things that had been written about him by people who were then in authority. I read the whole file to him and we had a good laugh. There was one particular incident which I found interesting. A report by the Protector of Aborigines asserting that he had spoken to Jack about his forthcoming marriage at Moore River Settlement. Jack laughed when I read it to him. It seems that the Protector had interviewed Arthur Neal, the white superintendent of the settlement, who had told him how Jack felt. This was then reported officially as being an interview with Jack. There are times when an oral account is far more reliable than a written one.

Of course there are constraints in this kind of work as any other. There was the obvious one of Jack being a male who had been through the Law and me being not only female but related as well. Also, I had to accept that there would be certain information shared which he did not want me to include in the book.

When the book was in final draft, Paul read it to him in its entirety. Jack's hearing had become progressively worse and it was now easier for him to listen to Paul's voice than mine. This reading is very important. The teller has to know his confidences have been kept, his stories have not been distorted, and his life has been communicated in a manner in which he himself would speak.

Our final decision was regarding the cover. Originally, it was going to be an old photo, but the quality was poor, so we decided I should do a painting. One night I asked Jack to describe Wanamurranganya and as he talked I drew.

"Does this drawing have the feel of that place?", I asked him.

"Nearly. Flatten out those hills a bit, and you need some reeds near the water."

When I showed him my next attempt he said "No, no, that's no good, the hills are still too bumpy. Here, give me the pencil."

I watched as he slowly changed my drawing. Finally he said, "Ah, that's it. You can paint that now." And so the cover was born.

Just before he went back North after his story was finished, I asked him how he felt about it. His reply sums up what the book is about.

"I see it as the story of a working man, and I think working men who read it will understand because they know the struggle. Then I also see it as the story of Wanamurruganya, the son of a tribal Aborigine. Then again, it's the story of a man who is fighting with being black and white. A man who chooses not to live in the tribal way, but who can't live the whiteman's way because the Government won't let him. I could go on and on, because what I'm really saying is, it's the story of many people, and they're all me!"

AN OPPORTUNITY LOST: 1933-1935

Billy Martin was a good bloke, a real Australian. He'd been to war, he was honest and hard working and a gentleman. He trusted you. It didn't worry him to go away and leave Susie and me in charge. There were only two other permanent workers on Mt Padbury then, Georgy, who was an uncle of Susie's in the tribal way, and a young Englishman, who wasn't that experienced in station work.

The country around there was flat, except for Mt Padbury of course, which was the hill after which the station had been named. It was good grazing country, especially for horses. While Susie was cooking I was mustering sheep, looking after cattle, fencing and doing a bit of horse-breaking. My pay was around two quid a week.

The horse-breaking reminded me of my days with old Harry Farber, the greatest horse-breaker of them all. Horse-breaking is hard work and you can make it harder by not doing certain things properly. For example, if you don't mouth them the right way, if you let them take the bit in their teeth, you can pull them as much as you like later on and it won't affect them at all.

Once I had the headstall on them I'd let them roll around in the yard for a day or two, while they got used to it. While one horse was relaxing you go out and catch another one, so you end up with a few horses on the go all the time, but at different stages. That way you're not sitting around doing nothing in between.

Of course they all love to chuck you off, that's part of the game, but you can't let them beat you. You have to get back on and have another go. They'll try all sorts of tricks like running you into the fence.

You just have to ignore all that business and keep going with them. They come good as long as you're patient.

There were a lot of Top Rail Riders around stations in those days. They all treated the whole thing as a bit of a joke. They loved it when you got a real mean bugger because you'd be on and off the horse all the time and they thought it was real funny.

Most horses only take about a week's working, mean ones a bit longer. A mean horse will always have piggy eyes. That sounds funny, but that's how you pick them. If their eyes look piggy, and they're watching you all the time in a real sly way, you know you've got a mean bugger.

I shouldn't complain about horses really because mules are much worse. Mules are stubborn and take a long time to get used to you. You never want to ride an unbroken mule into the bush on your own because you'll never know when you'll be coming back. You hop off a mule and he'll pull aside, jump, kick you and all. With a horse you just have to watch their head and go with them, the same way you do when you're riding a bike, but a mule is different, they can surprise you. I often thought I was finally getting somewhere with a mule and would then find out quick smart that I was not.

I had been working for Billy for a few months when a letter arrived from Neville. It said they'd checked their records and couldn't find Billy's permit to employ me and Susie. They said it was illegal for him to employ natives like us without a permit. They sent him a form which he had to fill in and return before he would be allowed to keep me and Susie there. Billy showed me the letter and it made me really angry. I had never heard of this permit system before, what did they think we were, dogs that needed licensing?

I wrote to Mr Neville and told him that I could do station work without him interfering and that I would not work under a permit. I was old enough to look after myself.

Billy got some men together after that and we went on a droving trip to Noreena Downs Station. I took Susie into Meekatharra before we left because she was due to have our first child, and Meekatharra Hospital had started letting a few natives in.

We were six weeks on the road on that trip. Two weeks going up and four weeks coming back with four thousand head of sheep. I was the cook and no one died so I don't suppose I did too badly.

On our way home to Mt Padbury something funny happened. We pulled in at a well to water the sheep and decided to camp there. I was getting some tea ready when Tom Broad, who was pulling the water, sang out, "Hey Jack! Come and look at this sign someone's nailed up here."

"I've got enough to do without looking at that", I replied, "I've got meat and damper on the fire, I can't leave it now."

"I'll read it to you then, you might find it funny, it's about your old boss Farber."

"Righto, I'm listening."

"Goodnight Midnight Harry, and all your kicking bastards and mules, if there was a mongrel I ever met, you're the only one of them!"

We laughed and laughed. I could imagine someone writing that about Harry.

On that same trip I met Brumby Leeke. Susie had told me quite a lot about him by then. He had sent her money when she was at the Settlement and wanted her to go back north to his station. Her mother had wanted Susie back too, but of course Neville wouldn't agree. Neville had this idea that Brumby had taken advantage of Susie when she was younger, but Susie said it wasn't true. Anyway, Brumby came up to me where we were camped and said, "You Jack McPhee?"

"Yes."

"I'm Brumby Leeke. I'm in this area droving too. I hear you're married to a girl called Mularna."

"Yes, I think so. What's her white name?"

"Bessie Connaughton, she's like a daughter to me."

"Yes, that name's right, but they changed it at the Settlement to Susie Smith. She's in hospital right now having a baby."

"You don't say? Well, any time you want to come over to Prairie Downs there's a place for you. I've got horses and cattle, you're welcome to come and live there permanently."

Once we hit Mt Padbury we stayed a few days to settle the sheep down and then went into Meekatharra. I picked up Susie and baby Marie. She was a good healthy baby, and we all came back with Billy on the truck.

When I told Susie about meeting Brumby she was very excited. All she wanted to do after that was go and see her mother, who was on Bulloo Downs at the time, and Brumby.

After a while Brumby wrote and let us know that should we come to Prairie Downs he'd like to leave the station to us after he died. That was it as far as Susie was concerned, she didn't want to stay another minute on Mt Padbury. She was a strong woman and once she got an idea into her head it was hard to do anything with her.

I wasn't sure what to do myself, despite Susie urging me to take Brumby up on his offer. I knew it was a wonderful opportunity for both of us, and he struck me as the sort of bloke who wouldn't make a suggestion like that unless he really meant it. I had promised Neville I would never take Susie to Prairie Downs and I knew that somehow word would get back to him if I just went there and didn't tell him. In the end I thought it might be best to be open about the whole thing, tell him what we were doing, but also tell him about Brumby's offer to leave the station to us. Surely he wouldn't want us to miss out on an opportunity like that. I also added in the letter I sent

that I still didn't like working under a permit, just in case he got the idea of sending Brumby one of those forms as well.

We said goodbye to Billy Martin and left Mt Padbury towards the end of 1933. Billy was happy for us, "Best of luck Jack", he said, "you'll do well there, Old Brum is a bit too old to handle all that on his own now."

We hitched a lift with Campbell and Co., they carted mail and one thing and another up to Marble Bar by truck. They dropped us off at Bulloo Downs, which was on the way to Prairie Downs, because that's as far as they were going at that time.

That suited us perfectly as Susie was anxious to see her mother, Piper, and show her the baby. It had been nine years since they'd seen each other so you can imagine how excited they all were. We told her what our plans were and Piper decided she would like to come to Prairie Downs with us.

Watty Hall, the boss at Bulloo Downs, came and met me. He'd heard what was going on and said, "I don't know whether Brum is at the homestead just now and I haven't got enough spare horses to give you all one each to ride over there. If you can ride over on your own and let him know you're here, he'll come over in the buggy and pick you all up."

That's exactly what we did, and we were soon all living happily on Prairie Downs.

Susie was pleased to be with Brum and the other people there. Some of the old women living on the station had nursed her as a child, so they were very pleased to see her back and with her own baby too. There were more Aboriginal people than I expected on Prairie Downs, they liked to hang around and work for Brum because he fed them better than the other squatters and made sure they were looked after properly.

After we'd been there a few weeks Brum and I had a talk and he told me his version of why they took Susie away in the first place.

Susie's father had been Billy Connaughton, a white-man of all trades, who'd been living with Piper, Susie's mother, who was a ngayatda banujutha.¹ When Billy passed away, Piper had moved onto Prairie Downs and lived with Brumby. When Susie had grown into a teenager there was an Aboriginal bloke there who tribally was her straight nuba.² It meant he had a right to take Susie as his wife. Brum wasn't keen on her marrying tribally because she was mardamarda³ and had been brought up differently. Her tribal nuba was cross that Brum would not let her go, so he got some of his mates together and they decided to take care of Brum and then steal Susie away.

They waited until Brum went into the station store and then jammed him in there. While two guards stood outside, the other two tried to beat him up. The only thing that saved him was the shotgun he had hidden in there, he grabbed it and shot the bloke who wanted Susie, in the leg. The police heard about what had

happened and came out to investigate. The tribal blokes made false statements saying they'd seen Brum sleeping with Susie on the verandah. She would have only been fourteen at the time. After that Susie was sent to Moore River.

Besides listening to Brum's side of the story I kept my ear out for gossip. Many of the same people were still on the station and they all knew what had happened. I knew that if the story Brum had told me wasn't true, that one of them would let slip something. You could always count on the Mulba⁴ grapevine for things like that, and those old people have wonderful memories. There was nothing, not a thing. According to them, Brum's story was right, so I set my mind at rest over it.

Brum confided to me that he was worried that the Aborigines Department might still cause us some trouble. He was in his seventies then and past the stage of being interested in molesting anyone, but he reckoned the Department wouldn't believe that. He decided to take up some land out on the Oakover and put it in my name so that if worse came to worst we would at least have that. He took up a pastoral lease of sixty-four thousand acres for us near Balfour Downs country.

About the same time I talked to Brum about my cousin Jack Doherty and his wife Jean. I explained about Jack's eyesight but Brum said he was quite happy to have them come and live with us. He was sure there'd be something they could do around the station. I wrote to Jack and sent him ten quid for the train fare and expenses to get them to Meekatharra, I was going to ride in and pick them up from there. I wanted Jack out of the Settlement, it was no life for him.

A few weeks later I received a letter from Jack to say that he was temporarily keeping the money I had sent as Neville would not give permission for them to leave Moore River and join me because I was defying the Department by living on Prairie Downs.

I was really disappointed, because I had been looking forward to being with Jack again. As far as I was concerned all the Aborigines Department gave you was trouble, nothing else. They had already forced Piper to return to Bulloo Downs, because her man refused to work with her away. That had been a great disappointment to Susie as she had wanted her mother to be able to stay with us for good. And now, instead of letting Jack and Jean have a go at a better life, they were refusing to let them leave simply because of me. That was the whole trouble with them, they treated you like an ignorant child. They wanted to be able to dictate your own life to you.

Not long after that Brum got a letter from Neville warning him not to let me and Susie stay on Prairie Downs. Brum showed me the letter and said, "As far as I'm concerned Jack, I've never seen this bloody letter!" Then he threw it away.

I wrote to Neville asking him to let us stay. I told him we were very happy and didn't want to leave. I asked him who else would employ me for three pounds a week plus keep. Also, I explained to him again that one day the station would be ours, that I was already a boss there, and that it was a wonderful opportunity for us to get on in the world.

What I didn't know then, was that Neville had already issued a warrant through the Commissioner of Police for Susie to be taken from me and sent back to Moore River. You see, I thought that because she was a married woman with one child and another on the way, that they wouldn't go that far. I thought she belonged to me, not them. I was wrong.

In November of 1934 Susie had our son Johnny in Meekatharra Hospital. I was very pleased to have a boy because I thought then that when I died I could leave Prairie Downs to my son.

Not long after Christmas, in early 1935, the policeman from Peak Hill Station came out to see us.

"Unless the three of you take heed of this warning", he told us, "I will have to enforce the warrant for the removal of Mrs Susie McPhee to Moore River Settlement. Unless Jack and Susie leave here, Brumby, the warrant will come into effect."

"I'm not going to fire him", said Brum, "I don't look on him as a native, I don't treat him as a native, therefore I'm not doing anything wrong by employing him."

The policeman took me and Susie aside and asked quietly how we were being treated.

"Good", I told him, "he's happy to have us here and we're happy to be here. We're family to him, he's made me a boss already and wants us to have the place when he's gone. Can't you just leave us alone?"

"Are you sure he has no dishonourable intentions towards your wife?"

"Look at him", I pointed to Brum, "he's a done man, what's he going to get up to?"

The policeman looked at Brum and had to admit that he didn't look too good.

"I'm sorry", he said, "but there's nothing I can do, you have to obey these orders, you're a native!"

"I'm not a native! I've lived and worked with white-men all my life, I've even eaten with them, Mr Neville knows that. Susie's my wife, we've got two kids, we were legally married, how can he have more say over where she goes than me?"

"Because you're both natives, you're not whites. You have to do as he says, he's your Protector."

I laughed at that one. I was so angry, I thought of all the times when me and different ones I knew could have done with a bit of protection, and where was he then? Nowhere! And now here he was, interfering with the best offer I'd ever had. If Neville was going to protect us at all, it should have been from

bad, not good!

The policeman ended up warning us all once more and then leaving. He said he would put his report in but if we weren't gone in a week he would have to come out and get Susie.

We are all very, very upset. Brum was all for defying Neville, but I knew Susie couldn't handle going back to the Settlement. I decided we would have to leave. I wrote to Neville telling him that we were going, but that as far as I was concerned he had done us a very bad turn and I would not forget it.

Brum was his usual generous self when we left. He gave us a wagon full of stores, two camels, twenty-five head of cattle and twelve head of horses.

"At least you've got that bit of land", he told us, "if you fall on hard times and those horses get run

down, sneak back here and I'll give you a fresh lot. I'll be able to help that way as long as that bastard Neville doesn't get wind of it."

1. *ngayarda banujutha*—a person whose ancestry is entirely Aboriginal.
2. *nuba*—a person who is the correct tribal relationship to another person for the purpose of marriage.
3. *mardamarda*—a person of mixed Aboriginal-European ancestry.
4. *mulba*—the Aboriginal people of the Port Headland/Marble Bar area of Western Australia.

Sally Morgan, writer and painter, born and educated in Western Australia (University of Western Australia, post graduate diplomas at Curtin University) published her first book My Place (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987) to great critical acclaim, remarkable sales, and various awards.



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KEN INGLIS

Remembering Australians on the Somme, Anzac Day 1988

'Ah, les Anzacs!' I first heard our sacred word spoken in French nearly twenty years ago in Paris by Leon Marandais, a veteran of 1914-18 to whom my wife was related by marriage. He had grown up in the Pas-de-Calais and become a factory worker not far from places whose names were made as familiar to my generation of Australians as if they had been part of our own landscape. We heard them casually annexed by old diggers into their own speech: Bullecourt, Mont St Quentin, Pozières, Villers-Bretonneux. If not exactly household words, they were class-room and quadrangle words. So, further off, was Polygon Wood. Did we know that Polygon Wood was across the border in Belgium? The war had made that border meaningless. The only lines that mattered were the front lines, ours and theirs, drawn through Belgium and France for four years.

Few of us could have found those places on a map; but neither could most French people, so tiny were they, and so little known to any except local history; and now to ours.

Leon Marandais' face brightened as he met an Australian. *La Guerre* always meant for him 1914-1918, not 1939-45. *La Guerre* was a time of horror, especially that first winter at Verdun, battered by the army of the Kaiser and left under-clothed and lice-infested by politicians of the Third Republic who treated *poilus* not much better than animals. That was how he remembered it. After the war he was never active in any circle of *anciens combattants*; but it pleased him, for the rest of his 94 years, to be reminded of ancient camaraderie. For Australians visiting France it has been a common experience, especially in the adjoining departments of the Somme and the Pas de Calais, to bask in appreciation for the Anzacs, those large and loping strangers who had come across the world to help resist the Boche invader.

Had the French not been so famously reluctant to emigrate, the presence of old *poilus* alongside old diggers could have enriched the oratory and rituals of Anzac Day. They would have been more welcome participants than men of nationalities we did attract and admit—old enemies from Germany and Turkey,

Italians, and the respected Greeks and Poles. The reverse traffic hasn't been thick. Probably the Australians best known in France have been the jockey Bill Pyers and the cyclist Phil Anderson.

When the French committee for Australia's bicentennial year began to look for projects, they would have been sure to include some commemoration of comradeship in war even if the committee's president, Andre Giraud, had not been Minister for Defence. In February he flew out to open the La Pérouse Museum on Botany Bay, reminder that a different roll of the dice in the game of empire might have made the last continent *l'Australie*, sister-colony to La Nouvelle Calédonie, La Polynésie Française, and L'Indo-Chine. Back home, on Monday 25 April, Giraud drove up from Paris to Villers-Bretonneux. Anzac ceremony had long been familiar here. This year, ceremonies at the town and nearby at the Australian National Memorial were preceded by a weekend of commemoration at other places honoured in Australian tradition; and the main event, on Anzac Day itself, was given a novel military grandeur.

Plans were made in Paris by officials at the Australian Embassy and in the Ministry of Defence and by members of the Association France-Australie, and on the spot by mayors and *anciens combattants*. A contingent of Australian army officers who happened to be studying at the Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham, near Swindon, in England, travelled across by bus, accompanied by Canadian comrades on the same course who proved to be handy interpreters. From Australia were flown four old men who had survived the killing on the Somme and who were now, seventy years on, to have one more medal pinned alongside the row on their chests. On Saturday 23 April the young officers (khaki Australians, green Canadians), the veterans and a party from the Embassy visited Bullecourt and two neighbouring Somme villages for band music, speeches, wreath-laying and champagne. At Bullecourt local worshippers joined visitors in the stark church, which like every other building in the village was less than 70 years old. Artillery had destroyed all the villages on this



*Australian and French, soldier and civilian, young and old,
Memorial to First Australian Division, Pozières, 24 April 1988.*

pilgrimage, so that for once Australians coming to the old world were in the presence of a built environment newer than their own. At the end of the service an Australian flag in the north aisle was pulled aside by our Ambassador, Ted Pocock, and by one of the four veterans, Bob Harris, whose war record sounded as if made up for a character in the television series *Anzacs*: to German New Guinea in the force that preceded the AIF; on Gallipoli; in France from the first Australian action, in 1916, to the end. For bravery here at Bullecourt he had been mentioned in despatches. Now he helped the ambassador half his age to reveal a tablet saying: 'Sacred to the memory of the 10,000 members of the Australian Imperial Force who were killed and wounded in the two battles of Bullecourt April-May 1917 and to the Australian dead and their comrades in arms who lie here forever in the soil of France. Lest we forget.' The text appeared also in French, 'Lest we forget' becoming 'N'oublions jamais leur sacrifice'. At this monument, and over the road at the village's obelisk to its own dead, the visitors laid wreaths later on Saturday evening, after a short visit in a chill wind to the site of the Hindenburg Line, and a painting by the war artist James Scott

was presented depicting the death here on 11 April 1917 of Percy Black, an embodiment of Anzac legend: digger for gold in Western Australia before enlisting as a private at the age of 36; on Gallipoli from the landing to the departure, decorated there for feats with a machine gun; promoted from the ranks to major before the AIF was sent to France and decorated four more times for gallantry at Pozières and elsewhere; strongly built, laconic, and described by C. E. W. Bean as "the greatest fighting soldier in the AIF" (I take all this from the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*). Giving this painting to the commune of Bullecourt was the Australian War Memorial's formal gesture of participation in the weekend of ceremonies.

On Sunday morning the Embassy people and the army officers divided into three groups, to attend church services at Sailly-le-Sec, Pozières and Mont St. Quentin. They are places too small for our atlases. Sailly-le-Sec is just east of Amiens and north of Villers-Bretonneux, Pozières is further from Amiens on the road that runs through Albert to Bapaume, and Mont St. Quentin south-east of Pozières, close to the town of Péronne. At each place the visitors laid wreaths after the church services at a memorial to one of the Australian divisions. There are memorials to each of the five divisions of the AIF, but two went unvisited. The 4th Division is commemorated above the village of Bellenglise, near the city of St. Quentin, which is a different place from Mont St. Quentin and is some way south-east of Péronne. The 5th Division memorial is at Polygon Wood in Belgium. Both were too far off to be involved in this weekend, and in any case the track from Bellenglise to the 4th Division monument is so narrow and rough that the party's buses could not have made it and the hedge might well have scratched the Ambassador's Mercedes.

To Australian eyes these memorials look familiar. Four are obelisks, and one is a slouch-hatted soldier. They could be standing in any Australian town. They belong, though, to a tradition older than the local civic memorial, a tradition of purely military commemoration. They are the 1914-18 equivalent of *regimental* memorials raised on the battlefields of earlier wars, the division having replaced the regiment as the basic unit of army organisation. There are nearly sixty of them to British divisions in France and Belgium, including those from Dominions. They bear the names not of dead men—that would be impracticable, on small monuments to such large units—but of battlefields in which the division served. The Divisional Memorials stand separately, and in all but one case not eloquently: you don't see them unless you know where to look, and they don't tell you much. The memorial at Pozières is not quite visible from the main road that runs south west from Bapaume to Albert and Amiens, and the plaque gives sparse information:

'To the officers and non-commissioned officers and men of the first Australian Division who fought in France and Belgium 1916.1917.1918', then the places where they fought. The 3rd Division memorial at Sailly-le-Sec, on a road which does not attract much traffic, is similarly inscribed. So is the 2nd Division memorial at Mont St. Quentin; but this one is more expressive and more accessible. It has bronze bas-reliefs: men hauling and pushing a gun; men advancing with bayoneted rifles and hand-grenades. This was the only one of the five initiated by members of the division, and the only one for which negotiation with canny landowners and French authorities yielded a really satisfactory site: you come across it on the road from Bapaume to Péronne. Above the bas-reliefs stands a bronze digger, strong, thoughtful, faintly smiling as he looks down from a pedestal. The base has been there since 1925; the soldier, however, is less than twenty years old. Originally an Australian soldier thrust his bayonet down through a German eagle. This was the work of Web Gilbert, creator of belligerent bronze soldiers on memorials at home (in Shepparton, Broken Hill, and the Adelaide suburb of Burnside). Innocently sure that the victory here commemorated was once and for all, the makers did not imagine what returning German soldiers might think of this statue. In 1940 they smashed it. Stanley

Hammond's replacement is more discreet: in the age of EEC tourism, no German is likely to be offended. (Back in Australia custodians of 2nd Division tradition have lately re-created the original in silver for the officer's mess at Coogee).

The three parties converged for lunch at Pozières. Franco-Australian conversation across the tables needed less Canadian aid with every glass of wine, and none at all by cognac time. News cuttings stuck to the wall record earlier visits by old soldiers and a journey by Pozières people at RSL expense to Queensland. A letter from Peter Burness at the Australian War Memorial thanks the proprietor for sending a relic picked up in a field. The dustjacket of Peter Charlton's *Pozières* is pinned up, beside a map of the district and under an Australian flag. This unofficial and amateur display is more informative than the obelisk.

After Sunday lunch the party visited a memorial created for the then independent government of Newfoundland. A bronze caribou stands guard over the Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel and the plaque is more informative than any on the Australian divisional memorials. Trenches have been preserved. All in all, the visitors' imagining of the war was more easily stirred here than anywhere else on Saturday and Sunday.



On the edge of [the] ceremony, Australian National War Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux, Anzac Day 1988

Villers-Bretonneux was the right place for a Franco-Australian bicentennial Anzac Day. Exactly seventy years earlier, on 25 April 1918, men of the 4th and 5th Divisions had captured the town. On a hill to the north, 20 kilometres east of Amiens, the Australian government and the Imperial War Graves Commission agreed in the first year of peace to erect an Australian National War Memorial. A sign in the town leads you there. From high up in a central tower, guided by an orientation table, you can see where the armies fought. Manning Clark's guide in 1985, as he noted in *Overland* 100, pointed out that the trench line was marked by a change in the colour of the grass. You can see also marks of the next war, damage done to the stone of the Memorial by shellfire and deliberately left after 1945.

At the base of the tower you read what is special about this monument: 'To the glory of God and in memory of the AIF in France and Flanders 1914-1918 and of eleven thousand who fell in France and have no known grave.' So it has two purposes: to honour men in all five divisions of the AIF who served on the western front, and to record the names of men who were killed in the French part of the front and whose bodies were never found, or not found in a condition enabling them to be identified. Their names, listed by battalion and rank, are cut into a curving screen wall bisected by the tower and flanked by pavilions. They are The Missing. That gerund, at first used administratively in the count after an action, then communicated by telegram to next of kin, acquired a terrible resonance as the number of men blown to bits or putrefying in mud or buried without identifying marker became larger and larger. It could be read as a euphemism, nourishing hope that a man might one day reappear, either miraculously saved from death or supernaturally taking furlough from the other world as some did in spiritualist visions. W. K. Hancock, in an anguished paragraph about his brother, 'missing' on the Somme in 1916, writes that his mother "was close to losing her reason because of her continual fretting over Jim. I learned after the war that he had been obliterated by a shell at Pozières. If the authorities had felt able to report him killed instead of missing they would have acted more humanely, for the suspense prolonged and poisoned my mother's grief. (I felt the strain too and used for many years afterwards to have a horrible dream in which Jim came back to us mutilated and mad.)" I asked Sir Keith awkwardly, not long before he died last year, how long Jim had been missing. He replied: "He's still missing."

How to give due commemoration to the Missing became a challenge to the empire's architects and sculptors. Of the Australian missing, the 6,000 or so who disappeared in Belgium had their names recorded with another 80,000 missing from elsewhere in the empire on Reginald Blomfield's Menin Gate at the

entrance to Ypres. I was surprised to find the setting of the Menin Gate entirely urban, built-up on both approaches. It is both a memorial and a contribution to urban renewal, the whole city having been destroyed in the war. The rural setting familiar to millions of Australians who have seen 'Menin Gate at Midnight', Will Longstaff's dream-painting, has been invented by the artist to let the Missing rise from the poppies in the Flemish earth. Because it is in a city, this memorial—and only this one, of 1914-1918 British monuments to the Missing—is the scene of daily ceremony, the bugling of the Last Post at sunset to honour the dead. The Australian dead are given particular recognition on Anzac Day, when a wreath is laid under AIF names on behalf of the government and people of their country.

The 11,000 Australians missing in France might have been named on Edwin Lutyens' Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval on the Somme, within sight of Pozières but the Australian government preferred to do separate honour to men of the AIF missing in France. £100,000 was set aside and a competition to design the memorial was won by William Lucas of Melbourne. For reasons never announced the commission went instead to Lutyens. It turned out to be the last job commemorating the war of 1914-1918 done by the Imperial War Graves Commission. King George unveiled it in 1938.

The Imperial War Graves Commission embraced the modern principles of individuality and uniformity. More rigorously than the French, the British committed themselves to giving each dead man separate recognition. I wonder if this difference was connected with the fact that at first all, and always a large proportion, of the British army, unlike those of the continental powers, were volunteers? I wonder if there is also a Protestant element in British policy, a reverence for the visible word which makes contemplation of a carved name serve as a kind of equivalent to Catholic prayer for a soul's repose? The British were also more rigorous than the French, and any other power, in imposing the principle of uniformity. They were the first to decide that every grave in a war cemetery should have an identical headstone, regardless of rank; and they were the only belligerent government not to let families make their own arrangements for burying soldiers who had died in foreign fields. War has been a moderate leveller for the living in twentieth century Britain, and a great one for the dead.

The English planners of mortuary regard hoped that there would be no separate national memorials for the Dominions but only the New Zealanders were compliant. The governments of Australia, Canada, Newfoundland and South Africa all opted for commemoration more general than was provided by the divisional memorial but more specific, more national, than was expressed in British cemeteries and



Children of Villers-Bretonneux, Anzac Day 1988

British memorials to the missing. The Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux is a mild but firm expression of dominion nationalism.

It is designed in the working style of the imperial cemetery architects which has come to be known as stripped classicism. You approach it uphill through a war cemetery, Lutyens' secular monument visible behind the Cross of Sacrifice, placed against Lutyens' and other non-Christians' judgement at the centre of every cemetery constructed by the War Graves Commission. A civilian, especially one of anti-militarist sentiment, may be chilled or angered by all those headstones standing on parade. They are softened by horticulture, and many of them are given particularity by inscriptions the next of kin were invited to submit. Here, below rank and name and number and dates, sometimes fully legible only after you bend and hold plants aside, are a touching miscellany of last messages. Only here does commemoration become personal, the dead soldier connected with his family. Some offer proud public statements:

'A soldier and a man—One of Australia's best.' That took Manning Clark's eye.

Some connect their names with his:
*'Dick, loved son of J. and M. Roe
 Nobly lived, nobly died.'*

Some reach for ritually familiar phrases:
'Greater love hath no man'

Some grasp at supernatural hope, Christian or stoic:
*'God accept him
 Christ receive him'*

'He is not dead but taking rest'

*'Somewhere in France he is sleeping
 The son I love so well'*

Some prefer the laconic mode:
'From Mum and Dad'. Manning Clark thought that one unmistakably Australian.

Some ask questions:
*'Oh why are we dead we youths
 All ye that pass by forget not'*

*'Another life lost
 Hearts broken for what'*

Geoff Page noticed that one, and went on to write, in his poem 'Inscription at Villers-Bretonneux',
 I think of the woman
 and those she saddened by insisting—
 the Melbourne clerk
 who must have let it through.

Many have no inscription, either because the clerks could not reach the next of kin or because for whatever

reason they chose not to respond. And many a headstone, here as elsewhere, bears the words 'A soldier known only to God', meaning totally unidentifiable, or 'An Australian soldier known only to God', meaning either that something he wore or carried showed him to be from the AIF or that the pieces of flesh and bone found at that place could only have come from an Australian. *These* men's names must be among the 11,000 on the walls of the memorial beyond.

More people walked up through the cemetery to the lawns in front of the memorial on Monday, 25 April, than had attended Saturday's and Sunday's ceremonies. The official Australian party had been joined by some Australian tourists and English visitors who had enrolled for an increasingly popular 'Six Days on the Somme'. A hundred or more people from the neighbourhood had come along. Children from Villers-Bretonneux, carrying poppies, lined the approaches. Stiff on parade stood detachments from the French army, navy and air force and the Garde Republicain, dressed for the French Revolution—and on foot, not horseback. In front of the walls bearing all those names were ranged slouch-hatted officers from Shrivenham and *anciens combattants* with tricoloured banners.

A military band made *La Marseillaise* sound as inspiring as ever and did its best with our national dirge. The parade was inspected by officers of the three French services and by the Australian ambassador, Pocock, and the Minister for Defence, Giraud, who then moved together to a podium in front of the tower. Each man used the other's language as well as his own. The ambassador spoke briefly, with well-turned cordiality, and delivered a message from Giraud's opposite number Kim Beazley. Giraud began with an apology for having to defer the ceremony from morning, as planned, to afternoon, because his Prime Minister, Jacques Chirac, had unexpectedly called a cabinet meeting. The implied message was flattering: this occasion was too important for him to send a substitute. His speech was carefully crafted. Picking up Pocock's reference to 'nos jeunes volontaires', he dwelt on that aspect of the AIF which had so astonished Leon Marandais and his comrades, telling the story of those recruiting marches through the country in which men from town after town fell in, as if on their way to a gold rush. He quoted Andrew Fisher's 'last man and last shilling'. He praised the AIF's effort at Villers-Bretonneux as a contribution to allied victory. He passed to the war of 1939-1945—Tobruk, El Alamein—but stopped short of the second AIF's engagement against his

Children of Villers-Bretonneux in front of war graves on the approach to the Australian National War Memorial, Anzac Day 1988



countrymen. Though the minister did not actually mention Aborigines, he registered their presence delicately by saying that we were celebrating two hundred years of *modern* Australian history.

And he had a few steely sentences on the subject which had possibly persuaded him to keep this day's appointment. Australians, he said, recognised that those Pacific islands in one of which a few days ago four of his gendarmes had been killed and many more taken hostage, those islands were an integral part of France. He was sure Australians knew that the French presence in their region represented a force for stability. After the speeches, eight military jets flashed low over our heads, in a tribute to the dead and an ear-splitting demonstration to the living.

The four Australian veterans had medals pinned on their lapels by the minister: three Legions of Honour and a Medal of National Merit. Then we were free to mill about, inspect the memorial, look for names, climb the tower for the view. The tower, and the twin pavilions at the end of curved walls, struck me as perfunctory and sterile. The only signs of Australia are the AIF symbol below the tower and draped flags carved in stone. To my eyes the monument does little more than provide the necessary surface for the names of the missing.

Back in the town the minister and the ambassador laid wreaths on the local war memorial, a mourning female France before a rough stone obelisk, at her feet 'A nos morts 1914-1918' and just in front 'Souvenir au Australiens morts pour la libération de Villers-Bretonneux'. Outside the Salle de Victoria, an Australian museum alongside the village school, Giraud and Pocock drew back French and Australian flags to reveal a seventieth anniversary tablet commemorating 'cette page de la mémoire commune des nations Australienne et Française.' Already the school building had a wall tablet proclaiming it in two languages to be the gift of the school children of Victoria. On a column in front of the school, tablets record a visit by W. M. Hughes as Prime Minister in 1921 and the laying of a foundation stone by Frank Tate, Director of Education in the state of Victoria, in 1923. Children of the school called out 'Thank you' to curious Australians, as generations of them must have been taught to do since 1921. Shop windows displayed assorted Australiana: boxing kangaroo, stuffed koalas, flags, sticker declaring love for Australia and in particular the twinned town of Robinvale in Victoria. At the end of the day, in the Salle Communale, the band played *Waltzing Matilda*. Unless in the Museum, which was locked when I got to it late in the day, visitors to Villers-Bretonneux in 1988 are given little help to imagine 1918.

