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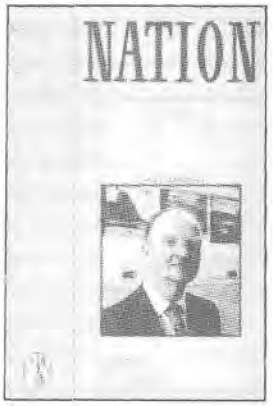

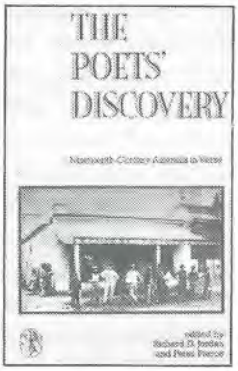

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NIKKI GEMMELL

Dogbox

3.55 am. It's a dog box world.

The desk is spare the streets are lean, mean.

The newsroom's stilled tic tic, waiting for the onslaught.

Police scanner coughs, scratches. Domestic. Tic tic. Stabbing, no furphy. Tic tic. Mva. Torana into pole. One to Westmead. Yeah I'll pick up a maccers on the way two fillet-os and a pink shake yeah yeah. Some dude singin' Somewhere Over The Rainbow and NOT IN THE MOOD. Ah cops. Tic tic. Nothing doin'. Tic tic.

Metro bulletins looking mighty thin where's those bodies?

The city smug, asleep.

He wraps his fingers around her neck. "I could kill you you know." She laughs nervously. She's known him three weeks, slept with him once. She looks, and looks. "No, your eyes are too kind." She laughs, nervously.

10 am. Airwaves crowded, jumping from domestic mva stabbing assault domestic domestic. L-plater, failed to stop, old lady run over. Driver distress. A zip-up bag at a Blacktown bus stand, dripping blood. Unconfirmed, can't be found. A woman threatening suicide on the Newtown bus. But the subs don't touch suicides, unless it's like Dan Quayle. A rival station has the death of the old guy, stabbed with a screwdriver in the street she lives in. He'd been lingering for weeks and damn, they'd kept up the body check. Does the ringaround, pushes the digger angle, the Rat of Tobruk thing.

"You think the dog box is bad now? All you've got is one little scanner. In the old days we had this huge bank of speakers in a row, ambos smokies cops from each district all coming out at once and you had to listen to everything. Concentrate, you don't know the meaning of it."

He holds her hair as the alarm goes off. Her head snaps back as she wills herself out of bed, sleep.

"Why do you have to get up at three?" " 'Cos it's my job, 'cos someone has to do it and 'cos if I don't then no-one, including you, will know anything about what's been happening out there." "Why doesn't one of the others do it?" " 'Cos they've all done it before. Everyone pays their dues."

Kings Cross. Hailing a three-thirty cab. Kardomah thumping, Venus glowing, ghosting faces the poor house faces. Sweat stain spits. She incongruous in office clothes. Fear.

A cabbie's weariness. She slides into front seat.

"Jeez you smell fresh. Just out of a shower huh? Just washed your hair? You smell soooo beautiful. Off to work luv, at this hour?

"A reporter? Aren't you a good little worker. There's a big smash along Parra Road for you. Looks like a double fatal. They wouldn't let me stop and look.

"Jeez it's good to smell you."

He surprises her at work. Saunters in reluctant to give. "So this it. Thought it'd be a bit more exciting."

11 pm. Night shift filler for Sarah who tossed it in, walked out two minutes before the six pm bulletin and is never going near the newsroom again. Won't even come back to fill out release forms.

Scanner clogged with shit. Some guy's walked into the Albury with blood on his hands, saying he's just killed his boyfriend. A kid's told his dad he saw this girl being pushed into a car at Fairfield Station. A baby sitter and the baby's stopped breathing. The airwaves crackle and bubble, and die, the pen is put down, tic tic. Deceased. Pen is snatched, body leans. Man washed up off Doyles at Watsons Bay. Elderly, naked, but for underpants around his neck. Story story.

Subs don't even use it. Too many bodies lately. "Oh a derro."

She is home. Crying crying on the phone to her mother. What is wrong with me where is my strength? Am I mad, am I mad?

To doctor. An AIDS test, a glandular fever test. The needle deep into the softness of her inner arm. But the bruising, the bruising doctor, why is there so much bruising?

Doctor tells her he uses condoms now even with his wife and he's been married nine years. Doctor tells her 50 per cent of young girls he sees have some sort of genital complaint.

She remembers the ferocity of their lovemaking, the first time. "Can I come inside you?" And she thinking fleetingly condoms and so this is AIDS goes crazy or something. She thinks of her plants.

So tired, so tired.

And mother on the phone. "I am glad of your sickness, your sudden frailty. It shows you are human after all."

Is he madman, aidsman? Seducing girls with everything to live for and saying can I come inside you and killing them off, one by one, with his seed.

Why does she sleep with her eyes wide open?

A Magritte dream. Sitting at dogbox, ring ring, forehead furrowed, story, story, sunrise behind her. And 3.05 alarm. Awake, rise, do. Exactly as the

but in that moment, ah stuff it. "If I die I die."

The results are delayed, again and again. The receptionist gets to know her voice. In the end doctor rings. "Exhaustion." Shift work, stress, competitiveness, emotional demands. Oh I see yes doctor thankyou. Vitamin B and sleep should do it. Oh and no more being silly, galavanting about.

So tired, so tired.

And something about mucking up the shifts is the worst, not getting into a routine sleeping pattern. Research in Europe about how the body needs a certain amount of sunlight each day or it dies, or dream. Oh! Even in dreams! They had always been such a delicious, snuggle into sheets with popcorn treat. Her bed, dear bed, her nightly movie, her escape. And now.

"Why are you always so tired?" "Because it's my job."

So he goes to his mates, again. Drunken restaurant parties at smart inner city establishments. They are known. Drinking and drinking and a joint out the back, by the kitchen, and a bit of coke. She had done it once, the first week of him. And

the next day her eyes were slits, her lids pillows and laced with reddened veins that radiated across her cheeks. The horror of the mirror in the morning, the panic. Just a night, just four hours to ruin everything. And then the relief as slowly the day stretched on and the anger in the face subsided.

And weariness returned.

Family killed on the north coast. Ten bodies. The mother and her nine kids, all dead, all in the station wagon. Good story kids are good, they use kids. On a holiday from The Territory. All in the station wagon.

"Am I mad am I mad?"

Newsroom pick-a-death. Twenty cents a week and everyone's got a person. Who's going to go next. Easy money on Bette D. and Larry O. Sneddon had them stumped. The court reporter with the Queen mum has a despairing Cheshire grin.

He wants to make love to her deep into the night so clutching at two hours, three hours sleep.

Reading something in the magazine, a line about a woman in a play or something. "Somebody almost walked off wid all her stuff."

He hates condoms. She can't say no. She's convinced he's bi. Look at the house, the friends. She's convinced he has AIDS and it's all a scheme, grand scheme.

She can't say no. She's not sure of love anymore. She wants him.

Liz tells her there's a three-month 'window period' between infection and a test showing positive.

A tall window to the world, knocked by the blow of a very heavy curtain.

Approaching delirium tiredness.

Wierd.

Jolted out of a quiet news day stupor. A voice taut, bottled up with something huge can't get out, a voice to be snapped.

Constables down shots what.

Garble garble get can't words out. Man at radio control on other end infuriating in his calmness.

"Slow down constable."

"What are you saying?"

"We can't understand you."

Shots police mate down away two.

Police down! Police hit! The chill.

And at other end control man – a sudden snap and panic reaching out across the airwaves to all the journos straining at the desks in their newsrooms all the police listening in in their squad cars at their stations. "Can anyone understand what he's saying?"

And gradually the young policeman's breathing normalises, the mind unjumbles, the story unfolds and it's action stations all systems alert.

It is only later, much later, leaving work and walking through the park that she crumples. Starts shaking. Wants to cry, and cry, and does.

He has slept with an ex-journo acquaintance of hers he picked up from the pub while she was asleep at seven thirty at night because of a dog box shift next morning.

She says she'll kill him if he ever does it again.

It's only later the rescue man tells he couldn't give her the proper death toll because there were bits of body everywhere and no-one knew who or how many or why or how.

25 DEAD they intoned (screamed) and then the toll going down down as darkness stretched into day and everyone saying "thankgoodness" but she could sense it, that hope of more bodies the subtle deflation. OK it's a tragedy but not quite a disaster.

To doctor. She can't stop crying. The pressure of bodies, more bodies.

Cabbie. "Are you on ecstasy?"

She, snap. "No. Why?" (Hadn't even noticed him before this. They never ask her anymore if she's just stepped out of the shower.)

Cabbie. "Whenever anyone gets in my cab and they're on ecstasy I start breathing really heavily, I don't know why, and when you got into my cab I started breathing really heavily."

Silence.

Cabbie. "Wow your presence is just like amazing."

He gets pissed.

Tells her about Sarah being awake when he fucks her.

Reminds her of her pledge and laughs, and passes out.

She goes to the kitchen.

Boils up a can of fat.

Pours it into his ear.

Takes him five hours to die.

She gets to work early. Has a scoop. Writes a story. Subs don't even use it. "Oh, a domestic." Too many bodies lately.

ERIC ROLLS

Cumberdeen Diary

46 *The Clearing Sale*

The clearing sale began as always on the back of a truck with tins of nuts and bolts, spanners, stilsons, pipe wrenches, chains, pulleys, fuel pumps, electric cable, drills and bits, fire extinguishers, soldering irons, bearings, rings, drenching guns, cultivator points, pipe fittings, a cast-iron glue pot from the last century. Small spaces had been left bare for the auctioneer and his offsiders to stand on. "Sale Oh! Sale Oh! Sale Oh!" Bill Tapp, head of a firm of stock and station agents and well known in the district, addresses a circle of three or four hundred people.

"We're selling account the Thurleigh Partnership, David and Harry Hadfield. We've got a lot to sell you today, ladies and gentlemen, all presented in immaculate order. I ask you to keep your bids coming in or the sale'll run so late you'll cut into our drinking time. Well, let's get on with it, what have we got?"

David Hadfield holds up a twelve-tonne hydraulic jack. Young Larry Tolmie takes over. "She's a goer that one," he calls, "lift all you want to lift, eighty dollars worth there. Do I hear, 80, 70, 60, 50, 40? Who's got 20 to give me a start? 20's the money, 25, 30 I've got boys, over here, 30's the money, 35, 40 called out the back, 40 I've got now, 40, 45 right here. Are you done? Out it goes. Done? Done! Number, sir?" And the penciller notes down the number on the card fixed on the buyer's hat brim, or pulled out of shirt or hip pocket. He has registered his name before the sale began.

Larry calls so quickly it is difficult to take down what he says. There are no pauses. Like the old-time conjurors, he believes silence is death to the trick.

The next article is held up, sold, the next, sold. Soon Larry has room to move. Buyers stand with their purchases at their feet. The keenest seem to be growing out of them, a personification of odds and ends.

There is a slight hitch in the sale. One of the offsiders holds up a truck spring. "It's the front spring for a Bedford," explains David Hadfield, "but I forget which model." They bought it as a spare fifteen years ago, just before the old Bedford stopped work. They have had four or five old workhorses since. "Well, it's a good bit of metal," says Larry. "Do I hear 10 dollars, 9, 8, 7, 6? Who's got a dollar to hear me go? Must be worth a dollar." There is no bid. "Well, put something else with it. What's in that tin? Hold it up, turn it round so everyone can see. Show those out the back. Five dollars I've got, boys. It'll go in one bold bid. Five dollars, done? Done? Done? Done." He closes his hands half-heartedly. He did not have a bid. "We'll have to start that one again, boys. Two dollars I've got over there. I've got it this time, two dollars. Done! Number 74!" An auctioneer often has to work harder to sell something nondescript for two dollars than to sell a tractor for $20,000.

The sale progresses to bigger items laid out in rows in a mown paddock: wire netting, sheep feeding troughs, old tyres and rims, motor cycles, a war-time Jeep with spare parts, old vehicles fitted up for fox-shooting, a vice on wheels for use in the paddock, welding gear, hammer mills, grain bins, then the big items of machinery, a bulldozer, grader, tractors, ploughs, combine, header, scarifier. All was presented in excellent order, all engines started at the turn of the key, though the sellers' stomachs tensed with each start. What if a trusty engine developed a nervous foible about the size of the audience? What if someone had fiddled with a connection somewhere?

All made good prices. Bill Tapp sold the big items, speaking slowly and holding buyers with voice, hands and eyes. He is a master. One can watch him pulling bids, hear him catch them. "Twenty-six thousand, it is. It's against you, sir. Another thousand might wrap it up. What's another thousand? It's only money." His fingers reach out

Jiri Tibor Novak

further, eyes concentrate. "Twenty-seven thousand!" Snap!

He uses humor to keep the crowd's attention through the seven tiring hours of the sale. "I'll take hundred-dollar lifts on this one," he says, as he calls for bids on a farm truck. Five hundred dollar raises are usual on big machinery. "I won't knock you up in raises of a Kings Cross night out."

"Gawd! You'd knock up after twenty dollars worth now, wouldn't you, Bill?"

A windmill was sold, still straddling the bore it pumped from when Harry and David were children. They have heard it knock as it changed stroke all their lives, watched the fluttering shadow of its blades on the ground.

"They must have had a bloody big row, those brothers, to be selling stuff as good as this," someone said to me. But no, they are good friends. One wanted to retire, the other to farm less strenuously. They sold one of their properties, then the joint machinery.

It was a farming lifetime up for auction, forty-five years of hope and experience laid out in a final succession.

51 *On Show*

I put myself on show in "Sunday Afternoon with Peter Ross" on ABC Television. A couple of months ago, after an invitation to appear on the program, Elaine and I had morning tea with Cynthia Connolly at the Art Gallery. It is Cynthia's job to do the research: to find out what each guest speaks about best, to record accomplishments, interests, refusals of any subjects, and also, there is no doubt, to deduce what can best be done with the guest if, despite their careful initial investigations, she finds they have picked a dud.

We enjoyed meeting Cynthia and it was a delight for me to be talking and having someone else making notes. When I am not writing I am on research, and usually I am asking the questions and recording answers. We went out to the studios at Gore Hill for preliminary talks with Peter Ross and George Pugh, the producer of the program. These interviews are not the casual chats that Peter makes them appear on the screen. They are that way because of the work he does beforehand.

On the morning of the taping, a chauffeur-driven Mercedes picked us up at seven o'clock. Guests have to fit production schedules. Cynthia met us and guided us through the huge warren of buildings divided into rooms, cubicles, studios. Props are stacked against walls, shelves bear boxes of tapes marked with familiar names, some current, some

out of production. The place is already alive with people, all seemingly urgent. The clocks are insatiable. They demand perpetual offerings of schedules timed to the minute.

I went to the make-up room. These used to be officiated over by girls displaying their art with long, false, red fingernails, intricate hair-dos fixed in place with spray, and faces more iced with cosmetics than dusted. These days they are more likely to wear no make-up at all. They toss their natural hair back and get to work. It is mostly a matter of shading the shiny spots so that what the camera reproduces looks like skin not metal. They keep testing their mixes of color. The camera exaggerates differences in tone and might see the left hand a different color to the right.

I enjoy talking to big audiences from a stage. I can walk about, wave my arms, speak to individuals or groups all around the hall. Before the camera I sat brightly lit in a chair facing Peter Ross. I was conscious of wires, machines, producers, technicians in the background, but could not watch them or talk to them.

"Move your chair a little more round this way. Test it for squeaks. That's good. Now look in this direction. You can move your head through about that angle."

One sits plugged into the machinery by the microphone fastened under the coat. A make-up man in jeans, sneakers and T-shirt gives us a final dusting. I watch Peter Ross, imagine an audience, key myself up. This is not my way of talking. I speak as I write, deliberately, deciding just how best to say it. On radio or television there cannot be long pauses. One has to be instantly interesting.

"Ready, Antoine?" Peter asks the head cameraman.

"No, a minute yet! . . . Thirty seconds . . . I've got a loose tooth, it might drop out."

There is constant in-house banter, sometimes obscure.

"Break a leg everybody! Here we go!" Peter gives the traditional showman's blessing.

"Fifteen seconds, ten." Peter clears his throat. The girl working the autocue moves her finger above the button. The screen begins to roll behind me. Peter introduces his program. He does not always bother about what is on the screen. Sometimes he had to ad-lib anyway. For some unaccountable reason the autocue several times broke into nonsense.

He tapes the interviews in four seven-to-ten minute segments that fit into a four-hour show of music, dancing and documentaries. He keeps the right questions coming. One can relax and talk. At the end of the first section I said involuntarily, "You're good, Peter, there's no doubt!" During the intervals Cynthia sometimes reminded Peter of questions. She queried one introduction. "Is it the Vienna Symphony or Vienna Philharmonic?" "Symphony," replied Peter, "That's from the music department . . . Right! Are we happy to move on? Here we go! Stand by!"

I finished by talking about the joyful life Joan and I had led together and I said a poem, 'Last Kiss', that I wrote for her after her death. It is probably my best. Peter tried to close the program and could not. "I'm sorry," he said. "That affected me. We'll have to wait."

The cameraman filled in time with still shots of me to use if or wherever necessary. "Don't speak now, just nod as if agreeing. All right! Now don't nod, just sit as if you are listening."

The next day I taped a radio broadcast for the Canadian Broadcasting Company's science show, 'Quirks and Quarks'. It was about the exceedingly complex result of the introduction of European animals and farming methods to a country as different as Australia. I had given them *They All Ran Wild* and *A Million Wild Acres* to read, plus published talks.

The interview was in a small bare room at the University of Sydney. I had to sit facing closely into a wall to get the sound right. I could not see the interviewer, who apparently had read nothing I sent him. He did not give me one helpful question. For 45 minutes I had to answer fluently the questions I was not asked and somehow make it seem I was responding to what he did say. The sweat poured off me. They got a good interview. The subject is so fascinating I was determined to explain it properly.

I cannot even say they more than got their money's worth out of me. I was not being paid.

52 *Growing Words*

The crops are up. The district tractors have done their 24-hour-a-day stint and the paddocks are green with lupins, wheat, barley, oats and triticale that grow so well here. Already the cereal crops have secured themselves with the permanent roots that flare from the seedling stem just under the surface of the ground. On the rich black soil that we farmed at Boggabri twenty years ago, there was always an anxious wait for the good rain to encourage these roots. Seedling roots lose their energy after seven weeks, and the fluffy, self-mulching soil dried out on top so there had to be a good follow-up fall about a month after sowing.

At Baradine, not only do light falls of rain soak much more deeply into the sandy loams, but there is more upward capillary action to keep the topsoil moist. Particles of black soil slide about on one another and keep rearranging the pore spacing. The soil is more stable here. Usually the sowing rain is sufficient to produce the permanent roots and the plants can survive an extra few weeks without rain if they have to.

This year, also, we have no crops sown, and perhaps I shall never again make use of the marvellous science of growing them. There are too many books that I have to grow to allow me to do the work directly, and this farm that supported a family and a farmhand or two so well for so many years can no longer afford to pay wages. Rising costs demand more land, as they have always done. Two hundred years ago, when men farmed with hoes and scythes, twenty hectares provided them. Ironically, many of those who obeyed the dictum 'Get big or get out' several years ago borrowed too much at too high interest from eager lenders and found themselves ruined when prices of wheat, fat lambs and cattle dropped for two or three years. Farming, which is a long-term business, depends too much on short-term money.