What did representatives of other Dominions do? The South African national memorial at Delville Wood, also on the Somme, by an English architect, has as centrepiece a domed arch on which stand bronze

figures in the imperial Roman manner revived by Napoleon. Behind the arch is set a cross which is not quite the customary imperial cemetery's cross of sacrifice: South Africans, or at least Afrikaners, recognise it as the Voortrekker's double cross of consecration. So there is a little more of national symbolism than at Villers-Bretonneux, but not more information—or not until recently.

Canada is another story. As well as divisional memorials and other battlefields monuments, the Canadian government erected a huge triumphal structure at Vimy Ridge, north of Arras in the department of the Pas-de-Calais, to commemorate at once the victory there on 9 April 1917 (Canada's near-equivalent to Anzac), the solidarity of Canada and France, the binary Canadian nation, and the 11,000 Canadians Missing in France. A Canadian sculptor, Walter S. Allward, created the design in a dream. The heroic figure of Canada broods over her dead in front of those two pylons which the sculptor said stood for Canada and France but which Canadians also see as expressing their national bi-culture. A marble figure represents Sacrifice, and just below it stretches another figure with a daring resemblance to the crucified Christ.

This monument is like no other imperial structure, British or Dominion, to come out of the war: American in its flamboyant declaration of nationhood, set in a memorial landscape which expresses an American approach to education. Beside the great monument is a bronze map of the battlefield, which well-briefed bi-lingual guides use as a blackboard before visitors make their own way along Canadian and German trenches and are led through a subway which housed a whole Canadian infantry brigade. (Moreover, Vimy Ridge, unlike Villers-Bretonneux or Thiepval or the Menin Gate, has the toilets needed to encourage a tourist to linger in comfort). Yet even at Vimy Ridge it is not easy to imagine the experience commemorated. "There is no feeling here of death or devastation," writes the Canadian historian Pierre Berton, "no sense of horror or of loss or of senseless human waste. The subway and the trenches are bone dry, and so are the great craters in which men once drowned—carpeted now with their blankets of grass. The trenches are as neat as the lawns, their sides plumb-bob vertical. The sandbags are as regular as bricks and on close inspection turn out to be concrete counterfeits." One detail does astonish. Empty, dry and clean though the trenches are, the visitor is startled, as each new detachment of Canadian and German occupants must have been, to discover how close the enemies were: less than forty yards separated them. The army officers among our group, fresh from computer-aided studies of future warfare, were no less amazed than the civilians to find these mighty military machines in 1917 no further apart than ancient bands of warriors armed with spear and stone.

I am told that what the French have done at Verdun, where nearly 800,000 French and German men died, does reach modern imaginations. Donald Horne has two vivid pages in his book *The Great Museum* elaborating the theme that of all sacred sites from the war of 1914-18, "the monuments of Verdun catch the most extreme meanings." A memorial museum, a variety of memorials, cemeteries, forts left as they were, the ossuary containing bones of 100,000 unknown dead; and near the railway station, Rodin's winged victory "neither calm nor triumphant, but demented by rage and horror," With less calculation the battlefield of Gallipoli communicates some sense of what men did to each other there in 1915 mainly because there was nothing else there before 25 April of that year and nothing much has happened since other than the making of cemeteries and monuments.

The abandoned battlefields of Verdun and Gallipoli may have more power than the reconstructed Vimy Ridge to evoke a sense of sheer desolation; but seventy and more years on, aids are needed to tell the visitor how all this devastation happened, how flesh and blood endured and did not endure it. On the edge of the Vimy Ridge Memorial Park a hoarding coaxes visitors from likely nations (French, Canadian, British and German) to visit a nearby 1914-1918 military museum. The notice signals an enterprise more professional than the casually arranged collections of local war relics exhibited over the years in French and Belgian towns. Others are on the way. At Péronne, public money from the department of the Somme is going into an ambitious museum of 1914-1918 to be opened in 1990. Australian aid will contribute to this 'Historial de la Grande Guerre', as one of its makers, Jean-Pierre Thierry, has been in Canberra exploring the treasures of the Australian War Memorial as 'Villers-Bretonneux Scholar' for usable facts and ideas about how to display them. As the years 1914-1918 recede, as the period of peace within Europe lengthens, and as people in regions short of other attractions think about how to attract tourists, the Great War will be increasingly subjected to the new audio-visual, tactile and even olfactory arts of museology.

Will these arts be applied to any of the old imperial war cemeteries and memorials? What if the Australian War Memorial had its charter extended to contrive displays in France, Belgium and Turkey, in Egypt, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea, of Australian experiences in war, designed to give Australian and other visitors, in this age of global tourism, understandings so far denied them almost entirely at Villers-Bretonneux and offered only fitfully at Vimy Ridge? Mary Baillieu, provoked by Manning Clark's account of his visit to battlefields in France to write (in *Overland* 102) a meditative note on battlefields in Egypt, concludes: "There is no memorial to the Australians except silence." The silence of El Alamein and other

battle sites moved her, but left curiosity unsatisfied: "How did they live and hide and fight and write letters home? There is nothing, nothing—only desert."

Local governments and Australian resources permitting, answers could be constructed to Mary Baillieu's and other questions wherever Australians are buried or commemorated. To the originators of imperial cemeteries and monuments, the idea might have sounded like sacrilege; but it has already been done by the South Africans in their National Memorial at Delville Wood. Here in 1981 the Voortrekker cross standing at the rear of the main structure was enclosed in a citadel, a laager, fit to represent the embattled post-imperial republic, and within it were installed galleries depicting white South Africa's experience of 1914-1918 in words, blown-up photographs, paintings, models, and larger than life bas-reliefs of men in battle, from Smuts to ordinary soldiers. The effect is as if elements of the Australian War Memorial had been reproduced at Villers-Bretonneux. Like any essay in popular history that goes beyond dates and numbers, the new work at Delville Wood emits an interpretative message. Here is a gesture from Afrikaner Briton, Castor to Pollux, in retrospective endorsement of a cause of fraternal solidarity against common peril. An enterprise such as the museum at Péronne must also give out messages. What will they be? What understandings of the battles on the Somme, and of the whole war, will the creators try to generate? And what would an Australian museum at Villers-Bretonneux say?

Standing beneath the bronze caribou in the Newfoundland Memorial Park on 24 April, an Australian reflected aloud: "Only 80 out of 2000 men survived this. Another case of the Colonials being used as cannon fodder." What made the image of cannon fodder startling to me was that it came from an officer in the Australian armed services. Nor was he eccentric. But the words Anzac and Vimy still had some power, in the years of these officers' formation, to emanate a sense of sacred things; and an old dominion nationalism, perhaps fortified in general by the evaporation of empire and in particular by their experience of condescending English officers at Shrivvenham, appeared to stir among them as they contemplated dead compatriots. They can find plenty to strengthen it in books and films and television programs. Indeed, one great challenge now to historians of dominion involvement in that war, in print or in any other medium, is to explain why all those men did come, voluntarily, all that way, and kept on coming after Gallipoli and Pozières, and kept on fighting.

Popular historians, including museologists, now have such promethean powers available to them that I am sure they will get better and better at

verisimilitude: in the case of the Somme, at doing what more than one writer about its horrors has called describing the indescribable. In Australia Bill Gammage's *The Broken Years* and Geoffrey Serle's recovery of Eric Partridge's *Frank Honeywood*, private are among the new resources accessible to historians at work in a variety of media. The Somme and other battlefields of 1914-1918 have lately attracted young poets. See Geoff Page's anthology *Shadows From Wire*; see Chris Wallace-Crabbe's *Clubbing of the Gunfire*. See also David Holloway's selection of poems written near the event *Dark Somme Flowing; Australian Verse of the Great War, 1914-1918*. Page's selection uses both poems and photographs. We can expect to hear poems in museums, if they are not there now; already newsreels and other films are among the exhibits.

How skilful, how searching, how adequate to the state of scholarship, will the museum makers be in interpreting the experiences so variously reconstructed? From Georgian war poets and disenchanted returned soldier prose writers of the 1920s we could easily take the view that the battles of the Somme served no rational purpose and even that one cause was no better and no worse than the other. *Oh, What a Lovely War* transmitted those views seductively to a new generation. People who lived through the Vietnam war found it easier than their elders to think

that no war in which Australians were involved served any good or even serious purpose.

From certain religious or moral vantage-points, and on certain readings of evidence, that may well follow. But it's another thing to reach this conclusion in one jump from a reading of horrors, or by retrospective inference from Vietnam. The really clever and imaginative museum creator will find ways to confront the audience with more than one interpretation of the Somme, including the view defended by John Terraine and others that the so-called futility of the Somme campaign is a myth, and that the German army was irreparably damaged by the battle there in 1916. They will also animate those moments when some people somewhere—Henry Ford, the Pope, members of one or other high command, neutral or belligerent politicians—tried to stop the killing; and they will invite us to judge the probabilities of success, the gains and losses, short-term and long-term consequences, if the war had ended at any of those moments. For as long as visitors are drawn to these death-sodden landscapes, they are sure to have a simple urge to know under what circumstances the memorials would have been raised to fewer people.

Ken Inglis is a professor of history at the Australian National University.



L O F O

SARA DOWSE

In Flight

I wake, trying to remember the dream, which leaves me stung yet kindled with longing. Buried in blankets I trace its broken contours: a man's face, lowering onto mine: a woman's knowing smile.

I would pull the curtain and lying there gaze at the sky.

No curtain. No window by the bed. Nothing so unnerving as a hotel room. The radium arms of my travel clock explain the darkness but not the noise. Trucks and honking taxis rattle and race past the foot of the bed. The metal contents of giant rubbish bins clatter into the closet. Neon trickles through the frosted glass of the bathroom window and spills on the floor.

It is hot beneath the blankets, under the starched sheets. An airconditioner gulps the air.

These are the migratory times. We are birds in our rites of passage. It is said in a book of records that, on average, each of us will travel seven thousand kilometres in a lifetime. For some far less, for me far more. Great chromium-winged flyer with powdered cheeks and creamy eyelids. I am a bird with mechanical wings, wrapping the world.

Touching down, a sparrow on a grimy steeple.

We make order out of chaos. My bag, for instance. There are pockets for my underwear, my stockings, my cellophane tissue packets. A zippered envelope contains my toiletries. Another my eyeliner, my blusher, and the pancake makeup for the arc lights.

One change of clothing, wash and wear.

The clerk at the desk should be bald and spectacled, scraggynecked like the one in my dream. Instead of a she like me. Painted face, capped with a fluffy helmet. A gust of scent escapes from her uniform each time she moves. She hands me a message, folded for privacy.

'How did you find me?'

'The price you pay for fame and fortune.'

'It's hardly that.'

'No? How else do you explain the loss of anonymity?'

I laugh in spite of myself. Because I'm pleased and also, to my credit, embarrassed. 'Well, whatever. Where are you ringing from?'

'New Mexico.'

'New *Mexico*? I thought . . . I mean, it sounds so close.'

'I knew I couldn't see you. I did the next best thing.'

'What are you doing, out there in the desert?'

'Learning.'

'That's all?'

'That's enough . . . Did you get my message?'

I laugh again. 'Was it from you?'

'Of course.'

'Honestly now. How could I have known. It sounded like some sort of crazy.'

His turn to laugh. 'It's my Indian name. Morning Star.'

'You're joking.'

'Why should I be joking? Morning Star. For one thing, it's reliable. By the way, how are you for time?'

I remember then to look at my watch. 'Okay, I guess.' I speak slowly, a cover for churning thoughts. 'A car's coming, in half an hour.'

'Good. I want you to tell me how you are.'

'If you must know, tired. Most of the time.'

'Come to New Mexico. Clean air, cloudless skies. The desert will restore you.'

'Possibly,' I say.

'I'm serious. Topple off your carousel. Get a head start on heaven.'

'You're as pressing as ever.'

'Look at it this way. It's the cheapest I can get to see you.'

'Cheap for you!'

'Precisely. You're the one who can afford it.'

'I'm just an employee. I don't own the airline.'

'You're on a good retainer.'

'How would you know?'

'The face that launched a thousand ships . . . It must be worth a packet.'

'Aha! So that's it!'

'You're everywhere, beautiful.'

'It's a short life,' I say. 'And a mortgaged one.'

'Can't blame a bloke for trying.' He sounds disappointed, but then that always was his way.

'Seriously, Eddie. What are you doing in New Mexico?'

'Morning Star.'

'All right. Morning Star.'

'Just what it sounds like.'

'I told you. Crazy.'

'You never were too bright. I'm working on a paper.'

I blush for my stupidity. 'Ahaa . . . They paying for this?'

'Naturally. It's a business call.'

'Eddie!'

'What could be more legitimate than an interview with Miss Intercontinental?'

'I don't think your readers would be interested.'

'We have billboards in New Mexico.'

'Eddie, I gotta go.'

'Morning Star.'

'Whose Morning Star?'

To know you is to love you. My smile beams onto the dreamers below, marching to a rhythm known only to me. For I am the Great Sky Mother, a tray of drinks in my hands. See me smiling, beckoning, bending towards my minions.

'Margot! How did you catch me?'

'Your mother. She said you'd be in town.'

'She did?'

Margot doesn't beat around the bush. 'Well, did you see him?'

'Who?'

She hesitates. 'Eddie.'

I hesitate. 'What makes you think I'd see Eddie?'

'Well, you were in the States. All last week, weren't you?'

'Margot, there are 200 million people in America . . .'

'But only one Eddie.'

I correct her. 'You mean only one Morning Star.'

'Huh?' Her voice is faint, slightly breathless.

'He's some kind of hippy journo. I think.'

Her tone deepens. 'You said you didn't see him.'

'I didn't.'

'Then how . . .'

I didn't say I didn't see him, but I didn't. I spoke to him. He rang me.'

'Where?'

'I was in New York. *He* was in New Mexico.'

A pause. 'What did he sound like?' she asks, in a little girl voice.

'Crazy. As usual.'

'Can I come and see you? To talk? *Explain?*'

'I'm leaving in twenty minutes. For Bonn.'

The blue water tilts: the sky, a lighter blue, upended. I whisper farewell to the brilliant harbour, flipping over on its side. And wave to the last circling gull. Through the galley window I spy a piece of the bridge. Only a corner framed in the glass, a shining metal grille flung in the air.

His scalp gleams from the overhead light, and the air vent ruffles the frill of white hair that covers his ears. I would have recognised him at once, even without the glasses—the hotel desk clerk from my dream. I hand him a magazine—*The Economist*—and he leers at me as in the dream. His thin shaven neck, the bulging thyroid cartilage; particularly repulsive.

The woman carries her coat over her arm, to cover a stain perhaps, or a sanitary napkin. There is a queue and she stands, patiently, waiting her turn. And then, I guess, she recognises me. She nods and smiles.

'Thanks for ringing.'

'It's nothing,' I say, the cablegram before me. 'But I haven't long.'

'I'll ring later then. What's the number?'

'Never mind. What do you want?'

'I want to see you.'

'I'm only here till noon.'

'Where to then?'

'I should think you'd know. You seem to be so acquainted with my itinerary.'

'You're queen for a day—that's democracy. But from now on it'll be harder to track you down.'

'I'm looking forward to the time.'

'I bet, sweetheart.' He strikes a chord. 'Look, I want to see you.'

'You had your chance,' I say.

'And you can't find it in your heart to give me another?'

There are beeps on the line.

'Try Margot, since she's more to your liking.'

'What's your number?'

The operator asks if I wish to extend the call.

'Mama, please, will you stop telling Margot where I am?'

'She keeps ringing . . .'

'I know.'

'I thought she was your friend.'

'So did I, Mama. So did I.'

I wake, trying to recall where we were when I fell asleep. I fumble for the latch and raise the blind. A dawn so white it dazzles: we are flying into the sun. And the sea, the sea is a pearl.

HELEN DANIEL

Plotting (3): A Quarterly Account of Recent Fiction

LOOTING

In the last issue, Dinny O'Hearn chose graceful plodding through recent Australian fiction. What to do this time? Plaiding perhaps. Shall I plait? Pot? Pilot? Loot? Or counterplot?

Last time, Dinny O'Hearn wrote about Janet Frame's *The Carpathians*—but modestly omitted one of my favourite characters in recent fiction, the marvellous Dinny Wheatstone who introduces herself thus: "I'm an impostor. I suffer from the impostor syndrome. Perhaps you have heard of it?" Proclaiming herself "the Official Impostor with leave to occupy all points of view . . . marauding among other people's points of view", Dinny Wheatstone is also "an impostor novelist", stealing points of view in "an act of dream-light robbery".

In this business of fiction, trafficking between novelist and reader, all of us are deep in imposture. So why not an Impostor Reader, with leave to occupy all points of view and maraud among novelists' points of view? Readerly looting in acts of dreamlight robbery. So let's begin this readerly brigandage—but not with highway robbery. Last time, Dinny O'Hearn and I both travelled along the highways and byways, mapping out the place and space of contemporary Australian fiction. This time, why not start with time? Why not maraud points of view in past, present and future?

The Carpathians is addressed to the future, searching for a new language and a new structure of thought which can accommodate the vast contradictions behind new ideas of space and time. In a cataclysmic scene which is a dark vision of humanity at an impasse, language rains down on the residents of a New Zealand street like atomic fallout, leaving a rubble of letters, old meanings, a debris of old ways of seeing things.

We are now approaching not just *fin de siècle*, but *fin de millennium*, perhaps a privilege of history or perhaps a chiliastic weirdness, an ontological malaise, of our times. Millennial consciousness, a sense of tumultuous change ahead of us, might drive us to the future in an attempt to prefigure some of its upheavals. Or it might drive us to the past. In Australia, millennial

consciousness has had an unnatural boost from the bicentennial, but many writers are turning back to the past, a collective stocktaking of the merchandise and properties of consciousness.

In Janette Turner Hospital's *Charades*, there is a quest for origins—of *Charade* herself and of the universe—to get the past straight, so to speak. But then the past is never straight. In a novel which pilfers our old linear sense of time, almost the first tale is the Tale of Yesterday and Tomorrow, which begins

"Once upon a time, a person could journey more or less straightforwardly from birth to death . . . Once upon a time, geography was stable . . . there was once a time when days followed one another in orderly fashion like huge beads on a rope. You pulled your way along, hand over hand. You could stop and look behind and say: There's the past."

But, Hospital adds, probably even then "the beads just out of reach curled back to touch the past. Probably time has always been a necklace".

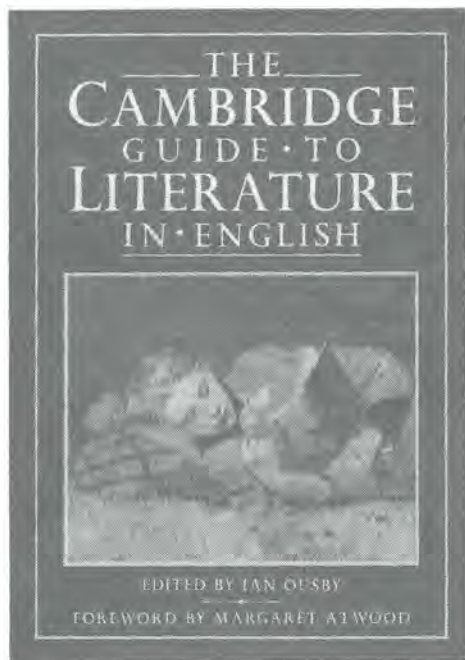
Here's some loot already, a beaded necklace purloined from *Charades*. There are many necklaces in recent Australian fiction, as time curves back on itself or strings out into the future—in George Turner's award-winning *The Sea and Summer*, his vision of Melbourne in the new millennium; and Rodney Hall's prophetic novel, *Kisses of the Enemy*, first published in 1987 but recently released in the US, an important novel, worthy of retrieval here in Australia; and Amanda Lohrey's *The Reading Group*, a novel set in the near future about the condition of recoil. The tendency to recoil, the sense that only the private vision holds now, may be millennial too, a retreat from vast and mysterious forces at work in the world.

But let's start on this path of pillage with more recent novels. There is rich booty in the past in Robin Wallace-Crabbe's *Australia, Australia*, a comic extravaganza, with a wondrously parodic sense of history. Lines of connection twist through time, with

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a myriad fugitive details and characters interlocked in a vast mosaic from the early 18th century to the 20th, in extravagant settings from Pictish lands to Australia. As predatory aristocrats strut through history and colonialism devours nations, Wallace-Crabbe boldly parodies his own family history, until his own birth in 1938. Anachronisms abound in matters social, rural, economic, racial, cultural, aspects of aviation, real estate, theatre. Running from ludicrous wit to mythopoeic celebration, it is a novel of incongruous twists of history in a comic conundrum of time and place all impinging on Australia. Comic verve, booty galore already.

Further spoils in another comic picaresque, but this time a morose version of the present, millennial gloom and dark presentiments behind the comedy in Jack Hibberd's *Memoirs of an Old Bastard*. With some rococo flourishes of wit, the novel is more often wicked and ribald, a knockabout comic melange, a non-stop comic run of skirmish and rout, with an improbable mix of Rabelaisian picaresque, Australian Satyricon and parodic homage to Melbourne. In a medley of morose Latinate, cerebral bawdy and romping macabre, the novel has a breakneck momentum of energy and invention, a myriad plots and a bewilderingly large cast of deadbeats, savants, quidnuncs, literati, rustics, rogues, parvenus and aristocrats. In the comic strut of the contemporary, hilarity is rife and plot is on the run, ever accelerating, but running on the spot. An excess of loot here, the looter in a comic haze, dazed by too much derring-do.

Back to the past, the cusp of centuries, in *The Bathing-Machine Called The Twentieth Century*, where Nigel Krauth engages in dreamlight robbery too, marauding around the viewpoints of the townspeople of Booloominbah at the turn of the century, the 19th clinging to the advent of the 20th. With *fin de siècle* malaise, the townspeople see the sinister and magical in the ordinary, like the bathing-machine, a numinous contraption come among them. Across a range of eccentric and vibrant characters, Krauth moves easily from droll undertone to darker elements of death and loss. Amid quirky images of the new messiah, the novel reaches back into the past, while poised on the cusp of time, old ways and old meanings falling into disuse, the future nascent.

Marauding in time means place too in Victor Kelleher's *Em's Story*, Namibia in the early 1900s and South Africa now. Dinny O'Hearn has already been here, but I'm back for a second foray into Em's journey through the desert, with its enduring sense of no person, of a being stripped down to a residual self by grief, despair and horror. Her solitude in the empty landscape is an elemental existence where she is driven into the furthest recesses not only of herself but of human identity. It becomes for me a sense of humanity stretched across a vast and idiot landscape,

insufferable, inert, alien. And this, with the resonances across the Australian landscape, the racial issues resonant too across Bicentennial Australia, is the most powerful aspect of the novel.

While we're in the dark continent, we can try marauding Bryce Courtenay's *The Power of One* but the booty is slight. The novel is sometimes moving and Peekay appealing, but the power of the novel is sapped by the gross tendency of things to work out well. Forever attracting legend, Peekay is an heroic figure, an exceptional child and a perpetual winner, aided by a series of colourful characters and a welter of improbable plotting, which usurps from within the novel's insistence on "the power of one". And this is not even tackling the racial stance of the novel, the white boy as saviour of the black people. A large book, but not much loot.

Another beaded necklace for the literary coffers in *Livio*, as Leon Trainor follows the narrative of memories as they occur to Livio, beads out of sequence, or rather beads of light catching the eye of memory. The novel is quietly understated, Livio's a detached sensibility, inhabiting a wryness about himself and events, as if set in a middle distance of the self. Content to pursue memories as they glint, the novel is often moving, notably in the scene with his daughter in the Uffizi Gallery. A gentle novel awash with light, enriched with an aesthetic sensibility.

Filigreed time in the landscape of memory, private reflection and recollection in Peter Cowan's *The Hills of Apollo Bay*, a novel which is close and poignant, at once impassioned and stripped to a meditative prose which would be severe in the hands of a lesser writer. With a profound dismay at the directions we have followed since the 1940s, Cowan recreates the cultural climate of the 1940s in Perth and Melbourne and challenges cherished assumptions about the achievements of the post-war world, while reflecting on the passage on his own literary commitment.

Beaded time in 1940s London in Elizabeth Jolley's *My Father's Moon*, a profoundly moving novel of the thresholds of pain and exile, of memory and self, on the edge of fiction and truth. The fiction is Vera Wright, isolated in an anguish of self-doubt, yet always her own harshest judge. Through fragments of her experiences as a nurse in war-time London, the novel is in part a meditation on the workings of memory, memories which enclose others, all licking around an old wound. It is also a narrative of elision, the connection ours to make in a work poised across absences. As if set in an inmost courtroom, at the deepest reaches of feeling, memory, vision, word, the novel becomes an inner debate between the merciless honesty of a confessional self and the splendid defiance of the writer, who creates clemency in a feat of truth-telling.

We seem to be locked into the 1940s but Janine Burke's *Company of Images* threads us back to the

present. Set in Melbourne in the 1980s, the novel also conjures up beads of Paris from the 1920s to the 1940s, through the life of Margeurite Dance, an elderly artist contending with the indignities of age and infirmity and reflecting on memory and truth. Both passionate and acerbic about the art world, Burke explores the shadowy play of image and memory and companion selves beneath the surface lives of her characters. As she writes about the dimensions of artistic vision, space, image and light in art, Burke creates a subtle play with the form of the novel itself, the narrative light and space among the characters.

From light to dark in Kevin Brophy's *Visions*, a disturbing work, at once grotesque and moving, as Margaret pursues a sainthood of wounds, suffering, self-abasement, the degradation of the body. While the novel is, as Helen Garner suggests, "Weirdly touching . . . A vivid account of the two-way warp between extreme faith and madness", it is also a curious slant on Christian faith, the spiritual soar of physical debasement. As her visions give way to memory and dream, in part Margaret's quest is for salvation from the ordinary, from the banality of life. With Jesus as her paradigm, she searches for the ultimate suffering and the ending is both preposterous and wholly convincing. The looter moves on, perplexed by this bizarre condition of consciousness.

Chiaroscuro again, from the darkness of *Visions* to the light and simplicity of the good man in Rod Usher's first novel, *The Man of Marbles*, a warm, appealing novel about that most problematic of characters, the good man, here a god's fool innocent in suburban Melbourne. But in the contemporary world distrust and subterfuge generally offer richer loot than goodness and innocence. In Michael Wilding's *Under Saturn*, a quartet of stories on the problematics of authenticity and "reading the signs" through rival versions of things. In the quartet, the first and third are tense and disturbing, with a sinister intention at work in the world, a dangerous reality stirring beneath the amiable surface. In these the darkness is relieved by the energy and wit of the writing. More bemused, the two lighter stories counterpoint that sense of random intrigue with characters intent on their own inscrutable plots. In debate on the authenticity of reality, the quartet is a work of creative discord, in patterns of light and dark across ambiguities of interpretation and agencies, with a pervasive sense of subterfuge just below the deceptive surface of things.

The impulse to change and the *fatigue* which accompanies it in David Foster's *Hitting The Wall*, two novellas which turn on a sense that reality is elsewhere, outside the enclosure of the present. Sober by comparison with the zany quests of his earlier work, they yet share his preoccupation with perpetual quest, at once alluring in its promise and poignant in its folly. In "Eye of the Bull", life closes in on Wilson, like the rhomboidal configuration of runners in India

keeping pace around him like images of his own discontent. In Australia, within the larger spaces of the narrative, Wilson is again running along with a configuration of runners, his wife, his children and his girlfriend all keeping pace, apparently steering him to an unknown destination. In the 1977 novella, "The Job", there is a cycle of apparent change, as the narrator, picked up outside a prison by Brian, gradually takes over Brian's life, colonising a life by default, until the narrator too reaches the point of waiting outside the prison for an aide-de-self.

But if we really want to loot and maraud in quest of fictive spoils, short story collections are rich sites of viewpoints—sometimes too rich. Which reminds me of Dinny Wheatstone who, after the scene of tumultuous fallout, together with the other residents of the street, disappeared. I hope not to disappear, but the image recurs when I contemplate the myriad short story collections raining down on Australian readers at present. If not cataclysmic, it is certainly tumultuous. Many are blurring in my memory. Perhaps disappearance is imminent. Perhaps it begins with the readerly memory, stories lost like dematerialising fingers and limbs in a readerly cataclysm.

But that image is purloined from "The Anecdote Man", a story in one of the most interesting recent collections, Brian Matthews' *Quickening and Other Stories*. As people steal from the anecdote man, plundering his memories and his anecdotes, wiping out interludes of his life, the loss of self becomes a bodily process, dematerialising toenail, finger joint, lower arm. I find Matthews' collection a mixture of the inventive and the nervous, as if he is distrustful of his own power. Some are tense, spare and moving, tracing a single intense moment or a single fantastic notion breaks through the mundane suddenly or hovers, murmuring possibilities. Some of the best focus on moments of change in the relationships of couples, moments which imprint themselves indelibly on the future or capture the very governances that preclude change. Several have a millennial mood, one with creatures gathered in ark pairs amid images of global flooding breaking through. In another, "The Funerals", a grim work of surreal dread, human purpose shrinks as endless processions of the dead break through the margins of reality, a macabre vision of protest on the sites of 20th century abominations.

Difficult to filch a few viewpoints from Zeny Giles' *Miracle of the Waters*, because the 21 stories make up a work of unusual linkage, a network of global lines running from European origins and intersecting at the Moree Baths, in inland NSW, where the thermal waters are therapeutic and where stories abound. Although some characters recur, the essential linkages are of place and of story-telling. Across the notion of change, sometimes healing and curative, sometimes a matter of grief, loss and dislocation, many stories summon up rival worlds, the characters negotiating

between the claims of the European past—Yugoslav, Polish, Hungarian, Greek—and the claims of contemporary Australia. Sequential links suddenly emerge, or the protagonist of one becomes the bystander in another. With freedom of form and character yet the linkage of place, Giles creates a mosaic pattern of contemporary Australia through lines of history and distance running back to European origins, stories simply told but a lively collection.

From the linked to the pleasantly miscellaneous in James McQueen's *Death of A Ladies' Man*, an hospitable offering of shifting perspective, mood and place, from a grim story in Manila to a light story of miners incongruously playing cricket in outback Queensland, from stories of macabre incongruity to a chilling vision of a small Tasmanian town. Subtle correlations hold between some stories, in the light of one the shadow of another. The title story sends out tendrils to the bush ethos, racial attitudes, the male mien, but also tendrils of irony into the next story set in Thailand. Sometimes more sombre correlations hold, patterns of vengeance or perverse celebration. Often the perspective a mirror which turns back on the narrator, the collection is an appealing mixture of energies in telling, place, and angle of vision.

A number of recent short story collections explore the condition of recoil, as if a veil has fallen between the self and the world. Darker loot in the taut enclosure in Stephanie Johnson's *The Glass Whittler* and the extremes of self in Strephyn Mappin's *Heart Murmurs*. Mappin's vision is surrealistic, as if the real world is cordoned off, held in abeyance. In some the characters have seceded from the real world, to inhabit their own shrinking realm. Mappin's vision is disturbing, sometimes with a kind of black relish in deformities of mind and soul, but his exploration of strange and visionary states of mind I find gripping. An uneven collection but I find a brooding intensity in his deceptively simple style, which murmurs at the reader in a mesmeric way until suddenly the story inhabits some sinister vision.

From the dark to a private vision amid domestic clutter in Jan Hutchinson's *Desire and Other Domestic Problems*. Compressed, even austere, many stories work across gaps and silences which extend them beyond the domestic world in which they are apparently contained. Many are formally inventive, some with a writerly presence which suddenly enlarges, like clenching and unclenching the content. Most are day to day stories with mundane settings, among lovers, friends, garbos crashing about outside, the importunate voices of kids or of memory. In some rival selves in unspoken dialogue or some symposium of time; some have a Murnane intonation across absence and presence, others a literary playfulness. Whether teasing the reader or teasing out ambiguities, the voice is memorable, like a dialogue of selves running beneath the still countenance of the surface.

And another distinctive private vision in Joanne Burns' *Blowing Bubbles in the 7th Lane*, five "prose sequences" of intense modulations and meditations—on clothes, domestic routine, shopping, a park. If that sounds dull, the prose is not. It edges towards a surrealist vision as if under some internal pressure of vision, intensely private and slightly askew, and yet spectatorial as if an observer is drawing us ineluctably into the interior of the observation. A slim incisive book, set somewhere between passive and active voices, or in some legerdemain of word and image, with something of French *chosisme*, objects as numinous figures of our innermost selves.

In Sally Morrison's *I am a Boat*, some glittering stories as her characters move in and out of themselves, sometimes free, sometimes blocked off by figures of themselves. Her style shifts from the stripped and spare to a wry delight in the ironies of change thrusting forward rudely, dreams dulling and things falling into disarray. With a sense of hope as a stubborn and saving folly, these are stories of ordinary lives in disarray, figured in the tangle of dream and loss, in the shadow between now and then. Both poignant and wry, they search out the talismanic moments in the passage of ordinary lives.

Even looters get tired and I have to confess to readerly fatigue. Hitting the wall. Not all short story collections offer rich booty to the yegg. Perhaps it's the weight of booty I've already collected, but readerly haze is setting in, as I encounter more and more collections strung together with a recurring character, often in predictable dilemmas and often female.

The best of these is Marion Halligan's *The Hanged Man in the Garden*, where Martha is a recurring figure, along with husband, kids, sister. Set in Canberra, these are linked stories of ordinary lives but lifted by the power of Halligan's writing, some by a literary *trompe l'oeil*. Like the title story, where the Tarot figure offers a new perspective on the world, at once permitted and condemned to see things afresh, many stories are about shifting angles of vision on the domestic and private world.

Another Canberra writer, Marian Eldridge opens and closes *The Woman at the Window* with stories of Alvie and her family, some tracing Alvie's love affair from its adolescent beginning to its end in Italy. Alvie is absent from the best stories, notably the title story of grim entrapment, taut and tense in the telling, our window onto a terrible despair. Another, in Italy, narrated in the second person, explores the gap between the glamour of the setting and the squalor of solitude. Another, "Pieces of Furniture", is a poignant story of an elderly woman besieged by her son and his wife.