But this year we are not fattening sheep either. Drought-breaking general rains brought such a rise in store stock, there is too little margin between buying and selling prices. John Johnston, a neighbor, took the farm on agistment. It enabled him to hold all his lamb drop for the expected rise in wool prices. He has just called in to say he found a bower that our Spotted Bowerbird has built.

I have looked for his display grounds often, but until now he must have performed off the property. This one is complete but of fairly recent construction. He speared long grass stems into the ground and laced them together thickly into an arched hall about 60 centimetres long. He has not done any beak painting yet with charcoal or bruised berries but he has hung two aluminium ring-pulls on one wall and a length of yellow twine on the other. About both entrances he strewed bleached vertebrae from a long-dead sheep, shrivelled creamy berries off the White Cedars and little green oranges. There is a broken yellow cattle ear-tag and a few galvanized nuts. He must have been into somebody's shed.

He has kept up with changing times. None of those adornments were available to his ancestors of two hundred years ago.

Unusually, this bower is hidden. It is under a spreading Giles Net Bush in a fenced-off plantation. A female could not see it from the air. He must call them in to watch him parade with outstretched wings, to run through the arch, to hop back, to move his baubles about. If he does it with the right flair, perhaps she will mate with him.

I offer my books to Elaine. We intend to marry in a year or so. Why does marriage make any difference? Are we following old-fashioned prejudices? Neither of us explores our actions, neither of us is influenced much by outside opinions. It simply seems a good thing to do. The advertising of love by marriage somehow deepens it. This house is secure again with the love, the good sense, the rich living, the hard work that it always knew.

Our marriage will not be for making children. Both of us have already made them and they will be a vital part of the union. Elaine would not have interested me, I would not have interested Elaine, without the extraordinary quality of our children to bolster us. Whatever a man or woman has done is incomplete without children to maintain the same excellence in their own different fields. Talent has to grow talent or it fails posterity.

Much of our future depends on *Flowers and the Wide Sea*, the human history of the Chinese in Australia that is now growing each day. That is as it ought to be. A writer, like a farmer, has to risk himself.

Eric Rolls, author of They All Ran Wild *(1969),* A Million Wild Acres *(1981) and* Celebration Of The Seasons *(1984), amongst much else, has been writing a history of the Chinese in Australia,* Flowers and the Wide Sea, *which will be published shortly.*

NIGEL ROBERTS

Billy Marshall-Stoneking

Those who know Papunya and its society - the Pintibi, the Walpiri and the Aranda peoples of the western desert region - have been waiting for Billy Marshall-Stoneking's *Singing the Snake* for some years, for this is the book that can flesh out our experiences of that unique frontier outpost between a stone age people and the twentieth century.*

A poet's first book is, of course, both a milestone and hurdle, and often includes all the best work of the poet up to the time of publication. After twelve years of waiting for his, the original manuscript submitted to A & R by Marshall-Stoneking was no different. Wisely, however, his publishers chose to accentuate the strengths of the book, advising that the earlier city-based work did not sit well with that of Papunya. Accordingly, the latter became its focus.

It was good advice, as the book coheres and satisfies, with its compassionate and poetic reportage of Papunya. It also received immediate public acceptance, and within two weeks of publication the first edition had sold out - rebutting both those publishers who found the Aboriginal content of "little interest" and one major publisher's reader who thought the book "patronising and racist".

In 1972 Marshall-Stoneking came to Australia to teach in the Western District of Victoria - and it was there he became part of the early nucleus of the Poets' Union - which included Pi O, Eric Beach and Shelton Lea. These poets were impressed both by Billy's own work, and by the verve with which he interpreted and performed the work of others, notably 'The 38', by the Beat Poet Ted Joans.

If you want to hear poetry in performance that can really stir an audience and win over the unconverted, ask Marshall-Stoneking for 'The 38'. To hear and see him in action with this poem is to touch base with what he and those others achieved - and still attempt to achieve - in performance poetry: a poetry of undeniable excitement, that centres upon dialogue and narrative, and which also underpins most of the poems in Marshall-Stoneking's first book.

An American in Australia who must, in the 1970s, have still felt the heat of Vietnam at his back, Marshall-Stoneking left town to work in Aboriginal Publishing at Papunya, on textbooks written in Pintibi luritja.

Many whites who take up such contracts or tours of duty, don't last the distance. They quit, because of the flies, the isolation, lack of creature comforts and, if they are honest enough to admit it, their inability to communicate with and relate to their clients. Marshall-Stoneking and his wife Annie, on a year's contract, stayed four.

At Papunya, the first task is to become part of the community. If you don't know the language, you listen, you exchange things, set up a trading post, collect waru, give food and money, or give rides in your car, you acquire sign language, take a 'skin name', you don't drink in a dry community, you wave to people and don't hide in the white enclave - and you allow your kid to play with their kids . . .

Marshall-Stoneking did all of this and more, hence the success of his book. He kept his eyes and ears wide open, and this is his report, unobscured by too much interpretation, filtering, or coloring. In *Singing the Snake* Marshall-Stoneking reports the seen and records the overheard. It is a poetry of dialogue, the as-told-to, the found - a poetry written 'after' Paul Bruno or Tutama Tjpanagti. Three of the poems, 'Dreamin Mine', 'The Last Butchy Men', and 'Drinking Alatjapuring' are more accessible read aloud, or heard on the cassette Marshall-Stoneking has produced.

Is there much in *Singing the Snake* of landrights and other political issues? Of course there is: both explicitly and sub-textually. Not that Marshall-

Stoneking presumes to editorialise on the behalf of Tutama, Nosepeg and Co., especially when they do so effectively themselves - with great persausiveness and humor.

I would like to point out an error in the Biographical Notes concerning Tutama Tjapangarti. Tutama died about a year to eighteen months ago, before the biographical notes were written. Marshall-Stoneking, I believe, may be unwilling to accept the death of this beloved fellow artist and storyteller. They were mates, and their partnership and exchange of cultures - oral text into written text and then, through performance, back into oral text around the campfire - brought them even closer. Rest in peace Tutama. Here by the paper talk of writing and drawing, your dreaming and our understanding of it goes on.

I remember a poetry reading held in Papunya, at Bill's and Annie's home. The readers were Gary Snyder, Eric Beach and Nanao Sakaki. All there read, then Billy read 'Pintjana Wangka', a poem about Tutama's reaction to the non-arrival of his pension cheque. When Billy finished, all were curious or surprised to hear Tutama say, "My turn", and to see him take a book from the table and repeat the same anecdote, though with greater force and much elaboration. Then, to underline his contempt for 'that Canberra Mob', he stabbed his finger at 'relevant' parts of the text which, unfortunately, was upside-down. "Finished," he said. There was a thirty-second silence, which Eric Beach finally broke with, "Well, I guess that's the poetry reading".

A screen writer and playwright as well as a performance poet, Marshall-Stoneking now lives on the east coast of Australia.

Singing the Snake is an important book for both black and white Australians. Buy it, and the tape as well, which is available from: Off the Page Tapes, Box 162, Balmain NSW, 2041. The price is $10.00.

Nigel Roberts is a poet and the author of Steps For Astaire.

* *Billy Marshall-Stoneking:* Singing the Snake *(Angus & Robertson, $14.94).*

ROSLYN PESMAN COOPER

Randolph Bedford in Italy

From the time of the foundation of the first colonies, Australians have visited Italy as one of the stages of that ritual event of Australian middle-class life, the overseas trip. The Italy that the prosperous bourgeoisie of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought was the land of their imaginations, the site of past greatness and Antiquity, of Art and the Renaissance.[1] This Italy was to be found in the centres of the major cities of the *via turistica* and was mediated through English literature and English guide books; Italy was also the land of Byron, the Brownings and Ruskin. In Europe, most Australians tended to think of themselves as British and they approached Italy not only with their heads full of English images but also with a sense of superiority as members of the British race. While the pilgrims were acutely conscious of what they perceived as Australia's deficiencies in culture and history, they carried with them an unassailable confidence in their own social and moral values.

There was always the occasional travelling Australian whose exploration, experience and outlook were somewhat different from the norm. Randolph Bedford is one such exception. Sometime farmhand, actor, theatrical manager, miner and speculator, journalist, novelist, politician and eventually Labor member of the Queensland parliament for almost twenty-five years, Bedford was the archetypal man of action.[2] His rumbustious personality, enormous girth, truculent volubility and boast that he could outdrink any man in Queensland suggest a character of Falstaffian proportions, but his exuberant humor, wild optimism and reputation as a raconteur were Rabelaisian. This larger-than-life character went to Europe in 1901 not with deference and awe but as a patriotic and assertive Australian who was possessed by a great love for the Australian countryside, angry contempt for Britain and "the curiosity of a puppy, the village gossip and of an Inquisitor General, who must find what is behind everything".[3] Bedford was a passionate anti-Imperialist and Australian nationalist from the world that spawned the Trinity of the *Bulletin*, the Bush and Bohemia, and chose as one of its meeting places in the 1890s Fasoli's, the European-style café presided over by the genial Vicenzo Fasoli who was reputed to have fought alongside Garibaldi. In *Bulletin* circles at this time, new links were being forged with Europe that bypassed Britain.

It was the medical opinion that his sickly young son would profit from a long sea voyage, and his search for financial backing for his mining ventures, that took Bedford to England. It was his desire to escape England and his interest in Italian mines that first took him to Italy. But once encountered, Italy "tugged at my heart strings", and much of his time overseas between 1901 and 1904 was spent there. His family was established for a time in a villa at Bellosguardo on the outskirts of Florence, which was used as an Italian base by some of his *Bulletin* mates like Lionel Lindsay. While in Europe, Bedford wrote a series of articles for the *Bulletin* and these were republished in 1914 as *Explorations in Civilization*. The greater part of the book variously described, exaggerated and romanticized his escapades in Italy.

Bedford's quest in Italy was not for the ancient, the romantic, the picturesque, but for mining investments: silver, mercury, bauxite, copper, ochre, marble. Thus, while he lived in Florence and visited and enjoyed the great cities, his mining fever took him to the bleak Tuscan Maremma and to remote, barely accessible regions of the Apennines as well as to Liguria, Sardinia and Lecce in the south. The Italy that he encountered and described was not the land of art and Anglo-Celtic imagination, or as Bedford put it of the "precious Mr Ruskin" and his "beastly Botticelli", but a world rarely visited by tourists, like the village of Santa Fiora way up above Arcidosso in the Tuscan Appenines.

> The town of Santa Fiora is a thousand years old, and has never had an official pilgrim of the night in all its history. It is enclosed by very high, very thick walls, which were not so much to keep the inhabitants in, as to keep strangers out. This signifies that some strangers did want to get in - which again signifies gross ignorance and bad taste.

This was a rural world of poverty that was not picturesque but nasty and brutish, a world of "fear, hunger, and despair":

> The people of Santa Fiora never see meat unless it is alive and beyond their reach; rarely eat bread of wheat, and live on chestnuts and chestnut meal. The town is built in one of the most healthful and beautiful places on earth, yet the mortality is over 30 per 1000 - mostly children. The nursing mothers are poorly nourished, so that their milk stops early; and then the toothless child is fed on chestnuts; and a little polenta for Sundays. The chestnuts and the summer finish off the seven-months-old babies as a dust storm kills caterpillars - of marasmus most of them die; of enteric some.[5]

This was a land peopled not by Renaissance or Anglo-Saxon literary shades but by Tuscan peasants about whom Bedford wrote with sympathy and sensitivity as well as with an occasional romantic tinge:

> You look at these hopeless, beautiful people, and see where the artists of the awakening found their Madonnas and child-Christs. Any one of these handsome girls, loaded like beasts and shod as heavily as draught horses, is weary enough to be our Lady of Pain. And for Christ in his agony take ten of every hundred of these miners - haggard and worn and ill-fed; facing the perpetual martyrdom of keeping a big family on fifteenpence a day, and staying ten hours underground to earn it.[6]

Unlike many of his fellow Australians, but consistent with his own vision of Australia as the new and the future, Bedford had little respect for tradition. He viewed with exasperation the conservatism that locked rural Italians into their lives of misery and hardship. Bedford's contempt for the cult of tradition was also brought into play by the automatic worship of the old and famous. In a remote village church he was taken to see the treasured Della Robbias

> which would be worthy almost any amount of a dealer's money - supposing always they could pass the barriers and be taken out of Italy. For myself, I'd hold them long enough to advertise them, and then sell them to the highest bidder. A great many of these old works are simply ugly; but most tourists and many collectors are marvellous animals, and value a corpse if it is old enough. The Della Robbias in this church are merely old. One of them represents the baptism of Christ. The Redeemer is shown as a bearded lady standing in a pea-green stream, while a blue John the Baptist pours water with an unholy blue tinge in it - like to that of gin - over the Holy Head. The pulpit here is supported on the backs of stone cats, grinning - almost Chinese in their malevolence.[7]

Bedford might be contemptuous of the breathless tourist, who worshipped with Ruskin in his left hand and Baedeker in his right and genuflected before any ancient or renowned object, but his articles reveal his own sensitivity to Italy's artistic and architectural heritage. Thus he wrote of his encounter with the Piazza del Campo at Siena:

> I went on to the town's backbone again and plunged down deep old stone ramps, past palaces full of darkness and mystery, into the very ancient Piazza del Campo, the Place of the Field. There was a big, carven, three-sided marble fountain - the Fonte Gaia - looking down the cobbled slope, and I gazed ahead and gasped.
>
> The moon had just risen and a segment of it was cut by the tower of the public palace . . . The beautiful shaft seemed to leap its 300 feet into the blue and silver air; the gothic windows were dwarfed in the half-dark; all the impression I carried away was of a great marble fountain whose waters tinkled music to the moonlight, and a faultless tower soaring.[8]

Like many travellers, Bedford commented on what was perceived as an innate sense of beauty and style of the Italians and their ability to create works of art out of the commonplace, although his observations were less clichéd than most. In Pisa on Christmas eve, he wrote:

> I have been gloating over a graven brass spring at the back of the bathroom door - very common here, but all the manifestations of art in articles of utility are new to me, and I gloat accordingly.[9]

It was what he saw as Italy's affinity with Australia that framed much of Bedford's response to the peninsula. Like Australia, Italy was a land

of sun, warmth and light to be contrasted with England, alien because of cold, fog, gloom, dirt, squalor, the place where Bedford had begun to "feel like howling for a sight of Australian sun". Over and over again, Italy reminds Bedford of Australia. Thus, describing the Viale Galileo in Florence, he wrote:

> How like is Australia to Italy in atmosphere. There is in my garden in Grey-Street, East Melbourne, a cypress as beautiful as any here, and as calm - it looks east to the Dandenongs, which are lovelier than the Apennines.[10]

In Livorno, Bedford noted "the softness of a Sydney spring in the air". A glimpse of "oranges and oleanders" turned a Pisan vista into "a pale imitation of mine own land". The garden of his hotel in Rome "was flooded by moonlight almost central Australian in its intensity". In a gondola in Venice, "for the first time in my life in a city I felt a silence as deep as the silence of a salt lake in central Australia".

Bedford advocated the acceptance by Australia of immigrants from Italy, not only because rural Italians were "industrious, cheerful and kindly" and "hardworking, sober and frugal" but also because they came "from the sunlight". He had no doubt that Italians would prove better settlers than the pale, half-starved, frost-bitten, chilblained English. Bedford's support for Italian immigration to Australia should not be taken as an absence of racism on the part of this fervent champion of White Australia who cheerfully referred to "Niggers" and "Jewboys". Rather, Italians fell into the 'us' category.

Bedford also believed that there was much that the land of sun and light in the south could learn from the land of sun and light in the north, particularly in building and town-planning. He spent part of his time in Florence housebound, recovering from illness.

> My sky is as much as fits into five square feet of window; and I am glad that Italy is the place of my sickness. In northern countries - England and others - they use little mean-looking windows of a foot square, and we in Australia have imported these dreary light obscurers into our country of sunlight.[12]

Bedford's call was not, however, for mere imitation of Italian practice. What he perceived in Italy was the harmony between the creations of Nature and of men and women. The magnificent simplicity of the Pitti and Strozzi palaces might have been suggested by some great rock in the Apennines. The lesson to be learnt was that:

> We want in Australia to kill the imported abuses of the old world - to imitate in our art our trees and our climate - beautiful, generous and strong, as these Italians did . . . The beautiful gum trees should have suggested columns: the Waratah - flame and sword in one - should have suggested colour and form in decoration.[13]

A not-very-hidden agenda behind Bedford's espousal of Italy was his hostility to the British ruling class who "lorded it over colonials and foreigners and kept their own people in poverty and

subjection" - and who incidentally had given no support to Bedford's mining schemes. Bedford was contemptuous of British claims to racial superiority:

> it was and to some extent still is, the English fashion to speak of the French and Italians as decadent . . . The French and the Italian except in trade have been the superiors of the English; and trade superiority happened because of great coal and iron deposits in Britain, whereas Italy has never found or mined a ton of coal in its history.[14]

Much of Bedford's positive comment on Italy is linked to criticism of Britain and of its baleful influence on Australia. Life in the colonies was much darkened by the English parsonical superstition that was responsible for the dreary Sabbath of the "Calvinist killjoys" and "the prohibition of drinking outdoors, barbaric licensing laws and the consequent barbaric drinking habits". In contrast was the civilization of Italian customs and the Continental Sunday. In Livorno, Bedford noted the legacy to that town of its large English presence:

> There were many English families there - you still find traces of them in the heavy and severe mahogany furniture sold at the second-hand dealers' shops - and in the enormous quantity of English religious literature to be bought at fivepence the hundred-weight on every bookstall. I bought at Livorno, in a package of old books, some of the most depressing literature extant. One was *The Plain Man's Guide to Heaven*; another, *Morbid Speculations of a Sinner*; another, *The Remains of the Rev. Walker Bethune*; and yet another, *Spare the Rod and Spoil the Child*.[15]

Italy captured Randolph Bedford. On his return to Australia he wrote:

> I had thought that having once felt the beauty of the art of Italy that never again should I be satisfied with a country that is sordid in many ways.[16]

When he published his travel articles, the dedication to his family read: "To the Seven in Tuscany who were Too Happy to know they were happy". But the pull of the Australian bush had not weakened. The answer to Bedford's fear that he might never again be satisfied with his own country was:

> But Art merely imitates the beauty of primitiveness; and my land is beautiful in its every rock and tree - even if only because of its illimitable spaces. And all are of equal value in their kind; Ghiberti's doors and Freeling Heights; Giotto's tower and Pichi Richi Pass, the brown walls of Florence and the hills at Patsy's Spring; Fowler's Gap and the Simplon Arch that dominates Milan.[17]

Geoffrey Blainey has distinguished two kinds of Australian nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century, a positive nationalism linked to a new sense of place and belonging, and a negative nationalism that expressed itself more as dislike of England than as love for Australia.[18] No such distinction can be made in the case of Bedford, and both elements came into play in his response to Italy. Until at least the 1960s, the story of Australia and Italy is the story of three places, not two, but whereas for most Australians Britain was the guide and comforter on their Italian pilgrimage, for Bedford Italy was a stick with which to beat mother England. Nevertheless the relationship was still triangular. What gives Bedford's response to Italy particular interest is that at the same time it is also a dialogue between Italy and Australia in which the one land is the means to explore the other; his love for the Australian environment informs and enriches his response to Italy just as he perceives Italy as relevant to Australia.