Overlapping stories of Clare from the 1950s to the 1980s, in Rosemary Creswell's *Lovers and Others*, a collection with gritty sharpness and much twisting of emotional knives. Clare is absent from the stories I

liked most, one of a passionate, intense figure of subversive and dancing energy, who lives on the edge of black depression; another of a marvellous eccentric who has taken to her bed, there to receive guests and deliver her blunt, peremptory views on things. Two stories feature Iris, the Sydney literary agent who appeared in 'Coloring In', here in a kind of comic nightmare perhaps intrinsic to the job, stories of comic embattlement and bizarre excesses of her clients.

But I too am embattled now and can't carry all the loot when the coffers of Australian fiction are so full. Many other recent short story collections are there to be marauded, including Libby Hathorn's *Better Strangers*, Suzanne Falkiner's *After the Great Novelist*, Michele Nayman's *Somewhere Else*, and noteworthy too is *But Not For Love*, previously unpublished stories by Marjorie Barnard and M. Barnard Eldershaw. Other novels too, including some which explore the sexuality and freedom of women, Mary Fallon's *Working Hot*, Helen Hodgman's *Broken Words* and a lively first novel, Inez Baranay's *Between Careers*, with witty and contrary images of women and sexuality through a double character, Vita by day and Violet her night-self as a call-girl.

Novels of political and cultural issues include *Water from the Moon* by Rory Barnes and James Birrell, a lightweight novel which explores corruption in Indonesia, through the linkages with an Australian company. And a very uneven novel, Robert Carter's *Prints in the Valley*, which cuts between Australia in the early 60s and New Guinea in 1967, suggesting contrasts of culture and social rituals. The New Guinea sequences with the girl Suli appeal more than the Australian sequences of Alec's experiences as a school counsellor with the difficult boy, Jack. When the two link up with Alec's visit to Suli's village as a patrol officer, richer pickings as it moves into an interesting legendary and dreamlike sequence.

Already burdened with loot, what possibilities for pillage are ahead? A new novel, set in medieval times, by Marion Halligan due in 1990; a new Thea Astley; Tony Maniaty's new novel, set in Smyrna, and a splendid novel from Nicholas Hasluck. But that's part of next year's loot.

Imminent this year is Barry Oakley's new novel, *The Craziplane*, with much Oakleyesque wit about theatre from the 60s to the 80s, and about the Carlton tribe. The novel seems set in theatrical space, crossing the boundaries between theatre and reality, fiction and drama. Amid comic shudders of guilt and malaise, dissolution and panic, the narrator, Michael, is first the biographer of the Carlton playwright, Frank Minogue, then furtive interloper, trespassing on the life he is there to record, taking over and colonising Minogue's life, clinging to Minogue's wife to ward off general deracination, while meditating darkly on the Macbeth theme.

Imminent loot also includes *The Man with the*

Suitcase, a collection of stories by Walter Adamson, author of the marvellous surrealist novel, *The Institution*; Thomas Keneally's new novel, *Towards Asmara*; the first novel by leading short story writer, Peter Goldsworthy, entitled *Maestro*, which I have not yet read; a brilliant novel I have read, the first novel by Graham Henderson, *The Mountain*; and the new Peter Mathers which I have not read . . . And there's loot of a different kind ahead in Candida Baker's third in the *Yacker* series of interviews with Australian writers, and a new critical work by Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman, *The New Diversity: Australian Fiction 1970-1988*.

But these are still to come. Let's follow the necklace back to the start of all this, in imposture, the impostor reader with leave to loot among points of view. But, of course, imposture is also to do with imposing points of view . . . and all of this in the end is about individual readings. You of course have looted and plundered different points of view. These are the spoils of my path of pillage and acts of dream-light robbery. I, Helen Wheatstone, am the impostor author of this impostor reading of this contemporary Australian fiction.

Adamson, Walter: *The Man with the Suitcase* (Houghton Mifflin 1989, \$16.95)

Baranay, Inez: *Between Careers* (Collins Imprint 1989, \$12.95)

Barnard, Marjorie & M. Barnard Eldershaw: *But Not For Love* (Allen & Unwin 1988, \$15.95)

Barnes, Rory & James Birrell: *Water from the Moon* (Penguin 1989, \$11.99)

Brophy, Kevin: *Visions* (A & R 1989, \$24.95)

Burke, Janine: *Company of Images* (Greenhouse 1989, \$14.95)

Burns, Joanne: *Blowing Bubbles in the 7th Lane* (Fab Press 1989, \$11.95)

Carter, Robert: *Prints in the Valley* (Heinemann 1989, \$24.95)

Courtenay, Bryce: *The Power of One* (Heinemann 1989, \$29.95)

Cowan, Peter: *The Hills of Apollo Bay* (FACP 1989, \$14.99)

Creswell, Rosemary: *Lovers and Others* (McPhee Gribble 1989, \$11.99)

Eldridge, Marian: *The Woman at the Window* (UQP 1989, \$11.95)

Falkiner, Suzanne: *After the Great Novelist and Other Stories* (Picador 1989, \$12.99)

Fallon, Mary: *Working Hot* (Sybylla 1989, \$19.50)

Foster, David: *Hitting the Wall* (Penguin 1989, \$11.99)

Frame, Janet: *The Carpathians* (Bloomsbury 1988, \$32.95)

Giles, Zeny: *Miracle of the Waters* (Penguin 1989, \$11.99)

Goldsworthy, Peter: *Maestro* (A & R 1989, \$24.99)

Hall, Rodney: *Kisses of the Enemy* (Penguin 1987, \$12.95)

Halligan, Marion: *The Hanged Man in the Garden* (Penguin 1989, \$11.99)

Hathorn, Libby: *Better Strangers* (Millennium 1989, \$14.95)

Henderson, Graham: *The Mountain* (Picador 1989, \$12.99)

Hibberd, Jack: *Memoirs of an Old Bastard* (McPhee Gribble 1989, \$29.99)

Hodgman, Helen: *Broken Words* (Penguin 1988, \$9.99)

Hospital, Janette Turner: *Charades* (UQP 1988, \$11.95)

Hutchinson, Jan: *Desire and Other Domestic Problems* (McPhee Gribble 1989, \$11.99)

Johnson, Stephanie: *The Glass Whittler* (Penguin 1989, \$9.99)

Jolley, Elizabeth: *My Father's Moon* (Viking 1989, \$22.99)

Kelleher, Victor: *Em's Story* (UQP 1988, \$11.95)

Keneally, Thomas: *Towards Asmara* (Hodder & Stoughton 1989, \$29.95)

Krauth, Nigel: *The Bathing-Machine Called The Twentieth Century* (Allen & Unwin 1988, \$21.95)

Lohrey, Amanda: *The Reading Group* (Picador 1988, \$12.95)

McQueen, James: *Death of a Ladies' Man* (Penguin 1989, \$12.99)

Mappin, Strehphyn: *Heart Murmurs* (FACP 1989, \$12.99)

Matthews, Brian: *Quickening and Other Stories* (McPhee Gribble 1989, \$11.99)

Morrison, Sally: *I am a Boat* (McPhee Gribble 1989, \$9.99)

Nayman, Michele: *Somewhere Else* (Heinemann 1989, \$14.95)

Oakley, Barry: *The Craziplane* (Hodder & Stoughton 1989)

Trainor, Leon: *Livio* (Greenhouse 1988, \$14.95)

Turner, George: *The Sea and Summer* (Faber 1987, \$29.95)

Usher, Rod: *The Man of Marbles* (A & R 1989, \$24.95)

Wallace-Crabbe, Robin: *Australia, Australia* (Collins Imprint 1989, \$12.95)

Wilding, Michael: *Under Saturn* (Black Swan 1989, \$12.95)

NON-FICTION:

Baker, Candida: *Yacker 3*, Picador 1989, \$15.99)

Gelder, Ken & Paul Salzman: *The New Diversity: Australian Fiction 1970-1988* (McPhee Gribble, 1989 \$16.99)

COMING IN OVERLAND 116 SPRING 1989

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Michael Keon on the Chinese Student Tradition

John Sendy on Soviet writers and the Environment

VERONICA ANGUS

Montage

From the top step of the nursing home you can see the sea. All through the day gulls swoop over the grey tiled roof and rest on the television aerial.

Below, in the sitting room, a row of chairs face the television. At the end of the row, nearest the window, sits Oscar. Next to him Nancy White rolls the hem of her apron.

Oscar's eyes are fixed on the television screen. He waits for each scene to end, then taps his knee with his finger and mouths the camera instructions. Nancy's eyes are fixed on the window—waiting for a gull to fly by on its way to the television aerial.

Behind the row of chairs a nurse shovels mash into Mrs Marshall's mouth. Mrs Marshall's mouth is limp and the mash dribbles out and into her lap. The nurse shovels it back into the wasted hole.

A gull lands on the window ledge.

"Quick Bert," Nancy says, "it's looking in."

She turns and looks at the chair next to her. Miss Glover's head is bent and her eyes closed. Nancy looks bewildered.

"You'll have to move when Bert gets back," she says. Then turns back to the window.

The gull takes flight and glides over the grey tiles. Nancy anxiously rolls the hem of her apron and takes another quick look at Miss Glover.

"I don't know what Bert will say," she says.

On the screen a rapid sequence of images flash.

Oscar slaps his leg excitedly.

"Montage," he roars.

Nancy jumps. Her legs start to shake.

"Bert," she whispers, "he's starting again."

"Bert!" she calls, looking along the rows of chairs in front of the television. Then at the chairs along the walls. "Bert! . . . Where are you Bert?"

"Why don't you go and join your Bert," Miss Glover



mutters, her eyes still closed.

Nancy goes through the motions of getting up, then slumps back into the chair.

"I'll wait here for Bert," she says, looking around at the yellow walls, "he told me to wait here."

Miss Glover opens her eyes.

"You silly cow", she says. Then laughs.

Beside Miss Glover, Mary Giles puts down her crocheting.

"You're the silly cow," she whispers.

"Get on with your crochet," Miss Glover retorts.

Oscar taps his knee as the scene ends.

"Cut!" he yells.

Nancy's head begins to shake.

"Bert! Bert!", she yells, "he's started again."

Mary gets up. She shuffles past Miss Glover.

"Vindictive old cow," she hisses.

"Sticks and stones," Miss Glover replies.

"I want my Bert", Nancy whines, making a grab for Mary's hand.

The screen fills with a woman's face. Oscar taps his knee.

"Close up!" he yells.

"Shush," Mary says, nudging him, "work quietly."

Oscar looks blankly at her.

"If you're not in this scene get off the set."

"I beg your pardon", she says, shuffling to the side.

Oscar smiles up at her then turns back to the television. He taps his leg.

"Long shot!" he roars.

Past the window flies a gull.

Mary points.

"Look Nancy! You're missing them."

Nancy looks at the blank window.

"Where's my Bert?" she whines.

Mary squeezes her hand.

"You watch for those birds. Then you'll be able to tell Bert."

Oscar taps his knee.

"Cut!" he shouts.

Nancy jumps and loses hold of her apron.

"Bert!" she screams, "I want Bert."

"Nurse!" Mary calls, "If you don't do something she'll wet herself."

Nancy searches the air for her tiny imaginary ball, and starts to roll it between her fingers.

The nurse hastily shovels a heaped teaspoon into Mrs Marshall's mouth, then turns. The food flows down Mrs Marshall's chin and into her lap.

"Mrs Marshall's being very difficult today," the nurse says, damming the flow with the spoon.

"Let the poor old bugger die," Miss Glover yells,

her head still bent and her eyes closed . . . "the old cow next to me's going to piss herself any minute now."

Oscar slaps his knee excitedly.

"Montage", he booms and gets to his feet.

Nancy screams then cowers into the protection of the vinyl.

"Get my Bert . . . he's going to hit me."

"Sit down," Mary says, pushing Oscar back in the direction of his chair.

"Get off the set," he roars.

The nurse drags the bib from Mrs Marshall's neck, scoops up the puddle of mush that is soaking into the floral print, and heads for the door.

Oscar waves his hands in the air.

"Long shot . . . close up . . . Montage."

His voice echoes round the room.

Mary shields Nancy's chair as a trickle of urine appears from under her apron. It slides down the vinyl and onto the floor.

"You dirty old cow, you've pissed yourself," Miss Glover hisses.

Two newcomers fight for a place on the television aerial.

The nurse rushes back through the door carrying a glass of water. She turns off the television.

"Cut!" yells Oscar. Then looks expectantly at the screen.

The nurse pushes two tablets into his mouth and gives him the glass.

"Drink it," she says.

"Have we finished for the day?" Oscar asks, his eyes still on the screen. Then obediently drinks the water.

"You're finished for the day . . . open your mouth."

The nurse peers in.

"You've not hidden them under your tongue have you?"

Oscar sticks out his tongue.

"Good boy," she says, leading him back to his chair.

"The dirty old cow's gone and pissed herself," Miss Glover says, lifting her head and opening her eyes . . . "can't you give her some of that black medicine and send her off to Bert?"

She laughs, then bends her head and closes her eyes again.

"Is Bert coming?" Nancy asks.

The nurse smiles, then prises Nancy's fingers from the imaginary ball and puts the hem of her apron in its place.

"Now you sit there and watch the birds . . . you'll have nothing to tell Bert if you don't."

Nancy starts to roll her hem.

"He told me to wait here," she said.

"That's right," Mary says, skirting around Miss Glover's chair.

The nurse looks over at Mrs Marshall. The mash is still trickling out the corners of her mouth.

"Mrs Marshall," she says, "is being very difficult today."

"Put the fucking television back on before you go back to her," Miss Glover snaps, "and don't leave the piss on the floor all day . . . there's nothing the

matter with my nose."

The nurse goes over and turns on the television.

Oscar looks bewildered.

"Am I working?" he asks.

Nancy White looks out of the window. A gull flies by on its way to the television aerial. Nancy nods to the gull and rolls the hem of her apron.

Oscar stares somewhere between the television and the yellow wall.



Jiri Tibor Novak

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Not in the book. She would have thought to be in the book. Not in the index, nothing of consequence but honoured by a footnote or identifying asterisk.

Not in the book the afternoons in rented rooms when she brought flowers for the fun of it, for playing at playing house, to parody the furious surge of love.

There were rooms five stories over the street or a staircase down, a basement where through glass, cement and brick the traffic hissed.

Not in the book the week of snow near Lincoln, or the other snow that slowed a train rolling over Minnesota on Christmas morning, smoke streaking snow, black claw mark on the snow, above the snow a frozen sun.

Not in the book the lies, denials and public tears or how they would separately leave such rooms in the city's innocent evening, defaulters, with the crowd of good intent.

Not in the book where his life's displayed, arranged, accounted for.

Still she looks for clues, and finds one. He has smuggled her into a line of print as once across a frontier. She can close the book.

ELIZABETH RIDDELL

AT THAT TIME

At that time,
when songs come to find us
and play us like
old violins. It is then
that we do not snap,
do not crack. Moonlight
also has its way with us
and departs, leaving us
with what is.

Love,
now more primitive,
is freer with a rhythm
like good poems, which
thrust us through
to the other side.

MAL MORGAN

ELEGY FOR VALERIA

On the day they buried her
the new priest said
She came from Yugoslavia.
She married Anton.
They had no children of their own.

(Not the stuff of elegies or of songs)

She sang Mexically Rose I Love You,
ordered him from her kitchen
or the shed where she prepared great pots of food,
wiped her hands on the apron
tied firmly at the back of her thickened waist,
said a long Ahhhh—the cry she gave as she exhaled,
to draw us in, and give us kids a hug.
Or she dressed in her best for the Friday night film,
a wedding, or a dance
when she went out with him.
And always spoke in her vehement native tongue
in front of us
to chastise him.

She sang Mexically Rose I Love You—
as sweet as muscat was her song—which
in the end
when all was said and done
was sung for him.

FAYE DAVIS

OPERATION

You won't feel a thing, they said.
But you do, and thinking about it
All those long weeks before
Doesn't help.

You'll be cured when we remove
The trouble, they said; you'll be
Your old self again.

Who would remove shadow from
The moon's crescent just to gain health?

Waking awkwardly that morning
With the mind staggering back—
The trouble's gone, they said. But
So had some measurement of life.

Who does not need some exclusive
Illness, some hoarded sorrow—
Why otherwise foist daylight
On the contented night?

SHANE McCAULEY

THE CONSTANT FACTOR

There was the father I once knew,
and there is the father quite unknown
but for the children, through whose eyes
I see a friend, now quite familiar.
Then there's the mother, the constant factor,
who opens windows on past and present,
so I can see rooms a long time darkened
by cold and anger and long silence,
peopled by shadows from my heart;
but there are also those she opens
on rooms that are warm and bathed in light
that sheds itself into the past,
warms and illuminates the cold dark rooms,
brings understanding to the night.
And there are the children, for whom the past
is but a dream, its shadows lost
in present brightness and radiant future.

MICHAEL DUGAN

OH, BROTHER!

Ode To A Japanese Word-Processor

Oh, Brother! You certainly are a word-processor!
You're more complicated and intricate than a
reconstructed

University Professor!
At the end of a week, instead of serious stored
poems, Causleyite

and Heath-Stubbish,
all I have is three Files, named TESTPOEM, Rosesare
and RUBBISH!

These are empty but for one item in each
(a man's grasp won't exceed a word-processor's
reach).

I've also printed out a poem or two
and (some sections reprinted twice) quite a long
book review.

You seem to gallop about regardless of space and
time—

your terrifying Hot Zone at the line's end turns
over a rhyme

and I'm powerless to stop it. You seem malevolent
and even alive!

In the middle of a printout once you changed the
line-spacing

of a poem from 1 to 1.5.
I have difficulty with your margins. I think you're
processing

me!
Shall we ever settle down together, Pearl Harbor
forgiven?

Well, we shall see!

GAVIN EWART

drought

crippled growth of anti-season the river's
tongue extends its speechless riddle light
discovers the transparency of living truth the
land is cast in skeletal existence we are at
home, stationed in adversity, with nowhere to
go our thoughts are captives of a native
apparition naked branches remark
generations the air is full of denial this is how
it's always been, without water, without grace a
stubborn survival of promise the horizon veiled
by the dust cloud of a solitary truck *born and
bred, raised and dead* growth descending
underground laughter struck like an artesian
well our memories dancing in the heat the
years stuck like a record, needle pointed to the
midday moon at the fly-screen the changing of
the guard each new day a furrow ploughed into
the sky soon we will be seeing things when it
rains fish and roos are diving into clouds, we know
the time has come the carcasses have been
burnt or bulldozed death is the body's envy of
miracles, the senses' treacherous
mirage nothing to plant the rocks will
blossom in their time we're shaded by our
needs the station-hands are playing cards,
dealing promises like women the two-way's
gone for good love's creature comforts are a
solitary toil roots exposed, the earth's tide
withdraws its gift of breaking plant, still carrying
the lizard's splendour we are the soil, waiting
for the dreams' return together we will mend
the fences of our heirloom's claim to dust

MANFRED JURGENSEN

SACRED CONVERSATIONS

After seeing Titian's 'St. Mark on Throne and Saints' at the Church of Maria della Salute, Venice.

I am tired of all those Saint Sebastians standing there
at the feet of Madonna or super-saint, among other
saved ones all waiting for the next prayerful
utterance
while ruminating on eternity. He is always so
undressed
yet so aloof, so helpless yet complacent, so
wounded yet whole.
I like saints who hide their virtues beneath ample,
jewel-coloured robes, for whom pain is pain, and
joy, joy,
not some awful mix-up of the two.

Still, this Sebastian by
Titian stops me. Only one arrow pierces his body;
another, fallen from his calf, lies on the floor,
abstemiously.
He has a serious, inward gaze, and no blood. But
the glory
of the painting is his stance, graceful yet arrogant—
if one could strut while standing still, he's doing it.
My guess is that he was a sixteenth century
gondolier,
happy to be gaining money for so little effort, but
bored
with standing motionless for so long on *terra firma*.
So he imagines being gazed at by each woman
who enters
the church—over four centuries, a tall order,
but time has delivered . . .

Above, Saint Mark is half-shadow:
Moses-like, he holds the book, stares at dark stars;
but this man's face is clear, his body resembles
neither
ravaged nor risen saviour's, the knots in that white
cloth
can be undone . . . For those arrows belong to Eros,
and this is not Christ but Dionysus, who has
wandered into
a strangely silent conversation.

DIANE FAHEY

THE PRE-APPRENTICES IN THEIR CORRIDOR

The Pre-Apprentices in the corridor are not talking
of the latest benevolent Budget.
They are not broadcasting either about drugs
or AIDS or condoms or any other
Government offensive. I do not know
what they are saying—they are talking too loudly
for anyone to hear, least of all anyone
not seventeen, male and offended, like them.
Over the green carpet while the sun
torrents past green grass and wattle and sluices
through walls of glass—over their lunch of pale
cardboard cups spitting up fingers of fat,
over the carpet and down the corridor, their voices
roar.

They have taken off their goggles. They have shaken
off their hairnets. All the machines now
are off but still they yell
still they roar against the workshops where they
learn
work they may never be paid to do still they yell
against the bellowing motors which shudder the
air
and sweat their grease and water endlessly
like pus from pimples squeezing over the steel
endlessly while the flimsy metal cuts and crimps
curling onto the concrete like the perm
falling out of the scalp of rose-cheeked Vegie's mum
after chemotherapy. It is silent now
in the corridor—except for this roar. What hard
tools
are they practising grinding now, keeping about
them
this factory blind of noise as they compete and bluff
and make sure that no one, no one can really hear
them?

In another minute—in another lifetime—they will
reassemble,
they will unfold this tortured origami, these overalled
muscles
still growing, still stretching against air.
They will rise like a blue army of conscripts and
move
reluctantly, down the corridor to a classroom
as if there they might find
the private silence of themselves which so far
they have been hiding—in another minute they
might find
what already they fear is not in their future—the
hope
of a job, the hope of having the money for what
they were just
shouting about: mag wheels, credit ratings,
confidence.
In another minute—in another lifetime . . .
till then, over the crushed paper cups and the Coke
cans
strangled or stomped on, all day all year
down the corridor they roar.

JEAN KENT

ROSLYN PESMAN COOPER

An Australian in Mussolini's Italy: Herbert Michael Moran

In 1936 an Australian surgeon came to the attention of the Italian Ministry for the Press and Propaganda. Three years later, his name appeared in the files of the British Foreign Office where his opinions were described as "complete rubbish" and some of his past activities characterised as "pernicious".¹ The surgeon was Herbert Michael ('Paddy') Moran, ex-international Rugby player, prominent and controversial Sydney cancer specialist, friend and benefactor of Chris Brennan and writer whose three largely autobiographical books show a capacity for self-analysis and disclosure rare in Australian literature.² He was also a dedicated Italophile and propagandist for the Italian cause during the invasion and conquest of Ethiopia—hence the disapproval of His Majesty's Foreign Office.

Who was this Australian who loved Italy and its cultural heritage and laboured mightily to improve Italian-British relations and to present Fascist Italy's case to the British world in the mid 1930s? What were the sources of his admiration for Italy, past and present, mythic and contemporary, for Dante and Mussolini?

Moran was born in 1885 into Catholic-Irish working-class Australia.³ His father had arrived in New South Wales from Ireland in 1876 at the age of 20. Anxious to integrate himself, the elder Moran held aloof from both his church and immigrant Irish politics. His son's links to the church as an organisation were through his mother and these weakened with her death when he was five. Moran was to remain both Catholic and Irish but he escaped from and became highly critical of the 'ghetto' and its clerical gatekeepers. From secondary schooling with the Jesuits at St. Aloysius College and then briefly at St. Joseph's College, Moran went on to study medicine at the University of Sydney, thus entering the ranks of the professional middle class; in 1908 he captained the first rugby tour of Britain. Moran remained overseas for two years working in London and Dublin and taking his F.R.C.S. at Edinburgh. Back in Australia he established a medical practice in Balmain. In 1915

Moran returned to Britain to join the Royal Army Medical Corps and served in Mesopotamia. Illness forced him out of the army and he came back to Australia in 1916 and was appointed honorary surgeon at St. Vincent's hospital. He went on to have a notable surgical career specialising in the treatment of cancer.

Moran was also a man with considerable intellectual and cultural interests and possessed of the passionate conviction that Australians should study European languages and literatures and develop the skills necessary to understand and interpret the outside world for themselves rather than relying on the British version of events.⁴ He belonged to an informal group in Sydney in the early 1920s interested in promoting European language and culture and associated with the language departments at both Sydney Teachers' College and the University of Sydney, the Modern Language Association and its short-lived journal, *The Modern Language Review*, the Dante Alighieri Society and the Alliance Française, and Christopher Brennan's informal French-speaking dining-club, the *Complicqués*.⁵ Moran was a deputy-president of the Modern Language Association, and a life member of the Dante Alighieri. Others in this circle, apart from Brennan, were A. R. Chisholm, then lecturing in French at the Teachers' College and later to move to Melbourne University, E. G. Waterhouse, also at the Teachers' College before becoming Professor of German at Sydney University, J. J. Quinn from the State Parliamentary Library, the speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Daniel Levy, the barristers, Frederick Jordan, later Chief Justice of New South Wales, and Furneaux Mann. Also associated with the group were Lionel Lindsay, the architect Hardy Wilson and the brilliant classical scholar, Carl Kaepfel.

Herbert Moran's particular interest in the 1920s and 1930s was Italian culture. In 1930, he became joint-secretary of a committee working to establish a chair of Italian at the University, and donated the large sum of £1,000 to the fund.⁶ By then, Moran was fluent in Italian and known in the local Italian community which according to the consulate regarded him as 'uno

dei suoi'.⁷ His ties appear to have been particularly close to the family of Tommaso Fiaschi, a Florentine-born surgeon who became an influential member of Sydney's medical establishment. Moran's Italian interests may have first developed through his close friendship with Fiaschi's son, Pietro, dating from the time when they were medical students together.⁸

Moran's first encounter with Italy was in 1932 at the age of forty-seven. On an overseas trip to study modern methods of cancer treatment, he went to Italy where he was received in audience by Mussolini.⁹ He also spent a month in Perugia, probably studying Italian at the Università per gli stranieri. Three years later, Moran retired from his medical practice and left Australia. Except for an interlude in Munich in 1937 where he studied German and a brief trip home at the end of the year, he lived in Rome from October 1935 until the spring of 1939 when he moved to England. He died of cancer in England in 1945.

In his account of the last ten years of his life, Moran referred to his Italian sojourn as 'the happiest period of my life'.¹⁰ His attitude to Italy as image can be reconstructed from his loosely autobiographical novel, *Beyond the Hills Lies China*, the story of a middle-

aged Australian doctor who goes abroad for the first time.¹¹ In Italy, the novel's protagonist, John Challis, undergoes the rebirth that so many northern Europeans claim to experience on entering Italy:

Yet after these months in Rome he could not be the same man who left Australia. Into his being had passed something of the spirit of the place . . . Out of the long, dull period of living he was welcoming the florid opulence of light and colour.¹²

In Italy he "fell captive to a beauty that in all his earlier life had eluded him"; he experienced a living past, he touched the timeless wisdom of peasant society.¹³ Italy as beauty, sensuality, passion are realised in the hero's 'brief encounter', a doomed love affair with a cultivated French woman of part Italian descent. Like so many Australians, real and fictitious, Challis is overcome by his meeting with the history and sophistication of Europe, personified in his Italian-French lover.¹⁴ He was "the somewhat gauche man from the Antipodes"; "his own ignorance hurt him; centuries jostled one another, in splendour and misery rebuked his neglect of them."¹⁵ Moran's 'Italy' was then the land of Romantic imagination, and of "poverty made cheerful by colour".¹⁶ But unlike most travellers in Italy, he was also interested in Italy as a contemporary society. When the consulate in Sydney wrote to Rome recommending Moran, reference was made not only to his promotion of Italian culture in Australia but also to his "vivo interesse per l'Italia fascista".¹⁷ The visit to Italy in 1932 confirmed Moran in his admiration for Mussolini and the Fascist regime, and he did not waver in this admiration until the invasion of Albania in the spring of 1939. Herbert Moran became a publicist and propagandist for Italy.

Like the majority of foreigners who were received by the leader, Moran succumbed to Mussolini's well-manipulated personal magnetism. His presentation of Mussolini was within an established pattern and previous reading may well have organised his perception. In Moran's writing, Mussolini is above all a Messiah figure, one who found his people and land "broken and disillusioned"; he "brought order out of chaos" and "enhanced everything he touched".¹⁸ He had transformed Italy materially and morally. Mussolini had also "cleansed the temple". Along with many Australians in Italy, Moran could associate the land with dirt, moral as well as physical:

During his regime it became safe for any stranger to walk at night through the little streets of poor fame beyond the Tiber, or around the Piazza Navona. . . . There had been no such cleanliness in any preceding era in Rome. . . . The vile men who used to accost decent women



in the streets, pinching them in the back, were hunted out, beaten, mauled.¹⁹

Thus Mussolini intended to turn his fellow-countrymen into a more virile, disciplined, active race.²⁰

The Messiah was also the Gallilean carpenter, the simple, unassuming man of the people:

No one could have been more simple or natural in his behaviour. I carried away from that interview the impression of a tired, worn out, simple man.²¹

To a reporter from the *Sydney Morning Herald* who interviewed him on his return from Europe in 1932, Moran stated that "Signor Mussolini was a simple, kindly man, neither arrogant nor aggressive . . . He lives simply and unostentatiously, and has no luxurious diversions . . . honours, title, wealth hold no attraction for him."²²

Moran had less to say about Fascism than he did about its leader and his impact on Italy. Fascism was of course a bulwark against communism, 'Asiatic Nihilism'. Its rationale was the chaos and corruption of the times which brought it forth. Alongside the restoration of order and the erection of walls against chaos and communism, restrictions on individual liberty, exile, even the murder of Matteotti, were inconsequential:

Let it never be forgotten that revolution had its origin in misery. Nor must it be overlooked that never in modern times was there relatively so bloodless a revolution. We have accepted without complaint murder on so terrible a scale in one of our Allies that to harp incessantly on the horror of the Matteotti assassinations savours of the ridiculous.²³

While Moran had no interest in importing Fascism into his own society, he did on occasions express a strong suspicion of democracy and the belief that parliamentary systems would give way before the strong man. To a friend in Australia he wrote from Rome in 1939 of the weakness of the democracies, of the growing ineffectualness of parliaments, of his belief that "the initiative in many important movements and social progress has passed out of our hands into the hands of the dictator nations".²⁴ The 'decline of the West' tenor of his outlook became even more marked by the time he was battling cancer to finish *In My Fashion*. "I hate democracy if it means the mob rules and the mental defective and the moral delinquent will outvote the honest".²⁵

What Moran also singled out in Fascism were the vitalist aspects. According to Fascist doctrine: "life is a duty, an elevation, a conquest, it must be lived fully, strenuously, dangerously".²⁶ But then much of

the appeal of Fascism was that it was not a "doctrine carefully elaborated in advance"; "it was a response to the need for action, it was action".²⁷ In an address to the Australia-Italy Club on his return to Sydney in 1932, Moran told his audience that Fascism:

denied the material aim of mere economic peace and happiness. It considered that the realisation of mere material well-being could convert men into mere animals . . . It affirms the irremediable inequality of men who cannot possibly be levelled by some mechanical means such as universal suffrage . . . The State was a spiritual and moral force.²⁸

Little has been established about Moran's activities after he returned to Australia at the end of 1932. In August 1935, the Consulate appointed this 'amico dell'Italia e del Regime' as the representative of the Italian Red Cross in Australia.²⁹ Later that year, Moran retired from his medical practice and went back to Italy, arriving just as the invasion of Ethiopia began. He was of sufficient interest to the Italian authorities to be granted another audience with Mussolini three days after he arrived in Rome.³⁰ Furnished with the warmest recommendations from the Consulate and the connections of the Fiaschi family, including the presence in Rome of the Marchesa Guiliana Torrigiani, Tommaso Fiaschi's daughter, Moran moved into the established Anglo-Italian world in Rome that centred around Luigi Villari, son of the historian Pasquale Villari and his English wife. This was a world sympathetic to Fascism and its *Duce*. Thus Moran met a number of prominent figures in the regime and was received in private by Mussolini on at least two further occasions.

Moran claimed that what upset him most on his return to Italy was the deterioration in British-Italian relations, or more specifically British hostility towards Italy and failure to appreciate and support Italy's legitimate aims in Abyssinia. His dismay spurred him into action. In November, and December, he wrote a series of long public letters to put the Italian case before the Australian audience. There may have been some trouble in finding a venue for the letters; the first was published in *Smith's Weekly* but no more appeared in that paper.³¹ The series of three articles came out in the *Italian Bulletin of Australia*,³² the organ of the Italian Chamber of Commerce and a vehicle for Fascist propaganda. Early in 1936, the letters were re-published as a book in an edition of four thousand copies at the expense of the local branch of the fascisti.³³

Moran's professed first aim in his *Letters from Rome* was to counter the distorted British propaganda reaching Australia.³⁴ In contrast to this British censorship—also revealed in the refusal of the BBC to allow Marconi to put Italy's case on air and later of

the Australian government to let Moran broadcast from Rome to Australia—Moran emphasised the free circulation of information in Rome; all British newspapers, except the *Daily Telegraph*, were on sale.³⁵ He told his readers that contrary to the lies in British propaganda, the Abyssinian war had the enthusiastic support of the Italian people. Moran then went on to make the usual defences of Italian policy; the hypocrisy of the other colonial powers whose empires had been acquired by conquest, the dirty tricks of Italy's opponents and of the League of Nations, the Bolshevik connections of the supporters of the League. Particularly relevant to Australia was Italy's need for an outlet for her surplus population, a need rendered more acute by the actions of the United States and Australia in erecting immigration barriers. "What right has Australia, with six million inhabitants on a vast territory to sit in judgement?"

If this vast area which Australians themselves will never colonise were populated by hardy southern Italians they would make it bloom as a garden. They would build roads and construct bridges. And they would be friendly neighbours, for never yet has the Italian been at war with us—they are the one European race with a long tradition of friendship for the English people. They would be customers and clients for our goods and they would be a solid barrier against inevitable aggression from the East. But who will have the courage to tell a people in Australia these sober truths with the authority of a leader?³⁶

At the same time that he was making his public defence of the invasion of Ethiopia, Moran founded the Peritalia society in Rome, an activity that he claimed had its origins in his October interview with Mussolini.³⁷ Membership of the society was open to British and American nationals and its professed aim was the promotion of British-Italian friendship. There were several such organisations in Rome, and no doubt Peritalia was an Anglo-American social club, many of whose members, like most expatriates, had little interest in the domestic affairs or political structure of their host society. But there was more to Peritalia than tennis and bridge. Under the guise of improving British-Italian relations, its aim was to win acceptance for Italy's policies and actions. The British Embassy in Rome certainly regarded the society with considerable distaste, referring to it as "an obnoxious little institute". This view was passed on to the Foreign Office which later accused the society of carrying on "some singularly pernicious propaganda in Italy during the Sanctions period".³⁸ Among those associated with Peritalia were some of Mussolini's most enthusiastic British supporters, Major James Barnes, Lieutenant-Colonel Cyril Rocke, the

archaeologist Eugenie Strong, H. E. Goad, Director of the British Institute in Florence. Also prominent in the association were Luigi Villari and Bettina Varé, wife of the Italian diplomat and writer, Daniele Varé.³⁹

Shortly after the establishment of Peritalia, Moran went to London on its behalf "to see if anything could be done to preserve British-Italian friendship".⁴⁰ He went without illusions—not least because he was "an Australian without anything but a few sporting and medical acquaintances and without the slightest social and political influence". His contacts in England were no doubt given to him by his colleagues in Rome, Sir Arnold Wilson, Leopold Amery, Sir Edward Grigg, Lady Houston, all Fascist fellow-travellers or Italophiles with strong Fascist sympathies. Moran also wrote to the Archbishop of Liverpool, Dr. Downey, whom he had met in Sydney. But the Archbishop was non-committal. Moran's pessimism about his mission proved well-founded; thus when he had a further interview with Mussolini, he had little to report. It was at this time that the Italian government recognised Moran's support and appointed him commendatore della Corona d'Italia.⁴¹

His personal mission to London was not Moran's only intervention to assist in influencing English opinion. In January, he wrote to the Ministry for Press and Propaganda suggesting that Italian propaganda in England would be more effective if it appeared to originate from an uncontaminated source, nominating Victor Fisher of the British Council for Peace and Friendship as a suitable person.⁴² The Italian Embassy in London was hardly in need of such counsel. As it informed Rome, Moran's advice was based on the false assumption that the "organizzazione del Fisher sia un movimento spontaneo da parte 'disinteressati amici inglesi'".⁴³ Fisher was in fact on the payroll of the Italian Embassy which financed the British Italian Council.

Soon after his return to Rome, Moran went to Ethiopia where he remained for two months as a freelance medical officer with the Italian forces. The Australian doctor was anything but impressed by the local population: "I thought the Abyssinians the most unpleasant native race that I ever had the misfortune to meet".⁴⁴ His admiration for Italian ingenuity and the capacity of the Italian peasant for back-breaking work was tempered by dismay and abhorrence for the disregard for Australian sanitary norms. His experience in the war zone did not temper Moran's enthusiasm for the Italian cause; in June in letters to both the *Bulletin* and the *British Italian Bulletin* in England, he claimed that at no time during his stay in Abyssinia had he seen any evidence on the bodies of either the wounded or the dead of poison gas.⁴⁵

When Moran returned from Ethiopia to Rome, he had another meeting with Mussolini at which Suvich, Minister for Foreign Affairs was also present.⁴⁶ The

Duce was not interested in the Australian's proposal that Asmara was an ideal site for a great tropical disease institute but "jumped at the suggestion" that a high class English journal, directed by a joint committee of notable Italians and English should be established in Rome. Mussolini's enthusiasm was not sufficient to underwrite such a journal, and Moran was then asked to try and raise funds from among the English friends of the regime, but no support was forthcoming from that quarter.⁴⁷

While working in Rome and London in these months, Moran had not forgotten his native land. In February he arranged for Alessandro Lessona, Under Secretary for the Colonies, to put Italy's case in Abyssinia before the readers of *Smith's Weekly* and himself wrote further letters to the press.⁴⁸ Moran was probably also involved in efforts to set up in Sydney an organisation similar to Peritalia. In February 1936 the Consulate in Sydney informed the Italian Embassy in London that a committee had been formed to combat anti-Italian propaganda and to improve Italy's image.⁴⁹ It was intended that the Sydney committee should work in very close association with Dr. Moran's Peritalia society. Among the members of the committee was Moran's old friend, Pietro Fiaschi. At much the same time, Moran was working towards the organisation of a lecture tour of Australia by Luigi Villari. He had little doubt that Villari would be a success since "he is very English . . . a member of the Athenaeum Club".⁵⁰

At the end of 1936, disappointed with the lack of support for his efforts to help Italy, Moran went to Munich to study German. His enthusiasm for Fascism did not extend to its German manifestation. In Munich, he observed a world permeated by suspicion and secretiveness, and "the mechanical obedience of the Germans to a sign".⁵¹

While in Munich, Moran received a letter from Dino Alfieri, Minister for Popular Culture, asking him if he would give a year's voluntary service to help found an English-language journal in Rome.⁵² Moran was happy to take up this task but heard nothing more about it before he left Europe to visit Australia in September 1937. On his return to Italy in 1938, Moran learnt that a Florentine English-language weekly, *The Weekly News*, dedicated to social and tourist matters, had been taken over by the Ministry of Popular Culture and transferred to Rome. He was asked to write for *The Weekly News* and join its editorial board but declined because this 'nonpolitical' journal "in no way represented my original idea for a high class publication".

Moran remained in Italy until the spring of 1939, but with growing unease at what he saw as the increasing German influence.⁵³ He resigned from Peritalia in April and left Italy in the following month, journeying via Belgium and France to London. On the outbreak of war he joined the Royal Army Medical

Corps. Until the Italian invasion of France in May 1940, Moran continued to work for Anglo-Italian reconciliation. But now it was to the British rather than to the Italian Foreign Office that he directed advice and suggestions, advice that his previous activities and association with Peritalia rendered unacceptable to British officials.⁵⁴ The advice he gave was well founded; that Italy would intervene on the side of Germany if Mussolini saw this as his greatest advantage, that the Italians were united behind Mussolini and that anti-British feeling was running very high in Italy. Whereas the need in the past had been to present the Italian case to Britain, Moran argued now the reverse was necessary, to present the British case in Italy. Thus he advised that Peritalia should be utilised to this end and that a high class journal, preferably under the auspices of the British Institute, should be published in Italy. In May 1940 at least one Foreign Office official showed some passing interest in this suggestion but with the proviso that such a review "should of course have nothing to do with Peritalia". Moran expressed frustration at the failure of the British to listen to the Italian case, to respond to initiatives such as his own. The result was Italian entry into the war on the side of Germany. If efforts of the groups and individuals in circles such as Peritalia had been supported, lives would have been saved and the war shortened by the non-intervention of Italy.⁵⁵

Moran's last few words on Italy were written shortly before his death. By then, there was much less adulation of Mussolini than there had been in 1932 and 1936; the Messiah's feet of clay stood revealed. And Moran's comments were very much in the genre of the fall of the great man—Mussolini, the victim of his own passions, success and vanity, of the sycophants and time-servers who came to surround him, the divided personality, the leader who became so corrupted by power that everything was subordinated to his personal megalomania.⁵⁶

The reason that Moran gave for his resignation from Peritalia in 1939 was that the society was degenerating into an instrument of Italian government propaganda.⁵⁷ But the British embassy in Rome had long regarded the society with suspicion and hostility, and Moran was certainly persona non grata at the Foreign Office by 1939. To what extent then was Moran's horror that Peritalia was being used by the Italian government somewhat ingenuous?

Italy's Fascist regime was from its earliest days well aware of the importance of influencing opinion abroad and in using and manipulating the world's Italophiles and their organisations.⁵⁸ Daniel Waley has divided the propaganda destined for British consumption into two kinds, that produced voluntarily by individual sympathisers and that organised and financed by Italian embassies abroad.⁵⁹ There was of course overlap between the two, an overlap illustrated in

Herbert Moran's activities. There is no indication that Moran ever received any money from the Italian government. Nor is there any evidence at this stage to contradict Daniele Varé's claim that Peritalia was never financed by the Italian government or any other organisation and that it lived from hand to mouth on voluntary labour in borrowed offices.⁶⁰ Moran's efforts to start up an English language journal in Rome failed because financial backing could not be found. On the other hand, the Italian propaganda machine was obviously willing when appropriate to make use of such a ready instrument as presented by Peritalia. In a document headed *Propaganda in Gran Bretagna*, the Italian embassy in London, arguing for the continuation of the subsidy to the British Council for Peace and Friendship, referred to the advantages gained from the Council's contacts with Peritalia.⁶¹

On one occasion at least, the Italian government did invest money in Moran's activities. The local branch of the fascisti had secretly financed the publication and organised the distribution of his *Letters from Rome*.⁶² It is difficult to believe that Moran was unaware of this procedure although he does appear somewhat naive in his understanding of the propaganda activities of the Italian government—thus his proposal that the Italian embassy in London employ Victor Fisher in the dissemination of propaganda material. It may be that it was the very 'innocence' of Moran and his associates that disinclined the Italian propaganda machine to give them overt and concrete support.

In his 1945 *apologia pro vita sua*, Moran wrote that the members of Peritalia may have been ingenuous but "the motives were pure".⁶³ The aim had been to prevent an irreversible breach between Britain and Italy and to keep Germany and Italy apart. Thus he wrote to a medical colleague in Sydney in 1940:

Even you, dear old Moley, wouldn't recognise the validity of my getting worked up over 'Abyssinian stupidities'. I saw the menace then and I saw Italy being unwillingly forced into German arms.⁶⁴

From Moran's viewpoint, preservation of British-Italian friendship meant British acceptance and support for Italy's Fascist regime and its foreign and imperial policies. He had tried to play some part in influencing British official and public opinion to this end through his use of the press, the activities of Peritalia, the mission to England, the advice to the Italian government on the importance of setting up front organisations and English language journals. In all these endeavours, Moran showed a clear awareness of the value of propaganda.

The problem of the interests and influences that led Moran to his self-appointed role of defender of Italy

is not easy. But it is clear that his interest in and admiration for Mussolini and his Fascist regime was already fully developed before he first went to Italy in 1932. Already in that year the *Italo-Australian* described Moran as "one of those who can be called teachers of Fascism in Australia apart from being already a great benefactor of Italy".⁶⁵ Thus the Australian background warrants some investigation. There was nothing exceptional in Moran's enthusiasm for Mussolini and his regime in the early 1930s. Conservative opinion in Britain and America tended on the whole to admire *il Duce* and the apparent success of the Fascist regime.⁶⁶ The situation was no different in Australia. Travellers who visited Italy almost invariably echoed what editorial opinion in local newspapers like the *Sydney Morning Herald* told them, that Mussolini and Fascism had wrought a great material and moral transformation in Italy.⁶⁷ The rider was of course added that while Fascism was a suitable regimen for Italians, it was in no way appropriate for British countries.

Such self assessment or self-congratulation should not distract attention from the strong conservative and anti-democratic currents in Australian history. These are clearly manifest in the early 1930s environment of economic crisis and fear and loathing of socialism. Movements like the New Guard and the All for Australia League were highly critical of party politics, displayed interest in corporate ideas as a means of eliminating class consciousness and class conflict and admired strong leadership as well as being vehemently anti-communist and anti-labour.⁶⁸ Both movements attracted large middle class followings. Similar ideas were expressed both at the 1933 Conference of the Young Nationals and in their journal *The Australian Statesman*.⁶⁹ The President, Wilfrid Kent Hughes, also Minister for Sustenance in Victoria, published a series of articles in the Melbourne *Herald* with the title *Why I have become a fascist*.⁷⁰

Fascism has proved very elusive of definition and its hotchpotch of doctrines meant that it could be found of interest and attraction for many different reasons. Sympathisers and admirers could travel different paths, picking up some pieces, marginalising, discarding, ignoring others. Thus Wilfrid Kent Hughes proclaimed himself a Fascist—but one without a black shirt. Fascism for him was some vague corporate economy and state, it certainly was not a mass revolutionary movement or "Italian theatricalities". On the other hand, opposition to party and class politics, anti-communism, dislike of parliamentary democracy, did not need the Italian Fascist example. The problem of the extent, if any, of the influence of the example of Italian Fascism on Australian right wing politics has not yet been fully explored. Even so the claim of the Italian consulate that the All for Australia League might be described as the Australian Fascist Association and that it "ebbe all' origine un

programma simile al nostro movimento fascista" should not be taken too literally.⁷¹ More accurate was the further observation that the leaders of the AFAL could not or would not develop a mass movement.

While Herbert Moran certainly held views similar to those advanced by organisations like the All for Australia League, he does not appear to have been associated with right-wing movements in Australia—indeed he claimed to have “nearly always voted Labour”.⁷² His political activity in the 1930s was directed towards the championship of a resurrected Italy, not towards the reconstruction of his own society. Moran’s attitude to Fascism was differentiated from that of his countrymen by the extent of his interest in Italy; it was also more informed and intellectually based.

In Rome, Moran associated and worked with that group of English men and women whom Richard Griffiths has characterised as “fellow travellers of the right”.⁷³ They were high Tories whose common outlook included a long-standing relationship with Italy and a high-minded approach to political and social questions. Most of them also held strong religious beliefs—Anglo-Catholic or Catholic in the mould of Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton—that led them to recoil before capitalist democracy and to look back nostalgically to a perceived medieval corporate order and forward to its restoration under Fascism.

At first glance, Herbert Moran, a son of Irish working class Australia and of its anti-intellectual church, would appear to have little in common with his English friends in Rome, high Tory members of the British establishment. But he had certainly been exposed in Australia to some of the same influences. Interest in the corporate values espoused in Leo X’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and reaffirmed in 1931 in *Quadregesimo Anno*, in guild socialism and the ideas of the English Catholic revival was particularly marked in the early 1930s in embryonic Catholic intellectual circles around the Champion Society, founded at the University of Melbourne in 1931, and the Melbourne diocesan paper, *The Advocate* and its sometime editor Denys Jackson.⁷⁴ This English-born Catholic convert was also influenced by the ideas of Charles Maurras and *Action française* and was among those who identified in Fascist Italy the seeds of a corporate society.⁷⁵ A monarchist, he believed in strong personal government, and admired Mussolini and defended the Italian ‘civilising mission’ in Ethiopia.⁷⁶ In 1933 a branch of the Champion Society was established in Sydney. Herbert Moran was a close associate of its advisor, the Jesuit priest, Richard Murphy, whom he had assisted in the establishment of the Catholic medical guild of St. Luke.⁷⁷ In writing about his religion to a friend, Moran was to invoke Verlaine, “‘Je suis catholique’ said Verlaine ‘mais du moyen âge’. I too friend Paul.”⁷⁸ Thus it seems that Moran may well have shared in the religious and social

thought that led Mussolini’s English friends to perceive in his Fascist experiment some approximation of their ideals. Recounting his disillusionment with Italian Fascism in the 1940s, Moran wrote:

Already it has been forgotten that the very concept behind the term “Fascism” was in itself good, for it symbolised the binding together of all the classes for strength in the common good. Surely a noble aim. The defect of Italian Fascism was that it departed very far from the initial concept.⁷⁹

The Champion group was a development of the early thirties but Moran had earlier contacts that would have exposed him to modernist movements that could link into fascism. These were the academics and intellectuals clustered around the Modern Language Association, men whose passionate interest in European languages and literature appear to have connected them with the European right, and who shared in Moran’s admiration for aspects of European fascism. Michael Roe’s recent study, *Nine Australian Progressives*, has shown how vitalist and Nietzschean ideas were transmitted to Australia and debated, adapted and utilised in local intellectual circles.⁸⁰ Christopher Brennan had of course studied in Germany and been thoroughly exposed to the European intellectual currents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His interest in Nietzsche is now well established, and his collection of European literature, which Moran eventually purchased, contained a number of the works of d’Annunzio.⁸¹

Moran appears to have been reasonably close to Brennan.⁸² He was a member of the committee set up in 1928 to provide financial assistance for Brennan and he was the doctor who was with Brennan when he died. They had earlier been allies in the campaign to have Italian introduced as a subject at Sydney University.⁸³ It may well have been through Brennan, who was an early and ardent admirer of Belloc, that Moran came into contact with the intellectual Catholic right.⁸⁴

Alan Chisholm, the main force in the Modern Language Association had been interested since undergraduate days in Belloc—whom he met in 1936.⁸⁵ Fervently anti-communist, Chisholm was also an admirer of Charles Maurras and *Action française* and their credo of monarchy, hierarchy, and the restoration of the pre-revolutionary world. In France in 1936, Chisholm met Maurras and began working on an English translation of *Avenir de l’Intelligence*—a project he abandoned when Maurras joined the Vichy government.⁸⁶ Chisholm also witnessed the French election of 1936 and the birth of the Popular Front which he bitterly deplored; the only salvation from red tyranny as far as he was concerned lay in the union of the two great parties of the right, *Action*

français and the fascist *Croix de Guerre*.⁸⁷ Writing in 1939, Chisholm admitted that:

As an opponent of Russian communism, I was rather sympathetic towards Hitler, at first inasmuch as he seemed to be setting out to impose order out of chaos, and to weld disruptive and opposite groups into a strong unity.⁸⁸

This admiration began to wane with the developing persecution of the Jews. As a reminder that political attitudes are complex, it should also be noted that Chisholm was a friend and benefactor of Omero Schiassi, a Socialist refugee from Mussolini's Italy and the leading Italian anti-fascist in Australia.⁸⁹ After war broke out, Chisholm became a patron of Italia Libera, the local Italian anti-fascist organisation.

While in France in 1936 Chisholm was introduced to Hilaire Belloc by Furneaux Mann who was living in France. Mann was also on the European right; he bitterly deplored Britain's stand on the Ethiopian war which he described as "a moral, intellectual and spiritual treason".⁹⁰ During the Spanish Civil War, Mann was for two years chief observer for the International Non-Intervention Committee.⁹¹ Mann's views were quoted by Carl Kaepfel in an article in the *Australian Quarterly* in December 1935 defending Mussolini's actions in invading Ethiopia. In the following year Kaepfel published another article in the same journal defending the rebels in Spain.⁹² Admiration for Italy's fascist dictator can be found among others in the early 1920s language-literature circles. E. G. Waterhouse proclaimed himself much impressed by the new Italy that he visited in 1924, by the "sense of order, the discipline, the punctuality".⁹³ Ten years later, the Italian consulate recommended to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome that Waterhouse be given an audience with Mussolini; he was an influential person who admired the *Duce* but who had some reservations about Fascism which the Consul was sure a meeting with Mussolini would dispel.⁹⁴ No expressions of political sentiments by Sir Daniel Levy or Sir Frederick Jordan have been found, but both were certainly in the good graces of the Italian consular officials.⁹⁵ As to Hardy Wilson, much work remains to be done in unravelling the strange concoctions of his ideas.⁹⁶ He was obsessed with 'creativity' and the Renaissance as the high point of civilisation, a civilisation that was about to collapse. He visited Italy on several occasions and believed that "under Mussolini's guidance, the nation was advancing towards a stage where, once again, it might produce a creative movement".⁹⁷ The architect sent copies of his books to both Mussolini and Hitler expressing his profound respect and admiration⁹⁸ and he also published a nasty anti-semitic pamphlet.⁹⁹ Thus, interest in ideas that could plug into right wing and fascist movements in Europe were present in the

intellectual circles in which Moran moved in the early 1920s, and many of the other participants display attitudes to European fascism similar to those of Moran. Their views sprang clearly from bitter anti-Communism and from vitalist ideas. These were men too with a profound interest in and admiration for the past civilisation of Europe, a civilisation which was threatened by the post industrial world of mass democracy, men who felt that their world was in decline. A sense of the 'decline of the west' was not restricted to Moran. Chisholm in a review in the *Australian Quarterly* of Spengler's work, while disagreeing with much of the method, expressed his agreement with the conclusions—"that there is something rotten in the state of Europe".¹⁰⁰

While it is possible then that the roots of Moran's interest in Fascist Italy are to be found in religious and intellectual circles in Sydney, it may have been his Italian contacts that were the decisive factor. The cultivated Italians with whom he associated, the consuls, the Fiaschi family, Antonio Baccarini, the backbone of the Dante Alighieri, were all fascist in outlook and no doubt went out of their way to win Moran to their cause. But beyond this lies the passion of Moran for that state of mind called 'Italy', which has seduced so many Anglo-Celts, provincial as well as metropolitan. It is this romantic framework that provides the key to Moran and Italy.

The activities of Herbert Michael Moran are an episode in Italian-Australian relations. His efforts to defend Mussolini, his regime and imperial policies were of little importance to Italy. What is their significance for Australia? A major driving force behind his propaganda mission for Italy was what he saw as British control of Australian public opinion. Moran's attitude to Britain was often hostile. Thus, for example, he did not lay all the blame on Mussolini for Italy's eventual entry into the war on the side of Germany. The British bore much of the responsibility; the failure to understand Italians, modern Italy and Fascism. Moran was particularly scathing in his condemnation of British race pride before Italy, of the open expressions of superiority to and contempt for Italy and Italians, the 'Punch and Judy' cartoons and caricatures.¹⁰¹

Moran's attitude to Britain was that of Irish Australia.¹⁰² His resentment of Australian dependence on the British version of the world dated back at least to the Easter Rebellion in Ireland and the bloody repression of the Black and Tans. Of the coverage in the press of those events he wrote:

Never was the artful use of emphasis, and the clever invention of effective caption turned to more profitable account in the moulding of public opinion.¹⁰³

The use of Italy as a stick to beat Britain was not

without precedent in the Australian nationalist tradition. A generation earlier, that larger than life figure and *Bulletin* habitue, Randolph Bedford, had also castigated British attitudes of race superiority to the Italians and extolled Italy's superior virtues.¹⁰⁴

Moran recognised that it was difficult for Australians to see the world for themselves because of isolation, an inequitable education system, the ignorance and philistinism of the country's leaders. Thus the average Australian "became an easy victim to catch-cries and slogans".¹⁰⁵ In an article for the magazine of his old school, Moran made a plea for his compatriots to break out of their intellectual isolation and dependence, to cultivate the humanities, to study the languages, cultures and histories of Europe.¹⁰⁶ This was the course Moran had himself followed. The result was that this Australian surgeon moved for a time on the margins of European politics and diplomacy. Moran was undoubtedly an eccentric self-opinionated, difficult man who made many enemies. The frankness of his criticism in *Viewless Winds* of the Catholic clergy and of many members

of the medical profession did not endear him to either establishment. His friends tended to write about him as something of a trial, "poor old Paddy". His championship of Fascism hardly recommended him to the post-war world. Yet I am much inclined to conclude with affection and respect. The last sections of *In My Fashion* and the letters he wrote as he came to terms with his cancer and impending death are extraordinarily moving and sensitive documents, comparable to the personal element in some autobiographical material at the polar extreme from Moran, and that is Gramsci's *Letters From Prison*. And in an age when most Australians regarded the outside world with indifference or through the parental lens of Britain, Moran participated in events in Europe with a passion and commitment. However misguided his perceptions and actions may be judged, he did at least perceive and with his own eyes.

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- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 224, 220. On Australian travellers in Italy, R. Pesman Cooper, "Visitatori Australiani in Italia (1850-1914)", in *Geografie private. I resoconti di viaggio come lettura del territorio*, ed. Elisa Bianchi (Milan, 1985), pp. 241-260; 'Australian Tourists in Fascist Italy', forthcoming, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 1990.
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- 17 ACR Seg. part. Cart. ord., N130355.
- 18 *Italian Bulletin of Commerce*, September 1931; H. M. Moran, *Letters from Rome*.
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- 30 *In My Fashion*, pp. 1-31.
- 31 *Smith's Weekly*, 29 November 1935.
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- 38 PRO, FO 371/23787/R8989/1/22; FO 371/23788/68943. Notes of A. N. Noble, 20 October 1939, 3 January 1940.
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Comment

MICHAEL SHARKEY

The Australian Fascisti

I enjoyed Andrew Moore's 'The Historian as Detective', the more so since my own game of detection concerning *Bulletin* editors and sub-editors between 1918 and 1926 has turned up one James Alexander Philp (1861-1935), author of *Jingles that Jangle* (1918), and *Songs of the Australian Fascisti* (1923). A copy I investigated in the Mitchell Library is dated Brisbane September 1924. Philp was educated in New Zealand, and part of his collection *Some Bulletin Stories* (1916) is set in New Zealand. Philp appears to have contributed verse and stories from Brisbane to the *Bulletin*, of which he was a sub-editor during the Great War. His *Songs of the Australian Fascisti* is a loose compilation of verse-journalism from various periods, brought together, I think, as a reaction to events since 1919 in Brisbane (the One Big Union Propaganda League which organised the March 1919 demonstration is directly alluded to in Philp's call for 'Another Big Union', and in his title-page device.

Philp's Foreword to *Songs of the Australian Fascisti* reveals his grievances at rigged electoral rolls and faked ballot-results; taxation without representation (a result, he says, of calmly paying taxes at the behest of Parliaments "elected by means of stuffed rolls, electoral quotas and ballot-boxes with sliding panels", which scandals "have been associated with Australian Labour politics in at least two States"; and finally, the association of Labour politics with Bolshevism.

Philp's poetry is as undoctinaire as his political analysis; 'The Prince's Smile' is a commentary on changes to the teaching of history in Queensland State Schools about the time of the visit of the Prince of Wales (1920); 'Class-

Songs of the Australian Fascisti



To M.L. Reading &
with the authors' compliments

Brisbane Sept-1924

by

By J. A. PHILP

Author of "Some 'Bulletin' Stories,"
"Jingles that Jangle,"
Etc.

AUSTRALIAN Originals

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Consciousness' and 'Comrades' (pp. 8, 23) represent the author's diatribes against the traitors in our midst who breed a sense of class: from the latter poem,

You're a scoundrel
A traitor
A disintegrator
You're as foul
As the filth
In the sewers
You're the offspring of Cain.

On the evidence of Philp's other essays into verse-experimentation, it is plain that the devil indeed had the best tunes. Philp's subjects are those of the day—the Irish Troubles ('The Freedom of Michael', p. 23), the rigging of the electorate in Queensland ('The Ghostly Voters', p. 22)—but his verse misses the satiric edge which might have revealed some self-awareness or irony, features which redeem much of the hack verse-journalism of 'Gilrooney' (R. J. Cassidy), H. E. Boote, 'W' and 'Glen' (David McKee Wright) and other contemporaries on *The Worker* or *The Bulletin* staff. *The Bulletin's* brief mention of the publication (Red Page, 15 May 1924) observed that the book was "ready to meet the Australian Bolshevik case", and was "at least a wholesome warning". After such fulsome praise, Philp might have offered more wholesome hints, but these are not recorded in book form. I would be grateful for any particulars relating to Philp's career in Brisbane, or his contacts in Sydney.

Michael Sharkey's most recent book is The Illustrated Treasury of Australian Humour (O.U.P., \$39.95). He is writing a biography of David McKee Wright.



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STEPHEN NICHOLAS

Convicts, Crime and Work

In *Which Road to the Past?* the English historian G. D. Elton wrote that the absence of controversy in any field of historical research signified its intellectual death. If the reviews of *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past* are any measure, then Australian history is alive and well. The book has breathed new life into the old question of 'who were the convicts?', an area of Australian historiography largely deserted and abandoned since the work by Lloyd Robson, Manning Clark and A. G. L. Shaw answered conclusively that Australia's transported convicts were part of the criminal classes.

In his review in *Overland* (no. 113, p. 81-3) of *Convict Workers*, John Hirst quoted at length one of our main conclusions: "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." Unfortunately, Hirst then went on to misrepresent our argument. In an effort to reassure readers that Robson and Shaw's interpretations of the convicts were "not superseded by this book", Hirst alleged that *Convict Workers* argued that the convicts were "all ordinary workers" and "that convicts could not have been professional and habitual criminals because such creatures did not exist!" We made no such claims. Here is what we wrote: "That Australian historians have clung so tenaciously to the Victorian notion of a distinct and separate class is surprising. Historians of Victorian crime in England—such as David Philips, David Jones and George Rude—have rejected the idea of a dangerous class, born and bred to a life of crime and operating as organised gangs . . . Not

only were those transported to New South Wales not part of a criminal class, the fact is that there existed no such class in Victorian Britain from which to select the transportees".

What is at stake in our different interpretations of the convict period is real differences in the way historians view history. *Convict Workers* sees the convicts as part of the British and Irish working classes. For the old historians, Manning Clark, Lloyd Robson and A. G. L. Shaw, the convicts came from a criminal class, a sub-group of professional and habitual criminals quite distinct and separate from the working class. Clark distinguished the criminal classes from the urban working class by a "certain character and upbringing", by a "psychological aberration" which made them permanent outcasts of society. Shaw thought that those transported had "sprung from the dregs of society and had been trained to crime from the cradle". Lloyd Robson sought the criminal class in the "indifferent and non-existent parental control" and "the professional class of thieves who taught children, not always their own but waifs and strays, how to pick pockets". These are not the values or life style of the British working class. The work of our predecessors denies Australia's first settlers their heritage as men and women nurtured within normal family relationships of obligation, love and caring which characterised everyday working class life. It is that view which Australian historians have accepted uncritically. It is an interpretation which *Convict Workers* rejects.

The criminal class interpretation has permeated and distorted our perceptions of our past. It led Humphrey McQueen to argue that Australia inherited from the convicts a "deformed

stratification which had itself been vomited up by the maelstrom which was delineating class in Britain". Small wonder that mateship (honour among thieves), hatred of authority and individual acquisitiveness marked for most historians the meagre cultural baggage that the convicts brought with them to Australia. In the traditional historiography, these singularly unattractive values were the convicts' only contribution to the formation of culture in Australia. In contrast, *Convict Workers* encourages historians to recognise that the values that the convicts brought to Australia were those of the British and Irish working classes.

While Robson and Shaw recognised a diversity amongst the convicts, their interpretation unequivocally represented them as being predominantly professional criminals. According to Robson (in the concluding sentence of his book): "But if the Hampdens are placed on one side of a scale and the ne'er-do-wells on the other, the scale must tip toward the ne'er-do-wells". For Shaw, the convicts were recruited from a distinct body of people, the professional and habitual criminals, and "all in all they were a disreputable lot". This view has been widely accepted by Australian historians. In *Convict Society and Its Enemies*, for example, Hirst wrote that Shaw's work "finally established the large professional criminal element among the convicts." Yet Philips, who Hirst quotes extensively in his review of *Convict Workers*, suggested that at most 10 per cent of the Black Country criminals were "professional and experienced". In his review, Hirst, citing the work of David Jones on Manchester, focused on whole families who remained criminal for generations and the work

of organised gangs. According to Jones, however, Manchester police statements for the 1840s and 1850s identified only 200-300 thieves and another 200-300 persons known to steal occasionally. The fact is that professional criminals were an infinitesimal proportion of the population of England, and they formed a very small proportion of those transported to Australia.

What of the convicts as workers? Hirst alleges that by abstract reasoning we assert that the convicts readily adjusted to work in the colony because they had been disciplined to stable work patterns at home. In fact we wrote: "The experience of the regularity and discipline of household and factory in Britain, meant transported workers would have been able to adjust readily to the fixed work days and work week under convictism". Adjusting to fixed working days and hours is not the same as adjusting to work; several chapters in *Convict Workers* discussed work, offering new evidence on the organisation and operation of gangs, payments, incentives and punishment. Rather than ignoring defiance and absconding by convicts, *Convict Workers* analyses in depth the problems of extracting work from a coerced labour force where defiance, absconding and malingering were endemic.

Convict Workers offers new and radically different interpretations of our colonial past. As a result, we are critical of many of our predecessors, including Robson, Clark and Shaw. But it is wrong to see our new interpretations as 'bucking' authority. An historian knows no authority other than that of his sources and evidence. It is the task of historians to tell the truth about the past as they see it. If their interpretations differ from those that went before, so be it. It would be a pity if historians trivialised and misrepresented the conclusions of *Convict Workers*. As historians our arguments should be over the use of evidence and the conclusions we draw from our data.

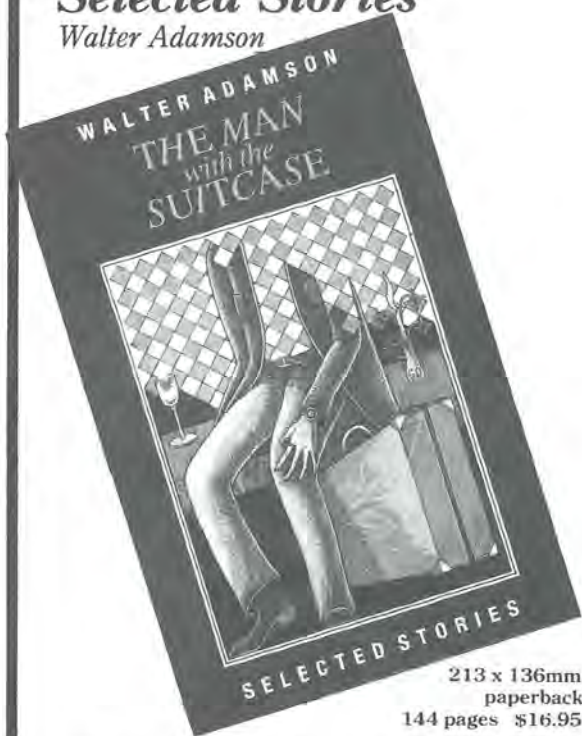
Stephen Nicholas teaches in the Department of Economic History, University of New South Wales

[John Hirst comments: Perhaps my difference with Stephen Nicholas on professional criminals among the convicts is a matter of degree. He now states that they constituted 'a very small proportion'. My impression from Robson and Shaw and my own work is that it was more than that, but on the other hand I think Nicholas and his colleagues have shown that the level of skill and work-experience among convicts was such that Shaw and Robson should not have been quite so free with 'ne'er-do-wells', which is how they characterise the majority. I would be very sorry to have misrepresented the authors of *Convict Workers*, but in the book I could find no acknowledgement of even the tiniest proportion of professionals. The statements seemed quite categorical—there was no such class and convicts without exception were ordinary men and women (pp. 7-8, 74). If I was wrong to represent them as saying all convicts were ordinary workers, I would be glad to be told where the book discusses those who were not.]