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1. Roslyn Pesman Cooper, 'Australian Visitors to Italy in the Nineteenth Century', in G. Cresciani, ed., *Australia, The Australians and the Italian Migration* (Milan, 1983), pp. 124-41.
2. On Bedford, Norman Lindsay, *Bohemians of the Bulletin* (Sydney, 1965); Geoffrey Blainey, *Mines in the Spinifex* (Sydney, 1960); Vance Palmer, 'Randolph Bedford' *Overland* 26 (1963), pp. 21-2; *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8 (Melbourne, 1979), p. 242.
3. Randolph Bedford, *Naught to Thirty-Three* (Melbourne, 1976), p. 216.
4. Randolph Bedford, *Explorations in Civilization* (Sydney, 1914), p. 68.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 70. 6. *Ibid.*, p. 74. 7. *Ibid.*, p. 81. 8. *Ibid.*, p. 90. 9. *Ibid.*, p. 37. 10. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
11. Bedford, *Naught to Thirty-Three*, p. 261; *Explorations in Civilization*, p. 132.
12. Bedford, *Explorations in Civilization*, p. 168. 13. *Ibid.*
14. Bedford, *Naught to Thirty-Three*, p. 261.
15. Bedford, *Explorations in Civilization*, p. 63. 16. *Ibid.*, p. 240. 17. *Ibid.*
18. Geoffrey Blainey, *Our Side of the Country* (Melbourne), p. 133.

DESMOND O'GRADY

Praz's Perversity

Probably no Italian writer has brought to Australia literary luggage comparable to that of Mario Praz who, in 1965, spent a month travelling between Brisbane and Perth. The articles Praz wrote on his trip for the Roman daily *Il Tempo* were more acerbic than those published in its competitor *Il Messagero* by Gabriele Baldini who was in Australia at the same time.

Renowned as a scholar, essayist and collector, Praz, sixty-nine at the time of his visit, denounced Australia's insipidity whereas Baldini's articles were polite but also forgettable. Baldini was an assistant to Praz who held the chair of English Literature at Rome University. At his farewell ceremony in the university's Great Hall in 1966, Praz read Browning's 'The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Prazed's Church' (a Roman church) in which the dying Renaissance bishop describes the multi-marbled, richly-decorated tomb he desires. Then Praz indicated Italy's best-known English scholars, present for the occasion and who had all been his students, calling them his tomb's semi-precious stones. One by one he identified them with amethyst, tourmaline, malachite, lapus lazuli and then, indicating brick-complexioned, hard-drinking Baldini, concluded, "he's my ruddy jasper".

Swarthy, short, stocky and with a squint, Praz had a club foot. He pointed out that Byron had the same affliction. Being unattractive may have forced him to adopt a mask of malignity, making a vice of necessity. Some hinted he was cloven-hoofed: he enjoyed a sinister reputation for having the 'evil eye' and a sulphurous aura. It may even be risky to write about him: he delighted in stories of precious porcelain figures cracking and chandeliers crashing to the floor as he entered antique shops. To save for his acquisitions, he dressed shabbily (except for university where he wore a black jacket and striped trousers, remembered by generations of students).

He acknowledged that Empire-style furniture is considered monumental, funerary, suitable for the Uruguayan president and former heavyweight boxing champions but insisted, however, that it is "noble, serene and gay". Over sixty years, Praz built up an unrivalled collection in his Roman residences. His collection was a bourgeois temple, an obsession which had become reality, a magic evocation of a vanished epoch with Praz at its centre. The 1165 objects ranged from important oil paintings to shoes and beloved wax tableaux. Praz used to say that each object, at one time, had attracted a cult. He had stories or reflections about them: A regency redwood table, for instance, could inspire a comparison with Keats's use of romantic elements in a classical form. He recalled Rabandranath Tagore in Florence deploring Westerners' "foolish pride in furniture" but applied Gerard Manley Hopkins's "there lives the deepest freshness deep down things" to his collection described in *The House of Life* and *The Philosophy of Furniture.*

For twenty-five years Praz lived at Palazzo Ricci which he claimed was the residence of the Osmonds in Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* but four years after his Australian trip he moved to Palazzo Primoli which was more congenial and better lit. Appropriately the palazzo also houses a Napoleonic museum. Like Petrarch, who in 1362 offered to leave his library to the Venetian Republic in exchange for a house for the rest of his life, Praz obtained the Palazzo Primoli apartment for life at a peppercorn rent by bequeathing his library to its administrators. On his death in 1982 the State acquired Praz's collection of books and objects for a little over $US2 million. It was to become a museum, although at the end of 1989 Praz admirers were still awaiting it.

Praz brought an English bride, Vivyan Eyles, with him on his return to Rome from Manchester in 1934. Eleven years later Praz separated from Vivyan who took their only child, Lucia, with her. Deluded by the unpredictability of people and

passions, Praz preferred the security offered by objects. His 'Portrait of an Epicurian' who liked a quiet life but had a sociable wife, seems autobiographical: the wife came to "Hate the tranquillity of the house and left after accusing him of considering her as one piece of furniture among others". The epicurean then became enamoured of another with a "foot similar to those of ancient statues . . . and the smell of dead violets in her hair". She was content to be adored but in her face he recognized "the seal of Her Serene Majesty Death". The objects Praz collected seem to have been this second love.

Praz was renowned for scholarly essays of extraordinary eclectic erudition in which he aimed to be evocative rather than systematic, just as he did in his collecting. His model as a personal essayist was Charles Lamb, whose work he had translated. One of the literary Florentine English, Vernon Lee (Violet Paget), had encouraged him to pursue the essay genre which still receives ample space in all Italian dailies. Praz's most famous book in English is *The Romantic Agony* which, in Edmund Wilson's words, "traces the development from the eighteenth century onwards, largely under the influence of the Marquis de Sade, of a literary tradition of erotic cruelty, hysterical enjoyment of horror and perverse admiration of crime". Praz excelled in comparisons between the arts. He wrote on such diverse subjects as Rimbaud in Ethiopia, Stendhal and Palladio, the Brazilian emperor's capital Petropolis, Edward Lear's limericks, Robert Louis Stevenson and Carducci, Merseyside, the Medici's semi-precious stones, Tolstoy's house, Halifax in Canada, Balthus's illustrations for *Wuthering Heights*, films based on Shakespeare and old photographs of Milan. He boasted that he pursued manias rather than ideas. Rambling from subject to subject, apparently obeying whims rather than logic, he often made illuminating juxtapositions, although Hugh Honour found he had an "insatiable appetite for red herrings". He concentrated on details as if mindful of the German saying "the devil is in the detail" – presumably because it foils generalization.

Edmund Wilson coined the phrase 'prazzesco' (evoking *pazzesco* – crazy) to describe a melange of the macabre, the mordant and the queer. Saul Bellow linked Praz with other Anglophiles in *Mr Sammler's Planet*. His seventy-year-old protagonist Artur Sammler reacts with restraint like an Oxford don when, on a New York bus, he spots a pickpocket. Bellow explains that as a Warsaw schoolboy, before World War 1, Artur had fallen in love with England but later "he had reconsidered the whole question of Anglophilia, thinking sceptically about Salvador de Madriaga, Mario Praz, André Maurois and Colonel Bramble". In a 1925 letter, Edmund Gosse wrote of Praz as a "great Swinburnian". The aged professor and his maid, in Luchino Visconti's 1975 film '*Gruppo di Famiglia in un interno*', were based on Praz and his governess. (Burt Lancaster, who played the old professor, could not have been less like Praz, but a search for his lookalike would have reduced Central Casting to tears.) After the release of the film, in which the old professor was robbed, thieves broke into Praz's apartment. Praz recounted his wife's dalliance with a Vatican official dispassionately but described the robbery of his objects as if it were a rape.

Mario Praz lived in England for eleven years from 1923, lecturing at Liverpool University before, in 1932, becoming professor of Italian studies at Manchester which he left, after two years, for Rome University. His English memories made him feel at home in Melbourne, which he likened to the Liverpool of 1924 – had that city been cleansed of soot. And Liverpool, he pointed out with pleasure, had changed little from the beginning of the century: Praz preferred journeys into the past. It was a dream, wrote Praz, to see in Melbourne so many late Victorian houses, "particularly certain narrow houses with windows framed by heavy ashlars and towers which seem gnome's castles painted shiny white or light green". The streets were wider than Liverpool's, the air cleaner, the vegetation exotic but, nevertheless, when Praz went to the window of his Windsor Hotel room, there opposite (the Treasury) was a caramel-colored replica of Saint George's Hall, Liverpool. He had been intrigued by neo-classical St George's but had to go to Melbourne to see how it would have been before the soot begrimed it. He found Melbourne's architecture "repellent but hallucinating". Both qualities attracted Praz.

Given his interest in furniture, it is not surprising that Praz described the Windsor's decor in detail. He also studied the dining room's fauna: "grey-dressed men who all seemed from the same mould and solitary old ladies with permanent-waved hair, dressed in impossible colours." The Windsor was England in the Twenties, England at the beginning of the century: Praz said it was the most intense impression of historical depth on his trip. (Port Denison, which he described as being in Botany Bay, could not compare but, with friends like Praz, Melbourne had no need of enemies.)

Needless to say, Praz's impressions of Australia's remoteness were reinforced by visits to the Melbourne Club and the Victorian Governor-

General's residence. He felt the presence of a queen there and was surprised that it was no longer Victoria; the young officer he dealt with seemed one of the phantasms who had spotted angels at Mons while Sir Rohan Delacombe recalled the young Walter Scott.

Later Praz visited the Healesville Sanctuary where he saw kangaroos "revolving their paws like a person twiddling his thumbs and koalas lazily clasped to trunks like hairy excrements of the trees". Were they the rare and threatened species, he asked, or rather the Windsor Hotel, the Melbourne Club and Government House? He compared this trio to Edgar Allen Poe's Mr Waliemar who, mesmerised on the point of death, lived for a time in a state of suspended animation.

Tasmania, or rather Hobart, disappointed Praz who had expected streets like those of Edinburgh but found only isolated neo-classical buildings. He did, however, pay tribute to the light, which he found – as elsewhere in Australia – superior even to that of Rome, which had attracted Claude Lorrain and Poussin. He described Port Arthur graphically, comparing the stone gunpowder deposit with Theodoric's tomb in Ravenna. He found that nature here, specifically the Blow Hole, "competed in cruelty with man". In fact man had outdone nature in cruelty in these sites but Praz did not reflect upon that and, as will be seen, there were other oversights. Tasmania disappointed Praz but in Tasmania Praz disappointed also.

On arrival in Australia, Praz felt the island was a kingfisher isolated in the ocean. He could not believe his eyes at the customs declaration he had to complete on the flight from Fiji, and was tempted to ask if even fleas were prohibited imports. As he was leaving, a month later, controversy flared about the expulsion of a Fijian girl who wanted to become naturalised. He applied to Australia lines from T. S. Eliot's 'Triumphal March':

> O hidden under the dove's wing, hidden in the turtle's breast,
> Under the palm-tree at noon, under the running water
> At the still point of the turning world. O hidden.

Australian cities struck Praz as a presage of mankind's standardized future, regulated by a boring routine "under the dove's wing": "freed of the weight of history and time, isolated in space, [in Australia] you really feel at the still point of the turning world. The Kantian dream of perpetual peace realized is also life reduced to a kindergarten." His comment on Donald Horne's

suggestion in *The Lucky Country* that Australia should allow Asian migration was that Rome, in its decline, opened up to other races without this saving it.

Praz recalled that D. H. Lawrence, in *Kangaroo*, praised bungalows just as a decade later, in *Etruscan Places*, he was to prefer ephemeral Etruscan dwellings to heavy Roman constructions. But Praz deplored Australian housing: from a plane at night, he wrote, Australian cities look beautiful but when you land you experience a surprise similar to admiring a woman in an opera box only to find in the foyer that she has dwarf's legs.

He preferred Sydney's nineteenth century terrace houses sloping to the harbor, "theatre boxes seen through a telescope", to modern bungalows which "often boast strawberry roofs, colors which set the teeth on edge and the most pretentious features. They reflect the taste, Praz wrote, "which disseminates in middle class gardens polychrome statues of dwarves, terracotta mushrooms and other horrible surprises". Even nineteenth century houses, he added, are often painted so that street facades look like multi-colored icecreams or boiled lollies; moreover, shops are loaded with luminous signs which make the streets seem crowded and oppressive comic strips. For Praz, cities of "chicken coops, of big rabbit hutches . . . of toy houses sometimes enamelled like kitchens or lavatories" disproved Lawrence's claim that Australian bungalows harmonised with the landscape.

Praz noted that Australian eucalypts were not all sad and flaccid, like those in the Roman marshes planted in the mistaken belief that the trees would combat malaria. He distinguished himself from Norman Douglas, who detested gum trees, and seemed to mirror himself in claiming they had "perverted attitudes . . . a demoralising look of senility and precocious vice". To the "solemn, monotonous and slightly sinister" bush, Praz found that gum trees added an "agitated, alarmed almost hysterical" note through their "disorderly bunches of leaves and trunks peeled to bone-white which, in certain declivities, seemed like candles in a funeral procession".

With their intense green, Praz maintained, European forests suggest plenitude and peace but the eucalypt's contorted branches, peeling trunks and partial shedding of leaves recalled "nervous creatures who are always filing their nails, adjusting their hair, tweaking superfluous hairs". Cezanne, he suggested, would have captured their exhausted colors and disordered silhouettes. He found something spellbound in the landscape as if "it spoke in an abolished language which a long silence had made absent and feeble". A mournful landscape under a sky whose luminosity and purity Dante had strangely forseen, describing the "other pole where he set Purgatory". And in this landscape, seemingly "exhumed from another world of which mankind has a faint, ancestral memory", there is, Praz observed with exasperation, "a proliferation of chicken coops".

At the Melbourne Club Praz had observed a wax Aboriginal and kangaroo under a glass bell and remarked that it was hard to realise these "strange, exotic apparitions" could actually be seen not far away. It is not clear whether he saw any full-blooded Aboriginals but he described them as Calibans. Near Armidale he did see some half-castes who he described as "still more repellent, above all the women". They reminded him of Swift's Yahoos. Aboriginal place names likewise seemed horrid, evocative of "gorgons and other fabulous monsters". Among others, he listed Goombargona, Tangambalanga, Umberumbenka, Wattamondara, Weebolabolla, Wowingragong, Yambaconna, claiming they would have delighted Victor Hugo. He even found Katoomba, Coolangatta, Lilli Pilli and Yarralumba 'prazzesco'.

Praz wrote of "three solitudes" – the Mexican Mt Alban, Persepolis in Iran and Ayres Rock – but said he was terrified of the latter and did not even visit it, merely "passing alongside". Nevertheless he compared it to a ghostly Salvador Dali maize meal mound. He described it as a sacred site which had not entered history, "together with the kangaroos, the platypus and the disorderly eucalyptus, it testifies to a world that is not ours; vestige of an ancient nature . . . on which the dates of our history could not be written". However he praised Aboriginal art, calling it the most interesting sector in the "vast but emaciated Sydney Art Gallery".

Finally Praz admitted to a perversity similar to that of his beloved Charles Lamb who, when visiting English country houses, asked first to see the Chinese salon. Likewise, when Praz reached Canberra, he visited the cottage which had been there since 1830, because the model capital recalled for him the models in Coca Cola advertisements: once seen, never remembered. He compared the Academy of Science to the Nervi Palazzo dello Sport in Rome but said he would never forget the War Memorial museum whose relics and paintings had such a "leaden, depressing quality . . . that by comparison the paintings of Napoleon's battles at Versailles seem gay carnival scenes". In Canberra, he wrote, one feels in a timeless limbo; even the parrots seemed as unreal as those which, in the

Roman de la Rose, populate the French woods.

He admitted that he could have compared perfectly functioning Monash University or the University of Queensland with its "vast mosque-like courtyards" to Rome University: "a barracks which is neither monumental nor adequate, which can accommodate only 250 of its 40,000 students, where there are so many professors and so few tutors, where there are insufficient lecture halls and the windows are usually dusty". He acknowledged that he could have compared Australian cities' ample parks and gardens with Rome's emaciated, threatened green areas and the superiority of Australia's facilities for children and young people.

Praz explained that just as the Count de Gobineau avoided describing Persia's celebrated monuments because it had been done so often, he had refrained from describing modern Australia because urban developments, like domestic appliances, are the same from one country to another. He took them as a matter of course, unless they were exceptional. He did not put the Opera House in the same category but only observed that the workmen constructing the roof seemed like ants on the wings of a dead butterfly. He paid more attention to the Belvedere Hotel's "deplorable furnishing", and to the pseudo-Renaissance objects in Wentworth House - where he spotted a Victorian writing desk masquerading as "Italian seventeenth century" as well as some fearsome statuary.

These were examples of Australians' vagueness about artistic styles and historical epochs, illustrated also by the Brisbane museum which was like an Olde Curiosity Shoppe or the Mahogany Inn near Perth which, among its historical objects, displayed a lemonade bottle with a marble as a stopper. In the absence of real antiquities, he recounted, one visits even old prisons such as that of Fremantle where he observed pin-ups in the cells and adjudged the inlay woodwork (Spanish dancers, bikini-clad girls, cats and parrots) designed to educate the prisoners' aesthetic sense as being as heinous as their crimes.

Everyone satisfies himself as he can, commented Praz, instead of real girls, pin-ups, instead of Greek vases, lemonade bottles. He drew a parallel between the prisoners' lack of contact with the world and most Australians' scarce familiarity with the West's great artistic traditions, saying it must have affected both taste and sentiment. He concluded with this "seeming paradox": that if Australia had not produced very original works of art, it is because originality only comes out of a profound tradition.

His paradox had validity but Praz leant over backwards to reach it: the Mahogany Inn hardly proves anything about Australia - Italian hotels certainly do not have Greek vases. Praz's perversity, his preference for the offbeat, is more persuasive than his paradox, but unfortunately it did not carry him beyond what he recognised were remnants of a defunct culture. Port Arthur, for instance, could have provoked a frisson in a De Sade specialist. Moreover, in Tasmania he did not notice that Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, the painter, writer and forger, had been sent as a convict to Hobart. Praz had written of Wainewright as a voluptuous dilettante, foreshadowing Oscar Wilde, "a subtle, perverse aesthete . . . who handled pen, pencil and poison". Wainewright in Hobart Town! Surely that would have fired Praz's imagination more than Tasmanian architecture and landscape and also prompted reflection on whether Australia could be other than a copy (or forgery?) of England. Instead Praz retained an image of Australia similar to the prevailing image of Victorian literature before his *The Romantic Agony* uncovered its darker seams. Praz's Australia was limited both by his indifference to the contemporary and the fact that he did not push his perversity far enough.

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The Overland Society Capital Fund

Michael Dugan, Honorary Treasurer, writes: This fund, established to ensure the continuation of *Overland*, recently received a donation of $3000 from an anonymous benefactor. The Society is most appreciative of this substantial support.

GAYLA REID

To be there with you

Water, the smell of brown water, its presence all around. On the one side, the Saigon River, meeting the ocean, taking its time. On the other, the South China Sea, with its small surf.

I sit in the hotel room and I wait for Ron.

When I went to Vietnam I took one newspaper clipping with me. I pinned it on the wall of my hotel room, as a challenge. (Quickly, it was discolored by the humidity; it curled at the edges.)

It was a photo of a Buddhist monk, who in the protests of the year before had poured gasoline over himself and burned to death.

By that time the city, Saigon, had become a series of cliches in the Australian mind. It was these cliches I sent home, one more time.

You remember: the pedicabs, the oxcarts, the cyclos, the capricious stream of lane-less traffic, the taxi fleet of neurotic blue and cream Renaults, the pall of exhaust. The big gutters at the sides of the streets, pungent. The water sellers with their panniers balanced on bamboo sticks across their shoulders; the shoeshine boys; the prostitutes in mini-skirts. The bars and massage parlors along Tu Do; the clapped-out tamarinds on the same street. The checkpoints; the flaking plaster on the buildings at the heart of town; the hotels - Graham Greene's old Continental and the thin, new Caravelle, where the Australian Embassy was located.

I described these things and I looked at the Buddhist monk. And I felt discouraged.

Two things I did not write about:

The people who lived there, the Vietnamese. What did they talk about when they talked with one another?

The corruption of unknowing. (*Did the people of Vietnam use lanterns of stone?*)

It was a relief to go down to Vung Tau, where the Australian forces were headquartered.

The room I finally found in Vung Tau was, in my opinion, everything it should have been. It had vile plumbing and dubious bedding. Everywhere, plants in pots. And tiny wrought-iron balconies that looked out towards the water (you couldn't see it, but you knew it was there). After Saigon, Vung Tau was wonderful.

It was a bit embarrassing, in this essentially French colonial setting, to be happy with Ron. Ron was in the regular army. I should not have approved. It was the men who'd been drafted we felt for - the nashos, forced into a war they knew nothing about.

In my letters home to friends I changed Ron into a French journalist. I had met him, I claimed, in the Saigon offices of La Presse. The only trouble with Henri, I wrote, is that he talks all the time.

One of the best things about being in Vungers was that I didn't have to go to the daily briefings. In Saigon, I was terrified - not of the war, but of the press corps.

There were hundreds of accredited correspondents in Saigon; they came from all around the world. There were women among them, some of whom were really famous. They were the ones who scared me the most. With the men, I could excuse myself.

But the women. I trembled.

Every day from about two o'clock onwards, I'd start having this sick feeling. Was I going to skip the briefings? Around three o'clock I'd decided to skip. From then until shortly before four I'd feel as if a mighty load had been lifted from me. Then from around four onwards, I'd be imagining myself, taking part.

I should be walking along Nguyen Hue (the Street of the Flowers) to the room above the art gallery. I should be walking up the steep stairs, choosing one of the hard, fold-up chairs, preferably near the fan. Then I should be examining the roneoed sheet

that gave the daily statistics.

This was the Vietnamese briefing, and it was usually over within a few minutes. Nobody, it seemed, was particularly interested in anything the Vietnamese had to say about the war.

The half-hour between 4.30 and five was the worst. This was when the journos chatted with one another as they dawdled over to the main event - the US briefing at JUSPAO, the Joint US Public Affairs Office. It was just down the street.

At JUSPAO there was the relief of air-conditioning, there was ice-water, there were comfortable chairs.

I imagined myself, with Henri, moving easily among the journos. I saw the two of us, part of the crowd, making our way through the JUSPAO corridors to the auditorium at the back of the building. At the entrance to the auditorium we'd pick up the daily handouts. We'd study the unclassified photos, and I'd have some brief, perceptive thing to say. I would make Henri laugh. After the briefing we'd be part of the crowd again, going off to the top floor, to eat frozen food flown in from the States. And to complain about it, later.

In fact I used to collect my handouts silently, and sit by myself at the back, relying on those handouts for protection. After the briefing I would sneak away, hoping no one was watching.

But the show itself I enjoyed. First, the chief of the US mission usually came on and made a few remarks. Against the curtained stage, he looked exactly like the master of ceremonies. Then someone from the US Armed Forces would give a spiel, complete with slides and colored maps, no expenses spared.

Then came the best bit: the questions. (I never asked a question myself.) Question time often generated a fair bit of snarling, usually from the US journos.

Once or twice, during question time, the entire auditorium would be seized with something alert, strained. I didn't know what it was, but it felt like the hairs going up on a dog's back.

Atrocities were not yet defined as news. News, at that time, was numbers: 189 Reds die in three battles.

I wrote in my journal: I look at Ron and my bones turn to milk.

Then: no, no, that sounds like dog food.

And later: D.H. was right, but T.E. probably more Ron's man.

I kiss him and my mouth trembles.

Start with what you've got, they'd told me, back home. Go for the human interest angle. Always get the names of the boys' home towns. Find out how many sisters and brothers they have. See if any of the country papers are buying. Try the women's magazines.

The Singapore-based correspondent who was to be my main contact described my arrival as "a collosal brass-up". At best, he treated me with a derisive flirtatiousness.

When he found out I was having an affair with one of the Aussie soldiers, he said, "Now we'll get some in-depth coverage." Snicker.

If Ron was coming down from the Dat I'd get this smooth, easy feeling. We had few rows, Ron and I. Ron let me know he simply couldn't get over his good luck: here he'd found someone to fuck with who wasn't a prostitute. He didn't have to worry about getting the jack.

I'd wash my hair and think of Ron, 30 kilometers away, having his shower. Getting clean for me, back from the bush again.

Ron saw women as creatures who had sex out of the goodness of their hearts, which is pretty weird. But he made me feel generous. So I had sex and I had virtue, too. Two bob each way: a pretty attractive proposition, for a guilty Catholic girl.

I was the only woman he ever slept with besides Shirl. So he said, and I believed him. I think he was shocked by the prostitution; I think a lot of the soldiers were, especially the ones who used the prostitutes. In many ways they were a pretty straight-laced bunch, the Australian soldiers.

They expressed outrage at the fact that there were women and children fighting them.

While I wait for Ron, I look at myself in the mirror.

I love you, I say to the mirror, to Ron, who is not yet here.

Is this how love feels?

Vung Tau was easy to write about. Set on a peninsula, it jutted out into the sea like a small boot. There were, of course, the beaches: the front beach, where the hotels were; the back beaches, where the soldiers were camped.

In the crowded front beach area there was a persistent feeling of holiday. There were the Aussies, steady boozers all, and there were the Yanks on their in-country R&R. There were the Koreans, and there were the South Vietnamese themselves. And moving among them, invisible, were the VC. For nobody denied that the VC, too, routinely used Vung Tau for their own R&R.

On the front beach evenings began early, with

a kind of nervy gaiety. By night's end that had deteriorated into something thick and heavy and tangled. You could smell the beer soaking into the dirt. You were forced to listen to the song declaring, with a hideous, accurate sentimentality, that the carnival is over.

On the back beaches the soldiers settled in, and were kept busy protecting their equipment from the sand.

I wrote about the orphanage the soldiers were restoring in a nearby village; I interviewed the Australian surgical team at Le-Loi Hospital; I wrote about Villa 44, the rest and convalescence centre; I mentioned the Grand, the main watering hole. The town, I claimed, had "a crumbling French ambience". The young Vietnamese women in their *ao dais* "seemed to float along the boulevard". That gave me particular pleasure, using the word boulevard.

I wrote these lying, partial stories and at first I was happy enough to do so. In that respect, I wrote the way the soldiers wrote letters home. Only they knew what they were censoring, and I did not.

Once that fact became clear to me, I began to be preoccupied with it.

Like many working class kids from Labor-voting homes, I didn't trust the Liberal-Country Party. And it was, above all, their war. They wanted to suck up to the Yanks.

It was a Liberal Prime Minister who said, "You are right to be where you are and we are right to be there with you."

But I liked the soldiers. They were nice and ordinary and scared.

I liked them because I knew them. I knew them a lot better than the university students who were protesting.

I knew what their homes would be like on Saturday afternoon: a radio would be blaring the races. If they were Sydney boys, I knew what footy teams they cheered for. I knew how they'd eat fruitcake and drink beer on a hot December afternoon. I knew what mum would cook for tea and where she'd hang her apron; how she'd made that apron herself and trimmed it with a bit of rickrack. I knew what their grandparents' house smelled like. I knew what sort of tin nanna kept her biscuits in. I knew what kind of biscuits they'd be, and how they'd taste in the mouth.

It was just as well I knew something about them, because they told me nothing. Nothing at all.

I am up at the lines at Nui Dat. I am talking to men just back from the bush. I stand in front of them in my miniskirt, with my long young legs poking out, and I ask them to tell me all about the war.

The only thing we ever quarrelled about, Ron and I, was the grog. I saw getting a bit drunk as a prelude to sex. Ron saw drinking and sex as two equally weighty activities. Even when he was with me.

Before Ron, I'd had two other lovers. With them, love was an overwhelming project, constructed out of words. I rehearsed the words; later I would analyse and revise them, finding them ill-suited to the huge task.

With Ron there was silence. His body accepted mine. We could sit in two separate chairs and feel whatever it was, humming back and forth. I knew I'd finally figured out what made girls from posh homes run off with lads from the other side of the tracks (although we came from the same side of the tracks, Ron and me).

We had been lovers in a past life. (Both our surnames were Irish.) In some smoky cottage, in a valley full of mild rain, I had waited quietly for him.

Even in that life, he'd been married.

That was something else Ron let me know: there wasn't any question of my mucking things up with Shirl.

Because the soldiers would tell me nothing, I became obsessed with geography.

Leaving Nui Dat, one sees the red soils of the dry rolling hills with their rubber, banana and coffee plantations give way to a brief flowering of tender green paddies which are, as we approach Vung Tau, suddenly usurped by the salt marshes and mangroves in their Army colors.

I tried again.

Nui Dat, which means 'small hills', is actually located in a rubber plantation, I chirruped. Above the camp one sees the Nui Thi Vai, the mountains that the soldiers have dubbed the Warbies, after the Warburtons.

I even managed quotes: "Conditions are fair enough, really. You don't expect the Wentworth."

After a few weeks of this, I finally wrote a decent piece.

One of the challenges of this war, an enthusiastic young officer at Vung Tau explained, was insect control. Not only did insects such as mosquitoes carry malaria, but they were also bearers of haemorrhagic fever, encephalitis and dengue (I didn't know what dengue was, I had to look it up in the dictionary).

But thanks to the new wisdom of chemicals, the Australian army was having absolutely no

problems. (It was, everyone knew, an army that understood fighting in the tropics.) Regularly, the valleys and hills were being aerially sprayed.

He pointed out the planes to me, going up and down, cheerful and busy.

It felt good to write about all this because it reminded me of my father. After he came back from New Guinea and the Islands, my dad had had problems with malaria. For years, it stayed with him.

A life sentence, he called it.

We are sitting in the courtyard of the hotel at Vung Tau. We are reading the Sydney Morning Herald.

Ron is reading about what some of the Labor pollies are saying. He looks cranky. He's been a Labor man all his life.

I read what some famous authors think about the US involvement in the war. (There's a new book out.) I like what Pinter says, for its brevity: "They were wrong to go in, but they did. Now they should get out, but they won't."

Might come in handy some day, I think. I copy it into my journal.

"What's that you're writing?" Ron asks.

"Nothing," I say.

What does he do out there in the war? I imagine him: he is in a VC village. He takes a grenade from his body, pulls the pin out, and chucks it down the well. (Is that what they do? They do use a hand grenade for something like this, don't they?)

Then I see him walking away, through the village, away from the ruined well. He has now grown very tall; he walks in giant boots.

These images come to me when I am moving my hands over his body.

I wondered if Shirl read my pieces. I saw Shirl sitting in her kitchen, looking at my articles in the magazine. Her kitchen smelled of white toast and vegemite and kids. The neighbors were proud of her and she was proud of Ron. It was, after all, no more than a year since the Battle of Long Tan. And at Long Tan we had won by 245 to 18.

We Australians excelled at outdoor sports of all kinds.

I dreamed of writing something like that, especially for Shirl.

At first I told myself there was Ron with me and the war on one side, and Shirl and the kids on the other.

As the weeks went by I was forced to redefine that. On the one hand there was Shirl on her quarter acre and me in my room in Vungers. On the other hand, there was the war.

At this rate, I told myself, I'd never become a good *bao chi*, a journalist.

Beer left Ron as tight-lipped as ever, so I got my hands on some Thai grass. Ron was leery at first, but he agreed to give it a go.

It made him completely paralytic. He sat rooted to his chair, unable to move. From time to time he said, "Ratshit, mate. Ratshit."

It was a profound truth.

But I was no further ahead.

Occasionally, after sex, he did get a tiny bit talkative. Like this:

"We were going down this bloody hill and we walked straight into those noggies. Right on top of them."

"And, and?" I urged.

"Felt a bit sorry really. Poor bastards. Having their smoko."

Ron was older than anyone I'd been with before and his big heavy body pressed down on me without apology.

"I love you," I say to Ron.

(Do I love him, do I, really?) Having been brought up Catholic I believe in the power words can have, particularly when repeated.

"I love you Ron."

Sometimes he murmurs, "Deirdre, Deirdre, Deirdre."

Sometimes he gives a short, tight laugh.

Like the rest of the journos, I was developing an obsession with the camouflage of language, with how much, in the attempt to conceal, is revealed. At the briefings, the favored line was, Contact was made. Not even, We/they made contact.

I listened to what Ron said about the Yanks. They were crazy bastards. They went crashing around like a mob of bulls in a china shop. As jungle fighters, they were a piss poor lot.

I spoke his language, and I knew what he was saying. He liked the Yanks. He liked their clumsy bigness. He was happy enough, in his own way, to be there with them.

Ron had only one word for the Vietnamese. They all did.

In a bar it would be "the noggy waiter". The VC were bloody noggies. It was a nog mine, a nog taxi, a nog ambush.

In this war, I told myself, the good guys we have come to save and the bad guys we have come to save them from both go by the same name.

I sat in my room and I tried to think about that.

One night, when I am giving him a back rub, Ron says: "I deny everything."

I stare at my hands, in surprise.

He lies still, letting me make my discoveries. (And I am thinking: this desire in me, to find such things in him; how different is that from how he feels, at the well?)

Then he takes me and fucks me in a hard, impassive way I find dazzling.

There was a South Vietnamese military training centre in Vung Tau. Some of the kids there, I decided, would be highly disciplined cadre from the other side.

I was very interested in the phrase, highly disciplined cadre. It suggested a staggering confidence of belief.

In Saigon – this was before Tet – I'd assumed that the Vietnamese I came in contact with were pro-US (pro us). In Vungers you just knew it wasn't true. Here were Vietnamese people serving you food, doing your laundry for you. But just down the road was Hoa Long. And Hoa Long was VC by night and had been for years.

In Vungers you thought about that more: their double life.

It is raining. We are in the hotel room.

Since the last time Ron was here, his best mate has been killed by a mine.

Ron stares out at the balcony, and says: "There were bits of him hanging from the trees."

He has never said anything this explicit before.

I look at his grey face, his hunched shoulders.

I go over to him, kiss him, press my breasts against his back. After a while, I am moving on top of him.

I feel, as I am doing this, that I have become someone completely ancient.

A woman is pushing her soft body against a man's, trying to make war go away: She feels powerful. And ambitious. And definitely pleased with herself.

When Ron and I went drinking we'd start off at the Grand then go on to these makeshift places they had along the beachfront – little round huts, they were. I'd try to get Ron and the others to at least say something about Dak To, where the main US fighting was going on.

They talked about cricket.

Sometimes, in one of those bars, you'd see a soldier crying his eyes out. "He's ratshit, mate," Ron would say. And look away.

We were in a bar one night. It wasn't that long after Ron's best mate Johnno had been killed. A guy called Ian comes up to us. He's young and he's really handsome.

Ian starts slapping Ron on the back, in a familiar way that is part friendly, part hostile. "Zip 'em right down the middle, mate," Ian says.

He's very drunk.

"Beauty mate," Ian goes on. "One for you and one for me."

Ron, who's quite a bit older, says, "Take it easy mate. Just take it easy now."

But Ian keeps on keeping on.

"One for you and one for me. What do you say? Beauty mate."

Ron gets up and punches him hard in the stomach.

That shuts him up.

I didn't see it as any big deal – Ron's punching him. They were all pretty physical guys, you know.

What interested me was what Ian had said.

I'd heard it before.

After the drinking and fucking had been pushed to the limit, and Ron was asleep, out of it, he said, in his sleep, but clearly enough: "One for you and one for me."

He could have been back home coaxing his kids to eat up their peas.

But I didn't think so.

Hair washed, perfume fresh, I opened the door, expecting Ron. We were going to the Beachcomber, to eat hamburgers and drink weak Yank beer.

But it wasn't Ron. It was some other soldier I knew vaguely. Looking awkward.

A tunnel, he said. Ron went down the tunnel. Then he said something technical about what kind of bunker system it was. I remember thinking, quite without anger: the technical details are terribly important to all of them; why is that?

I wondered what he was doing down a tunnel. Wouldn't he be way too big?

Next I thought: they'll give him two column inches on the front page of the *Herald*. Australian Task Force troops . . . Operation San Jose . . . Phuoc Tuy province.

The soldier took me drinking, and some of Ron's mates gathered round.

"Good bloke, Ron," they said.

And drifted off. They didn't know what to say next. They were pissed and miserable and not in the least surprised about what had happened.

They did not, they did not, any of them, say anything about its being worthwhile.

I walked back to my hotel and the night seemed not at all substantial.

I had been looking forward to the weight of Ron, upon me.

I had plenty of pics of Ron and me. I'd take them out and stare at them carefully. We all had lots of photos – someone was always snapping away.

My favorite was one of Ron and his best mate Johnno and me in the courtyard of my hotel in Vungers. Johnno is flexing his biceps and putting on the big bronzed ANZAC act. I'm sitting down and Ron is standing behind me, with his arms around my shoulders. I am leaning back into him.

I swear, if you saw that picture you'd think he loved me.

I also had a picture of Ron and Shirl and the two kids. They were in front of their home in the Sydney suburb of Bexley North. (How did I manage to wheedle that photo out of Ron? I search my mind for the time and the place but come up with a blank.)

"She wanted that house so badly," Ron said. For that house he'd given up promotions, the kind of promotions that come only if you're willing to pack up and move, to Albury, to Melbourne.

"Just down the street from her mother's," Ron said.

I got that photo out and looked at Shirl.

Neighbors would be coming to her front door, bringing cakes. They'd walk in and sit down in the lounge room, feeling slightly elevated, on stage.

Shirl was a widow. At least she had that.

What did I have?

A few photos.

What I could remember.

As you leave Vung Tau by air you watch its two hills grow flatter, and the ocean, suddenly huge.

This is the ocean into which a helicopter is to tumble. Some things will change, utterly.

All through the war, when I saw the protests, I imagined what Shirl might be thinking.