The Man with the Suitcase:

Selected Stories

Walter Adamson



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paperback
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The twenty-one short stories brought together in this volume comprise the first collection of the work of this well-known exponent of the genre. Some have previously been published in journals in Australia and West Germany, but many are presented here for the first time. The stories offer a variety of themes and styles: from lucid character studies and allegorical fantasies to humorous, meditative and surreal explorations of our times.

Walter Adamson is a respected literary figure who has published in both German and English. He has participated in writing conferences, has spoken on ethnic writing and writers and has read his own work on the ABC. His novel *The Institution* is used in a number of tertiary level literature courses.

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JULIAN WOODS

Public Libraries and Australian Literature. *The Continuing Debate*

Margaret Isaacs, Linda Emmett, Jean P. Whyte: Libraries and Australian Literature; a Report on the Representation of Australian Creative Writing in Australian Libraries (Ancora Press, Graduate School of Librarianship, Monash University, \$10).

The work under review is not for librarians or historians only. It needs a wider public. It addresses the malaise in our libraries in the 1980s and its effects on authors, publishers and readers.

Peter Mansfield in *Overland* 113 dealt with many of these issues, but I found his menu too rich. One could be side-tracked at every paragraph. For instance he advocates all literary and writers' grants to be centrally pooled for one year in order that a set of the Best 200 books of the last 20 years be bought and allocated to each centre of over 1000 population. One could wander along such tracks for a long time.

His article embraced libraries of all kinds, publishers here and abroad, authors and their incomes, Australian literature and its support, who should promote it (or pay for it), Public Lending Right, tax support for literature, and among other strictures, whether librarians are doing their job or not.

Libraries and Australian Literature is a work of solid statistics and some definite conclusions. It poses many questions. It shows how little authors earn in our society; perhaps we envy their fame and begrudge them anything else. We are shown beyond doubt that there is no bias in the library profession in general against Australian literature, that the opposite is the truth. What it also implies in many different ways is that the libraries of Australia are failing in their function.

The public library is the university of the people serving the whole 16

million of us and not on distant campuses either. There has been heavy criticism in the '80's and the most ominous, for it means less money, is of the kind uttered by the Victorian Minister of the Arts "Libraries must become more accountable and demonstrate improved performance."

How can this be done? Sociology could be stretched in the process. One would have to observe and question each library enquirer, question those who have given up asking the library, assess librarians' responses to known and accessible resources, assess the resources themselves and their adequacy, convenience of opening hours, and library siting and amenity. In one sense libraries are passive, offering up written culture in classified rows and the rest is up to the public. Moreover librarians do not write the books, literatures do have good and bad eras. But finally, librarians have to collect it all, or nearly all. For if we don't, who will? And what was ignored or despised, what fell stillborn from publishers' hands, can be re-discovered and re-assessed. To talk of absolute book selection policies is a nonsense. But the hardest fact we have is this: when a new or greatly improved library opens to the public demand swamps it, often to the amazement of those who set it up.

On the other hand we are still so unused to libraries (one can always tell the English or North American by their confidence and ease in a library) that the librarian like a good teacher must smile, encourage, put to music and lead by the hand in order to turn the uneasy and bashful questioner into a browser

and a confident searcher of catalogues and data banks. Accountable? Are we still pioneering or not?

What about performance measured by numbers of books lent? The overall figures are impressive, 100 million a year for the nation. But does it mean anything? There are thousands of books every public library system should contain which will only be borrowed two or three times a year but for half a century or more. These don't make very impressive statistics. Reflect popular demand only and the library is indistinguishable from a newsagents, and we have enough of those. Some public libraries are worse, more like shabby paperback exchanges.

Max Harris is wrong about "bad books driving out the good" as applied to public libraries (a Gresham's law of literature?). We do select. We don't let this happen although the pressure is on, and some librarians are 'giving the public what they want', (this only, and meaning, Jeffrey Archer fans can outvote E. M. Forster's) turning some libraries into newsagents with turnstiles, and becoming themselves little more than encyclopedia salesmen plus mechanical tricks. But in the main we are resisting.

If librarians don't collect books who will? We must collect, preserve and make available as much as we can. Four copies of an Australian book in two deposit libraries is the last safeguard against oblivion only, it serves the bibliographies, but otherwise is hidden, anti-democratic and futile. I wish I had kept a list over the years of the famous people, the authors,

sociologists, politicians, scientists, Nobel Prize winners, educated in this century by the open shelves, long hours of opening and massive book-stocks of the New York Public Library. It would be an inspiration.

Our library collections rarely achieve critical mass as Isaacs, Emmett and Whyte put it. Thin and haphazard collections are self-defeating. Collins, the famous secondhand bookseller, sums this up in the extreme: "Several books are hardly worth crossing the street for, a thousand titles are worth miles of travel. I have 50 thousand books on dogs alone. People find it worthwhile to fly to this collection from all over the world".

Our authors raise the question whether the librarian should lead or follow. To which there is an obvious answer: both. We need all the expertise we can get in and out of libraries. There is no conflict at all between a librarian selecting 500 Australian novels and consulting nobody and also carefully noting a borrower's recommended list of what may be a lifetime's study. Never underestimate who is out there in the street with knowledge we have no idea of. They don't have it written on their T-shirts. And if someone gives you an F. J. Thwaites for the collection, grab it and be grateful. Thwaites fans have their rights too. In a democracy every taste is élitist.

There are élites and élites. My library was given several years of *Nature*, a magazine which should be in every public library system (one of the 200 necessary periodical titles I could not afford). This I told the donor. Said the donor "But you wouldn't have more than twenty people in your town who would read it" (meaning, it's a bit of a cultural luxury under the circumstances). I said "Twenty people! How wonderful!" (Would there be a greater number proportionately in London or New York?). Relate this to Australia's population and we would have 15,000 reading *Nature*. Imagine the spin-offs in suburban and rural areas among H.S.C. students alone. Are we going to compare such publications with the *Women's Weekly* as though we were comparing sales of brands of dog food? Should I be gloomy because this figure will never match the numbers watching the match of the day replay?

I return to where I started. Why aren't we librarians delivering the goods? The answer is too sadly simple and written all over *Libraries and Australian Literature*. One discovers in post-Whitlam Australia endless distortion and twisting to blame all failure onto anything but the chief reason—lack of money. This reflects not just meanness in money-matters but a new-found Australian meanness of spirit. One witnesses ad nauseam the crying poormouth of well-off citizens supposedly interested in the arts when confronted with a cultural demand, who in the next breath will boast of the new 4-wheel drive at \$28,000 and of their overseas holiday.. We need a Balzac in the 1980s to chronicle the single-minded commitment of Australians to concrete and real estate, air-conditioning and junk including that re-assembled jetsam of the past called antiques. There are a million dwellings out there each as carefully adorned as palaces and with ducoed chariots at the ready. Times are tough, my arse. We are new barbarians sitting in a giant playschool of mass-produced toys and to quote from Studs Terkel "The Sistine Chapel of American Art is the 30-second colour commercial". Not only American art. As a librarian my standards are fine. But my bookstock declines and decays, I have no money to rebind (the most neglected area of librarianship). My apologies become more broken, more enormous. The public grows in ignorance as their access to books and information declines. My opposition are Australians who believe that until Mr Bond, Mr Packer, Mr Holmes a Court etc. *truly flourish* and the pool of toys in the playgroup grows even larger, that nothing can be done about education, about books, about anything.

In other words we are faced with a general crisis in the culture not specific problems about books or libraries.

This book proves by careful analysis what we suspected, that Australian libraries are not refusing to buy Australian literature. We will buy an Australian book all things being equal. The knowledge we need is not contained only within our borders.

About 100,000 books are published annually in English. Perhaps my public library needs 10,000 of these. About 3%-5% are Australian books depending what pamphlets, government publications, postgraduate theses etc. we include in the total. Now at \$25 a title I need \$350,000 per year (remembering that replacements and multiple copies must also be bought) and I would buy the majority of Australian books automatically. In reality, I have \$50,000 which makes the whole debate as relevant as Marshall Haig's cavalry waiting for the big breakthrough in France in 1914-18. No wonder only a few hundred copies of a novel are bought by libraries, an average of one for each library system.

I will not then, be drawn into stupid debates on priorities which in this context resemble arguments about the merits of different diets which furnish 200 calories a day. Even in my little library system in the Southern Tablelands, Goulburn, there are 36 separate physical collections needing life breathed into them continually, whose clientele varies from pre-schoolers and their board books to partially-sighted persons with Large Print.

"More accountability", and "demonstrate improved public performance" are assertions to be hurled back at the politicians responsible by all librarians. Let them demonstrate improvement and public performance with proper provision then we'll demonstrate ours. But we are not going to let them get away with handing us shovels to dig a Suez Canal and then telling us to hurry up.

Meanwhile, I read *Australian Book Review*, *Times Literary Supplement* and *New York Times Book Review* and learn quite a bit about thousands of books that will never reach the Australian public.

Julian Woods has been librarian of the Southern Tablelands Joint Library Service, Goulburn since 1984. He has published 23 Poems, with John Croyston (Edwards and Shaw, 1953), collected verse Snakes and Ladders (Viking Books, 1975). Poems 1976-88 will be published in 1990.

on the line

This issue was prepared while the tragic events in China took place. With the rest of Australia we shared the outrage and the anguish. We wondered whether to write to our correspondents in China—intellectuals and writers—and decided, for obvious reasons, it was better not to write just now. With hundreds of others we contacted the All-Australian Federation of Chinese Students, made a donation to its fax campaign and offered to help where we could. Thinking that John Herouvim's pressure-head of fury and anxiety needed relief we suggested he go along to the Federation's office in Carlton. They were so busy there, and naturally under stress—it could be expected that all activity was being observed and reported to the Chinese government—that it took a little while for John to arrange an appointment. John writes:

"After the mass murder of 4 June and the subsequent killings, when China's octogenarian fascists launched their propaganda blitz against "counter-revolutionary criminals", the All-Australian Federation of Chinese students undertook a counter blitz. Across China, fax machines began to receive clippings, photographs and translations from Chinese- and English-language Australian newspapers. Somehow Chinese citizens outside Beijing had to be told what had really happened. Telephones and the mail were no longer safe. At about \$20 a page, this tactic was as expensive as it was imaginative, but the public response to an item on ABC television paid both for the hired fax machine and its transmissions.

After a few days, a new development. The fax machine would be turned off in China as soon as the text was identified as one dangerously contrary to the official lies of Dung-souled Deng and his accomplices. Back in Melbourne, a Chinese citizen would turn the page upside down and fax the bottom half. The Federation's chief public spokesperson explained that even these interruptions were a positive sign. Someone has seen the truth. Maybe they will tell their family or one or two friends, and these people will tell others. In this way, many Chinese will come to know what was done.

For now, the intensive faxing is over. However, there

has been some contact with eye-witnesses who have escaped from Beijing and their testimony forms the main part of the current fax messages.

The All-Australian Federation of Chinese Students is very grateful for the support it has received, so much so that it says it would not be proper for us to appeal for further financial support for the fax campaign. The Federation's address is 26/422 Cardigan Street, Carlton, Vic. 3053. Tel: (03) 3470062.

People wishing to assist Chinese students in Australia may also do so by contacting *China in Crisis*, which is providing welfare, immigration, financial and general assistance. Tel: (03) 6622888".

We note the fine poems published in newspapers by Fay Zwicky and Chris Wallace-Crabbe. In our next issue we will publish material on the events symbolised by Tiananmen Square: a poem by Bruce Dawe and a searching article by Michael Keon giving an historical context to Chinese student political movements and a personal understanding of them. Michael Keon's first-hand experience of China and of key contemporary figures was formed over many years. We hope to add other material which may include a participant's report and some translations of recent Chinese poetry. Meanwhile we believe, supported by informed opinion, that even while so many who spoke and demonstrated are held in gaols under inhuman conditions, conditions which will cause death in some cases, the struggle for a more open, more democratic China, is, even now, gaining new strength.

Before the current repression outspoken writers such as Xue Deyon were already in prison. Many more, such as Ling Xiabo, are now in detention. Writers in Australia, including Patrick White and Thomas Keneally, are sending appeals on their behalf. The Chinese Foreign Minister, Qian Qichen, has said that such comments are "ill-informed and emotional". Should we not express emotion? How informed can we be in the face of the Chinese Governments' crack-down on information exchange, the clearing of foreign newspapers and magazines from shops, the jamming of foreign radio? Despite such responses many other Australians will continue to add their voices to the

protests. The spirit shown in Tiananmen Square cannot be silenced, in the long view, by threat, prison or murder by State decree.

A Women's Friendship by Ada Cambridge, edited by Elizabeth Morrison, has been published as a handsome paperback in the invaluable Colonial Texts Series (New South Wales University Press, \$19.95). The editing is a model of its kind. In her Introduction, among many interesting things, Elizabeth Morrison writes of the huge range of Australian newspaper and magazine outlets which existed for fiction one hundred years ago. *A Women's Friendship* was published as a serial in the *Age*, beginning in August 1889. At that time, Elizabeth Morrison tells us, "over one hundred of the two hundred or so newspapers and magazines then being published in Melbourne and country towns throughout Victoria were providing serial fiction for their readers." Thirty-two novels were appearing, eight of them by local writers. In the 1880s in Melbourne alone "three dailies and four weeklies published . . . twenty-seven [works] by resident colonial writers." Ada Cambridge (1844-1926) wrote twenty-eight novels of which nine appeared solely in newspapers. As Elizabeth Morrison says: "they are part of a still largely unexamined archive, the size of which can only be guessed at until a complete indexing of colonial newspapers are carried out."

What other works of quality remain to be rediscovered from this large source is a fascinating speculation. Further research may, indeed probably will, produce fundamental changes in our literary history. And what a range of newspapers and magazines were available to our writers one hundred years ago. How restricted today's opportunities, even if we take film, radio and television into account. Where are the outlets for today's equivalents of Ada Cambridge, Jessie Couvrier ("Tasma"), Rolf Boldrewood and numerous others whose names are today, for the moment, unknown? Even taking into account the occasional opportunities offered by film and television and the great effort of Bruce Pascoe's *Australian Short Stories* and the other literary quarterlies, the 'audience reach' of fiction prior to book form cannot compare with that of one hundred years ago.

It may be that quality fiction is being lost today, at least to literary record and criticism, just as much of Ada Cambridge's work was lost. Her equivalent today may not be found in book form but in the talents of script writers such as Ben Lewin and Sonia Borg. Perhaps it is time our literary critics added the work of such writers to literature under review.

In the June honours list Max Harris A.O. Gwen Harwood A.O., John Morrison A.M., Tjunkata Tjupurralla O.A.M. and Joyce Oldmeadow O.A.M. all brought an extra sparkle to the Order of Australia. John Morrison's work has appeared in *Overland* from

the beginning. Continuing a long relationship a new poem by Max Harris appears in this issue. Gwen Harwood's most recent book was reviewed by Kevin Hart in our last issue. She is our Hobart correspondent. Quite some years ago now we published drawings by Tjunkata Tjupurralla under his chosen name of Nosepeg and, of course, we have had memorable poems about him by his friend Billy Marshall-Stoneking.

Dromkeen Homestead at Riddells Creek near Melbourne is a national treasure created by Joyce Oldmeadow and the late Court Oldmeadow. The pioneer homestead houses not only the Dromkeen Collection of Australian Children's Literature but an international art collection. Here are the originals of many of the best children's book illustrations by artists in many countries. The collection has an international reputation. The Dromkeen Foundation lends exhibitions to other countries and supports a program of beautifully designed temporary exhibitions. Dromkeen has been visited by more than 70,000 children. Visitors are welcome but telephone first (054) 28 5224.

Olaf Ruhen died in July, Dick Diamond in February and Aileen Palmer last year. All shared a great deal with *Overland*. We hope to publish an article on Olaf Ruhen and his books in a future issue. Vane Lindesay recently recalled the extraordinary impact and runaway success, not only in the capital cities but in dozens of towns, of Dick Diamond's musical stage play *Reedy River*. Set in the aftermath of the 1891 Shearers' Union defeat, it was first produced by the New Theatre, Melbourne in 1953, that nasty time when we produced our own Macarthyism. Its success was a light in dark years. It has never stopped being played somewhere in Australia; the last full-scale performance was on the Gold Coast last year. Vane Lindesay writes:

"*Reedy River* created the stirring that was to develop a re-discovery of Australia where aspects of our folk culture were being, for the first time, researched and examined seriously by groups and individuals. Dick Diamond made a significant contribution to the national achievement." *Reedy River* is now available in paperback (Currency, \$9.95).

Deborah Jordan, of the History Department, Flinders University, quite rightly points out that the death of Aileen Palmer (1915-1988) should not go unrecorded in these pages. *Overland* published her poetry. Many of our readers will remember and honour, her work as interpreter and medical officer with the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. In World War II she was in London driving ambulances during the worst of the bombing. Frail and passionate, she was among the first to speak on anti-nuclear platforms. Deborah Jordan writes: "I first met Aileen thirteen years ago as the elder daughter

of Nettie and Vance Palmer, 'buried alive' as she called it in a mental hospital. A spirited, warm and generous woman, she was still writing, still caring deeply and dreaming of a 'world without strangers'. Aileen fought many struggles gently and persistently."

For some time I have wanted space to welcome *Imago*, a stylish literary magazine based in Queensland. Two impressive issues have been produced. Bruce Dawe and Philip Neilsen are among those who are assisting. I look forward to future issues. \$12.50 a year (two issues) from the Queensland Arts Council, G.P.O. Box 376, Brisbane 4001.

The performance poets had better look out, there is a star on that horizon. The veteran writer Len Fox has produced a new book of verse *Gumleaves and Growing Old* (\$5 from 10 Little Surrey Street, Potts Point, N.S.W. 2011) which with its sparkle and wit, deft use of everyday speech rhythms, demands to be read to large audiences in pubs. I hope Harold Park gets the message. And no anthologist of Australian wit or light verse can afford to miss this gem. It is a pleasure to note that the first impression rapidly sold out and that a new impression is now available.

Barrett Reid.

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH MEMORIAL TRUST FUND

All readers of *Overland* will know how much of his life Stephen Murray-Smith put into supporting Australian writing and Australian writers.

His friends want to continue his work and keep alive his memory. To do so, we have established

THE STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH MEMORIAL TRUST FUND.

This fund will be used to support Australian writing and Australian writers. Most specifically, it will provide money to support young writers and the publication of new writing.

Donations are requested and may be sent to:

Stephen Murray-Smith Memorial Trust Fund,
359 Pigdon Street,
North Carlton Vic 3054

This fund is administered by a Committee comprising Ken Gott, John McLaren, Shirley McLaren, Max Marginson, Ray Marginson and Barrett Reid.

NORTH HITCH BY CAMPBELL THOMSON

Four Excerpts From a Long Poem

Chance meetings along the road, these too have their secret meaning. Aeskylos



canto 1

In the end there is no map to follow,
Only names old gums can grind and growl,
Consonants the land can't tame or swallow
Grappling the bloody belly of the vowel.
WELLINGTON'S bayonet and MARLBOROUGH'S
pike

Carve their initials in the bark, blunt swords
Disembowel DULULU, hobnails hike
Up songlines trampling dreams as new land lords.
Words drown in poisoned water holes, in cries
Of crows, in the silence of a salt lake bed,
Mute orphans trip on petrol sniffing highs,
The arias of magpies fill my head.

The hook above my bed clutches my eye,
The wrists of convicts and the kero lamp
Which sways and splutters among ghosts who fly
Around the stable they built here and camp
Among the bales of wool in swallow nests,
Liming the beams that stink of lanolin,
Sheep shit and shearers' sweat; their spattered crests
Abstract the plaster as my mind bricks in
The mortar with the legend of Ben Hall
Who stole our stallion COMUS, shot the lad
Roused rudely from beside the champion's stall.
He freed it: polish can't make good lines bad.

Rifle in hand I go over the top
And down gullies with a glistening sand,
Fool's gold. The shallow trench in which I flop
Is paved with grass. Here miners churned and
panned
And chewed the earth; tailings a Passchendaele
With barbed wire gorse. A mixed rabbit dips
And dances on the cross-hairs so I fail
To fire. It cartwheels, pikes and flips—
Death's gymnast. Squeezing out the final pulse,
He wipes his hands on the dew. I turn away
Through stands of ring-barked Red Gums. New
lambs waltz,
Chops sizzle on the grill, last holiday.

Where three ways meet, the cars in quest of rays
Slow, scatter alms: the lipsticked butts of fags,
Half eaten hot dogs, frisbeed pizza trays,
The tortured snakes of retread tyres, plastic bags
Ballooning; hub caps mirroring the faces
Of fresh shaven respectability,
Smiling to stifle subversive traces:
The boy next door who couldn't rape a flea.
Just thumbing from the middle of the road,
He will sit and listen to each cliché,
Obeying the hitchhikers' highway code
He will play all the games you want to play.
One is easily accommodated,
Two bags fill the boot, three you take the bus.
The drunk, dangerous, lecherous or mad
Can be a problem. Best not make a fuss—
Pretending to vomit can do the trick,
Prayer is inappropriate in a truck.
You can bail out at a stop sign if you're quick
If not, just shut your eyes and trust your luck.
Conversation is camping, where to pitch
Your self. Truth may lie still on the ground sheet
Of quiet. It pays to take care where you stretch
Your skin: there's acid rain in some you meet.

canto 7

Rusty white combi van slews in the dust
And stops. I'm dragged from dreams, sprint up the
track
He drawls behind a fag

Gold Coast or bust
O.K.? Then chuck ya ruck sack in the back.
Ignore the dog, he likes a wog to chew
For lunch. (Laughs, coughs.) Just outa school?

Nah. Went south to escape the wet. And you?

I'm from Katoomba, run the local pool.

The grinning dingo slavers in my ear,



Two grimy kids agog sit at my side,
 Their hassled Mum throws me a wary sneer:
 Her driving and I'd still be there, stir-fried,
 We spurn the coast. The inland road unzips
 A frizzled, chapped flatness shimmered with wheat;
 Too dull for I-spy and tricks for long trips
 And too hot to sleep. Only yarns might beat
 The grizzles: Mulga Bill, Dot, Clancy,
 Ginger Mick, tales of colonial boys
 That they'd not heard before and do not fancy.
 So, no strummed Banjo only blood and noise,
 Raiders of lost rhymes, a video game
 Of space invaders in our glass cocoon.
 The screen goes black. I steer their eyes and name
 The Southern Cross. Our fingers shoot the moon.
 We park in Goondiwindi near a pub
 Next to the Anzac Memorial Park.

Ah, Greta love, um, find the kids some grub
 And fix the tent before it gets too dark.
 We'll see you in a jiff. Just a quick beer—
 To clear the throat.

Get pissed and crawl back late,
 I'll have you jokers.

She'll be jakes, dear,
 See you soon . . . Thank Christ for that. Let's go
 mate,
 Sink a schooner or two. Can't take bein' cooped
 Up with the meat and screamin' veg all day.
 Besides this road 'd try the Pope. I'm pooped.

Few prop the bar. Their eyes look up and say
 Get lost and stay that way. Four blacks play pool
 On tattered felt in cowboy hats. They pay
 No stares to us with segregated cool.

My shout. Whaddaya do then son? You're not
 A student?

Nah. Gave it the flick. I fish
 That dirty bath, the Gulf. My boss has got
 His boat outa dry dock; the prawns'll wish
 The cyclone tipped us: when we're on the boil
 Bananas flip so quick that down below

The freezers overflow . . . This wet could spoil
 Our chance to make some serious dough though.

I get to fish out dive-bombed kids half-drowned
 And test the piss for water. It's a job.

The eighth or ninth beer elbowed, hoisted, downed,
 We're friends for life when from nearby a sob
 Lets rip a chuckle, laugh then whooping hoot—

kooKooKOOKOOKOOKOOKAAKAAKaaka

THROW THE BLOODY KAFFIR OUT, THE BOONG
 GALOOT!

My friend's demand assaults the bar. The blacks,
 Game over, doff their hats and saunter out.

He does that when he wins, the barman cracks.
 Should be in opera not a roustabout!

The kookaburra singing in our ears,
 We trip-toe to the van. My swag unzips
 Itself beside the Digger. Spew in tears
 From slouch hat down inverted rifle drips.
 Saluting, swaying I retreat to sleep—
 Fishing for Barramundi with Rough Seas
 Off Mornington—We cast into the deep,
 And strike trevally, but no lure can please
 That hump-back king to rise.

Some time we can't
 Get what we want.

He smiles.
 You sly old fraud.
 You know each fish up here by name!

I rant,
 But still, we catch not one. Later, aboard,
 I open up his gift and find the fish
 In ochre on a piece of bark. A flash
 Beyond us leaps, an angler's glimmering wish
 Which shimmies, splits the ocean with a splash.

The kettle's whistle cleaves my crowbarred head,
 The digger's baleful gaze pierces with light
 The haze of hops. She gongs to wake the dead,
 Bonging a billy but we have no bite.
 Only slewed sluicing with a cold tap douche
 Succeeds. Hot coffee speeds us plus cold toast
 To thick-tongued parting, dumps me legless, louche
 And feckless in Gomorrah, the Gold Coast.

On a stop sign stark scribbled graffiti,
 Punctuated by short sighted shot guns,
 Left by bored passing highway banditti,
 Gentlewo/men of the road, Gott mitt uns:

WHY WONT SOMEBODY FUCK ME? (No one dares?)
 QUEENSLANDERS GIVE ME THE SHITS (That's fate)
 I'VE BEEN HERE ALL DAY. LOTS OF CARS— (Who cares?)
 NO LIFTS. I NEED A BEER. (Your shout then mate)
 LARRY AND KEN, BANFF, CANADA, (True dinks?)
 SYDNEY TO HERE IN 36 HOURS (Wow . . .)
 BUT WE'VE RUN OUT OF DOPE. (Jesus, that stinks.)
 TODAY'S PIGS, TOMORROW'S PORK (Stab the sow.)

canto 8

A cruising Jaguar picks up my trails—
 Weary, flat and sweaty, stale. An old bloke—
 White shoes, shorts and towelling hat—prevails
 On me to join him.

 You look fagged, son. Poke
 Your ruck sack in the back and park your bum.
 I'm for Mackay, to find the Marlin boat
 This bankrupt bookie owes me. Where d'you come
 From then?

 Near Cairns. I need to be afloat
 Up on the Gulf next week. You got a drink?

In twenty miles I know this great hotel
 That's stuck right on the beach, whaddaya think?

(I'd suck a boxer's sponge after the bell
 My throat's so dry, but there's the rub.)

OK—

Stopping my gob with my last butter-scotch
 I say—
 First round my shout, take it away
 Then James!

I try to not look at my watch—
 No cruise-control but still the speedo sticks
 On 56 Imperial miles an hour.
 I ask him how and why as my tongue licks
 My lips. He smiles,

 Common-sense; best use of power
 For torque, for best economy of fuel.

(As wayward words can helter-skelter burn
 The roof right off your mouth, a one-way duel
 Above the limit with no lane to turn,
 Locked steering wheel, no gears and worn out
 brakes
 Skidding into silence, I lock my jaw)
 The sweet melts in my mouth, the driver takes
 A turn down a dirt track and finds the shore:

One of the best kept secrets up this way
 This pub, cheap rooms and tucker too!

The hiss

Of Four-X opening on the Moreton Bay
 Fig shaded promontory, the cold beer's kiss
 Fondling my throat beside the wasp-free sea,
 The frangipani perfume wafting waves
 Up to the hotel's stilted balcony
 All justify his tourist brochure raves.
 Thalassa, thalassa, tears sear my eyes.
 He watches as I plunge in jeans and all.
 A pile of stubbies joins me and he lies
 Beer-bellied on the sand. The flip tops fall
 And I make motor bikes from them in chains,
 (We drink the doldrums in the Gulf that way)
 And listen, for nothing beside remains
 Except his voice.

When we were kids they'd pay

Us ten bob a fox, down by Lake Tyers,
 Beyond the pale, in "Caledonia
 Australis," as Gippsland was. Then bush fires
 Burnt down the school, beggared my father
 In the year of the crash, when charcoaled sheep
 Stood in the paddocks waiting to be clubbed.
 When Mum died in an op, nothing could keep
 Him off the booze. Huh . . . One night we both
 blubbed

When he'd whistled the stock whip round our ears
 Like a stockman cracking a black snake's back.
 Then we were packed off to an aunt's for years
 Of half-cast housekeepers and mouldy tack.
 They told us stories of a figure-head



Found washed up on the beach after a wreck,
 A pale white Venus, sent back from the dead:
 She was buried in sand up to her neck
 When Dad had drunk us dry the bank foreclosed.
 A Jaguar rolled up the drive, a "Swell"
 From South Yarra strolled our verandah, posed
 And left his after-shave for us to smell.
 Then I ran off, worked in a timber mill.
 I swore I'd have a car like that. I found

Who'd nark? There's just as likely to be snow
Upon my mangoes when I get back home.

Rain spatters no elegies on these plains
Where megaliths of termites sculpt a poem
For unknown hitch hikers. Curlews' refrains
Hang in the tattered T-trees with the bras

And bloody panties. Shadows hear their cries
And willi-willies scatter the bowers
Of birds collecting ear-rings as bride-prize.
Even my manic mango man is bled
Of words, transfixed by crazing bitumen
Wiggling the horizon. Nothing is said,
Splitting the silence, an archer of Zen.

ASCENSION

In memory of Stephen Murray-Smith

In the heat of a dog-day
The mind barks
In the eucalyptus dark
There is the smell of still.

Silence. And something grows
With the words.
The camellias wilt,
And the little roses blow.

In the cold of the hill
Is shortness of breath.
"Climb up! Reach me",
Says death.

Max Harris

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

After Poetry (2): Measure for Measure

*A quarterly account of recent poetry written
alternately by Kevin Hart and Graham Rowlands*

Yes, Kevin Hart. Writers are influenced by other writers—by welcoming or rejecting them. Begging the question of how the first poem came to exist, a person who never reads a poem will never write a poem. Even so, writers are influenced by the rest of the world and its history. If the first writers I read had only been interested in alluding to other writers, other writers' writing and their own and other writers' writing processes, I would have stopped reading.

Of course writers can write about the world without changing it much. Sometimes a work's only influence is the time the reader spends reading it. Something else could have been done with the reading time—for good or ill. Looking for the legislation enacted specifically because of this or that literary work is not a fruitful line of enquiry. However, discovering a work that has strongly influenced someone is more likely to show results. People are swayed for or against courses of action by many factors. Books are one of them. *Brave New World*, 1984 and *Catch 22* situations are seen to be common even when the titles are only picked up through conversation or journalism. Although the circumstances are tragic, surely Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* has terminated the notion that literature *does* nothing.

My own writing remains uninfluenced by Modernism, Post-Modernism, Structuralism and Deconstructionism if only because I was writing and publishing before I even heard of them. It cannot be denied that these isms are historical movements. But I am more interested in other historical isms and schisms. I have been influenced by Marxism, feminism and Shakespeare who was not an ism.

No day goes by when I do not quote Shakespeare either to a relative, friend or simply aloud to myself. I studied *Macbeth*, *Twelfth Night*, *Richard II* and *Hamlet* at secondary school. I studied most of Shakespeare at university. Now that I have him on video, as they say, I can play him anytime. And I do. My wife and I quoted some of the grottiest Shakespeare to each other during her childbirth labor. Love's labor was not lost—although we did not call him William. When I mainly wrote poetry for the eye, I wanted to write

lines as great as "Here lay Duncan / His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood". Now that I mainly write for the ear I want to write a dramatic monologue as great as Mark Antony's funeral oration for Julius Caesar. While the video is playing and re-winding, *some* things must be lost—in the original as well as in the translation. Perhaps they are Levi-Strauss, Lacan and Derrida.

All criticism is a mode of autobiography, said Oscar Wilde. *All* criticism—from the criticism that tries to hide its autobiographical dimension to the criticism that flaunts it. Years ago when I read extensively in Matthew Arnold's prose and poetry, I found a biographical critic who claimed to show exactly why Arnold chose his touchstones. It was convincing too. T. S. Eliot always remained puzzled by the comparison between Dante and Shakespeare. How could an anarchist be as great as Dante? He wasn't. He was. He wasn't. Shakespeare's anarchism was the reason for Eliot's confusion. He was quite clear about that. Why not be open about criteria?

I have reviewed poetry in *Overland* for thirteen years. I have never assessed a book by the status of its publisher. I like vivid visual imagery. In its absence, I must find something else—slang, irony, satire, rhetoric, dialogue, narrative. I like comic and political rhetoric but I usually find emotional rhetoric strained and overdone. I like tough-mindedness; dislike sentimentality. I hate poeticisms.

But this is not the whole truth. I have a particular liking for self-dramatization which partly explains why I like the Shakespearean soliloquy. Wilde referred to Lockwood's appalling denunciation of him at his last trial. How splendid it would have been if he had said all this about himself, Wilde had thought. I like that. And I like the self-dramatization that must be suppressed in work situations, particularly in large corporations and government departments. I like the poetry that some people think should not have been written—Sylvia Plath, Michael Dransfield, Anne Elder, Bruce Dawe, Rae Desmond Jones, Kate Llewellyn and, most recently, Edith Speers.

At last. And not just for the unemployed. Performance poetry is being taken seriously in Australia—after twenty years. The first problem was the post-performance medium. Records, audiotapes, videotapes? Too dear. Print has proved the main medium for expanding the audience. Paradoxically, the second problem was snobbery, print snobbery. Centuries of it. Despite Chaucer and Shakespeare. While some academic and/or editorial snobbery remains, newspaper and magazine editors have increasingly found space for reviews of Eric Beach, Rae Desmond Jones, Jenny Boulton, Joanne Burns, Jas H. Duke, Rory Harris, Myron Lysenko and Geoff Goodfellow. Most of these performance poets write other kinds of poetry as well. The issue is whether or not their *performance* poetry also works on the page.