The young man is making a speech against the war.

Shirl would like to slap that face, I think.

His talkative, hairy, safe face.

I knew it was Shirl because I still have the picture.

Shirl was there in David Jones' food department on Market Street. She was examining the foreign jams.

Ravaged. As we all are.

From behind the pickles, I got a good look at Shirl. Briefly, I imagined rising up like a ghost, announcing myself.

I thought: I bet she worries about her pot belly, starting to stick out.

The kids'd be all grown up now, in their twenties. What kind of people are they? Worried about the nasty real estate prices?

I bet she says: Kids expect to have everything right away, these days.

For a moment it seemed quite possible that there were, in David Jones', bones and guts spinning through the air. A severed breast, bouncing on the oysters. And in the frozen fruit the small, pumping heart of a child.

But really it was only me and Shirl.

Our lives still going on.

I read the book. I found Ian's interview.

Ian has not forgotten. Ian remembers, and tells us all:

It was early morning and we were coming back from a patrol. The whole thing had been a complete and utter shemozz. Johnno and Wilkes were blown to bits. We did look for the pieces but they didn't really add up to two bags full.

We were down on all fours, prodding our way out. It took forever. They had those mines we called chicom jumpers, because they were made in China.

So we're out of that and it's next day and we come to this creek. Three of us. We're resting a bit and these noggies come down the gully. A mama san and two kiddies. They've got their washing with them. They're going to do their washing in the creek.

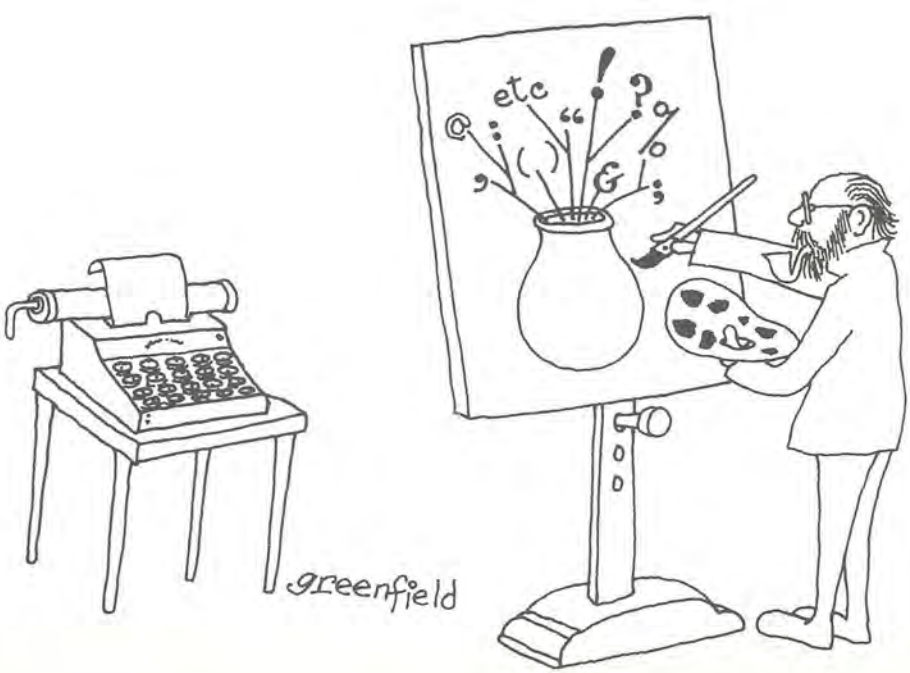
The sarge picks up his Armalite. That's the Yank rifle they gave us over there. He looks at the two of us, and he's kind of ratshit. Johnno was his best mate.

He says to me and this other guy: "One for you and one for me."

I thought he was just fooling at first, but he starts looking down his scope.

We shot one each.

We didn't talk about it. We just kept going. Nobody put them down as a kill or anything.



Donald Greenfield

THREE POEMS BY ROBERT ADAMSON

OUTSIDE OF DELACROIX

for Barrett Reid

Ocean cupped between sky and earth, the sea
rolling
out through the Heads, two people stand and gaze;
it's in the mind again as usual
through here from my window
I look up through actual hills and see water
or water's shape on the sky
and want to say to you
yes although we have made it up it's real
let detail convince careful readers
we want to get beyond the speck of blood
on the collar, the ash smudged on the sleeve
where someone's butt has rubbed
this chip of fingernail the stumps of white hair
growing in clumps on the edge of the chin
Ah the sea, how you know now what old poets
mean
when they say let's watch the rim awhile
and rustle up a phrase or two
Two cane chairs standing empty by the side of
the sea
their checked shadows embossing the dirty sand
invisible hands gesture in the dusk
we are happy and lost in the meaningless sound
of verbs
and toss them off like stones
let them skip out in a sentimental wash of ink
abstract and obscure
the way we like it, yet vague
reverberating with little edges of meaning
just enough to keep a child from wandering off
and yet, who knows what death means, what
matters is pain
as you cross over the water.

LOOKING OUT SIDEWAYS

for Barrett Reid

Through haze waves figures wobble about
on the scruffy yellow carpet
of sand-tattered shore; I talk to you
as we look out, saying there's one
freedom more inviolate than any other,
it comes to us when we trust
what we truly know. Now what we know
enough of is poetry, a power
as difficult as a bow
with the arrow going off to kill
even though we don't want blood on our hands.
All those wars and arguments rock
in our skulls, making a tight
but stilted kind of harmony. A flock
of gentlemen move into our view,
they are wearing shirts with lines
from poems emblazoned on their backs,
their flight is a wonderful clumsy sort
of foxtrot. Now children come running out
from the old fishing-shacks along the beach-side
as if they knew these blokes were escaped black
& white
butterflies out of lost poems from *The Movement*,
like Donald Davie
with a long line of false epiphanies strung together
and thrown onto a page.

PRAYER

Memory has my life in its silent
flickering; what words
can remain offerings after
they have been spoken to more
than one lover. Here take
this phrase in its winding line
with the sorrow I can never
bring alive. These hours
have arrived although
I have struggled for them
and are spread before me tonight;
they are thanks somehow
from where I cannot imagine
though there is no place I cannot
imagine: thrumming under phrase making
a rhythm for a child
I did not give life to;
its music is life little enough -
May I find in it more ways
than are evoked even with words
placed precisely in a craft of meanings.

THE HISTORY

june 1956 her ears are syringed
august the same year her temp is 99.4
and there is a split
first sound
december she requires physio for her elbow
february 57 a lump on the left breast
is first noted
by july the wound has healed
'beautifully'
and her ears are syringed
for wax
january 62 her right arm swells
march 62 no taste cannot eat custard
feels a sickness in the stomach
october 62 cystitis

and then nothing

until
january 88 she returns with cystitis
again and she knows she has
an infection she doesn't need no
tests she just
wants the right tablets the same
she got before and her daughter
will collect the prescription
and someday too
she'll have her ears checked.

as though nothing
has happened in 26 years?
this is no true record of
her life.
not even a daughter is mentioned.
so just what could this document
this identity paper
have to do with her life now?
and yet she has returned to it.

WARWICK ANDERSON

SEARCH

Leaving no stone un-
turned, he ended up a
lover of woodlice.

DAVID WINWOOD

THEY CAME, THEY SAW, THEY DID A LITTLE SHOPPING

West Berlin graffiti.

Folks don't want freedom,
they want VCRs: a hard truth.
The wall falls down, brick by brick
apparatchiks tumble, head over heels
to get out of the way of communism.
The people fill the streets with their hunger,
to dine on brave speeches
and the pride of nations, to crush tyrants
with the weight of their bodies.
Let them eat democracy! we cry
from the battlements; let them eat
capitalism, since their crops
have failed and their soil is barren
and their queues are long and lonely.
Let them sink their teeth into the ballot-box;
let them break their teeth
on hard-baked politicians, with their hard
talk and their tough times and their
necessary evils. By all means, let them
eat, let them eat on credit,
let them gobble up technology and
investment - may they never get their fill!

And let them eat unemployment, too,
in their thousands, on street corners
consuming progress over breakfast
television and broth. Let them eat
religion, the Catholic Church, the Pope;
let them eat God when
there's nothing else left to eat
but Union Carbide, Exxon, Mitsubishi,
and McDonald's. Let them stuff their empty bellies
with hard currency and hope,
while we feast on their freedom.

JEFF KLOOGER

THE ORCHARDIST

Orange trees cling
to the tin walls
of his home. A red
checked shirt and grey
pair of trousers hang
over the one-eyed tractor.
His oranges are small suns
and he is an astronaut
floating slowly
through their spheres
of influence.

JOHN KINSELLA

CENTRES OF ART

Each monument of art
Collects reminders for consumption
Like a sarcophagus. Inside
Sacred space the violin longs
For the growing tree; dancers' feet -
Tender skin and bone rubbed raw -
Celebrate a grave unity with earth;
Singers shed pretence, echoing
The first cry, the breath between lips:

Art, leaning to the edge
Of the impossible, drawn towards
The moment of chaos from the pure pole
Of silence, swings from a common pintle:
Wind across water, the foot on earth,
The engendering eye, encased
In famous palladiums
In case it spills across the footpath
And we discover how to live.

CONNIE BARBER

EXCERPT FROM 'EXTINCT MOON'

For Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and my father

You are Watt's risen clouds of water. You can reflect, eclipse or bathe. A milky, chaotic seedless, grape. Transparent to the point of collusion. Your tendrils are tensile. Sensual. There is a fierce tenderness here, grey-handed moon. You are whippet gentle, smoky smooth. Tensile. These clouds, mouth-clouds, send Goddard up into the branches of a cherry tree. He modifies the cherry tree: cherry. Cherry-red rockets reach for the cherry-moon. When ecstacy is strength, we gravitate towards obsession. Obsessed with flying, falling, floating over houses, trees, tall buildings, we touch the moon with our tongues, therefore our delight. We fly through fog in Berlin, the vaporous wall that fell, whether we walked through it or danced through it or kicked our way through it. That wall is a waterfall, we fly through it like steel fish. Like chisel, like hammer, like tongue. It is a risen cloud of water, an unpolitical ferocity of life. A metamorphic moon.
You are a Berliner-moon. There is a woman who wears an expanse of backless, black velvet. The skin of her back is very white and very smooth. There are small freckles and bigger, scattered across her shoulders like stars. Her lover finds the North Star and the Bear and the Plough. She laughs, deeply. She loves him more for finding them there. They are married. This is a vision of love. He is a mapper of the moon. He knows the Lake of Dreams, the Lake of Death. The Sea of Crises, the Sea of Vapours. Sea of Clouds. This moon wore a collar of razor-wire. A cloth star. A collar of sweet and spicy Egyptian flowers. The death mask is a milk-toothed, cartoon-moon. With metronomic eyes that shift from right to left. Left, right. Left. Its nose, a landed rocket. A poking-tongue automaton. Clouds of steam shoot from its pink ears. It is not grotesque. Collusion. A cloud of laughing gas collars the lost-alien shoulders of the lonely Little Prince, the cherry-red, grape-green, Sea of Serenity, moon. Its shadow is bigger than my life. Bigger than a sidereal cloud of steam. Smaller than the Little Prince's one-rose world.

MEREDITH WATTISON

TRIPTYCH

The poet is a mongrel dog
who was born to eat cake
choke on it
and reach heaven that way

He may, however, turn novelist,
trading the oblivion of paradise
for the delirium of purgatory.
At least he will have company.

The film-maker holds a
candle up to Lucifer
and he, for the moment,
is well pleased.

RICHARD MURPHY

THE EXECUTION OF AARON SHERRITT

The spire of the rising has the wide sweep of
eye
Of a god. A few wild disciples gaggle about;
A military rudiment. There is a doubleman, spy,
A flash scariot this, and gun of the barefist bout:
He whirls the traps silly, smirks on the hue and
cry.

A good fellow stalks through the night, drawn
To the slab hut by a snake-slim fipple,
Thin talisman to mark the sacrifice born.
Joe Byrne becomes enclosing menace, cripple
And China-pipe sot, treason to treason sworn.

In Jerilderie the saviour pens a thundering epistle;
It ripples the sluggish land. Dull upon tin
A kero-heavy beam blunts Aaron's penny whistle.
At the hard point of justice the night slams in.

P. R. HAY

FRIENDLY STREET

When my friend's father converted
his bain-marie take-away
into a pizzeria, a new perfume
had entered the street. At the bus-stop
each weekday morning, saliva
ran from the broken hand-grip graffito
bus-bars to the public service canteens
which hit the city each lunchtime
below the belt. Mozzarella endeavoured
to drown the anchovies and capers
in its yellow sea, as my friend's father's cousin's
plump fingers worked the dough
into little balls ready for the marble slap.
The concrete patio had
until now supported the cedar stilleto
legs of Florentine sunday furniture
slipping guests across the pebbling
into a river bed of quick lapidary death.
But of course the mortadella-fisted foccacio
now drew attention to the olive groves sweating
in rings of squid on pitta-baked bread.
This and the introduction of traffic lights
has changed the footpaths of tarred gum
into peopled cobblestones and oily cardboard
boxes.

And my friend now owns a Mercedes Benz.

GEORGE MANKA

INTRODUCED SPECIES

Being a fox is not easy
in the Australian bush.
Like a Middle-European at a cricket match,
he stands out in the crowd.
Aware of his accent
and the dark looks of the natives,
he snatches a glance over his shoulder
and misses Border hitting six.
He is startled by the cheers.
The scoreboard is impossible;
the tails of six close friends
hang on the barbed wire -
caught in the gully
by the man with the gun.
Integration will come.
In time his children too
will sit on the hill;
tear sheep to pieces;
throw cans.
Only their name will set them apart;
a gutteral bark -
Fox.

IAN SAW

DIALOGUE'S DRIFT

What blue clouded the constant
sky? - a Darlington writer asked,
another Darlingtonite replied:
white of course, and, have you
drawn on metal yet? - later, its
starkness was seen and subsequently
said. Alacrity, in nimble might a-
gain, began to record a thrall:
Convenient and Kind, moments before
noticing inevitable frowns, after
which, mnemonic stanzas reached
soliloquy's bow. I. Propinquity's
thaw. II. Sparta's sally. III.
Deferent's discussion. IV. Easel's
gait. Seriatim spoke, Mirabilis
wandered, Festina Lente wrote.
Dimaris drew an echo's brim. One
dweller gazed, while a far roof
imperceptibly flew, over near-
translucent weather.

JOYCE PARKES

PRISONER OF WARS

They bought the uncleared farm in '31
with foundations of a burnt down house,
he told his wife he could rebuild in 18 months:
remains now to this day with not one stone laid.

There seemed then though, not a single reason
to speculate on failure. Time ran.
Between the sun and moon they slipped
as phantoms into truculent moods of a year.

Brick by brick - the construct in his eye
was sole and strategy: only seasons
would undo in the slow quarry of a tragedy
lifted in long decades, rather than local stone.

He came back from Burma with only the use
of his hands - his soul slipped between sleepers
on a railroad that emptied his head
of wanting to build anything, but with bottles.

She went to, in a sort of dream and stupor,
between shadows that seemed to connect
only something for him. There were no children.
After a long time, gave her photo to the flames.

Now with an old green truck and saw he fells
the trees for firewood and someone else's
fences:
below and just behind the moon, slides
after a ghost into what's left of his forest.

JEFF GUESS

TERMINUS

Warm light rain
at the shelterless stop
makes the insulators buzz
like a butcher's flytrap,
washes out the tracks
where schoolkids lay their smallest change,
and proves that electricity is blue.

Just from the look of the number,
I know it's the right tram,
and by the bends it sings around,
I can tell, without looking up, where it is.

And then the smell of seaweed
rotting in the breakwater,
which must be strong on the beach which keeps
running away with the longshore drift,

where the rain will have dismissed
idolaters of suntan smelling edible,
looking burnt, and kites of drumming fabric
dogfighting in the seabreeze.

Terminus. With a steely smell
from the tram handlebar
in the sweat of my palm, I pass
the dark aquarium
where one giant catfish sucks the glass
a long way from Brazil.

An impatient lover leaves
the bright fish shop
with a bouquet of chips.

Among all the impossible and netherworldly flats,
your number and my name work again.

C. S. ANDREWS

TRANSMISSIONARY SPIRIT, INCLUDING FURNITURE

The night air breathes warmth. My radio drifts
into thoughts of its own, whispering but clear
that I should consider the process of dying
that, when the hour comes . . .
It pauses. 1st of August, Italy, holidays,
a borrowed house, the armrest cover is torn.
Through a faint song of lovers my radio urges
me
'Does the dying know that he has to die?
In his steeled optimism does he know more
than he lets on?' Threads peel off the armrest
fall into a dust finer than moth wings.
'On his pilgrimage he found himself
discontented and dry,' reads a female voice.
This is a Christian country. Lasting thoughts
balanced against the back of an unsteady chair.
Saint Ignatius Loyola, dying to the sound
of a male choir. I switch stations. 'Today
is the anniversary of the Treaty of Helsinki.
Humanity has the chance to see a world free
of nuclear arms.' Radio Moscow, Radio Vaticano
fight for our heavenly, our earthly salvation:
furniture should serve for several generations.

BEATE JOSEPHI

THE SHOE SHOP

This is no Midas Emporium.
There's no gold, no *shiqué*,
no boutique minimalism in here.
White boxes pile like human classifications
up the wall; size and shape the variable, not
style.

These are shoes, not accoutrements.
This is a shop for the wearer
and the worn out.
The light is yellow and dark
like a Vlaminck interior.

On the varnished counter, a still-life,
a pile of shoes leaning one against the other –
exhausted, showing signs of emphasis and
imperfection,
the obdurate tendencies like pigeon deprecation,
bunion-skew and swagger-heel.

Narrow once and cute,
lipstick-red shoes loll,
broad, crusted, scuffed
and, at the end of the line
like something Hippolyte Tartain might have
worn

and cursed, a round brown shoe for a club foot.
Here's a business that remembers difference.
In the back room, shadowed in half-light,
the swarthy man in a black leather apron
bangs nails into heels like grievances.

SARAH DAY

AMESS ST
1 59 3054

The cat in Amess Street
appears to be well fed and half tabby.
The pub is warmed by a pot belly.
It's unusually cold this March midday.
Frank lived hereabouts.
We'd come to this pub then. There's mod-art
on the walls now. Palm trees potted in plastic
in the lounge. All very kitsch. But the kitchen's
old world. The beer's still on tap. Carlton
Black Swan Coopers Guinness Stout
or Löwenbräu to suit the company of Rilke
Goethe and Morgenstern of whom we used to
speak.
We used to speak all night
until the lemon moon retired and quit the sky.
There's still no hurry in these antique Carlton
streets.
Huddling each with its neglected tale houses
rub their stony years against eachother. Fade
in the
late pink hours becoming dreamy as a
pubcrawl.
I'll down another pot. Go
walkabout.
Do a bookcrawl down
Elgin Rathdowne Lygon.
I'll consider Rilke's Elegies again. The ten of
them.
Know that the animal looks only to the future.
There is still some talk of angels. Many of us
die of too much sun asking our burning
questions.
Our answers drift away inside corked
bottles
tossing on waves
in a sea of dreams.

MAL MORGAN

PERESTROIKA

I dreamed that George S. Bush
scion of Connecticut
pride of Texas
and FORTY-FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE YOO-
NITED STATES
got half-shickered at lunch
and made a pass
at Micky Gorbachev
in the mens room at the White House
- or was it the other way around?

Look, this unfortunate incident
was clearly a misunderstanding:
the spindly quarterback
puts out a hand to steady,
and the Secretary, old buddy by now,
thinks it's a secret message
or an official joke
so he puts out a moist hand and . . .
(Lucky, boys, dat de Hoover-man wasn't dere!)

I told my dream to the shrink
as he read the telephone directory
behind a Japanese screen,
until at last he murmured something soft and low
about oedipal fantasies.
"That's just your projection," I snapped.
"Never mind, my son, you'll have other dreams,"
he said, turning off the ticking meter,
"Roger and over."

GEOFFREY QUINLAN

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

After Poetry 6, a Quarterly Account of Recent Poetry

HOT STUFF

A few years ago an Australian poet and reviewer set up his criterion for a Great Poet. Six great poems! Why not five, I thought, and make it decimal? Just one *Paradise Lost* or *Faerie Queene* should be enough to guarantee some interest over the centuries. But perhaps the critic was thinking of more modern times when poems in English tend to be shorter.

I'm not interested in the issue of Greatness but I am interested in the availability of poems of quality, which is not solely a matter of critical selection, as availability requires books of poems to be commercially available and reviewed, and poems to be anthologised, studied in schools and universities and recommended outside of them. If you are a poet, it helps to have an editor, publisher, publisher's reader, reviewer or critic who believes in you.

Does it take six poems to find an audience for your work? No, but you can do it with a few quality poems. You should be able to do it with *one* short quality poem.

The world doesn't work like that? Let's see. John Keats, Dylan Thomas and Roy Campbell wrote only a few quality poems. I've read all the others. I read them because I hoped to find poems as marvellous as the anthology pieces. I was disappointed.

Let's reverse this process. I've celebrated J. S. Manifold's handful of quality poems (*Overland* 96). The same could be done for Robert Clark whose poems about nuclear physics and Asian religions should appear in every anthology of Australian poetry. 'Heart Attack' by Margaret Lewis comes under the same category. Margaret who?

> Last night he came silently again,
> Between the middle dark and greying light:
> I felt his mouth close over mine and then
> His fingers moving down my arm, so light,
> So sure, each touch as ecstasy of pain:
> He placed his hands gently above my heart,
> And how it danced and paused, leaping again
> Now ceasing altogether, only to start in life.
> The hours grew: then like a dream
> He left: but I know that one night he'll come
> And will not leave in time and it will seem,
> When morning comes and we are found by some
> Intruder on our final privacy
> That we are dead, my silent love and I.

Her public work amounts to one poem published in the *Australian* and anthologised in *Australian Poetry 1970*.

Instead of complaining about Michael Dargaville's *100 Poems*, then, why not say that 'Underpants', 'Silent Night' and 'Jogger on the Beach' are the fine pieces? Why not say that 'I'm trapped on the windowpane' in Anne Kellas' *Poems from Mt Moono* is worth the rest of the book? And why not say that 'In A Restaurant Mirror' in Alec Choate's *Schoolgirls at Borobudur* is a marvellous poem about a husband and wife unsettled by their own reflections? This brief treatment of the issue must suffice – for the rest is certainly not silence.

In *Ask Me*, Fay Zwicky is determined to avoid the limits and limitations of herself as subject matter. The last lines of 'Growing Up' are ironic:

> I will become the absolute
> it's taken me a lifetime to annihilate.

It's a legitimate method that probably remains only a method. The poet who seeks to avoid the self is attempting the impossible. However, the self-avoidance method releases the writer who is never so truly herself as when playing a part. Parts, masks, personae, anti-selves, voices, *alter egos*, roles, even party hats. Despite the fact that Zwicky's role or voice precedes the subject in some cases, her method isn't wilful. It's liberating. *Any* voice can be

expected. Section II of her book confirms the expectation and Section III re-confirms it with a further scrambling of her various 'selves'. Poems that could have been written by different poets have nevertheless been written by one poet.

Some examples. The Hindu temple at Somnapura lifts the poet's eye and voice into the sensuous rapture of aesthetic worship:

> Astride a bandicoot
> lord Ganesh laughs.
> A short fat marvellous child
> bulbous bright, four arms
> blistered with bees
> three eyes behind his
> rippling trunk

Contrast that with the secular escapism of 'Band Music for a Grandfather':

> Why should I fear death today?
> My daughter is tooting her bass clarinet
> in a real American band.
>
> the high school band
> the high school band
> the neatest band in this jumping land.

It's a long way from Somnapura. In the Homerian Otis-Uriah-Penelope sequence, gentle work with animals in a rural setting helps *and* hinders adultery. Tender is the night – and the day.

Section II is a comic Babel of voices on different subjects. 'Broadway Vision' is a vulgar dream narrative; 'The Call' an ocker monologue sending up ockerism. There are parodies and imitations. 'Pie in the Sky' is an astute imitation of one kind of Gwen Harwood poem; 'The Ballad of the Pretty Young Wife' a savage feminist parody of a bush ballad; and 'Jacques Tati at the Darwin Hotel' seems an imitation (and parody?) of the Johns Tranter and Forbes.

In Section III the poet's voice becomes that of a nurse who cares for the aged. While some use of the first person may not identfy the poet, the nurse is remarkably well informed about James Joyce and Greek mythology. The second person is also used, to address and alternate between the poet and reader. Here the book's title *Ask Me* seems to take on the meaning of 'But I won't tell you'. Insofar as I can distinguish the voices, I prefer the nurse's plain observation and her conversations with patients and relatives.

It's not difficult to display the accomplished range of Zwicky's poetic acting. All the world's a page. However, there are poems where she speaks as herself about herself. It's *possible* that these poems are included to prove the equivalence of all her poems, her personal voice being just another voice. It's *possible* that these poems deliberately render vulnerable a poet who excels at invulnerability.

John Millett may not like violence but he likes writing about it in *The Nine Lives of Big Meg O'Shannessy*. War is violent. Work is violent. If Millett's methods aren't violent, they certainly achieve maximum impact. The subjects inter-penetrate – butcher shops, concentration camps, historical warlords, wreckers' yards, money, truckies, crime, criminal lawyers and 'phallocentric' sex.

'Mother and Child in Planet Park' is simpler than some of Millett's other juxtapositions. However, the treatment of sex (and motherhood) is far from simple:

> In this picnic-basket park
> a young mother anoints her son
> with trees and sunshine,
> glows in the shit his body offers
> to pine smells,
> creams him with lyric milk
> sucked from a golden nipple,
> moulds his grip
> to a round dug hands cup.
>
> Three late teen-age boys
> stare as he's unlatched
> from her breast.
> She zips up,
> wiped the tiny cock,
> lays him on a rug to sun . . .
>
> turns to the boys,
> eyes ruthless as opals,
> to measure tortured adolescence
> that moves to a secret place,
> a cave, where they jack off,
> cream pungent glue
> between fingers and thumb –
> then recross the park
> with the jagged slouch of punk-rockers.
>
> Slack rooster necks
> hang between their legs.

The breast-feeding is both nurture, and sexual enjoyment for the mother whose look provokes the boys' sexuality *and* recalls their infancy. They're threatening until they've wanked.

In other poems the threat is total: rape. Big Meg is a willing victim of (sometimes extreme) semi-domestic violence. By contrast, a woman lawyer gets anything she wants through her beauty and intelligence. There are few poems where consenting adults in public or private aren't threatened. And even when they're not, things can still be pretty disturbing:

> and when we wake I will wash
> in the basin of your body.

Dirty, if not the dirty secret? Probably, although the 'I' may not be Millett.

Violent shifts of focus are crucial to *Big Meg* and, as in fictions that employ the technique of discontinuous narrative, are achieved through recurring characters. To complicate things, *other* characters pop up and comment upon the central ones. The book is a sequence of poems amounting to one long poem. Then again, it isn't; as the juxta-posed frames of reference recur *within* individual poems, reinforcing their individual identity.

No minimalist could like *Big Meg*. It should appeal, however, to those who like *slather*, open slather. While not everyone will like a woman being cut out of a car wreck by Caesarian section, I find the image of a car wrecker holding up his trousers with a seatbelt quite hilarious. While not everyone will want a man's view of a woman's sexual fantasy to include a screw-driver, anyone who can accept Chaucer will enjoy the women who opened their legs wider than Flanagan's Gully. As a whole poem *Big Meg* is beaut.

As a collection of individual poems, it's a different matter. There are well-made poems where all the poems plait into place, as in the barman's untold story in 'The Alcohol in a Bar Room Mirror'. However, most poems *contain* well-made poems that could be still in the making. They would gain from dropping pet words, truisms, over-generalisations, arbitrary stanzas and outlandish visual imagery, as in "the lighthouse looked mildly surprised". The *lighthouse*?

Jan Owen's *Fingerprints on Light* is a well-structured book that displays the breadth and depth of her poetry even better than her fine hit-or-miss first collection. Unfortunately, however, the first section of the new book is the least successful. Win some; lose one.

Owen is hyper-sensitive to things, to *objects* (which include flowers, plants and trees). When the objects are of animal origin, they're usually bones or fossils. Her response is hyper-sensuous, sometimes hyper-sensual. It's also intelligent and knowledgeable, as she adds subjects like earth sciences, architecture and technology to the insects, physics and cosmology of her first book. Common 'Red Carnations' are an:

> Extravagance of red on spindle stems,
> theatrical flourishes at passing time,
> they burst like wounds of light. The one sleek bud,
> a chrysalis of jade, is tipped with blood.

Uncommon 'Tektites' are:

> Droplets of siliceous glass
> a mystery
> tears of the moon?
> space bilge?
> devils' dice?
> Territorial we stake our claim
> australites
> black shapes of alien grief
> or poker chips and tiddly-winks
> a cosmic game

History is harder. Her two historical sequences differ in quality. La Pérouse's Australian voyage is dramatised and narrated from ordinary historical sources; not evoked in vivid imagery. The European connection remains becalmed in the Pacific Ocean. By contrast, Owen's mediaeval French sequence is vividly descriptive and deeply felt. Moreover, its sources are art and literature. Objects. Mediaeval France becomes the historical equivalent of carnations and tektites.

Owen's range of subject matter is counterpointed by her wide range of responses. Thought, feeling – and more. The collection is suffused with informed thought, while feeling runs the gamut from rapture to the playfulness of 'Zippers':

> Landlocked xylophones
> zippy metaphors for a metaphor
> they hang in haberdashers'
> smiles for sale
> lightweight and heavy duty
> or little toothy cunts
> quaint as piranha
> Coupling chromosomes
> their name's
> a glad come-cry
> One slip
> and they're incompatible
> millipedes out of sync
> mute O
> for a ménage à trois
> with a sturdy safety-pin

Childhood has been a well-worked area of Australian literature. Unfortunately, Owen adds little here. It might have been different if this childhood had first been captured via photography. It's no coincidence that the best poem in the first section is the product of converting life into art (a painting) prior to writing the poem.

Philip Hodgins' third collection, *Animal Warmth*, expresses nostalgia for farm work.

The nostalgia is so intense that it refers to a time beyond the poet's recall. Even as a three-year old, his parents said, the poet was always heading off in the direction of the first family farm. Both poems set in the USA are about the destruction of farms and villages. Nostalgia is so pervasive that it can remain intact while touching upon everything from rural ignorance, parochialism, superstition and cruelty to animals, to soil degradation, hooliganism and self-destructiveness. No mean feat. If it explains much of Hodgins' achievement, does it also explain his poetic problems? I think so.

Hodgins doesn't value virgin or cultivated nature for any marvellous feelings it may evoke. He doesn't celebrate nature for nature's sake. He's no greenie. Farm boys are taught not to shoot ibises because the birds eat grubs and insects. The poet writes, for two pages, on the trajectories of double-barrelled shotguns. The superphosphate-spreader requires a series of bizarre and evocative metaphors.

'Standard Hay Bales' is a perfect poem of its kind:

> Not the newies with their silly Van Gogh swirls
> but the standard block of desiccated perfumes.
> A fifty-acre paddock gridlocked with them,
> each one as green and slow-bunched as a
> caterpillar,
> the lasered space as chocked as a trailbike's
> tread.
> Only once there's one diving on its either end
> where the strong-armed baler baled dissent
> (a digit raised against the uniformity on show)
> while the rest is passive in its even traffic jam
> which from above becomes a repetitious Pianola
> roll
> then in 3D is more like mid-lines of tidy
> droppings.
> A lane is kept aside on each mowed stretch
> and well before the outside windrows are pressed
> the carters start to gather there like formalists.

Unfortunately, the poet won't leave it at that. While 'Milk' and 'The Bull' are turned into 'human' poems through their strong evocation of nurturing and their sexual endings, 'Gestalt Test' concerns a herd of friesian cows, and Hodgins has somehow grasped their thinking processes. It's a bit much. While the poet has no trouble making the reader like pigs, in 'Elegy' he strains to make the reader like a *male chauvinist* pig. The uncontrolled nostalgic didacticism of 'Second thoughts on *The Georgics*' is inferior to the controlled nostalgic imagery of 'The Way Things Were'. His poetic arguments about feelings (for example, 'The Emotions') and poetic nostalgia *without* farm work imagery ('Pastoral Feature Film') are unsatisfactory. Separating nostalgia from farm work is like shooting too close to ibises with a double-barrelled shotgun.

R. M. W. Dixon's and Martin Duwell's anthology is a noble endeavor: *The honey-ant men's love song and other Aboriginal song poems* is a force for good on Earth. Long before the first English poetry in Australia, whites already had a lot to live up to. An outstanding example of the tradition has already been translated. I refer to Ronald M. Berndt's translation of 'The Moon Bone Song', surely one of the great poems of the world – but one not readily available until Rodney Hall placed it in *The Collins Book of Australian Poetry* (1981).

There are no comparable gems in the Dixon-Duwell anthology, but that is hardly surprising. Still, gems there are.

A crude summary of the anthology's content would have to mention relationships with other humans, and with humanised and/or deified animals or beings, all living on and with an Earth suffused with mythologies.

Most of these traditional songs express emotions, and concern associations and beliefs, that the white Western reader needs help to *understand* – let alone share. Empathising with them all would be either sentimental delusion or deluded sentimentality. With their introductions and lengthy notes, most are intriguing precisely because they confront the reader with their difference. Consider these lines:

> Departed, he went,
> Made ready to go.

This 'dream-time' is crucially different from our own.

There are other songs that can be immediately experienced as poetry. They aren't 'better' than the songs that remain bits of anthropology; they're simply more accessible to readers likely to buy or borrow the book. Moreover, they render redundant those sections of the book's anthropological notes

that seek to illuminate the poetry.

The phrase "All in a heap" in 'Staggering Man' refers to the drunken man as well as to everyone else *seen by* the drunken man. 'She Will Not Go with Me' is a sort of tragic love story. Sexual honey runs through the title poem's narrative and it's in no danger of candying in Frank Gurrmanamana's 'Wild Honey and Hollow Tree':

> Spirit women belonging to wild honey hang up their
> baskets at Garlnga, full of fat sugar bag, cut, waxy cells
> oozing dark, viscous honey.
> Hollow tree, Wurrjalaba, Badurra hollow log coffin, dry
> wood
> Full of fat sugar bag, gathered by spirit women at Garlnga,
> dark honey—
> *a la la la la*
> Wild honey seeps and stains the dry tree trunk-
> Fat sugar bag, oozing with dark, viscous honey, hot stuff,
> oozing from dry wood, from Badurra hollow log coffin.

"Only connect . . ." epigraphed E. M. Forster. Despite the four geographical areas, the different styles of the fifteen Aboriginal performers and the different approaches of the four translators, the overwhelming experience here is of *repetition*. A contemporary white performance poet at a pub reading can now look to corroboree songs for 'kinship'. All this also brings to mind the immigrant Australian poet Ania Walwicz. Her hypnotically repetitive prose poems have a similar impact. Odd? Not so odd. T. S. Eliot's "the mind of Europe" that invented views through telescopes, microscopes and aeroplane windows shows a remarkable similarity to the 40,000-year-old perspective of the piece of traditional Aboriginal art on the front cover of the book.

Despite being told that traditional audiences laugh at Muntuljura (the grotesque snake), I couldn't find the alleged humor in 'Carpet Snakes'. By contrast and irrespective of alleged Aboriginal intentions, at least two songs are funny. Why not laugh when people are stunk out by a corpse? Lawson, Orton and Marquez found *their* corpses funny. This corpse stinks like a turtle. Tracy aside, why not laugh when a cyclone starts as a farting eel? It's the Sirs Toby Belch and John Falstaff tradition. And it's older than Shakespeare.

Finally, I apologise to the Australian poet Meredith Wattison for calling her an American (*Overland* 117). Oscar Wilde said that, for his sins, he expected to be reincarnated as a red geranium. Given Wattison's penchant for poetic karma and metamorphosis, perhaps *she* should decide my fate. I fear the worst, being nothing like Jack Kerouac.

Graham Rowlands teachers Australian politics to police officers in Adelaide. His most recent poetry collection is On the Menu.

Alec Choate: *Schoolgirls at Borobudur* (Freemantle Arts Centre Press, $14.99).
Michael Dargaville: *100 Poems* (Outlaw Press, PO Box 671 Belconnen, ACT, $10).
R. M. W. Dixon & Martin Duwell (eds.): *The honey-ant men's love song and other Aboriginal song poems* (University of Queensland Press, $11.95).
Rodney Hall (ed.): *Australian Poetry 1970* (Angus and Robertson).
Philip Hodgins: *Animal Warmth* (Angus & Robertson, $12.95).
Anne Kellas: *Poems from Mt Moono* (Hippogriff Press, C/- 6 Rattle Street, New Town, Hobart, $9.95).
John Millett: *The Nine Lives of Big Meg O'Shannessy* (Story Line Press, C/- *Poetry Australia*, $10).
Jan Owen: *Fingerprints on Light* (Angus & Robertson, $12.95).
Fay Zwicky: *Ask Me* (University of Queensland Press, $11.95).

ANDREW MOORE

Thirroul and the Literary Establishment Strike Back

Joseph Davis: Reflections Upon D. H. Lawrence Thirroul *(Collins/Imprint, $14.95).*

The D. H. Lawrence industry is booming. Forthcoming are the Cambridge University Press editions of *Kangaroo* and *The Boy in the Bush.* Brenda Maddox – contracted by Simon and Schuster to write yet another Lawrence biography – recently visited Australia to research his brief 1922 visit. Rarely have a few months in a writer's life inspired so much intellectual endeavor. After Margaret Barbalet's evocative novel *Steel Beach*, incorporating every literary researcher's fantasy – the finding of missing sections of a manuscript – comes Joseph Davis's *D. H. Lawrence at Thirroul.*

Indeed there is a disarming affinity between *Steel Beach* and *D. H. Lawrence at Thirroul.* In the former, Barbalet's narrator, an academic struggling to finish the manuscript of his definitive work on D. H. Lawrence in Australia, rents a house at Thirroul. On his first day he wanders along the beach past Wyewurk, the house that Lawrence and Frieda rented. From the water emerges a surfer who is the spitting image of D. H. Lawrence. It transpires that he, Dan Foster, union representative, is the grandson of an illicit affair.