Enter II. O.—on the page. A performance poet, he has also been on the page for nearly 20 years. And the pages have not changed. *The Fitzroy Poems* have a black and red cover. II. O. is still a left-wing anarchist. The collection has been printed from manual typewriting. No outside body funded it. The book contains black and white photographs, line drawings, sketches, words and lines, ideograms, epigrams, graffiti, concrete poems, interplays of Arabic and Greek alphabets, various type sizes and styles, underlining, foreign language accents in phonetic English, II. O.'s own phonetic English, slang, Australian phonetic slang, Greek, and finally, poems in Dr. Johnson's English. Well, almost Dr. Johnson's English.

I find this book challenging at every level. It reads as immigrant deprivation but II. O. is proud of being a greek immigrant with a poor inner urban childhood and adolescence. He knows how different he is from most other Australians and how different he is from all multi-millionaire immigrants. He does not want pity and self-pity would be impossible. He demands respect. I think he also wants to 'culture shock' the reader.

These poems could be called streetwise if they occurred on the street. They are largely set in a shop that sold hamburgers and coffee at the front and illegal alcohol and gambling at the back. The poet as son, child, adolescent and employee was keen to know who was doing what to whom and for whom. Knowing the difference between a Slav and a Turk was more important than his homework. Hence, the violation of Dr. Johnson's spelling. The errors may not be deliberate. However, II. O. is saying to the reader, "What else would you expect?" He is rough around the edges but he is not 'schoopet' (stupid). This applies to the people who visited the shop. And perhaps to the whole of Fitzroy at the time.

Most poems are plain descriptions of people and events. Sometimes it is possible to know what happened to them outside the shop; at other times

it is explicitly impossible. Many poems are dialogues or contain dialogue. There is some humor. For example, Aristotle waffled while Archimedes *did* something. The best poems are 'Greece':

they say:
there are statues
in the street
that
look like
me . . .
and
they should know
cos they came from
there.

and 'Phan':

a
vietnamese
girl
holding
her
baby
sister
on
her
hip
walks
into the cafe
looking
for
phan
who's
playing
war
games
on the
video
machines

phan!

phan!

I do not follow all the book. Concrete poems, alphabet designs and ideograms are, er, my Achilles' heel. Moreover, I find the phonetic poems sheer torture. It is as if I have to learn a new language to pass a test. I fail, but I understand the reason for the test.

Ron Pretty's *The Habit of Balance* consists of carefully worked poems in a well edited order with the title poems implying that the reader will applaud not just the poet's usual balance but also his fall (or falls). The latter brings him back to the reader, to earth. Special pleading? Probably. But the title indicates the intelligence behind the whole book.

Pretty's poems cannot be summed up in two or three themes. They cover a wide range of subjects and there

is a genuine attempt to make each poem new. He usually writes free verse but includes rhyming sonnets, half-rhymes, regular stanzas, numerous puns and varied literary allusions where he sometimes parodies the originals (although not with the intention of humiliating the host). He can write vivid visual imagery:

a mallard
suddenly driving upwards
is also plunging down
and feathers furtively drifting
kiss their rising image
before the mirror ripples into jaws
to grip the bloodied morning
like a vice.

He can be witty with words that do *not* rely on visual imagery, as in 'Verbs'. His portraits can be satirical as in 'The Admiral' or compassionate as in his unsentimental poem about his father's last months. The horror of 'The River' is intensified by the device of the round and 'Whalesroad' uses Neville Shute's title to devastating effect. The apparently light-hearted ending of 'The Stone' belies a poem of considerable insight and challenge:

Condemned by silence to his annual death
he takes again the burden of his cross
and, knowing again the agony and the loss
he cries with his last despairing breath

Why hast thou forsaken me?
Again the cry rings out, again the void
the endless pageantry of blood enjoyed
by the jeering mob he cannot set free.

Like Sisyphus he rolls the stone aside
to flee the emptiness that seals his fate
but back the burden rolls—there's no escape
from the ever-turning agony of love denied.

Jesus woke and found himself in hell;
I conclude (with Sisyphus) that all is well.

There are two Alex Skovrons in *The Rearrangement*. One writes a variety of lyrics, portraits and narrative/historical/meditative sequences. These poems range from compassionate to sharp-tongued observations; from sombre tones through irony to punning humor. Although scarcely colloquial, the style is clear and relaxed. I like this Alex Skovron. 'Elsternwick' is a moving lyric about his mother's death:

It was not until later,
not till I tasted the orphan
remnants of her very last cake, crafted

with a heart joyful & failing,
that the tears came.

Our very last secret.

Both the 'Cyril' poems are wry and affectionate:

More often he would quietly sit at home
framed in leaves and pastels on the veranda.
Wondering if the snails would emerge tonight
he'd watch passing children ignore him, unsettled
only on the bad days by their fickle air of
destination

'From an Interview with a Faded Juggler' is typical of his sex poems. There is tongue-in-cheek sexual boasting *and* tongue-in-cheek sexual humility.

The other Skovron takes on huge subjects and overwrites. These poems are less frequent in the second and third parts, although the collection ends with a mosaic of history some of which is overdone. If the order of poems is the order of their writing, Skovron is overcoming a problem of abstractions, long words and awkward syntax. But I am not sure about the order. The book's title suggests several relevant meanings—travel, immigrant experience and playing with memory. The title *poem*, however, is a study of obsession. A 63 year-old endlessly rearranges 1200 books. The author of this poem *must* have thought over *The Rearrangement's* order. If so, it is unfortunate to lead with the most difficult and awkward part. A further irony emerges from these lines in the title poem:

Some days I'll agonize
all morning on a newfound fleck, sparring with
myself,
possessed. I'd even swear the *style* a book
employs
is oddly related to the faults I find

The 'faults' are smudges and flecks on the bookcovers. Still, I wonder. *These* lines in a collection that divides into styles far more easily than it divides into themes and subjects. The following examples of the other Skovron's style come from all three parts of the book:

But I, in pain, already feel the slinking
Triffids of my redemption ramifying
And between her ears
the silent music's clinging abacus.
the thunder caverns of the soul's moltenness

The 63 year-old of the title poem only *rearranges* his books. He will not throw any away.

When Jeff Guess' first book of poems was published in 1984 Judith Rodriguez said in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that *Leaving Maps* was "a major collection". What more could any poet want? A reader who agreed with this opinion could hope for another work of the

same size and quality in a few years. Is that book called *Replacing Fuses in the House of Cards*?

There are two ways of answering the question. The first tells more about the collection; the second tells more about the urge to publish books (while also explaining the first answer).

Replacing Fuses contains some fine poems. In 'Making Easter Cakes' Guess describes a woman making cakes until he wants the "melting butter of her tongue". 'Mark of the Day' evokes all upward aspiration with the warning that catching any piece of sky is not enough. What counts is what is done with it back on earth. 'Old Fencing Contractor' is a portrait-narrative of a worker whose fingers are sliced off when "a white hot line of light" snaps in the straining-pliers. 'Wally Who?' is a portrait of someone who cannot have a portrait because almost nothing is known about him. Not even by his mother. 'Watermelons' is a very fine William Carlos Williamsian piece:

green cold
globes fed to donkeys

striped drums
of pink chilled juice
we carried after school
to cool dark ditches

dripping chins

green rind ear-to-ear.

Clearly, there are some very well made poems in *Replacing Fuses*; but not enough to make a well made collection. Why?

The second answer provides the reason. Since *Leaving Maps* Guess has published three poetry collections, all smaller than the first and all of comparatively inferior quality. Yet another is forthcoming. Moreover, his fourth collection *Replacing Fuses* is his first collection not to *reprint* poems from *Leaving Maps*. The poet is vitiating his impact. His fourth collection contains only a handful of poems as good as the poems that filled *Leaving Maps*. In five years I would like to see another major collection. The poet owes it to his readers and himself.

It would be going too far to say that John A. Scott's *Singles* is worthwhile despite the poet. However, the collection is worthwhile despite the poet's *poetic*. Scott's art is only art—but marvellously so. He says that. He is sick to death of sense. He says that too. He makes connections and then takes them away. Satire would indicate moral concern or, horror of horrors—politics. So he opts for parody as in 'The Third Coming':

Nightfall in Bethlehem.

A rough beast thumbing
through the street directory.

Funny. Harmless. Inconsequential. Whereas Yeats took on all Christendom Scott takes on one of Yeats' poems. 'Reverie' can be read as one of several defences of his poetic. It is done objectively through someone else. The kite's line and the poetic line are neatly tied together. Art is defined in autonomous figure-eights. This art is based on "a terror of the commonplace". The poem is perfect. Unfortunately, perfection cuts out not only the commonplace but most of human history as well.

What about the area between the figure-eights and the commonplace? At least a third of Scott's book comes into this category. 'The Park' is a portrait. 'The Chicago Blues Style' and 'Breakfast' are about relationships. Their funny lines work well because of their context. The pigeons are 'unemployed'. The children of pollution are 'sons of trash'. The following lines in the context of a man-woman relationship are very funny:

Meanwhile, the eye-man
is on to new plastics for the contact lens;
falling prey to those stupid obsessions of alcohol.
And why not? He knows that outside, the
constellations
are doing their stuff: saucepans and bears
preparing
their case for the prosecution. So, he wonders
if she'll join him tomorrow for breakfast.
But she
won't be there.

In so many other poems, however, lines like these are removed from all semblance of context. They are lost in a helter-skelter of intentional silliness. For example, the possibility of a garden collapsing when the dog bones are moved is just a waste of time and paper.

Fortunately, the figure-eights are always on the verge of disintegrating and mixing with the commonplace—regret, memory, yearning. The memory 'Catherine' is based on an impossible connection and / but quite beautiful:

And so it returns
to the narratives of rain, if only
for the moment of downpour. A speech
described in faint parallels, becoming
this pool, or this flood. A design
across an empty view which cannot be
possessed or contained in focus
beyond the theory of its falling.
Let us call this "Catherine". Find
this knowledge suddenly moving
like dancers through a cage: rain
lighting cigarettes; rain, inhaling.

Rain, like the fine bones of
a grammar boy.

It is a lyric struggling to get out.

The rationale for Dennis Haskell's and Hilary Fraser's anthology *Wordhord* is impeccable. Western Australia once voted by a two to one majority to secede from the Commonwealth. It is a long way from most Australian poetry readers. This anthology offers W.A. poetry of mainly national standard to a national audience. WA poetry? Well, not exclusively about WA and not exclusively by poets who were born, have lived and will die there. Not only do I agree with the criteria, I am sure that any lingering demand for a regional anthology to have a sense of place simply misunderstands the sociology and creative sources of contemporary Australian poetry.

There are many fine contemporary W.A. poems. By and large the best poets are given the most coverage. The short biographies are useful, particularly accompanying poets with only one or two poems. If Mary Dilworth is not the best 'major' poet, she is certainly the most underrated nationally:

Strange, how the neighbours spoke to grief.
Some avoided it altogether.
It was easier to talk of the weather,
the sporting results, or manure: the best to use
and the time to choose.
I passed a man in his garden.
He shook my hand. I could feel his sharp bones
on mine, for hours.
The florist delivered flowers. There was a white
card
with lilies and a bell. People came to see me:

their eyes looked away. One woman brought
eggs.
I stood at the door. She tried to smile.
Always I remember the day, the way the sky
was a brilliant blue,
the brown eggs, and the woman who said
nothing.

The best of the least known poets are Anne Brewster, Jenny de Garis, Joanna Hall, Janice Herring, Glen Phillips, Jim Pipp, Mark Reid, Kim Scott and Jane Underwood.

Reservations? I regret having to complain about the long critiques of 'major' poets. But surely they are editorial overkill in an anthology. I am surprised to see Stephen Hall and Lee Knowles among the heavies; I am equally surprised to find Caroline Caddy *not* among them. I am sorry not to see any poems by the consultant editor Wendy Jenkins and the co-editor Dennis Haskell. However, their restraint is laudable. Such professionalism makes one or two so-called national anthologies look like the parish pump.

Graham Rowlands works as a TAFE lecturer in Adelaide. His most recent poetry collection is On the Menu.

Guess, Jeff: *Replacing Fuses in the House of Cards* (Poetry Australia 115, South Head Press).

Haskell, Dennis & Fraser, Hilary eds.: *Wordhord: Contemporary Western Australian Poetry* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, \$19.99).

Il. O.: *The Fitzroy Poems* (Collective Effort Press, \$12).

Pretty, Ron: *The Habit of Balance* (Five Islands Press, Box 1946, Wollongong, NSW, \$8.95).

Scott, John A.: *Singles* (University of Queensland Press, \$9.95).

Skovron, Alex: *The Rearrangement* (Melbourne University Press, \$19.95).

floating fund

BARRETT REID writes: Our May launch party for the Overland Society was a great success bringing new sales and a number of subscribers, including life subscribers. In addition our Capital Trust Fund is off to a good start. From February to May you donated a much needed \$884 to the Floating Fund. Specific thanks to: \$100, F.O.; \$76, J.D., N.S.; \$60, B.F.; \$40, C.W.C.; \$26, C.C., R.M., L.G., P.D.; \$25, L.P., G.G.; \$20, V.I., J.McD., J.B., G.R., M.D., G.P.; \$16, J.P., P.H.; \$11, C.O.; \$10, R.S., T.E., V.B., F.G., V.W., M.G., R.W., L.F., D.P., D.M.; \$7, D.A.; \$6, H.R., H.C., B.A., G.E., R.G., P.M., M.K., Mde.C.P., R.M., H.H., F.L., A.J., J.K.; \$5, J.S., D.B., D.M., J.C.; \$3, T.S.; \$2, H.H.; \$1, S.O., A.S., A.C., P.B., A.M.

WRITERS OF OUR TIMES (case study # 146) by Lofa



* SHARON McFLAIR DIDN'T KNOW IT AT THE TIME, BUT THAT DAY MARKED HER TRANSITION INTO A PROFESSIONAL.

AN ELM TREE IN PADDINGTON

Branches of grape-vine thick as ankles
grow through the terrace iron,
the fruit is a bitter wood; I think

of Brennan standing on similar joinery,
in the same suburb, soured by love
and Symbolism. A black beetle waves

a feeler, its lasso, involves itself
with the security mesh before the panes
of rain-printed glass. I drink

American whiskey from a champagne flute
and imagine Lawson at The Rose & Crown—
he knew the price of a beer

cost more than the blackest sonnet.
The drinkers choose not to hear
parody in a voice, see the rag of a suit,

know the terrible hour it took
to shave up and comb for this sad front.
Out in the yard an old elm shoots

out from the acid dirt at an angle,
its boughs spokes of sylvan thought, here
where form eats content to a gloss.

ROBERT ADAMSON

LETTER TO A CHILD OF THE FUTURE

You asked me once about insanity,
stretching to understand
with the imperfect puzzled earnestness
of one thirteen years old
the night-time of the soul, the sad profanity
cornered already in your eye.

Too much awake to suffer lullabies
you waited. Vanity,
your captive presence, plus a certainty
the *Rubaiyyat's* demands
were not beyond your intellect had made me bold,
and I'd amassed an eagerness

to touch the magic text again, no less
for you than for what I
remembered once, watching the book unfold
its rich tonality.
But now your awkward question had to force my
hand—
I scrambled for reality.

What could I tell you? Partiality
to fobbing off the best
evasive maxim a moment could land
was not at all my style;
nor academic posturing—formality
can quench a thirst for knowledge cold.

And yet something, somehow had to be told . . .
I said: Humanity
means constant war on the brutality
waiting within, or else—
Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!
The vast majority will band

somewhere between these two: they can command
the label 'Sane' to hold
together as their sacred alibi.
But such normality
is what the mad fall short of, or have in excess;
that, son, is their calamity . . .

I understand, you said. Yet, a profanity,
like something old and tired of earnestness,
licked at my eye. A lizard on the noon of sanity.

ALEX SKOVRON

ALABAMA'S FUNERAL

For Alabama, Aboriginal sideshow boxer

On the day of your funeral, Alabama,
The two skins of Swan met,
The cycle of being paused in bushland.
In its column of blue, the Scarp made clouds
Over black eyes, white onlookers,
Old alcoholic, half-forgotten beings—
Oncoming winter with things standing clean
And these goblets, the marri nuts, fallen.
I remember the commotion and the ropes,
I was there in my frustration,
Alabama, sparring partner.

Thursday closed your margin:
This is your afternoon, humped and difficult,
In this radius to lie down
Among marri, banksia and grazing horses.
So our opacities meet again;
So the river runs with no guarantee.
'You don't know the time of day!'—
See: your voice is hailing me again;
Like a flower swaying in a greatcoat,
You, yourself king of Thursdays
Hinting of value beyond nostalgia;
Royal Thursdays ripened with muscat.

Left foot, right foot, the seeking eye,
The world's fortune in ourselves;
Something forward, supple and rich,
A social contract, the buds slow to open.
So, now, you come to your time,
Left foot, right foot, the pores of bushland
Opening before a column of blue;
And there are voices, tepid muscles
Handing you down to imagination,
Where imagination waits,
Alabama, sparring partner.

ALAN ALEXANDER

HOME

On Pondalowie Bay dusk is settling.
The 'roos are feeding as though each were alone.
From food-rich seas the terns return to nestlings.
How sweet this earth that is my home, my home.

Skies tender with new shorn clouds or bruised with
storm,
are one great blue balloon of simple bone-
pure air from frozen reservoirs far south.
I gulp down draughts of strength, for I am home.

Above Wilpena Pound the wedgetails cruise
and know this place is theirs they do not own.
Nor I. We are the owned. Yet owned and owner
are one when we are in this land, our home.

Up Oodnadatta way the austere desert spreads
death and decay in skeletal sand dunes blown
to shapes like human bodies, scalpel clean
and lethal. Cruel is the beauty of my home.

Goolwa and Coorong, Coomandook, the Burra,
Onkaparinga, Orroroo, names I have known
forever, drift as gum leaves fall in summer,
and through my ears I taste the land that's home.

The plumbing may be disinterred, floors, roof
and doors removed for sale, the garden sown
to weeds, graffiti over walls, yet still
the earth and sky remain. They are my land,
my home.

ROBERT CLARK

MY MOTHER AND HARRY

I was the last to leave home
and my mother, in her crumbling interiors—
when I'd go back for meals,

she would apologise
for all the things
I should have done . . . Since my father died,

Harry was her one concession
to love. Raised in mining
and utterly single, he'd visit for dinner

and tell us about the shack
where he was born, its galvanised sides
determining him for better things.

When he bought the farm,
she'd visit him, and leave our house wrapped tight
as an unclaimed parcel. My brothers and I

knew he was married, but would visit also,
as divorce cleared a dusty path
among them. The farm

went on forever—
paddocks stapled with fences
were scattered from scrub-covered hills.

In spring, crops frothed with green;
and the dams would swell and glisten,
while wood-ducks and galahs

splashed about
in the grey, brimming sky.
Hay bleached the summer pastures,

the pale days rising
in the hard dry heat—in the evenings,
we'd sit outside in the simmering air,

watch the moon settle
in a crimson down
horizon. Always the cattle, predictable

as traffic, avoiding
the immensity of the paddocks,
lined along tracks. We'd hear them

tearing at the weeds about the house,
or revving up in the distance—
and Harry would take us

into the dark, where wallabies ground away
at his stubbled investment.
But my mother wouldn't go,

so I'd often stay with her;
and we'd hear the gun, its blinding flares
sent up into the silence . . .

After his divorce, Harry would bring
friends to dinner,
as if for my mother to feed on;

but when she seemed content, he'd find something
sour about them,
and give his own lean standards

to keep her from starving.
When I'd leave for the city, I'd feel
the strength of her clutching farewell,

and think of the quiet, dusty house
where she was going . . .
At meals, she said, silence was served

with such precision,
as the television chugged away
in the lounge room. Then he'd see to the accounts,

clean the guns,
and take his dose of sleep.
For her, the days drifted off, withering

on the harvested ground
where he worked, determined now
to lose nothing.

So when he was out one morning,
she packed her things, walked to the gate
and turned her back at last

on his success.
Caught the train back
and unwrapped her old house;

heard the traffic
stamping about in the dust
of her dark lounge room. Sat for hours

before photos of my brothers and I;
and my father, staring out from their wedding,
into the house he'd made.

JOHN FOULCHER

THE SEED

The women sit around
each other:
petals of an open flower,
on the cushions
of their turned back feet.
Between open thighs,
the travelling boundaries
of their hearth,
they rub babies with fat;
spirit white hands
grind millet for cakes,
spindles turn
root fibre
and finger-husked hair
to string.

Across their chests
ribs of new scar
remember the child
led by Shadow People
to the claws
of a not-quite-dead
young grey 'roo.

In the centre
the old woman sings,
stamping her palms
on a hollow log . . .

a lone old woman
leaning on a corrugated gunya,
feet thrown out
from a tent dress,
singing who she was.

KATHIELYN JOB

THE BONE-MAN

Along housing commission streets
a spindly white woman
pulled by her stroller,
three Aboriginal women
flashing pink palms
on bleak front steps . . .

. . . and something for the cat?
His hands show empty.
Not even calves-liver?
"Expensive, a luxury
in Germany," he says again.
"The bone-man came this morning,
can't keep anything back,
have to be careful—
only keep fresh.
People say, Oh some scraps
for the cat,
bones for the dog.
The children say
not so much meat last time.
Mothers tell them,
go for ice-blocks.
They buy for the dog
two-three times the week.
If you came before Easter—
plenty! They buy
sausages, chops, everything . . ."

KATHIELYN JOB

UPON UPON

Every once in a whilst you find a whilst.
Turn back. While doesn't live in Whil St.
Hasn't ever. Not even Once in a whilst. Still

every once in a whilst you come upon upon.
Say Up yours to the up in upon, if you like;
but don't say comeon instead of come upon.

No matter how many Comeons have been come
upon
at all hours of the day & night & night by
livid lovers or wives or husbands or meowing cats

Comeons aren't worth it. Always come upon
Once upon a times even if only video replays of
your long lost one & only one night stand.

You can't keep upon with. But even if you
just keep on coming on with Comeons
you might get your face slapped. Come across.

No! Don't. If you insist on coming down on upon
you'd better make sure of your placard or
someone somewhere will accuse you of violating

the upon in Once upon a time by
spreading the up & the on like legs.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

ALAN MAYNE

What Immigration Policy for Australia?

An Historical Perspective

Australia is an immigrant nation without an abiding sense of its immigrant past. Our popular culture retains only a scattering of fading icons to migration: Convict Settlement (the days of exile); Gold Rush (enter the bold and the free); White Australia (cultural heritage holds geography at bay); Snowy Mountains Scheme (Europeans under the sun); Boat People (Asian neighbours). The experience of migration has been depersonalised. There is no awareness of migration as the hopes, disappointments, choices, hurts, and triumphs of flesh and blood people.

Of course my reason for emigrating . . . was the hope of bettering my condition.

Alexander Harris, c. 1847¹

There is no sense of human scale, either, in the immigration debate that surrounds us, because there is so little comprehension of our immigrant history. There is, manifestly, none in the crude slogans scrawled on lavatory walls, or in the pronouncements of a beleaguered federal Liberal Party leadership. But the blindness extends, as well, into radio talk-back shows, newspaper correspondence pages, and media commentaries. How can we make sensible choices about future immigration policy when we have no conception of the strengths or weaknesses of the programs and principles which have shaped the present? How can we make informed decisions when we deny the multicultural realities that are the essence of this still emergent immigrant society? As we frame policies for the future we grasp merely at abstractions and phantoms, and fashion forecasts of economic returns and likely population racial mixes in which migrants are reduced to percentage points. We consider migrants not as people, but as types.

When I went to the embassy [in 1974] they didn't really bother anything about myself. They just gave me the form; I filled in the form. They said why did I want to go; I said to them 'I understand it is easy to study there, and it's a nice country, and I would like to take my family with me' . . . And they said 'Oh yes, you can take your family' . . . After a couple of years I wanted to bring my

family, and I could not bring them. I had the hardest time bringing in my family members. I ended bringing my mother and younger brothers in the end, but it took such a struggle to bring them.

Muyesser.²

Yet the last 200 years of Australian history, and the family recollections in which we are all embedded, demonstrate that the migrant presence has been a central feature of our evolving society and culture. There has been a federal department and minister for immigration since 1945, and a federal immigration program has been in train since 1920. The origins of federal immigration policy can be traced even earlier to the colonial programs of the 1830s. It is fair to say that there has been a consistent immigration program, based upon a coherent immigration policy, for at least 150 years.

Over three-quarters of Australian population growth to the middle of the nineteenth century stemmed from immigration. Only during the last quarter of the century did births rather than immigration become the main motor of population increase, and in the 1890s economic depression halted immigration altogether. Of a total population approaching four million in 1901, some three-quarters were Australian born, but migrants still dominated the adult population. Natural increase has remained the principal source of population growth throughout the twentieth century, but in the years immediately before the first world war, and throughout the 1920s, and again after the second world war, immigration was almost as important as native births. In the 1980s, out of a total population of some 16 million, 21 percent were born overseas and another 20 percent are Australian born of migrant or mixed parents. Four out of every ten Australians today are thus products of recent emigration to Australia.

I felt with a poignancy bitter in the extreme, the many ties I was bursting in twain, alike of friends, of home, and of Country!

Thomas Mort, 19 September 1837³

Why is there such a disjunction between the historical significance and, indeed, the personal immediacy to all of us of migration on the one hand, and the public knowledge that is translated into migration policy on the other? Why do we have a debate about migration in which the human scale and a commitment to social justice are so often left off the agenda? The answer is in part cultural. In common with other new world societies, we have a settler psyche. In our representations of ourselves in literature, history, and popular culture, our national myths are drawn from the fellow feeling that we claim was born as we settled the land. The act of migration as opposed to that of settlement is deliberately and necessarily marginalized. Myths of settlement are about the here and now, and include a promise for the future; whereas migration is neither here nor there, neither belonging quite in the old world nor yet in the new. Migration is indeterminate; it has therefore been allowed no place in the forging of national identity. The writing of Australian history has been all about settlement and nationhood. Its heroes have all been masculine, back-bush types: the Mates of the Bush Legend. The migrant type is problematic in such nationalist myth making: he or she is not yet a settler, but is only a sojourner, a transient. This settler psyche helps explain the mocking and resentful representations of the 'new chum' and the 'whinging Pom' in our folk culture over two centuries, our abiding and obsessive concern with migrant assimilation, the reluctance to concede the magnitude of return migration, and our current interest in making citizenship a 'watershed' for migrants and a statement of their commitment to Australia.

of course I didn't speak a word of English. There was no orientation given to me beforehand, before coming. Only knowledge I knew about Australia was that it was a hot country, so I sold all my winter things . . . and had a suitcase of books and just a few light things to wear. On the day we arrived in Sydney it was pouring, simply pouring, and cold! And windy! So I had nothing to wear for cold weather. And even in the hostel, I'm sure they explained things, but I didn't understand a word of anything . . . the following morning the cleaner came and wanted to clean the room and make the beds, and you had to go and queue for a breakfast. It was so degrading I couldn't believe it. She just said 'UP, UP, UP!' . . . everybody shouted at you . . . I felt so insulted each time someone shouted at me I felt, you know, running into tears and going back to Germany.

Muyesser.⁴

There are two other reasons why we are ill-equipped to devise an immigration policy that is both efficient and humane. First, Australian immigration policy has always addressed other imperatives at the expense of social justice. Second, public knowledge of and interest in migration has been so constructed that we only recognise and respond to immigration 'issues' if they are cast for us in the predictable and interminably rehearsed forms of race ("Asian" migration) and

assimilation ("One Australia"). Let's examine these two themes in turn.

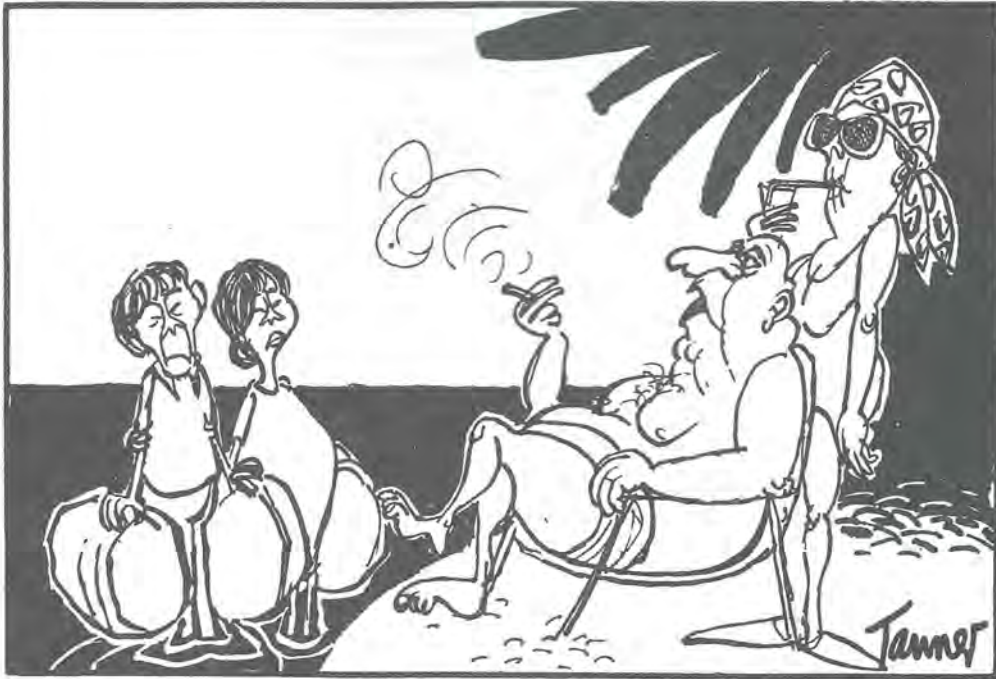
Immigration policy in Australia developed, variously, as a tool for economic management, social engineering, and cultural maintenance. It has always been subordinated to economic management. It began as a product of colonial employers' demands for a larger pool of wage labour, in part to meet expansion in the booming pastoral industry, and in part to keep the lid on wages. From 1831, colonial governments paid the fares for intending migrants who met employers' occupational requirements: chiefly rural labourers and female domestic servants. Employers' criteria for selection thus set the tone for immigration debate. Migration was justified on the pragmatic grounds that "an adequate supply of labour, and an increase of population, are essential to the present interests, as well as the future advancement of the Colony."⁵

we poor exiles in Australia . . . cling to the hope of returning to Old England.

Henry Parkes, 22 Sept 1840⁶

Migrants were simply pawns in the strategies of economic development. They were made to work for wages by keeping the price of rural land artificially high. Pre-migration work skills were disregarded since employer needs were simply for heavy manual labour, and no government schemes and little private charity were available to address the traumas of economic hardship and diminished status. Immigration programs were tailored to the cycles of changing demand for labour. Eschewing the personal calculations that motivated migration—"Independence for the present, comfort and wealth in your declining years, and a certain provision for all your children"⁷ politicians regarded migrants collectively as a stream, the tap on which could be arbitrarily turned on and off according to economic need. Victoria abandoned assisted migration in 1873, and by the early 1890s all the other colonies had followed suit. The Australian downturn in the demand for labour in the wake of the 1890s depression meant that no government assisted migration schemes were revived until 1906. The state programs resumed again after the interruption of the first world war, and from 1920 were directly supported by the commonwealth, which selected and transported the migrant quota set by each state. The subsuming of immigration policy into national economic planning was made explicit by the federal Bruce-Page government, with its slogan of "Men, Money and Markets".

Yet for all the human cost of a century of immigration strategies, the expected economic returns were disappointing. Although immigration contributed enormously to Australian economic development, it did so in ways the planners could neither have foreseen nor desired. Notwithstanding governments' occupa-



"Hearts & minds—not bodies"

tional categories and emphasis upon farmers and rural labourers, immigrants exercised their own personal choice concerning work and residence in Australia. Similarly, although immigration planning was on the premise that Australian economic development depended on boosting rural industries, ever since the 1840s, immigrants have sought their fortunes not in the back blocks but in the cities.

The shackling of immigration to economic management was cemented in the post second world war period as a result of the wartime spurt in manufacturing production, and politicians' belated switch of focus from rural to industrial production as the key to future economic development. Arthur Calwell's appointment as Minister for Immigration in 1945 was an integral part of the Chifley Labor government's comprehensive plans for post-war reconstruction. The migrants continued to be treated as pawns. They had value simply as labour. They were channelled into low-skill, low-pay, jobs in manufacturing and construction. Workplace inequalities were translated into inequalities of access in lifestyles generally: housing choice, education, health care, transport, shopping. The decline in manufacturing in the 1970s, and the technological changes and economic restructuring in the 1980s, have exacerbated these inequalities: "many migrant workers [have] remained[ed] members of an economically insecure and vulnerable segment of the workforce all their working lives."⁸

they gave us visitors' information which had a telephone

number which saying for interpretation ring this number—in Turkish that said. So I said 'Oh great, I'll ring the number and ask for a Turkish person to explain to me' . . . I ring up the number and the answering is in English. I don't know a word of English. I'm saying 'I want to speak Turkish, to a Turkish interpreter', and they just saying all sorts of things I don't understand anything about. It just was disastrous.

Muyesser.⁹

Social engineering objectives have always overlapped with economic planning in slanting immigration policy away from considerations of human scale and equity. Two areas in particular have received attention: regional rural development, and the birth rate. Ever since immigration programs were begun, it had been intended that orderly rural settlement of migrants would create a conservative English-style yeomanry on the land. Immigration policy was thus framed as a tool to be used against 'mob' democracy. The yeomanry idea achieved new force with the revival of assisted immigration in the early twentieth century. It was intended that rural settlement would correct the concentration of population in cities. In Victoria, the Closer Settlement Board set aside land for the purpose in 1905, and between 1910 and the outbreak of war the Victorian government vigorously sought to settle immigrants on small irrigation farms. The scheme was a disastrous failure, as were similar schemes in the 1920s.

Immigration policy has also been framed with population objectives and the birth rate in mind. Early

colonial programs placed a high priority on attracting young single women to help balance the ratio of women to men and to encourage family formation. The population debate intensified at the turn of the century, galvanized by alarm at the decline in the birth-rate during the 1890s, and business enthusiasm for immigration as a means of expanding local markets. As Australia emerged from the great depression in the 1930s the population debate resurfaced, with mounting concern being expressed at the continuing decline in the birthrate. Joseph Lyons promised in the 1937 elections to increase maternity benefits and renew assisted migration from Britain to allay popular concern. Wartime, and in particular the close escape from Japanese invasion, fuelled this population debate and converted Labor politicians from their traditional opposition to immigration. The Curtin Labor government was already by 1942 giving detailed consideration to immigration to boost post-war population. Calwell argued in 1945 that the war had highlighted the inadequacy of Australia's small population for defence and that by encouraging both motherhood and immigration, planners could target for a population sizable enough to counter any future Asian menace. The rhetoric of humanitarian concern to resettle European refugees masked more calculating considerations. Government planners aimed for an annual population increase of two percent, only half of which they could expect from births; the other one percent had to come from immigration. The impersonal imperatives of grand-scale social engineering and economic planning over the next half century propelled the immigration planning for post-war Australia.