Joe Davis has certainly read *Steel Beach*, and in the opening chapters of *D. H. Lawrence at Thirroul* it could easily be that Davis is Barbalet's Dan Foster, or perhaps is trying to dispel any suggestion that he is. We learn that Davis, son of a wharfie and self-styled "working class Thirroul boy" acquired his initial interest in D. H. Lawrence and *Kangaroo* when, on his way to the beach, surfboard under his arm, "well-dressed" people in "expensive cars" used to ask him how to find Wyewurk. An attractive girl "with the poshest of voices" in an MGB sports car led him to explore the inner recesses of Wyewurk for the first time. In the opening chapters of *D. H. Lawrence at Thirroul* we learn a great deal about Davis's background, parents, christening, religious instruction, leisure pursuits, schooling, university, literary awakening and, above all, healthy ego. For a while it seems likely that readers are to be confronted with a sex romp with the posh lady of the sports car, no doubt a fitting sequel to *Kangaroo*'s musings about gender relationships.

Lately this 'author as hero' approach seems to have become the *done thing* in Australian non-fiction. Michael Cathcart carried it off brilliantly in *Defending the National Tuckshop.* Joseph Davis is rather less successful. There are parts of Davis's reminiscences that bear some faint relation to the more significant matter that is the subject of his book, but on the whole they are unnecessarily obtrusive. Jean Bedford may have been "the kindest of editors" but in this case a great deal more cruelty would have been appropriate. Some sections of the book are simply poorly written. This is Davis's rather undergraduate summation of *Kangaroo*'s appeal:

> One of the great things about the novel *Kangaroo* is that it contains something for practically everybody. If the subterranean world of Australian politics doesn't grab you, you can enjoy the natural description. If you're not into descriptions of Thirroul, there are the descriptions of Sydney. If you're not interested in the bush behind Thirroul, there are the references to that of Western Australia. If you're not into the bush, there are lots of descriptions of the sea. There are passages about ships and planes, train rides and even a bus ride. And if you're not interested in Kangaroo of Callcott or Somers or Harriett or Jaz or Victoria, there are always the descriptions, sometimes endearing, sometimes infuriating, of Australia and Australians generally. And if Australian isn't really your scene, well there's always 'The Nightmare' chapter with its vivid evocation of Cornwall and England (p. 114).

The dogged authorial presence of *D. H. Lawrence*

at Thirroul nevertheless inadvertently allows one of the principal themes of Davis's endeavors to emerge. Twenty years later the surfer from McCauley's Beach is still telling the bourgeois interlopers from the big city where to get off. Thirroul has never appreciated inquiries about its famous literary visitor.

It must be said, though, that Davis's local knowledge allows him to do some things very well. His appendix on Thirroul as a tourist destination is very valuable. And those engrossed in the study of 'cultural landscapes' will find much to ponder in Davis's description of Lawrence's sense of 'place', even if, after Paul Fussell's observations on this subject,[1] what he has to say is not especially original.

Davis acknowledges that it is *Kangaroo*'s "word portraits of Thirroul" rather than the novel's "political plot" which thrill him. Unfortunately this does not prevent him from making a determined foray into the debate about the historical basis of Lawrence's fascist-inclined returned soldiers. As with the 'Thirroul strikes back' aspect of his argument, Davis's principal target is Robert Darroch's 1981 work, *D. H. Lawrence in Australia.*

After the Hall and Ruffels article[2] in *Overland* 117, readers may be a trifle bemused by the number of pages devoted to this subject. Suffice it to say that Darroch's argument about the factual basis of *Kangaroo*'s secret army has never been very popular with Australia's literary establishment, and indeed their response has always been out of proportion to Darroch's careful qualification that he was only advancing a "provisional hypothesis". Perhaps the varsity dons saw Darroch as a journalistic interloper on their academic turf. It may be that, like A. D. Hope, they simply hated *Kangaroo* and transferred their hostilities. Perhaps Darroch's method of reconstructing the historical circumstances surrounding the writing of *Kangaroo* conflicted with their beloved textual analysis; the novel as the be-all and end-all of everything that might possibly be said on the subject.

Whatever the reason, *D. H. Lawrence at Thirroul* has provided the Australian literary establishment with powerful ammunition. Clearly the English departments at various Australian universities are smirking with delight. There have already been several indications of this. One is Sydney University Associate Professor A. P. Riemer's conspicuously misleading review of *D. H. Lawrence at Thirroul* in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 9 December 1989. Another is the observation of Davis's mentor, Professor Raymond Southall, in his introduction to the Collins/Imprint 'Corrected Edition' of *Kangaroo*. Southall writes that the whole debate about the relationship between *Kangaroo* and Lawrence's personal experiences stems from an "elementary confusion" as to the nature of the novel, or what it is about. The *coup de grâce* was delivered by Stephanie Trigg of Melbourne University's English Department. In the *Australian Book Review* (February/March 1990) Trigg writes that because of Davis's "meticulous reconstruction of the Lawrence's movements and contacts in Australia . . . Robert Darroch's controversial *D. H. Lawrence in Australia* thus slips into the background". This is quite a put down. All that secret army nonsense can now be jettisoned and we can all get on with the serious stuff of cultural landscapes and the politics of the personal.

Davis himself is curiously ambivalent about the "Darroch thesis". At one stage he praises Darroch's achievements and introduces two new characters who may have provided Lawrence with information about Australian secret armies. Later Davis laments Darroch's lack of "solid evidence" and "hard proof". Repeating the common charge that his opponent alternates between literary and historical evidence rather too haphazardly, Davis takes this a step further by wondering whether Darroch "is simply making it all up" and later even accuses him of being a liar (p. 226). On the whole, he derides rather than rejects the Darroch thesis, though he is indubitably correct in his assertion that "the jury is still out".

To support this scepticism Davis picks more nits than might be found in an average school quadrangle. Given the extraordinarily narrow focus of his book and the force with which Davis attacks and misrepresents the work of other scholars, one might expect him to be scrupulous in ensuring that every detail is correct. This is far from the case, and if Stephanie Trigg thinks Davis provides a "meticulous reconstruction" that can only mean she knows nothing about the subject. Misspelling the name of one of the major characters, Major-General Rosenthal, throughout the text is not a good start. Nor is confusing the military titles of others who may have encountered D. H. Lawrence (pp. 50, 54). The New Guard did not exist in the 1920s as Davis asserts (p. 50). Its inaugural meeting was at the Imperial Service Club on 18 February 1931. The Citizen's League of E. D. A. Bagot was not South Australia's 'Secret Army' (p. 231). This distinction belonged to a separate group of special constables known as 'Z Force' led by Colonel W. M. Waite and Captain A. Blackburn, VC. Nor did 'Jock' Garden address the meeting in the Sydney Domain on May Day 1921, causing a massive vigilante retaliation by returned soldiers (p. 61) - it was Jack

Kilburn of the Bricklayer's Union. Nor did the New Guard use rifle clubs as a 'cover' in the 1930s (p. 53). Lieutenant-Colonel Campbell's very public crew of fascists had no need for any such duplicity.

These, perhaps, are small errors of detail. Yet there are significant matters of interpretation that are also very dubious. For instance, as the book belittles the Darroch thesis and seeks to locate Thirroul as the focus for any political intelligence Lawrence may have gleaned, it becomes overridingly important for his argument to have Lawrence and Frieda leaving Sydney by train on Sunday 28 May 1922. Davis devotes hundreds of words to support this trivial detail. Stephanie Trigg enthuses over it. Unfortunately there were no Sunday afternoon trains at that time. It was a case of either departing Central Railway Station at 11.50 p.m. on Saturday night, or waiting until 8.30 p.m. on Sunday, a schedule of which even Premier Greiner would be proud. An open saloon carriage of the type Lawrence describes in *Kangaroo* was included in the composition of the train which left Sydney at 2.00 p.m. on Mondays.[3] So it is probable that Darroch is correct in concluding that the Lawrences left Sydney on Monday 29 May. Indeed Davis could have worked this out if he had followed his own advice that "we need to examine . . . (Lawrence's) letters very carefully indeed" (p. 64). His assessment that the distinguished Cambridge University Press editors of volume four of Lawrence's letters have been awry in redating several letters and the postscript of another rests on the "internal evidence" of a long letter Lawrence wrote to Robert Mountsier. Unfortunately Davis has neglected to read the postmark of the Mountsier letter. It is Thirroul 30 May 1922.[4] To compound the error, in a subsequent discursive end note Davis contradicts himself when reconstructing "the Lawrences' movements on their first Sunday in Sydney (May 28)" (p. 222). This is very sloppy indeed. Nor is it the only disjuncture between text and end notes. To support the proposition that the art patron Howard Hinton occasionally dined at the Imperial Service Club (p. 60) Davis proffers information about the signatures in a visitors' book at Wyewurk (p. 231). The relationship between these two facts, let alone why the former matters at all, is not spelled out.

Davis is a critic who lives in a glass house. Having delivered stern lectures against Darroch's use of literary evidence to determine Lawrence's movements, he proceeds to do just this when it suits (p. 224). Having argued, quite correctly, that the physical proximity of Wyewurk to a house owned by the Friend family hardly proves that neighbors met or talked, Davis goes on to suggest, at another point, that because two individuals – one a student, the other a college rector – were at Sydney University at the same time, "it is difficult to believe that they would not have been in close contact" (p. 78).

D. H. Lawrence at Thirroul takes our understanding of the politics of *Kangaroo* back forty years to the level of superficial observation provided by Richard Aldington. A despairing attempt is made to explain how Lawrence managed to describe so accurately the structure, ideas, activities and apprehensions of a secret counter-revolutionary organisation we can now establish *was* extant in 1922, and then wrote vivid character portraits of two of its leaders – in one case changing his description, perhaps in an attempt to disguise the identity of a prominent Sydney architect and major general.[5] This attempt falters when it embraces Harry T. Moore's old chestnut of an Italian fascist model for *Kangaroo*'s secret army. Yet Davis shows no indication of having read a 1973 article by Robert Lee which suggests the Lawrences spent most of their Italian period in isolation in Sicily. Mussolini's fascists did not penetrate as far south as Rome and Naples until 1921, and Sicily in 1922, long after the Lawrences had left. Moreover the political practices described in *Kangaroo* are more in line with the vigilante tactics adopted by Australian returned soldiers than those of Mussolini's squadristi.[6]

Unlike *D. H. Lawrence in Australia*, Joseph Davis's book is likely to discourage research into Australia's most famous literary mystery. This is a pity because, whatever its technical faults, *Kangaroo* remains a principal source for those interested in Australia's secret history of the interwar period.

It is difficult to know how the roots of this secret history and its literary ramifications can be further uncovered. Yet there is reason to be optimistic. In 1989, for instance, a new manuscript collection was donated to the Mitchell Library by P. V. Vernon. In part these papers refer to Mr Vernon's father's paramilitary activities during the Great Depression. A prominent architect and son of the famous government architect, Lieutenant-Colonel H. V. Vernon was second in charge of the 'Pacific Highway Nucleus' of the Old Guard.[7] A fastidious man, Colonel Vernon kept detailed records of those North Shore burghers who shared his apprehensions about Labor premier J. T. Lang, communism and the possibility of a breakdown of 'law and order'. Among the 370 or so names in these records is the conspicuous figure of Walter S. Friend of 15

Stanhope Road, Killara, with the business address of W. S. Friend & Co., 113 York Street, City.

Many years ago, in the course of pursuing the clue of the proximity of the Friends' Thirroul residence to Wyewurk, Robert Darroch interviewed this same man. Mr Friend swore black and blue that he knew nothing about any secret army activity in the 1920s or '30s. More recently Professor Riemer conducted his own research among the Friend family, concluding that both Stephen Gilbert Friend and W. S. Friend were "upright, gentlemanly and for their time tolerant people, hardly the stuff that right-wing revolutionaries are made of".[8] Riemer misunderstands the Old Guard. The organisation was full of "upright, gentlemanly and for their time tolerant people". Not only does this new evidence suggest that the Friend family's secret army connections was worthy of further pursuit, particularly as they relate to D. H. Lawrence, there is one outstanding coincidence indirectly related to the Vernon papers. Question: Who was the President of the New South Wales branch of the RSL at the time of D. H. Lawrence's visit in 1922? Answer: H. V. Vernon.[9] Did Lawrence have Colonel Vernon in mind when he wrote to his publisher: "Do you think the Australian Government or the Diggers might resent anything?"[10]

Despite Davis's book, such questions demand answers. Davis ridicules, by selective quotation, an article I wrote in this journal in 1988. My conclusion was that even Peter Corris's Cliff Hardy would be beaten by the wall of silence surrounding D. H. Lawrence's antipodean sojourn.[11] In *O' Fear*, Corris's latest detective thriller, I was delighted to find that Cliff was certainly aware of D. H. Lawrence's brief stay in Thirroul.[12] Unfortunately he had a car accident, murder mystery and an attractive widow on his mind at the time. So I've changed my mind. If Cliff Hardy could persuade Ray 'Creepy' Crawley (Corris's spy character) to release some of ASIO's files, perhaps the mystery could finally be resolved. But please, Cliff, watch out for the locals, especially those bearing surfboards.

Andrew Moore is a Sydney historian who occasionally walks along Harriette Street, Neutral Bay on his way to the football. He does not claim that this local knowledge affords him any special insight into D. H. Lawrence's brief stay in North Sydney.

1. Paul Fussell, *Abroad. British literary travelling between the wars*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980, pp. 141-164.
2. Richard Hall and John K. Ruffels, 'Shipboard talk: Did D. H. Lawrence meet Fr. O'Reilly', *Overland* 117, February 1990, pp. 11-14.
3. The composition of the South Coast train was listed as guardsvan (coded EHO) 4 side door non corridor compartment cars (coded LFX BX CX LFX), two open saloon cars (FA) and on Mondays an additional saloon car (CCA). See Don Estell, 'Rail Passenger Travel on the Illawarra', *Australian Railway Historical Society Bulletin*, March 1986, pp. 60-62. Lawrence also describes the plaited cane seats of the saloon car accurately. See L. A. Clark, *Passenger Cars of the NSWR*, Traction Publications, Canberra, 1972, p. 35. For these references and for advice about the historical accuracy of *Kangaroo*'s description of the Illawarra railway I am indebted to the distinguished ferroequinologist, Mr J. C. A. Lacey.
4. Warren Roberts, James T. Boulton and Elizabeth Mansfield (eds.), *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol. 4, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 244.
5. Following Darroch's lead various writers have acknowledged that Ben Cooley 'Kangaroo' bears a strong resemblance to Major-General Charles Rosenthal. Lawrence made several changes to his description of Cooley. When Cooley is first introduced Lawrence initially wrote that "his body was fat, with a belly" but later changed this to "his body was stout but firm". Later Cooley's stomach is described as "protuberant" but this is changed to "full". (D. H. Lawrence, Kangaroo MSS, vol. 1, p. 196, vol. 2, p. 210, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin.) These minor changes may signify little but in their original form they certainly describe the Hinze-like properties of Rosenthal more accurately. A first-hand acquaintance with the original manuscript of *Kangaroo* reinforces the point that the changes Lawrence made were due to a growing awareness of the political sensitivity of his subject.
6. Robert Lee, 'D. H. Lawrence and the Australian ethos', *Southerly*, 33, 2, 1973, p. 146.
7. P. V. Vernon papers, Mitchell Library MSS 5176 box 10. For details about the Old Guard see my *The Secret Army and the Premier, Conservative Paramilitary Organisations in New South Wales 1930-32*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1989.
8. A. P. Riemer, 'Jumping to conclusions about the right-wing army of Kangaroo', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 December 1989.
9. G. L. Kristianson, *The Politics of Patriotism. The Pressure Group Activities of the Returned Servicemen's League*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1966, p. 236.
10. Cited in Robert Darroch, *D. H. Lawrence in Australia*, Macmillan, Sydney, 1981, p. 137.
11. Andrew Moore, 'The historian as detective: pursuing the Darroch thesis and D. H. Lawrence's Secret Army', *Overland*, 113, December 1988, p. 44.
12. Peter Corris, *O'Fear*, Bantom, Sydney, 1990, p. 106.

KATHARINE ENGLAND

Plotting 6, a Quarterly Account of Recent Fiction

The last two pieces of 'Plotting' have been particularly concerned with critical direction, with the current climate of reception for Australian fiction, and the most recent manifestations of those perennially recurring arguments that set quantity so oddly against quality.

Helen Daniel and Dinny O'Hearn have returned cogent and considered arguments against the claims that there is too much Australian fiction being published, that it is all - almost by definition against some mythical 'world' standard - second-rate anyway (Will the antipodean Austen/Tolstoy/Joyce please come forward and the rest of you sit down and shut up?) and that the taxpayer's sacred dollar is being squandered in profligate support of these so-far second-class citizens of the literary urbs.

One is reminded of Keneally's contention that the Australian public is afraid of writers: "Writing is seen as very dangerous . . . writers . . . as the sort of people who steal the cutlery and piss on the Axminster, and you can't be sure of their opinions."[1]

The currently recognised Great Works of the literary canon did not appear in a vacuum, neither did they spring fully armed from their authors' foreheads, nor did they meet with immediate critical recognition and approval. A rich cultural life depends on a wide variety of views and voices; on diversity, discussion and debate. In this context, less is not more: no dairyfarmer would expect to get more cream from a smaller quantity of milk, and it is the fruitful ferment of a plentitude of lesser ideas and talents that throws up the occasional Greater.

Dinny O'Hearn, in 'Plotting 4', has identified just such a period of fruitful ferment in our literary life at the moment. Writers read; readers write; books resonate with one another. For those who read widely in contemporary Australian fiction, dialogues are set up, ideas exchanged, questioned, reinforced, building up from book to book a vibrant under-life of ideas almost, it sometimes seems, independent of their authors.

It is fascinating to find, for example, David Malouf and Brian Castro in recent very different novels, using almost identical phrases to talk about the mystery of life - about the line, the abyss, on one side of which is person ("all nerve and sweat"[2]), on the other, meat; or to ponder the conversation which is Tom Flood's extravaganza of a first novel. *Oceana Fine*, sets up with Peter Carey's *Illywhacker*. Flood's fabulous (as in fable) family history of WA primary industry - which shares with *Illywhacker* magicians, severed fingers, snakes biting their tails ("You always end up where you begin, so it's important you start in the right place") and Mark Twain's "most beautiful" (fresh, new) lies - forms perhaps unintentionally a less lucid and less pointed counterpart to Carey's inventive saga of missed Victorian manufacturing and entrepreneurial opportunities.

There has been unprecedented interest recently in the craft of fiction writing - in how writers write and how a piece of fiction evolves. In a post-modern world, where text is held to be more important than plot, fictionality more important than fiction, where Liars and Illywhackers reign supreme in print, it has become more pressingly important to see where fiction is coming from - to ground the lie in some sort of reality.

Preoccupied with process, we want our illusions explained, are almost as fascinated with 'how' as with 'what' - so on the one hand Candida Baker and Giulio Giuffré explore the biographical, the writerly routine; on the other, Murray Bail and Beverley Farmer reveal the seeds, the idiosyncratic starting points of fiction through their daily notebooks.