I hadn't expected to teach when I came out here [in 1948]. When I came here I was classified by the authorities as a heavy manual worker. They told me more or less that my qualifications wouldn't be recognised.

Tad.¹⁰

The third plank in immigration planning has been cultural maintenance. Australia was founded by Protestant Englishmen. It was natural that they should set about re-creating the culture of their homeland. The settlers and, increasingly, second-generation Australians, could not use the experience of migration with which to forge a new world sense of identity and solidarity. Migration, as we have seen, was too indeterminate an experience for that. The colonists drew instead upon their ethnicity: upon their recollections and representations of what there had been before the passage to Australia. It is unsurprising, therefore, that an English visitor in the early 1840s remarked how "Almost all persons in this land, call Great Britain *Home*".¹¹ An Italian visitor in the late 1870s was matter-of-fact in describing the colonists, their mores and their institutions as "English".¹² My

father recalls from his childhood in Western Australia during the 1920s that "the common view we had of Australia was as a kind of overseas county of the United Kingdom".¹³

Immigration policy was framed as a means of perpetuating that dominant ethnic heritage. This is evident both in regard to migrant selection (the dogma of White Australia, and the boast 'Ninety-eight Percent British') and reception (the dogma of Assimilation). Migrants were depersonalized as, from its very beginnings, immigration debate identified preferred ethnic and racial types in the migrant intake. Immigration practice was thus rooted in exclusion and discrimination. It was axiomatic that the offer of assisted passages should be reserved for just one type: Britons. An ethnic pecking order was also quickly established even among migrants so selected. Early assisted immigration schemes were criticised for over-representing "the very refuse of society from the South and West of Ireland".¹⁴ With monumental insensitivity, these refugees from the Irish famine were branded as "the most degraded race of people that Europe can produce".¹⁵ European migration was not hindered, but neither was it officially encouraged. Only small numbers of Europeans arrived in Australia during the nineteenth century, almost all of them privately. Some, like Germans and Scandinavians, were cautiously welcomed because culturally they did not diverge too markedly from the British 'type'. Italians, however, were a different matter: the crude typecasting of Italians was typified by a mayoral costume ball in Melbourne in 1877, at which many guests appeared dressed as "Italian bandits".¹⁶ Of the 860,000 overseas-born colonists in Australia in 1901, eight out of ten were born in Britain or Ireland.

When I was working in Melbourne as a welfare worker, I had a group of women who were working in one particular industry . . . they made comments like 'Oh but Mueyesser, you wouldn't know what it's like to work in that factory' . . . So I got tempted and went with one of them to this factory in Brunswick and asked for a job. They gave me a job in the night shift, and I was treated exactly like a migrant woman who did not speak any English . . . They shoved a piece of paper, saying 'Sign here, sign there. That's it!' You didn't get a chance to know what those papers you were signing for. One of them was for union membership, for pay deduction. And then they took me to this machine, and there was this Asian woman who had to show me how to use it. Her English was very little, so she kept saying 'Do like this!' That took five minutes to show me. That was it . . . And they get insulted, shouted at. I mean, it's appalling, and the union didn't do anything about it.

Mueyesser.¹⁷

Small-scale European migration could be tolerated in nineteenth-century Australia, but the imperatives of cultural maintenance meant that colonists could never countenance Asian immigration. Racially discriminating legislation was passed between the

1850s and 1870s in four colonies to limit arrivals of gold-seeking Chinese immigrants. New anti-Chinese legislation was passed in these colonies in the early 1880s, and later in the decade by Western Australia and Tasmania. Racial exclusion entrenched the typecasting of migrant intakes into the central plank of immigration policy in the new century.

White Australia, legislated by the first federal parliament in 1901, effectively barred all immigrants who could be typecast as 'Asian'. Definitions, then as now, were loose: in 1916 the infamous dictation test was used to exclude even Maltese immigrants. The racial intolerance that flowed from the quest for cultural maintenance dominated immigrant selection policy for four decades after federation. Influenced by anthropological theory, immigration policy sought to boost the British 'type' by offering them assisted passages, while at the same time accepting unassisted migration by related 'Nordic' types from northwestern Europe, and tolerating the arrival of 'Mediterranean' types from southern Europe. When Italian and Greek migration increased slightly after the first world war, however, it prompted a nasty and prolonged racist backlash against the "greasy flood of Mediterranean scum that seeks to defile and debase Australia".¹⁸ Australia's population was recorded by the 1947 census as some seven and a half million people, one tenth of whom were first-generation migrants. Three quarters of them had come from Britain or Ireland.

My husband . . . came home one day swearing. 'Look, this bloody country. You can't even sing here.' He had been sweeping and singing and a woman supervisor had said, 'Jack, what's wrong with you? You're drunk.' He said, 'No, I'm just singing,' because it's our way of life. In Yugoslavia you always sing, it's nothing. But she said, 'You're drunk or mad. You must stop.' . . . We were very homesick, of course. Whenever we listened to songs from Yugoslavia we cried. We could never forget. Some people couldn't care less but we still feel we belong there.

Gordana¹⁹

Cultural maintenance continued to dictate immigrant selection in the post-war period. Paradoxically, however, selectivity itself became increasingly difficult to sustain as immigration policy was translated more and more into immigration practice upon a mass scale. Calwell had reassured Australians in 1946 that for every 'alien' migrant to arrive, another ten of the British type would be brought to Australia. It quickly became apparent, however, that the flow of British migrants would not even come close to meeting the projections of a one percent increase in population through immigration, and with serious signs of labour shortages emerging, Calwell personally visited England in 1947 to speed the program along. He was unsuccessful and was unable to find substitute emigrants of an appropriate 'type', either, when he went on to visit Scandinavia and

France. In desperation he turned to the repatriation camps for displaced persons: these people would accept the inferior shipping that the British had refused.

Only 'Balts'—Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians—were chosen for the first shipments of displaced persons in 1947, but with the immigration program still running below target, the racial criteria for selection had to be gradually broadened to include, by 1949, all European refugees. This sifting of the displaced persons camps could only be a stop-gap measure and the overriding importance attached to economic management and social engineering in the aftermath of war made it inevitable that immigration programs would target even former enemies and the despised southern Europeans. In 1951 an agreement was signed with Italy to offer some assisted passages to Australia, and in the following year similar agreements were made with Greece, West Germany, Austria, and Spain. Southern European migration comprised a full third of the total intake during the 1950s, equalling that from Britain, and northern Europeans made up another quarter.

I remember one of the English teachers saying to me: 'You come to this country, so you have to be an Australian; you can't be Turkish as well as want to stay here.' And I find that really offensive. You can you know, you can be what you are, and you can also adapt to new things.
Muyesser.²⁰

Concerted efforts were made to correct this drift away from selection in favour of the British type. In the late 1950s the Menzies government launched a Bring out a Briton scheme to boost British settlement. Although British migration did increase during the 1960s it remained well below expectations. Meanwhile the flow from northern Europe dried completely, and southern European migration also slowed late in the decade. Meanwhile, emigrants from Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Lebanon were increasing. With the immigration planners' definitions of 'European' and 'Asian' thus overlapping, a new dilution was needed in the criteria for determining what was an acceptable migrant type if immigration levels were to be sustained. Agreements were made with Turkey in 1967 and Yugoslavia in 1970 to initiate assisted migration schemes to Australia. In 1972 the Whitlam Labor government ended the last formal elements of racial exclusiveness when it proclaimed a new immigration policy based on "the avoidance of discrimination on any grounds of colour of skin or nationality."²¹

It was already clear by the early 1970s that selection by racial type had been a failure. Britons made up only forty percent of the over three million migrants who had arrived since 1947. The next largest national groups were all of the 'Mediterranean' type: Italians, Greeks and Cypriots and Yugoslavs. This result was

notwithstanding a blatant skewing of assisted passages: 87 per cent of British and Irish migrants had been assisted since 1947, compared to 17 per cent of Italians, 34 per cent of Greeks, and 61 per cent of Yugoslavs. Notwithstanding an immigration policy that had been designed to secure cultural maintenance, the Australian immigration program has so evolved that the source countries upon which it draws are now among the most diverse of any immigration program in the world. Over 100 nationalities and ethnic groups have settled in Australia.

It is one of the great ironies of the history of Australian immigration that while politicians, bureaucrats, and scholars have focused their attention upon programs and policy, immigration outcomes have been overwhelmingly determined at another level: that of individuals, family, and kin. The bulk of Italian migrants, for example, arrived in what is called chain migration. New settlers were encouraged and assisted to migrate by relatives or friends already resident in Australia. These helpers acted as intermediaries between settler and the host society: they provide initial accommodation, advice about jobs and other support. Those who decided to stay, in their turn became intermediaries. For every migrant the most important things in their new lives were mediated by informal networks of family, kin, and friendship.

Migrant realities, however, have been largely ignored in Australia. Immigrant reception, as well as selection, have been distorted by the impersonal imperatives of cultural maintenance. Our settler psyche has always represented Australian society as homogeneous, egalitarian, and tolerant. The other side of the coin has been our demand for displays of commitment to, and conformity with, the host society. Rapid assimilation into our society has always been regarded as desirable and inevitable: desirable, because of Australians' suspicion of foreigners; inevitable, because of the prided openness and fairness of our society. The consequence has been that immigration policy has, until the latter 1960s at the earliest, placed little importance on migrant reception or targeting of social welfare services. Reception simply involved a reclassification of the types that had been defined through the selection process: migrants ceased to be DPs, Balts, Wogs, and Poms, and became New Australians. Jean Martin has argued that it was in large part the demographic bulge of migration translated into bums-on-seats demand in schools, hospitals, and welfare services during the 1960s that began to break down the myths of One Australia.²² Certainly, recognition of the multicultural reality of Australian society began to stir, but recognition paradoxically often led to bigoted reassertions of monocultural identity.

They were coming into a hostile environment, people were calling them wogs, they were calling them balts, they were

calling them all kinds of names. They couldn't speak the language, they were finding difficulty in every direction. Ultimately, by dint of sheer hard work, they managed to get themselves a house and that was the centre of their existence. They built a life around that home of theirs and if you went to visit the houses you were stepping into Greece, into Italy, into Spain, into Malta. People now call them kütsch, but in those days to those people it meant their very survival in this society. Every time that an immigrant left his home, he was migrating. He migrated every morning into an environment where he was considered as being less than human. And when he got home at night, he was back home.

Tony Bonnici²³

The social injustice occasioned by the migrant reception stance of our immigration policy is now clear. The situation is highlighted by the experiences of non-English speaking (NES) migrants. The rhetoric of Assimilation was a reassurance directed to Australians; in practical terms it offered nothing that was comprehensible and useful to NES migrants. Professor Ronald Henderson's 1966 study, *People in Poverty; A Melbourne Survey*, exposed high levels of poverty and low rates of social mobility among NES migrants. Those findings were confirmed in 1975 by the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty. Analysis of occupational status by birthplace in Australia today clearly shows that men and especially women from southern Europe and the Middle East are over-represented in manual trades and underrepresented in higher-status white collar jobs compared with the Australian-born and migrants from Britain and northern Europe. As we now begin to consider the obstacles confronted by NES families, we still tend to forget the insensitivities which migration reception orthodoxies have caused as well to the largest national migrant group of all, the British. Australians' dominant ethnic heritage has made them all along insist that for British settlers there was no transition to make at all. The British were never really given the probationary status of migrant; they were automatically and necessarily at one with us. Assimilation was immediate, complete, uncompromising.

Such were the effects of frustration, many went back to the UK and their description of Australia as they had experienced it was not good for Australia. These remarks are not intended or meant to be derogatory, we were all migrants suffering from homesickness, loneliness, and the same frustrations . . . the Australians' culture was as alien to us as it was to Europeans.

Eric.²⁴

Australian immigration policy has focused historically upon the goals of economic management, social engineering, and cultural maintenance: the goal of social justice has been neglected. Australians' negative attitudes towards refugee migration highlight this neglect. I have already mentioned the intolerance displayed towards refugees from the Irish famine. The

Australian labour movement reacted to proposals in the 1890s that some of the poor from Britain's inner cities be resettled in rural Australia by labelling the proposed assisted immigrants "social garbage heaps".²⁵ Federal politicians were lukewarm and many Australians hostile when a scheme was proposed in the late 1930s to resettle Jewish refugees in the Kimberleys. Although refugees were admitted into Australia from the displaced persons camps in Europe after the second world war, from Hungary after 1956, and Czechoslovakia after 1968, they were accepted as part of the general migrant intake. There was no special refugee program with a separate admissions quota and specialized settlement aids. The only special treatment for 'refos' after the war was the requirement that they labour as directed by the commonwealth for two years after their arrival. Their status was not the humanitarian one of refugee, but the utilitarian one of directed labour. A separate program of refugee admissions has really been built into Australian immigration policy only since 1979. It was a grudging and belated initiative, forced by the flood of Indo-Chinese refugees at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the subsequent tensions between Vietnam and China, and the war in Kampuchea. The refugee intake today has fallen to half that of the early 1980s, notwithstanding calls by the churches and the Refugee Council of Australia for an increase in refugee resettlement.

I argued earlier that there were three broad reasons for weaknesses in our immigration policy. First is our cultural inheritance, our settler psyche. Second is our neglect of social justice. Let us now turn to the third reason, the construction of public knowledge about immigration 'issues'. Immigration debate has always been a bit like a private party: you only get in if the gatekeeper recognises your ticket. The gatekeepers control the door: most of us are kept on the outside, where we are content to watch the invited guests arrive, and to snatch fragments of the sights and sounds. The gatekeepers who control immigration debate in Australia have been drawn from politics, popular journalism, business, and the trade union movement. The agendas they set and the issues they embroider are geared to self interest: credibility, circulation, profits, and jobs for one's mates. Yet public knowledge of relevance and topicality in immigration debate generally is available only through them. That Australians have traditionally responded to immigration matters in mean and slanted ways is because immigration choices have only been represented to them in these terms. No other criteria than racial exclusiveness and cultural maintenance have been enshrined in our public knowledge.

There have been days when I felt very sad. I sat on trains, or walked in the middle of a crowd, to seek laughter, a grin, or hear the word 'hello'. But the Australians seem as indifferent and quiet as the winter in the Arctic. To

me, life in Australia is just the four walls of the house.
Unidentified Vietnamese boy.²⁶

The labour movement has always regarded immigration policy as a likely threat to jobs and wages. Government policy was already in the 1840s being damned for "inundating us with starving paupers" and thus glutting the colonial labour market.²⁷ As a sensationalist press began to tap these legitimate anxieties, populist politicians sought to manipulate the unfolding debate by spelling out an ideology of race hatred that could be directed away from the general question of migrant labour to the scapegoat of Asian migration. Directed at first against employer plans to import "Coolies from India",²⁸ popular hysteria was later turned against Chinese migrants. Racialism was thereafter enshrined for popular consumption by the gatekeepers as a central principle. Cultural maintenance was the other. The easy way of assuring popular acquiescence in government policy was by slanting immigration programs towards British 'stock', and by emphasising the homogeneous and distinctive nature of the host society. When the Chifley Labor government found it expedient to modify the first of these principles in 1945, it had first to win trade union support by pledging job security for Australian workers, and after cultivating employer groups, radio and the press, set about the next task "of conditioning the Australian public".²⁹ This was achieved in part by reasserting racial exclusiveness: immigration of European types would stave off the Asian menace. The goal was cemented by guaranteeing cultural maintenance. Assimilation became the key word of post-war immigration policy: Australia would remain one unified nation. The unhappy legacy of the ongoing manipulation of public knowledge is evident in 1988 in the bigotry and superficiality which characterises the strident calls for the limiting of 'Asian Migration', and for the assertion of 'One Australia' over a multiculturalism which supposedly threatens to transform us from "a self-governing nation . . . [into] a great big rooming house for the peoples of the world".³⁰

when I look back, there were a lot of very bad times, like people treating you like a dumb person, not having any respect for you. Even till a couple of years ago—even now—when I go to a seminar or somewhere, or talk or give a paper somewhere, people say to me 'You've done well, you know.' And I say 'What do you mean, I've done well?' 'Oh well, you know, for a Turkish girl you've really done well.' What are you supposed to be? Don't migrants supposed to have brains? Don't they supposed to be able to do things, mature things? That seems to be the perception.
Muyesser.³¹

What should we learn from the history of Australian immigration as we consider an immigration policy for the future? First, that immigration debate and planning easily obscure the people who migrate and

trivialize their life chances. Consequently, policy should be mediated by compassion and should be grounded in the personal criteria of the individuals who choose to migrate, and their friends and families. By this I mean that policy should not simply pursue impersonal goals that have been defined for us in the name of a supposed national interest. We have seen how such goals in the past invariably misread socio-economic trends in Australia, and led to results the planners never anticipated. We have seen, too, how those goals reduce migrants to categories in which human dignity is obscured and the way opened for discrimination and exploitation. Selection policy should be geared towards families and family reunion in its broadest terms, towards refugee settlement, and

towards the dreams of anyone who applies to come here. I remember a headline in the Melbourne *Herald*: "Big names would have been caught in migrant points net." The article suggested that under the revised points system with its quest for proven entrepreneurial talent, such "luminaries as Western Mining chief Sir Arvi Parbo and Ansett head Sir Peter Abeles probably would not have qualified."³² The only allowable limitations are the annual quota we set of newcomers we are prepared to admit, and a declaration of commitment by settlers to uphold our democratic principles and to respect our tolerant pluralism.

Alan Mayne teaches history at the University of Melbourne.

1. An Emigrant Mechanic, *Settlers and Convicts* (London, 1847), p. 8. My paper is arranged in two interwoven strands of narrative. One, in italics, unfolds the experiences of arrival and settlement using the personal perspectives of immigrants' recorded memories. These recollections are centred around Mueyesser, a young Turkish woman, who migrated in 1974 from West Germany, where she had worked as a fitter and turner. The second connecting narrative, in plain type, builds up an overview of the history of Australian immigration policy.
2. Transcript of interview, 9 October 1988.
3. Diary of Thomas S. Mort on the *Superb*, 19 September 1837-25 February 1838, Mitchell Library.
4. Transcript of interview, 9 October 1988.
5. Report from the Select Committee on Immigration, *Votes & Proceedings (Legislative Council of New South Wales)* 1843, p. 1.
6. Henry Parkes, *An Emigrant's Home Letters* (Sydney, 1896), p. 94.
7. W. Wrottesley, 'Hints to Emigrants to New South Wales' *New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 86 (May-Dec 1849), p. 198.
8. Stephen Castles, Michael Morrissey & Brian Pinkstone, 'Migrant Employment and Training and Industry Restructuring', policy options paper, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet, Canberra, 1988, p. 20.
9. Transcript of interview, 9 October 1988.
10. Quoted in Catherine Panich, *Sanctuary? Remembering postwar immigration* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin), 1988, pp. 126-7.
11. J. Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies* (London, 1843), p. 419.
12. Ferdinando Gagliardi, *L'Australia. Lettere alla Gazzetta d'Italia* (Firenze, 1881).
13. Transcript of interview, 3 October 1988.
14. The Reverend John Dunmore Lang to Earl Grey, 9 June 1847, in Lang Papers, vol. 2, Mitchell Library.
15. Georgiana Lowe to Mrs Sherbrooke, 3 October 1846, in Robert Lowe Papers, Australian National Library.
16. Gagliardi, *L'Australia*, p. 25.
17. Transcript of interview, 9 October 1988.
18. Quoted in Janis Wilton & Richard Bosworth, *Old Worlds and New Australia. The post-war migrant experience* (Ringwood: Penguin Books), 1984, p. 3.
19. Quoted in Wendy Lowenstein & Morag Loh, *The Immigrants* (Ringwood: Penguin Books), 1977, p. 84.
20. Transcript of interview, 9 October 1988.
21. Quoted in Jock Collins, *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land. Australia's post-war immigration* (Sydney: Pluto Press), 1988, p. 26.
22. Jean Martin, *The Migrant Presence. Australian Responses 1947-1977* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin), 1978.
23. Quoted in Michael Dugan & Josef Szwarc, 'There Goes The Neighbourhood!' *Australia's Migrant Experience* (Melbourne: Macmillan, in association with the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs), 1984, p. 171.
24. Quoted in Glenda Sluga, *Bonegilla. 'A Place Of No Hope'* (Melbourne University History Monograph No. 5), 1988, p. 72.
25. Quoted in Andrew Markus, Working-class attitudes to non-Europeans. Seminar paper delivered in the Department of History, the Faculties, Australian National University, June 1977.
26. Quoted in Collins, *Migrant Hands*, p. 51.
27. *Star and Working Man's Guardian*, 9 March 1844; *Sydney Chronicle*, 13 January 1844.
28. Report of the Select Committee on Immigration, *Votes & Proceedings (Legislative Council of New South Wales)* 1845, p. 3.
29. Quoted in Andrew Markus, 'Labour and Immigration 1946-9: The Displaced Persons Programme', *Labour History*, no. 47 (November 1984), p. 86.
30. Professor Geoffrey Blainey, as quoted in *The Age*, 13 June 1988 p. 3.
31. Transcript of interview, 9 October 1988.
32. *The Herald*, 28 June 1988, p. 2.

books

Phoenix with Broken Wings

Raymond Evans

Ross Fitzgerald and Harold Thornton: *Labor in Queensland: from 1880s to 1988* (University of Queensland Press, \$34.95).

One cannot help wondering—whenever watching that ubiquitous Samuel Beckett play from 1955—what Godot might really look like. Even when a fore-knowledge of the text has assured one that he will never come, one still goes on wondering, nevertheless. Queensland Labor supporters and particularly members of the labour movement who have been 'Waiting for Godot' to return since 1957 (almost as long as the play itself has had a life); and who like Beckett's protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon, have alternatively bickered and reconciled their differences, abandoned hope and revived their spirits—miraculously managing in the process not to go their separate ways—must by now be rather desperately wondering about that putative re-appearance too.

Many of them are not old enough to remember Godot's face when he last sat in power over them—although that is probably for the best. As Fitzgerald and Thornton so ably reveal, the continuous labor regimes, over which Forgan Smith, Hanlon and Gair presided between 1932 and 1957, provide little stimulus towards emulation. Invariably these were authoritarian systems driven by the bogey of anti-Communism into increasingly reactionary stances, finally bereft of progressive policies and confusing a niggardly economism for a sense of social justice, anti-intellectual to a man (there were no powerful women) and caring not one jot for such fripperies as civil liberties, education and culture, racial and sexual equality or the environment. It was arguably a blessing in disguise when that hoary old monster called the Queensland Labor Government tore out its own entrails in 'the Split' of 1957 and bled its way profusely onto the Opposition benches. A blessing, that is, until one's mind recalls the succeeding regimes of Nicklin,

Pizzey and Bjelke-Petersen, when darkness *really* started to cover the land.

In recounting all this, Fitzgerald and Thornton could hardly be expected to have written an entertaining or optimistic account. Rather, they have seemingly gritted their teeth to cover the entire period of Labor's trajectory in Queensland: from its 'Glory Days' between the 1880s and the 1920s, through its progressively more tawdry days from the twenties to the fifties, until they come to dwell extensively upon its time of debacle from the fifties till now. Each of these periods, upon reflection, falls into a roughly equivalent chronological sequence and one can only hope and pray that the third cycle may be rapidly drawing to its close. For any leftist, or indeed anyone seeking relief from the rapaciously bare-faced Nationalists, the tale in its telling is a sad one indeed. But it is an instructive one—one that must be told, and one that should be learned, chapter and verse, by the proponents of reformism if anything worthwhile is ever to arise from the sorry mess called Queensland politics.

Of course, the beauty of such a conscientious interpretive survey as this is that it allows us to comprehend both disjunctures and continuities in Queensland's political culture over an extensive time span. In Labor's case, the disjunctures relate to its gaining and loss of office, political splits, union dis-affiliations, expulsions and re-alignments, the vitiating spread of factionalism, and the disruptive impact of both rebels and 'rats'. Yet, if anything, the patterns of continuity are even more chilling.

The modern mal-apportioned zones of the Queensland electoral system, which have made every plebiscite since 1949 a severely handicapped race, were originally all Labor's doing. The Nationals also have Labor to thank for that draconic, strike-crushing godsend, the State of Emergency. For every occasion upon which conservatives have wielded that weapon to devastating effect—in 1964 at Mt. Isa, in 1971 against an anti-Apartheid mobilization and in 1985 against the electrical workers—there is an equivalent 'socialist government' occasion: against the meat-

workers in 1946, the railwaymen in 1948 and the shearers in 1956. Alongside Bjelke-Petersen's *Essential Services Act (1985)* one can place Hanlon's *Industrial Law Amendment Act (1948)*. Against the former's mass sacking of 920 ETU workers, one can stack Labor Premier McCormack's far more ambitious stand-down of 18,000 railwaymen in 1927. Both teams in office have wooed sparse rural electorates to the flagrant disregard of predominant metropolitan needs. Both have ignored women's rights and treated Aboriginal people abominably; and, in the stakes of sheer outrageousness, it is difficult to decide whether to back the more recent open season on rain-forests or the 1927 open season on koalas. Neither should it be forgotten that Opposition as well as Governmental fingers were caught in the till when dubious share deals were revealed in 1972 or when the Peel Report indicated inappropriate use of public funds in 1978. As the weight of Fitzgerald and Thornton's evidence shows, the fabled sugar-bag of banknotes from a person or persons unknown has not in the past been abandoned only in Bjelke-Petersen's grand office over the years.

If there are any clear heroes actually identified in this sorry saga, they are T. J. Ryan, who led the first ambitiously reformist Labor Government in Queensland from 1915 to 1919; and D. J. Murphy, who engineered the painful reformist thrust through the Queensland labour movement's clogged arteries of power between 1977 and 1981. Back in the late 1960s, when Denis Murphy was still a young academic researching his doctorate on the life of T. J. Ryan, he once showed me how he would position his chair in the Oxley Library so that he could gaze out for inspiration at the statue of Ryan himself in Queen's Park below, everytime he lifted his head from his notes. Murphy never abandoned hope in Labor. In 1977, when he was contemplating a title for his edited *Labor in Power* collection, I suggested the alliterative 'From Ryan to Ruin'; but he immediately rejected this as far too negative and pessimistic. Great hopes were pinned upon both Ryan and Murphy in their time, but, firmly within the tradition of the left's endemically thwarted dreams, both were struck down before realizing their full political potential.

Yet, thankfully, there are also many unsung heroes and heroines in *Labor in Queensland's* epic tale—the ordinary people who have composed a *de facto* opposition to militant, reactionary politics during numerous moral and political crises over the past two decades, whenever Labor's PLP has baulked at assuming any vanguard role. As the authors perceptively state:

The role of opposition came increasingly to be played by disjointed (and often near-resourceless) pressure groups such as civil liberties and environmentalist groups, militant

unions, students, academics, feminists, the Law Society, the Bar Association, church leaders and Aboriginal activists. Only the Socialist Left of the ALP was actively involved in such opposition. (p. 333).

What the study identifies as a key to success for the party is the forging of firm links between the labour movement and the groundswell of extra-parliamentary progressive associations: "As Queensland Labor showed in the lead-up to 1915, victory in an unfair contest is only possible where the whole of the state's progressive forces are effectively harnessed". The authors see this umbrella alliance not only as a strategy to regain power, but also to help determine the *form* that a future Labor government might assume: ie, returning the ALP to the radical and reformist traditions of 1915, without the racist and sexist overtones formerly associated with such traditions.

The volume, in a sense, is something of a fat primer for the 1989 state election campaign; and already Wayne Goss, the party's new parliamentary leader, has been publicly expressing some of its sentiments. Labor, however, needs a swing in the realm of fifteen per cent to win in 1989, pushing its vote to an unheard-of 57 per cent. Even in its most halcyon days, under Ryan in 1918, it has only previously managed 53.68 per cent of the valid vote. Perhaps the \$25,000,000 assets in Labor's fighting funds may help to offset the Nationals' advertising *blitzkrieg*, which seemingly thwarted the party's anticipated success in 1986. Although the present Merthyr by-election is predicted to pack a punch, what is likely to thwart Labor as decisively in 1989 is a politically unsophisticated public, who would rather welcome 'Godot' any day in the shape of a Queensland Sheffield Shield win than a Labor victory at the polls.

Raymond Evans teaches History at the University of Queensland. His most recent publication, The Red Flag Riots. A Study of Intolerance was published by the University of Queensland Press in 1988. He is presently working on a co-authored study (with Bill Thorpe) of class, race and gender relations in Queensland history.

Fireworks for the Client Country

Russel Ward

Noel McLachlan: *Waiting for the Revolution: A History of Australian Nationalism* (Penguin, \$24.99).

This marvellous book will bring rapture to *Overland* readers and to right-thinking Anglophiles severe migraines, supposing that is, that people of the latter sort can ever bring themselves to turn over its pages.

Dayloads of volumes have been inspired by their

authors' interest in Australian nationalism, but this is the only one to study the whole subject comprehensively and in detail from a historical point of view. Nothing is omitted or glossed over: Frank the Poet and convict/Irish calls for 'liberty or death', W. C. Wentworth's first *Australian* newspaper, Currency people and Horatio Wills, Henry Parkes and the Anti-Transportation League, Eureka and goldfields mayhem of the Chinese, bushrangers and larrikins, McIlwraith and New Guinea, the *Bulletin*, Test cricket, Federation, Anzac and Billy Hughes, World War II and Bert Evatt, Menzies, McMahon and Whitlam . . . Trying to give some idea of the book's rich contents was obviously a mistake.

McLachlan is too good an historian to try to identify the 'main' cause, or the moment in time, when Australia cut the umbilical cord to Britain and became a nation responsible to no-one but itself. He notes that some hoped it would happen at Eureka, which however, remained only a powerful symbol for the future. Few will disagree that it did not happen either at Federation. Most newspapers, and possibly their readers at the time, thought that Gallipoli's 'baptism in blood' signalled the birth: yet we still remained unilaterally dependant on Britain legally, economically and emotionally. Most will agree that the greatest leap forward took place in World War II, perhaps precisely when Curtin forced Churchill and Australian fossils like Page, Menzies, Spender and the rest to accept his recall of the A.I.F. from the Middle East.

For the next ten years with Doc Evatt as Minister for External Affairs, we at least acted like a nation responsible to and for ourselves; but since the conservative parties' return to power in December 1949 it has been abjectly clear that our station in life as a puppet or client of 'great and powerful friends' has not changed. We have merely transferred our child-like cleaving to the maternal bosom of Britannia to the brassier avuncular clasp of the United States. Ambitious politicians now beat a path to Washington, not London, there to outdo each other in protestations of subservience to the current American President. And the head of our country is still the Queen of some fog-bound islands in the North Sea.

McLachlan has a sharp eye for illustrative trifles, for incidents trivial in themselves which yet throw a flood of light on his highly significant general theme. For instance, when the first Federal Cabinet was introduced to the future King George V at the great imperial corroboree in Melbourne's Exhibition Building in 1901, the uncouth colonial politicians failed to bow and the Lady Mayoress wouldn't or couldn't curtsy. Seven years later at an aristocratic English country house party with her husband, Pattie Deakin failed to recognise an obscure sprig of royalty. "Damn you, why didn't you bob?" snapped her gracious hostess. Or consider that arch epitome of Australian larrikinism, Billy Hughes at Versailles.

Having bullied Wilson, Lloyd George *et al* into recognition of our separate national status, he signed the treaty but found himself short of a national seal. Perfectly unabashed, he fished an old A.I.F. tunic button from his pocket and pressed it into the wax.

Australian gaucherie and larrikinism cannot compete with the arrogant vulgarity—and sheer philistinism—of the Imperial ruling class exemplified by its leading ornament, the Duke of Edinburgh. In February 1954, Phillip and the recently enthroned Elizabeth II paid a state visit to Melbourne's Parliament House. Obviously the Queen had just been in tears and her spouse, equally obviously, was in a foul temper. As the Serjeant-at-Arms, loyally following Westminster ceremonial, carried out the Mace to welcome the sovereign, the Prince Consort bawled "What the bloody hell's that doing here!" The 'loyal' Australian media played down, almost to vanishing point, this provocation to republicanism.

These paraphrases have, I hope, given some idea of what joy it is to read *Waiting for the Revolution*. I have never read a livelier history book nor one more tightly packed with interesting and wholly relevant detail. Yet paradoxically McLachlan's style, while making it impossible to put the book down, does not make for easy reading. Complex ideas and allusions are compressed into a kind of breathless telegraphese omitting many verbs, but complete with dashes, brackets, italics—and the punctuation mark (unknown/newly introduced) to the language. Every paragraph coruscates with wit, humour and new ideas reminding the reader of the advertisement for Rice Bubbles, 'Snap, Crackle and Pop'. A single paragraph on page 17 is a fair example.

None of these exactly humorous men. Nor Bentham, though he fired heavy cannonballs of contempt/sarcasm at the colony (costly/illegal) hoping to demolish the successful rival to his panopticon prisons.

It helps to know that the first word 'None' refers to John Howard, William Wilberforce and Sam Marsden, but even so the reader must give his closest attention to the text. Those who do will find that the intellectual firewords are real. I found no damp squibs common in breakfast foods.

Russel Ward's most recent book, his autobiography A Radical Life (Macmillan) was published earlier this year.

Last of the Matinee Idols

Therese Radic

Charles Osborne: *Max Oldaker: Last of the Matinee Idols*. (Michael O'Mara Books, \$39.95).

In the long list of tribute books dedicated to recording Australian musical and theatrical lives one does not expect to find anything resembling biographical truth, let alone historical perspective. A bald text, nostalgia and whitewash are the rule.

It comes as a pleasant shock, then, to discover a model of the genre in Charles Osborne's life of his friend, the actor-singer Max Oldaker. Like his subject, Osborne is Australian born, but since 1953 he has been London based, producing books on music and literature, editing and writing for musical journals, and serving on the Arts Council of Great Britain. As far as I know this is his first major work on an Australian theme and his first intended as a 'fest-schrift', a delicate matter which he handles with consummate skill. The result is a highly accessible book with an urbane and graceful prose style.

The elements are obviously unwieldy, yet Osborne, by stepping discreetly back from the scene, permits only Max Oldaker to appear before us, keeping his own part in the script as unobtrusive as a prompt's.

There's the catch, however. Oldaker's rise and fall as a matinee idol on the Australian stage, during and after WWII, is seen solely from his side of the footlights. The society he played to and the entrepreneurial structure of the theatre life surrounding him at the time are barely visible in the background as the spotlight relentlessly follows the star of the show.

The Oldaker family was typical of migrant gentry who came out to renew fortunes ruined "by plundering bailiffs, the repeal of the Corn Laws and the rural depression of mid-19th century Britain." They settled in Tasmania and made a small fortune by supplying lumber for the gold-boom houses of an expanding Melbourne, but the family mansion at Devonport is long lost to the highway that now thunders down their once green valley.

That Max Oldaker found his way out of that remote setting and onto the London stage seems little short of miraculous, but it was not without precedent—Errol Flynn and Eileen Joyce, among other famous Australian expatriates, also managed the Van Diemonian great escape to find fame and fortune. They never looked back. Fortunately for Australia, Oldaker did.

In 1930, when he was a 23 year old counter-hand in the local music shop, the Westminster Glee Singers came through Davenport on their last tour round the Empire Circuit, picking up talent where needed. The shambles of a tour that followed Oldaker's induction into the group, took him to dozens of outback Australian towns and their equivalents in South East Asia but left him stranded in China. With funds from home he made it to London where a network of other Australian expatriate performers gave him the customary introductions, loans and beds. For years he hiccupped from job to job—the chorus and bit parts in musical comedy, summer theatre, touring, broadcasting and finally work as a tenor in the D'Oyly Carte

Opera Company after a stint at the Royal College of Music.

When war broke out he accepted a contract with J. C. Williamson's (then the Tait brothers) and returned home. For the next twenty years he played, unashamedly, the role of the matinee idol, touring in G&S, musical comedy and Shakespeare. His devoted female following had, it seems, no idea that he was homosexual, an essential deception at the time if both his career and his freedom were to be preserved.

But *The Desert Song*, *The Dancing Years*, and endless repeats of *The Merry Widow* and *Maid of the Mountains* with an aging Gladys Moncrieff, eventually palled. An attempt to return to the London stage failed. Back in Australia all that offered was more G&S and repeats until it became apparent that neither the Tait's nor Oldaker could survive the changing tastes of a new generation and the actor wisely returned to Tasmania to care for his aging parents.

The career, however, was not at an end. Sporadic forays to the mainland for acting parts on stage, for radio and T.V., stints as a director, critic and even adjudicator, followed. In particular there were appearances in the Sydney Phillip Street Revues from 1955 on, *Hat Trick*, *Two to One*, and, with Gordon Chater and Barry Humphries, *Around the Loop*, the latter event commemorated by Humphries in his Foreword to the book.

In late 1957 he was back in England, determined to corner the part of Professor Higgins in *My Fair Lady* when the piece transferred to Australia via the Tait management, but though he understudied Rex Harrison in the London production, appearing twice in the role, (only too successfully as it turned out—Harrison refused to allow him to take over again), the Tait's passed him over in favour of Robin Bailey, a bitter disappointment to Oldaker.

Though he died only seventeen years ago in 1972, Max Oldaker's name is now all but forgotten. The era recorded, however faintly, by Osborne is not. For all its imported values and vehicles, the musical theatre that JCW presented was a training ground for a new generation of technicians, actors, musicians and managers who were later to put their skills at the disposal of an indigenous theatre. Even playwrights (including Louis Nowra) have admitted to being strongly influenced by the unmiked and often home-spun versions of the big hits from *Over There*.

With the revitalisation of the musical has come a reevaluation of past performers and performances. In that context Max Oldaker's career takes on new meaning and Osborne's affectionate memoir, for all its tactful omissions, a new significance.

Therese Radic is a freelance writer currently teaching Australian Music History part-time at Monash University. Her books include biographies of Melba and Bernard Heinze. Her Songs of Australian Working Life (Greenhouse) has just been published. Melba's Last Farewell, a new play, goes into production later this year.

Musical Vocabularies

Robert Harris

John Jenkins: *Chromatic Cargoes* (Post-Neo Publications, \$6.00).

John Jenkins and Ken Bolton: *Airborne Dogs & Other Collaborations* (Brunswick Hill Press, \$8.50).

A long involvement in experimental writing lies behind John Jenkins' fifth, and at thirty pages honorably slim, volume of poetry. His books have appeared more or less regularly but always under the imprints of small presses which have lacked the influence to gain more than passing notice for his work. To make matters more difficult, Jenkins is an intellectual poet whose language is lively rather than orotund and whose poems set out to establish essential form rather than to exhibit formal virtuosity. This is still a recipe for neglect in what remains at heart a pretty frigid poetic culture.

'Chromatic' and 'Cargoes' can be taken as representative of complementary sides of Jenkins' poetry. The latter, his affective, lyrical content and the former, with its musical reference to the interval between flat and sharp notes, the conceptual transpositions and elisions that go with his interest in language as an independent element in writing, as well as his ubiquitous sense of color. "Hawaiian Flowers" opens: "In an ideal world the words write themselves./ You just wind them up then go away." The poem sets out to exemplify this proposition:

Will you tease me thus forever Carmelita?
Well has Don Carlos sent his hat flying.
The trees in the square are aflame with violet buds,
My Little Cha Cha.
Will you be there to see me when
I wear my flame sombrero?
Will you see my sails in the yellow light?

Don Carlos and Carmelita, recognisable stock characters from a score of movies, do attract the notes of longing and intimate realism which seep through, not only to find expression by other means but also to quiz the poem's initial proposal with a gravity that belies the ideality of this world.

"Seasonal Shifts" and "Whispers" show Jenkins as a poet of expressive obliquity, but his chief interests in this volume are in the richness of physical experience and in identifying the operations of poetic intelligence, a theme he shares with many contemporaries. In "Zooplankton" the poet finds an arena for both, as well as a revel in the language of micro-biology:

webs afloat . . .
floating with the many pirates of pincers,
maxillae, a mandibular comedy built in reverse
to daylight . . .

but it is "Juiced Cargoes" which amounts to an *envoi* for these dual interests. It opens, "There is no reason to believe/ the orange proposition/ that the normal style of modern usage or sentence construction/ is a fragment dealwood box . . .". Twenty six further lines of shimmering imagery and conceptual play culminate:

Dried in an African gumleaf sense
the labels are ripe with art in a sunflare,
the pips are shipped with the fruit,
to disclose essential form,
Oh my poem brightly burning!

As striking and triumphant in current poetry as a Gauguin in a gallery of Flemish still life, even if, routed through Surrealism, some of the faded labels still bear the names of locales in the French Colonial Empire—but why is it an "orange" proposition? This would appear as suspect, linguistically, as Rimbaud's phonology of vowels, and Jenkins' interest is engaged elsewhere: "These bright constructs. . . as easily interrogate the real/ like photons dance across the abstract." This simile is at the nub of Jenkins' thinking about poetry. The life of the mind and the life of things are not mutually exclusive but inter-dependent and mutually causal. Owing to this, categorisation becomes provisional and demands for descriptive realism or abstraction, equally irrelevant. Post-facto naming has little to do with the junction of 'opposites' where poetry arises.

Jenkins is the most unarmed of poets, instead of clanking with self-protective measures his work is suffused with a quirky amiability, and it is part of his stamina that his experimentalism is never emotionally defective:

Just let me say
that I like you because
you are as beautiful as a tropical
avalanche in a glass full of gold ("Why I Like You")

but a field in which to examine, and to assert, the freedoms in art. From "Gates and Omissions": "No objective./ None here, none there./ Whoo!/ Look at me flying!"

The title poem of the Jenkins/Bolton collaboration is about a group of dogs who set off to rescue another from the Southern Obedience Dog Training School. They are from New Kennel, an alternative planet for dogs, a tenth of a second out of phase with earth time. Urgency is provided by Houston, a rescuer who has 'woofed it', fallen into the time-phase gap between earth and New Kennel, where he circles helplessly, surrounded by alarm clocks, all ringing.

Among the "Other Collaborations" is a prolonged excursion by Jenkins into comic poetry called "The High Tides" and Bolton's rejoinder "Another Story".

The issue is a defence by Bolton of Jenkins' character Kill, a crime boss. Bolton plants a strong vote for the complexity and independence of non-verbal personality, but Kill, a murderer, becomes a force of nature in the process. He ends up too good to be true, conversant with Garcia Lorca's concept of *duende*, able to tell bad poets from good (unless they are Spanish) and nearly as philanthropic as, say, Mussolini portrayed by George C. Scott. Nevertheless, with Jenkins' synaesthesias and Bolton's supple, expansive writing the volume is a substantial foray into the tradition of Ariosto and Boccaccio.

The Cloud Passes Over (*A & R*) is the most recent book of poems by Robert Harris. He is a member of the Executive and Editorial Board of Overland.

More Right Words

John Herouvim

Stephen Murray-Smith: *Right Words: A Guide To English Usage in Australia*. Expanded and revised ed. (Viking/Penguin, \$29.99).

Less than two years ago, ABC broadcaster Terry Lane compared Stephen Murray-Smith to Billy the Kid. Launching *Right Words*, he predicted that, like the fastest gun in the West, Australia's self-appointed Chief Pedant would henceforth face a stream of glory-seeking gamecock contenders, creeping up to have a shot at him. In fact, hardly a shot was fired.

Like its author, *Right Words* was sensible, passionate and humane, albeit quirky. Written with elegance, peppered with wit and laced with caprice, it confirmed Stephen as public editor number one.

What was in it?

Advice for the uncertain, enlightenment for the curious, delight for logophiles (word lovers) and a lambasting for poseurs, jargonisers and linguistic slobs and snobs. *Right Words* was quickly accepted as a valuable and authoritative text. Of some twenty reviews and mentions I've read, mine was the most critical.

I sent Stephen a copy of it. "... My general comment," he wrote in response, "[is] that in a sense you do me too much honor by taking the little book so seriously". The little book, now in its second edition, remains the only guide to Australian English usage.

The new edition explains the difference between *admission* and *admittance* and scolds the Town Clerk for saying *agreeance* ("there is no such word"). It provides an entry on *idiotic reversals* such as *Worship Sunday* for *Sunday Worship*, and tells them to "off muck". It supplies the American origins and Australian history of *bushwhacker*, and the correct pronunciation of *flaccid* (*flassid*).

With the addition of such material from Stephen's eclectic interests and compendious knowledge, the 361 pages of the first edition have grown to 439. But "over 300 new entries" understates the work that went into the second edition before Stephen's death in July last year.

I read through the book, comparing it with the first edition. At the half-way mark, at which point I stopped counting, there were 176 new entries. Of the original entries, twenty-two have been significantly expanded or rewritten, forty-four have been expanded or rephrased a little and thirteen contain other changes. There were nineteen new cross references to original entries.

The appearance of two editions of a text on usage in such close succession furnishes an unusual opportunity to those interested in how this or that word, this or that pronunciation, this or that spelling gets to join the club. How, in less than two years, does an *Argentinian* change into an *Argentine*; and a *black* into a *Black*? Why is it now permissible to use *mean* to mean *average* (as in *mean score* and *average score*)? In 1987 "there seems no good reason why [egregious] should not be used in a positive sense as well." By mid-1988, "there is no good reason why . . ." A subtle shift, yes, but to fathom the lexicographer one must develop the habits of the incorrigible nuance-sniffer.

Changes in spelling are easier to detect. *Exempla gratiae* has gone, replaced by *exempli gratia*. One of the hundreds of letters Stephen received after the best-selling first edition was published may explain this change. The change from *disc* to *disk*, where computer disks are concerned, the author explains himself:

this seems a lost cause, and we may draw what comfort we can from the fact that, if we spell the computer *disk* that way, it at least distinguishes it from the gramophone record *disc*.

In *Right Words* you will see more facets of Stephen Murray-Smith than in anything else he wrote. You can meet him here—writer, crusader, teacher and sailor. You will hear a democratic voice with an aristocratic accent, a voice carrying the gentle winds of instruction, and occasional interdictory gusts.

The new entries are as interesting and lively, as diverting and instructive, as those they join. Some e.g.'s from the g's:

* **galvanise** . . . In the metaphorical sense *to galvanise* means *to stimulate into activity*, as [Italian physiologist and observer of muscle contractions] Galvani stimulated his experimental muscles.

* **garage** . . . the word is quite a recent one, and comes from the French *garer*, to dock a ship.

* **goanna.** The word goanna is a corruption of *iwana*, a word used by the Arawak Indians of the South American Guianas to describe a family of large lizards. The word, entering English through Spanish, became *iguana*, and was used for the first hundred years of white settlement in Australia to denote the Australian monitor lizards, a quite different group. The colloquial *goanna*, which gradually replaced *iguana*, therefore served a useful scientific purpose. The same process occurred with the American *opossum* and the Australian **possum**.

Those who over the years tried to fit Stephen up as a left-winger or right-winger used a political measure inadequate to his politics: he was an unaffiliated anti-

His experiences in the Victorian branch of the Communist Party produced in him a hypersensitivity to left-wing Jesuits, opportunists and careerists, but the dogmas and follies of both sides were repudiated with equal scorn:

* **Advance Australia Fair.** The Melbourne wit John Bangsund has argued that it is desirable for national anthems to be silly "in words, music and divisive function". He regards the Australian National Anthem as perfect.

* **elite . . . elitist** is often found in this country as a term of abuse, invariably used as such by those who themselves have had special benefits in educational or social background . . . the use of the words *elite* and *elitist* as terms of abuse is childish . . .

Right Words sticks up for Wilson Tuckey, who said that the Speaker of the House of Representatives was "just a political animal". According to Stephen, Tuckey's seven-day suspension was excessive for such "an innocuous phrase". "*Partisan political animal*" would have been a different matter.

From Wilson Tuckey to *Frankenstein's monster*, whom/which *Right Words* also defends. The book corrects those who call the monster *Frankenstein*, then adds:

and let us put on record that the monster is at heart kindly, humble and socially responsible. He is also of course very strong and very clever. People fear and shun him because he *seems* monstrous. It is his desertion by Frankenstein that drives him to violence and destruction.

There are new clichés to avoid: *it would have to be, on the back burner, the bottom line, in this time slot, each and every*. New pronunciations to master: *banal* to rhyme with *canal*; *canialoop* for the fruit; *fungi* as *FUNG-eye*; *abyss* as *a-BISS* and *gynaecology* to rhyme with *shiny-cology*. At least I've been saying *karib-EE-an* right.

There is also a brand new Australian Fisheries Service list of recommended marketing names for fish, which includes: *anchovy*, not *whitebait*; *Southern calamari*, not *squid*; *West Australian dhufish*, not *jewfish*; and *Trumpeter*, not *bastard Trumpeter* or *Tassie Trumpeter*.

Now that we've had some fun I want to start a fight. My quarrel is not with the rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation, which are almost always explained helpfully. I am not offended that my name is mis-spelt in the introduction, or that only half of my dozen-odd proposed changes were adopted in the second edition. No, my remonstrance is provoked by the re-appearance in the second edition of the ban on the use of *not un-* formations.

George Orwell's well-known recommendation, repeated in *Right Words*, was that the *not un-* "disease" could be cured by memorising the following: A not unblack dog was chasing a not unsmall rabbit across a not ungreen field. This advice appeared in 1946, when *not un-* was used more frequently and quite differently.

Of the changes I proposed for the second edition, my criticism of Orwell's view of *not un-* was the only one that Stephen specifically identified as "well worth including in coming revisions". I was, therefore, not undisappointed to find Orwell's not unblack dog still yapping in the new edition.

Not un- has its faults and is easily misused, but it can also convey irony, or provide a shade of meaning not otherwise easy to communicate. Being "friendly" to someone is not the same as being "not unfriendly". In Australia, more than forty years after Orwell penned his famous advice, I propose that his not unblack dog be ceremonially slaughtered at the altar of accepted Australian usage.

First published less than two years ago, *Right Words* is already securely established as the standard authority on Australian English usage. The second edition confirms and validates why this should be so. *Right Words* displaces many of the proscriptions with which pedants and snobs have terrorised the hoi polloi. It points out the location of many a linguistic tripwire and teems with fascinating tit-bits, such as the origins of *barbecue*, a Haitian word meaning a *wooden framework mounted on posts*—and *camp* (homosexual), first used by nineteenth century London gentlemen who "went for a bit of camp" when they slipped into the army tents in Hyde Park "for amusement with the soldiery".

While words about English usage will continue to break as impotent foam against the cliffs of idiom, error and jargon, thousands of Australians will nevertheless turn to *Right Words*: to get things right, to win a bet, or just to spend some time in the engaging company of an outstanding Australian.

John Herouvim writes and speaks and consults and teaches, usually in Melbourne, where he lives.

Erudite and Elegant

Helen Rosenman

O. H. K. Spate: *Paradise Found and Lost* (Australian National University Press, \$65).

For most aficionados of Pacific history, Oskar Spate, Foundation Professor of Geography and sometime Director of the Research School of Pacific Studies at A.N.U. is the guru, and this book is the latest and, alas, last volume of his brilliant trilogy of the history of European involvement with the Pacific from earliest contacts to the end of the eighteenth century. It comprises *The Spanish Lake* (1979), *Monopolists and Freebooters* (1983), *Paradise Found and Lost* (1988), each with the subtitle, *The Pacific Since Magellan*, Vols. I, II and III.

In the preface to the first volume, Professor Spate, surely tongue-in-cheek, writes: "I have no doubt that all those specialists will find superficialities and errors in my treatment of some of the multitudinous topics which a study of this scope and scale involves. But this is the occupational hazard of playing the generalist game, I have also no doubt that it is a game well worth playing." Indeed it is, superficial it is not! The listed bibliography, augmented in voluminous reference notes is mind-boggling!

Paradise Found and Lost can be read in isolation, but appreciation of it is heightened if one has read the first two volumes, as together the three form a quite marvellous history of European involvement with the Great Ocean.

So, to recapitulate briefly: *The Spanish Lake* chronicles the Iberian domination of the known part of the Pacific throughout the sixteenth century. The Spaniards via Cape Horn subdued and plundered South America in the name of God and Mammon; the Portuguese, in the same service, via the Cape of Good Hope, got Goa in India, the Spice Islands and Macao in China. Professor Spate makes coherent sense out of mountains of archival material from Spain, Portugal and elsewhere, at the same time telling a good yarn with erudition and irony.

Monopolists and Freebooters moves on to the seventeenth century when Spain and Portugal were in decline. The epigraph on the title page sets the tone of what follows:

"The good ol' rule
Sufficeth them, the simple plan
That they should take that have the power
And they should keep who can . . ."

In parenthesis I would point out that in all three volumes, each chapter has an equally apt epigraph, in turn ironic, witty, poetic, indicative of the universality of Spate's scholarship.

This was the century of the Dutch, who ousted the Portuguese from the Moluccas, in the process discovering the west and south coasts of Australia, pronouncing them as good for nothing—plunder and profit was the name of the game. They muscled into the China trade and for some years had a foothold in Japan. With the Russians who pushed into the Aleutians and Alaska ruthlessly to exploit the human and animal resources there, they were the Monopolists.

The Freebooters, mainly English and French, in general a bunch of cut-throats unofficially supported by their governments, preyed on the west coast of South America and intercepted the galleons carrying Spanish loot from the New World. The author, having complained in his preface that the seventeenth century is the Dark Age of Pacific historiography, admits to a soft spot for Dampier the privateer, mainly, I suspect, because he was a keen and articulate observer with a graceful prose style and provided reliable eyewitness material. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Spate writes, were periods of ruthless plunder of resources in the known areas of the Pacific and the enslavement of its people, nothing more.

And so to Volume III, *Paradise Found and Lost*, the story of the Eighteenth Century in the region. In form and pace it differs markedly from the other two which on the whole are straightforward narrative, expertly told. The preface explains the format: "This last volume posed much more complex problems of organization than the first two; I can only hope that my attempted solution, separating a relatively austere chronology from more discursive discussions of general problems of the Pacific in the 'contact' phase, has given some coherence to a very multiplex story."

The eighteenth century, when at last the great blanks on the map of the Pacific were filled in, marks the official entry in strength of Britain and France into the region. This was the century of the Enlightenment, the beginnings of the modern world as we know it, the emergence of science as a discipline, the division of 'natural history' into its many modern components, and the first scientific journeys of exploration, each ship carrying a complement of naturalists, scientists and artists. However Professor Spate observes that "despite the scientific bias, they always had eyes to the main chance in commerce and geopolitical advantage."

His main theme, he writes, is "an outline of geostrategic history of the ocean." The secondary themes are many and varied. By limiting himself to a strict time span he has leisure to take the reader down fascinating side roads leading off then back onto the narrative highway.

The first chapter is a comprehensive history of the likely way the Pacific region was first populated, originally written for *The Spanish Lake*, but put aside, as it seemed out of place there. The author brings it right up-to-date, assessing the anthropological and

ethnographic research of the last ten years, even including the latest computer compilations of the way the Polynesians probably settled the outriders of the Polynesian world, Hawaii, Easter Island and New Zealand. He rather scouts the Romantic view of the South Seas as an earthly paradise: "In Oceania fear was a constant, of sorcery and malign spirits" and "any illusions about the Pacific Golden Age before Europeans introduced grog and muskets could hardly survive the clustering pas of New Zealand or the ring forts of Fiji, so strikingly reminiscent of England's Iron Age forts." Yet he sees the best of Polynesian civilization as "a great and wild poetry for the heavens and the deeps of the ocean, and here on Middle earth, a civilization racked by brute fear . . . yet with much tenderness and joy, a graceful aesthetic and a tough realism co-existing in a very human mix."

In another chapter on the European annexation of the various islands, he notes that though the Pacific peoples lost out in the end, native chiefs often manipulated whites to their own advantage with considerable deviousness.

The main narrative line accurately and racily recounts the great explorations of the century, beginning with Admiral Byron, through Wallis, Cartaret (Carteret?), Bougainville, Cook, Lapérouse, Malaspina, d'Entrecasteaux and the numerous lesser lights. However, for me, who knows all that, the delights of this book lie in the author's "discursive discussions". A chapter called *Scurvy and Science* vividly describes this scourge that could wipe out whole crews, and how, slowly, realization that the traditional shipboard diet was the culprit, led to its virtual eradication as the century progressed. There is an informed and detailed discussion of the problems of victualling and watering ships for and during long voyages, on the improvements in ship design and navigational instruments, notably the marine chronometer, all of which allowed ships to venture further and more safely into unknown and uncharted regions.

After outlining the voyages of Cook, who dominates the history of Pacific exploration, in a chapter, *Comment on Cook*, Spate assesses his character and achievement, with whimsical asides such as, "did anyone after childhood ever call him Jim or Jemmy?" His fair and balanced verdict is that "he was as mixed as was his age. He was a just man and this the lower deck appreciated . . ." While admitting his shortcomings, he admires Bligh, but has this to say about that mutiny: "Perhaps no other gang of dropouts has inspired so much of myth-mongering and of devoted (if sometimes coterie and misguided) scholarship as the Bounty mutineers . . . but the story is Byronic."

Another chapter *Conditions of Humanity*, chronicles the misunderstandings inevitable in encounters between mutually incomprehensible cultures and makes some ironic and pertinent points: "To the

Aborigines of Endeavour River, that improving landlord, Joseph Banks Esq. of Revesby Abbey, Lincs., must have appeared no more than a poacher of turtles," and "Always behind the European Tapu was the latent firepower" and "Within eight years of Wallis's landfall, Tahiti had been 'possessed' by three powers . . . the Tahitians thieving of iron seems trivial." The temptation to quote is irresistible!

Everything is grist to the mill. Why, Spate asks, is there such continuing debate over who first brought syphilis to the people of the Pacific, when respectable European diseases like smallpox, measles and tuberculosis nearly wiped out whole populations? What was the noble savage? Another quirky chapter, *Terra Australis Quaerenda* (how's your Latin?) describes the abundant fanciful literature written at the time about these new discoveries, which became the location for an exotic literature of dissent against the society of Europe. And what did these romances have to do with the Pacific? Very little, says the author, "but they were part of the critical thinking of the century . . . that laid the foundations of our modern world. Terra Australis was important not only as a spur to the mundane efforts which brought the British to Botany Bay, but also to the intellectual movement which brought the French to the Bastille." It is stimulating stuff.

Often elegant in style, this book is a model of erudite and readable writing of history. My one grouch is that Professor Spate stopped at the first decade of the nineteenth century, devoting only a thoughtful two page coda to the last nearly two hundred years, entitled *A Prospective Epilogue*. The last paragraph, abridged, deserves quoting: ". . . From now, on [1840] the Islands were to become the small change of Euroamerican empires, sucked into the world market to subsist, poor relations on its periphery, Paradise had been found, briefly in seeming, then parodied in the tourist trade. The islands of romance became the theatre of oceanic war, some even testing grounds for atomic weaponry. Yet something of the ancient arts and graces survived . . . The Islanders are ever resilient!"

This book, with its two companion volumes, is the best history of the Pacific I have read or am ever likely to read. There are no concessions to dilatory readers. With his many classical and literary allusions, Professor Spate assumes that his readers are as literate as he is. (Some assumption!). Having praised the many apt quotes throughout the trilogy, I offer in conclusion and equally aptly, one of Francis Bacon's aphorisms: "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed whole, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts, others to be read but not curiously, and some few to be read wholly and with diligence and attention . . ." Chewy, *Paradise Found and Lost*, certainly is; would that the writer could be persuaded to make his trilogy a

tetralogy and bring this great story right up to the present.

Helen Rosenman is the editor and translator of Dumont d'Urville's accounts of his voyages in 1826 and 1838 to the Pacific and Antarctica, 2 volumes, Melbourne University Press, 1987. She lives in Sydney.

Difficult and Delicate Art

Beverley Farmer

M. Barnard Eldershaw: *But Not For Love: Stories of Marjorie Barnard & M. Barnard Eldershaw* (Allen & Unwin, \$14.95).

By the time they wrote the original collection of nine stories with this "somewhat sombre" title, Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw had already made their name with the novels *A House is Built* and *Green Memory*. Short story collections were not saleable, however, according to the English publishers they tried, Harrap and Jonathan Cape, though Cape did at least find "austere merits" in theirs. Daunted, Barnard turned to her mentor, Nettie Palmer:

That they "lack warmth" is the chief reproach . . . Is it impossible for fiction to be sincere without warmth? Outline has always seemed more important to me than temperature.

Nettie Palmer, it seems, found nothing but fault with all of them except "The Broken Threshold"; and Barnard in turn saw no possible remedy for faults rooted so "deep in their substance", although in a letter to Frank Dalby Davison about the verdict she wrote defensively that "a cold, thin soil suits us best, it's easier to be sincere within a rigid mould." They persevered in looking for an Australian publisher for the stories, and in intermittently tackling this "fascinating" form which Barnard, a novelist to the core, suspected she might be "congenitally incapable of".

In a 1936 letter to Nettie Palmer she wrote:

I work and churn about. Have been wrestling with some short stories, but they continue bad. Frank declares that they are "beautifully done", but that every time I write one I "leave life poorer than I found it". I ought to commit suicide after that.

This *But Not For Love* contains eighteen previously uncollected stories, most of them never published anywhere, and a splendidly comprehensive Introduction in which the editor, Robert Darby, places these stillborn stories and their authors in the literary

life of their times. Remarking on the difficulty of deciding who substantially wrote what, he concludes that Barnard must have written and Eldershaw revised the original *But Not For Love*, and Barnard alone the rest. ("Barnard hated revision . . .").

Early on in the first story, "The Broken Threshold", Bethia sounds the dominant note of the collection: "Life is more than loving," she repeated to herself through many bitter wakeful nights . . ."

The maiden daughter of self-absorbed old parents, Bethia wakes to a Sunday whose cosy somnolence is fractured by a telephone call that her cousin Hardy, a missionary, has died. She was engaged to Hardy twenty years before. Hardy, all spirit, brimming with universal love, had no passion; and Bethia broke the engagement—the "threshold".

Hardy had striven and suffered in a strange land, had seen so much that was terrible, curious and beautiful, had been acquainted with danger and often enough the companion of death. She had stayed in her quiet safe groove and the empty years had flowed over her. Yet Hardy had chosen death and she had chosen life.

For all the clumsy over-explicitness, "The Broken Threshold" remains a finely balanced dramatic story. As in "The Bride Elect", collected in *The Persimmon Tree*, a woman's pain is displaced on to a dog which is killed, in an ending left, for once, to resonate with ironies on a penultimate chord.

In "The Overcoat" Jenny, busily saving for a new coat for her husband Stephen, is outraged when he promises his profligate brother Roland a hundred pounds. Rebelliously she hides the money and is out when Roland calls. That night he kills himself. After days of suppressing her guilt, Jenny confesses and Stephen forgives her, but resentment festers in her. Then Stephen takes on Roland's debt, committing them both to a life of penury and bitterness. If Jenny had one ounce of the high-hearted valor of Nora in *A Doll's House!*—but no, she is too entrenched a little slave.

"The Journey" begins well: a young engineer, thrown out of work by the Depression, is driving his wife Enid and their baby to the railway station. She will stay with his family in Sydney until he finds work again. When the borrowed Ford bursts a tyre, her fear of missing the train ruins the parting for which Enid was saving her last strength. There follows a seven-page digression on the life-story of every woman in her carriage before we return to Enid and her dread that she should have stayed with Hugh. Out of steam now, the writing strains and snaps: "Unknown to herself, Enid's small, heart-breaking tragedy was being thrown into balance with other lives, touched against a standard, not single but multiple . . . The railway carriage had become the microcosm of the cosmic

design . . ." Last stop, bathos: "The train carried them towards their destination, towards the future, towards death."

In other stories, a woman in hospital for a minor operation mulls over her secret affair with a suave colleague of her husband's. A dowdy housewife meets in a tram the man, now rich and elegant, who was once desperate to marry her. A 17th Century Dutch painting evacuated from London in the Blitz heals a marriage. Property destroys: the greed for it and the malicious disposal of it in wills. Love, as the title hints, is void. Wistful or vicious old maids have missed out on it, girls dream of it, social-climbers grasp at it, wives childlike in their helplessness coldly manage their men with it behind mean suburban façades. Frank Dalby Davison had a point. In this pinched and narrow world too often brought to tepid half-life, fates are clinched with a cynical twist redolent of O. Henry

and "Saki". Tables are neatly turned. The 'sincere' stories, on the other hand, trundle along burdened with elaborate earnestness only to bog down, most of them, in flashback—"I know I should do without it, but the air won't hold me," she wrote to Vance Palmer.

Sincerity, it must be said, is not enough. *But Not For Love* confirms Barnard's suspicion that the "difficult and delicate art of short story writing" needed a lighter touch. Her stories were always her "indulgences", she said. These have withered with age as the lambent "The Persimmon Tree" has not, gold to their dress—which is not to say that there aren't plenty of stories here as well-crafted as the ones that were published and collected, besides being indispensable for the record. High time they came to light.

Beverly Farmer's next work of fiction will be published in 1990.

Overland Society Capital Fund

MICHAEL DUGAN writes: This fund was established in February 1989 as a means of securing the future of *Overland* and in recognition that, although the present editor and other executives of the Overland Society are honorary officers, salaries may have to be paid in future years. We are most grateful for the donations received to date from: Anon (\$3000), Anon (\$500), Clouston & Hall, Michael Dugan, Macmillan Company of Australia, Melbourne University Press, Charles Rimington, Alex Skovron, University of Queensland Press.



XUE DEYUN, CHINA

Writers in Prison, 2

As I write, the Avenue of Heavenly Peace in Beijing has become the avenue for an army bent on shackling the people who gave it its birth, and Tienanmen Square, no longer occupied by students, is packed with tanks. The students I met last year, so full of hope, may be among the dead and injured. These students were not necessarily anti-communist or anti-socialist, but they were tired of ideology and excited by their opportunity to read writers who had been denied to two previous generations. The campuses where the brightest and best of a new generation were looking with hope to a time when a free China would again take its place as a strong member of the community of nations, are now places of withdrawal and fear. The writers who were being given their voice can expect again to be silenced. So it is appropriate that this column should record the case of Xue Deyun, a poet from south China who was arrested on 29.12.86 after coming to Beijing earlier that year for an event called the "Big Explosion of Celestial Poets". Although alleged by Chinese authorities to be merely

an unemployed man from the provinces who hid under an assumed name in Beijing Teachers' University, Hong Kong magazines identify him as a poet writing under the name of Ma Zhe. The Beijing Daily alleged that he had come to the university to "peddle illegal printed material and preach the bourgeois view on democracy and freedom under the pretext of discussing poems with students". This continuing suppression of new ideas and words led eventually to the students' demonstrations, while the authorities who imprisoned him and his fellows expressed their continuing inability to control peoples' minds and words by ordering the brutal massacre of the protesters.

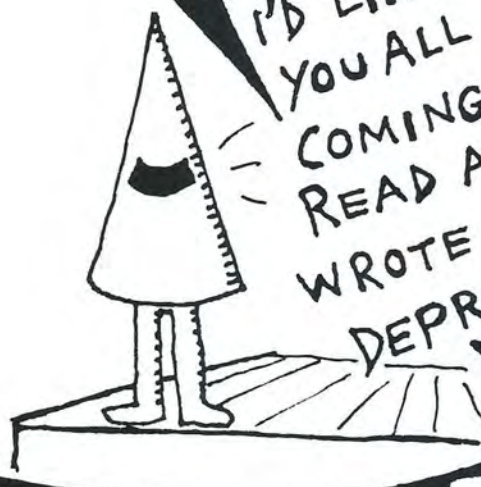
Xue's whereabouts are unknown, but enquiries should be addressed to:

The Ambassador,
Peoples' Republic of China,
14 Federal Highway,
Watson, ACT 2602

John McLaren

DADA AT LA MAMA!

I'D LIKE TO THANK
YOU ALL FOR
COMING, NOW I'LL
READ A POEM I
WROTE WHEN I WAS
DEPRESSED...



N/O

Sharkey's LIVES OF THE POETS