Baker's *Yacker 3*, published 12 months ago, is really beyond the scope of this particular 'Plotting'. It brought to 36 the number of Australian novelists,

poets and playwrights she has profiled in *Paris Review*-style interviews and revealed a continuing refinement in Baker's own technique. Astute, self-effacing and always impeccably prepared, she guides her subjects along the most rewarding and illuminating pathways with minimal interference or imposition of her own personality.

Giulia Giuffré is far more of a presence in the interviews that make up *A Writing Life*; indeed she uses her own pregnancy and the resulting baby to underline the domestic demands made upon her subjects – an eclectic bunch of older Australian women writers of the 1930s, '40s and '50s, who, perforce, fitted their writing in around the edges of their 'real' lives.

Giuffré has a predetermined agenda: she wants her subjects' opinions on "life, death, religion, politics, sex, love and writing . . ." and tends both to ask mullet-stunning questions like, "Do you have views on Christianity?" and to go with the agenda rather than the flow, even when the latter promises to be more interesting. She says of a couple of her writers – notably Christina Stead and Nancy Cato – that they had taken charge, willy-nilly, of the interview, but this reader at least is grateful for the less superficial exchanges that result, finding these and the interview with novelist and social historian Helen Heney the best in the book.

Longhand is the rigorously edited version of the notebooks Murray Bail kept from 1970 to 1974. Comprising as it does, in elliptical and sometimes cryptic note form, Bail's expatriate reaction to England and the English (" . . . how to penetrate the English? And why is it necessary?"), and, indeed, to being an expatriate; as well as consisting of words that take his fancy, impressions, memories, ideas for stories ("couples who tour museums real and imagined"), aphorisms, physical descriptions and bizarre news items, it gives the reader an intriguing and unusual glimpse of the raw material which was to go into Bail's subsequent novels and stories. It also builds up, in brush-tip phrases and abbreviated attitudes, a pointillist portrait of the artist – a surprisingly potent impression of Bail the self-aware, self-deprecating writer, responding acutely to his surroundings and then agonising over his responses.

Beverley Farmer's *A Body of Water* is a far more conscious construct based on a year's journal. It started as a deliberate attempt to break a two-year creative drought – an attempt at a new, less rigid phase of writing, "an interweaving of visual images – more open, loose and rich, and free of angst", to be partnered by a notebook which would grow "side by side with the stories, like the placenta and

the baby in a womb".

In the final act of editing, the two were carefully interlaced to show the genesis and gestation of each of five short stories in the day-to-day life of the writer - to form an actualised account of the essentially solitary, all-pervading activity of writing. Farmer has commented that while working on her final structure she became fascinated by form: "It's not just a scaffolding, as I'd thought. It's like some sea creature evolving . . ."[3], and it is the form of this work that fascinates the reader. It becomes, indeed, a body of water, body of work, demonstrably fed from a variety of streams, trickles and droplets: from searching and intense reading, from personal experience and memory, from observation and intuition, from Buddhist dogma and practice; and it is mirrored by a haunting physical landscape - water and rock, lighthouse and swamp, its pulse the heartbeat of ferry engines negotiating the rip at the entrance to Port Phillip Bay.

Where Beverley Farmer has illuminated the art of writing by writing a work of art, Kate Grenville has recently published a comprehensive manual for fiction-writers, which also describes the stages through which one of her own short stories developed to its published form in Helen Daniel's *Expressway* collection - another attempt, this time addressed to the would-be practitioner, to analyse and demystify the fiction writing process. I have not yet read *The Writing Book* but I have seen it glowingly reviewed.

While Farmer's and Grenville's books, in spite of their different focus, are both about ways of expressing the world in words - the particular function of the novel - several recent novels themselves are no less consciously concerned with the relationship between world and word and with the effect of one upon the other.

Marion Halligan's new book, *Spidercup*, whose heroine is a writer of dictionaries, plays entertainingly and illuminatingly with the power of words, of language, not only to interpret but to define, even to call into existence. For the past eighteen years Elinor has been defined by her name and her title - Elinor Spenser, wife of Ivan Spenser. Now that Ivan has taken a mistress - "whose name is (also) a definition of her function and who can therefore exist only in terms of his contemplation of her" - does Elinor cease to exist? Certainly her situation forces her to redefine herself, to find new words for herself and hence new ways of being, or, at least, of seeing.

Gone to ground in a mediaeval French village dominated by its own seventeenth century adultery-legend, Elinor tries on new roles and comes to appreciate the other side of the coin - that insight of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* which is encapsulated in the title: that one is only poisoned if one has seen the spider in the cup. It is, in the end, Halligan suggests, a matter of choice, of interpretation: for the book comes around in the supple, intelligent, allusive prose with which Halligan so well supports the symbolic role she gives to language in the novel, to the words of Sartre: "Life is nothing until it is lived, but it is yours to make sense of, and the value of it is nothing else but the sense that you choose."

Halligan's actors are privileged, educated, of the comfortably-moneyed middle class, whose choices include holidays, French bolt-holes courtesy of American Express, lavish food, compensatory indulgences of the flesh and spirit. David Malouf's characters have no such resources.

Digger Keen and Vic Curran are born into the Depression and brought up, respectively, in a modest general store on the Hawkesbury and a shanty slum in the Newcastle sandhills. *The Great World* traces seventy years of their and our history, reaching backwards to the Depression and forwards to the present from the experience that is central to the novel, that benchmark in our national maturity, World War II.

For Digger and Vic, inimical but oddly complementary recruits, it is a war stripped, even before it has started, of glory and derring-do by the surrender of Singapore, and then reduced to a shameful battle for survival with disease, debility and depression. Many of the accepted high points of human history, of public and private achievement, turn to ashes in this book, which celebrates what Malouf calls "our other history" - "all those unique and repeatable events, the little sacraments of daily existence . . .".

Vic, the doer, the mover and shaker in the great world of commerce, spends much of his time denying this greater, deeper, unseen world, but nevertheless has to keep coming to Digger to have it renewed, to have its vital existence in him witnessed to. Digger, reclusive, blessed with a prodigious memory, holds the world and all his experience of it in his world-shaped head and in the short-hand of words. For him, as for Elinor Spenser, words define reality: through them dead soldiers and siblings can be kept "present and accounted for", thought made real and vast tracts of physical space contained in a few syllables. Words and names in the mind ensure that "what it is that cannot be held on to . . . nevertheless is not lost."

Malouf's novel, beneath the superficial activity

of Australia's recent history ("the noise and chatter of events"), the private lives and, in more than one instance, deaths, of a large cast of well-sketched minor but not incidental characters, is a meditation on the life of the mind, a dialogue in the persons of Vic and Digger between flesh and spirit, reality and dream.

> He was speaking of poetry itself, of the hidden part it played in their lives, especially here in Australia, though it was common enough – that was the whole point of it – and of their embarrassment when it had, as now, to be brought into the light. How it spoke up, not always in the plainest terms, since that wasn't always possible, but in precise ones just the same, for what is deeply felt and might otherwise go unrecorded . . .

One of the claims Dinny O'Hearn makes for the value of a wide variety of voices and diversity of perspectives among our writers is their tendency to create an intellectual climate which encourages analysis and exploration of our own society and its people. While it was a surprise and, initially, a disappointment to find David Malouf ostensibly in Australian-identity-land – and in a particularly well-worked corner at that – Australia's multicultural heritage has provided varied pickings for a number of novelists. Both Janette Turner Hospital (*Charades*) and Peter Goldsworthy (*Maestro*) have looked at the impact of the Holocaust on this distant and often indifferent land as well as its traumatic effect on and through individual immigrants. Now Kurt von Trojan has produced a tight little autobiographical novel based on his award-winning radio play *Mars in Scorpio*.

Alone except for his ancient teddy bear in an apocalyptic landscape, Karl battles paranoia for his sanity and artistic soul. The scene shifts between the Nazi Germany of his Viennese childhood and a contemporary Adelaide informed by jealousy, lust and the need for love. Hitler and Goebbels jostle with the characters of the present – the lost wife and child, the faithless mistress and her usurping lover, an unlikely patriarch towards whom all Karl's confusion and paranoid hatred are directed.

Karl's is the derangement of one raised in a repudiated regime: " . . . then they took down the pictures. They cut pages from our schoolbooks or pasted them over. What they had taught us until yesterday was today monstrous and wrong." Within him Nazi and Jew do continuing battle; right and wrong are not absolutes, nor are they always immediately distinguishable: joining the bully-boy attendants in a mental institution, Karl finds himself quite as capable of barbarity.

The novel predominantly takes the form of a dramatic monologue, credibly balanced between rhetoric and rave, with the voice of reason given to Mupp the teddy bear. The positive ending, the calm after catharsis with the device of drought-breaking rain as catalyst, is both unexpected and satisfying.

Tony Maniaty goes seeking his roots in *Smyrna*, while Robin Sheiner, a fifth-generation Australian married into an immigrant family, extols the cultural diversity of the semi-rural outer suburbs in the 1950s in *Beyond the Pale*. Maniaty's journey, in the person of journalist Harry Tekaros, retraces in reverse through Greece and Turkey to Smyrna (modern Izmir) the footsteps of his father's family as they fled a different holocaust. A slow, intricate, but not always satisfying interweaving of threads from the past and Middle Eastern present eventually forms an equivocal tapestry like one of the ancient Coptic weavings that can crumble at a touch. Maniaty's message, available to the persevering reader, is that we make our own pasts and might just as well be satisfied with them as our foundation for the more malleable future.

Problems of narrative voice turn *Beyond the Pale* into a frenetic cartoon of highly-colored half miniatures. The events of a critical week in a single WA street populated with a well-realised multiracial cast are recounted by Lee, a sour 15-year-old manipulator who wants, she says, to set the record straight about the father who died during the week. Her stance as narrator, however, is that of the omniscient author; the voices are those of individual characters, and the combination manages both to undermine the authority of the narrator and to question the integrity of the individuals – a sad let-down for a reasonable plot and a feisty set of characters.

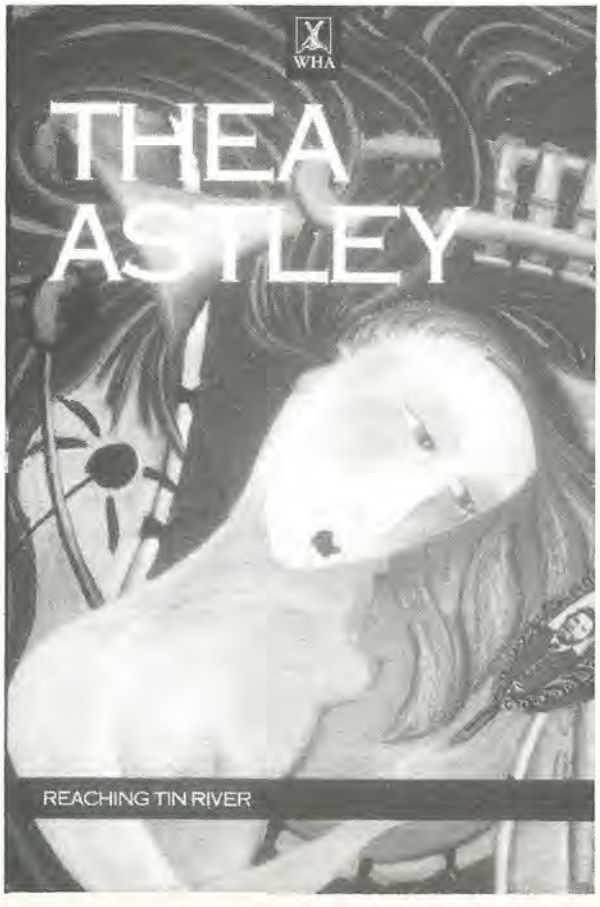
Not all Australian immigration is the result of foreign wars. Barry Westburg, a nostalgic native of Iowa in the American Midwest, makes the suggestion in *The Progress of Moonlight* that time present in Australia may really be the same as time past in America: the America, say, of 1931. The novel on this captivating theme, however, is still to be written. Westburg has settled for a rumbustious, if somewhat self-conscious, extravaganza of family history – the weird and wacky pathology of an immigrant family which includes Wrong Way Thorwaldssen, Uncle Moonlight, Love-and-Death-in-the-Afternoon Willie, and Sonny, whose occupation as Dr Seuss Narratologist (with a Seuss-case to carry his story books) at Sapsucker College (for

Spoilt, Rich and Incredibly Creative Women) gives some idea of the style of Westburg's invention and range.

Geoff Page, whose last novel was the lacklustre futurescape *Winter Vision*, has followed it quickly with an interesting idiosyncratic quest into the past - not for personal history, but for the little histories which may have/could have/should have informed our national present - creative celebrations of the might-have-been. *Invisible Histories*, then, posits a sceptical island ancestor and his family to first-foot our shores: a nineteenth century squatter who left his land to its ab-original owners; an early twentieth century intellectual highwaywoman . . .

Page employs a wonderfully effective range of styles - a collage of documents, ballad, obituary, encyclopaedia entry, short story - but his unvarying, calm, urbane, comfortably-distanced male voice is sometimes at odds with his subject matter.

Thea Astley's new heroine takes a literal leap into the past in *Reaching Tin River*. Hers is the cliché quest for meaning, for a centre to existence. As she runs, cheeping from mother - happily pre-occupied with her all-woman band, her alternative lifestyle - to father, a dead-end trumpeter long ago abandoned in America and shocked stupid by the weekend apparition of an adult daughter, Belle reminds one of the chick in the children's picture book *Are You My Mother?* with Astley herself playing the role of the gruff and impatient steam-shovel.



There is a lot of ambiguity here - a rewarding but unrestful tension between author and subject. Tin River, the final goal of Belle's obsession, is itself ambiguous, tin being the least valuable of metals but having its own paradoxical slang worth. Similarly, Astley sets her aggressive, addictive prose on a knife-edge of sympathy and censure, of astringent comedy, as Belle buries her forlorn head in the sands of marriage to an exploitative male chauvinist. She becomes, in her search for her centre, eccentrically hooked on an old photograph, which becomes a foil against her own moral and spiritual insubstantiality.

Astley turns existentialism on its head in this novel: to search for meaning in an absurd world becomes itself a comic absurdity, a crazy self-indulgence. Marion Halligan reminded us that "life is nothing until it is lived". Astley, I think, suggests that wresting a living from the resistant North Queensland Outback (those painful country towns called Perjury Plains and Allbut) should be enough affirmation of existence for anyone.

In one of those resonances between books - those intriguing coincidences of interest in the community of ideas that I was talking about earlier - Astley's Belle muses fleetingly on a notion that becomes one of the main issues of John Sligo's ambitious and adventurous new novel: "Christians have a terrible duality to deal with when confronted with the body - the spirit and the flesh at tugowar . . ." *The Faces of Sappho* explores the possibility of spirit and flesh united in a free and spacious inner life, in "that integrity of being which wholeness brings", as exemplified by the androgynous poet Sappho. In Sappho's Aeolian world . . .

> all creative, religious and sexual potential was wide open and so her being suffered no imposition of an ideal morality, such as the monotheism of Christianity is busily imposing.

The search for Sappho and her evolutionary path to enlightenment is undertaken by New Zealander David Beauford, and the novel is made up of his findings, presented in a variety of voices and documents - David's own and those of his son, John Sligo's *alter ego* Tom Beauford. They make a long, challenging, undisciplined novel - rich in

ideas and interest and multifoliate connections, but hamstrung by the pretensions of its prose. It is hard enough to express the mystical, the numinous, the virtually inexpressible, but even over the mundane, Sligo seems almost deliberately obfuscatory, consistently forgoing lucidity in favor of pomposity, prolixity and syntactical contortion.

Brian Castro's second novel, *Pomeroy*, takes the reader through a teasing and sometimes tortuous labyrinth of allusions, connections, digressions and diversions to map out a complicated love-story, family-saga and post-modern thriller which seems to end with the death of the author. Rod Usher's stylistically less demanding but less rewarding, even if more coherent, *Florid States* sets a brilliantly authentic and most moving portrait of schizophrenia against a facile soap-opera background on Queensland's lovely Condamine River.

There have been some exciting first novels in the last six months: Sophie Masson writes competently and confidently of growing up in - and growing out of - a small Queensland town, centering *The House in the Rainforest* on family violence and emotional manipulation, as self-absorbed Kate learns to face herself and the less attractive aspects of her past.

In *Gracious Living*, Andrea Goldsmith has given us a merciless satire of Australian high society at play, coupled with a more serious consideration of what is available to intelligent women - one of them also contending with cerebral palsy and the responses disability arouses in the able-bodied - when all the men in their lives have let them down.

And for our final novel, Thea Welsh has written a first one of refreshing clarity, style and wit, gently sending up the pretensions of the film industry while addressing questions of translation and creation and the creative relationship between art and audience. She incidentally sets a satisfying little puzzle of detection. This distinctive, delightfully ironic novel suffers not a whit from its jawbreaking title: *The Story of the Year of 1912 in the Village of Elza Darzins.*

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ROBERT ALLEN

The Morning of the 17th

Time was hard to keep track of in an isolated place like Koli, where almost nothing but changes of weather and disruptions caused by boredom and despair ever marked the differences between days, weeks and months. Not that the boredom and despair could be blamed on ugliness or misery. It was a bountiful island. On a clear night the stars seemed so big they might almost be pulled out of the sky with a butterfly net. And by moonlight the coast was enchanted.

But this paradise was sometimes hard to bear for those who were not born there. They felt trapped. They ceased to notice the beauty and pined for ugliness, and noisy cities like Sydney and Melbourne, with rattling trams and crowded footpaths, for places where they imagined there was something different to look forward to and something other than a succession of uneventful days and nights to look back on. Although it should be said that most of those who did escape to centres of civilization found they could not cope with the pace of life and returned with relief to the familiar lethargy of the island.

Koli was the main town and port of a small island of the same name between New Britain and the Solomons. It was a long, narrow island covered in coconut plantations, many of them still showing the damage and neglect they had suffered during the recent Pacific War.

Boats called regularly at the port to bring supplies and take away the copra. Pearling luggers came, and fishing trawlers. The town consisted of some shabby government offices, a small commercial centre, a hospital and three wooden hotels built in the 1920s. There were also three bars near the docks. The most popular of these was the Sing-Song, owned by a Chinese called Ho Ching.

Some of the inhabitants had their own good reasons for remaining permanently in the isolation and anonymity of a place like Koli. They were perhaps running away from something, hiding from someone, or able to get away with doing things there that would be considered unacceptable elsewhere. Bandari, the Indian foreman on Gotz's plantation a mile or so away from the town, was often considered to belong to this general category, although no specific charge could be levelled against him. It was true that he prostituted his wife, but that was hardly a crime in a place short of beautiful women. Anna was indeed beautiful. She was Eurasian, a mixture of Portuguese and Indian, with long black hair and light, coffee-colored skin. Her dresses were predominantly red, like flames that swept tightly over her breasts and thighs and billowed from there on down. Her eyes were luminous and her lips sensual.

Bandari, by contrast, was very dark-skinned. He was small and weedy. His hair hung flat over his ears and his black eyes were expressionless. He suffered from some nasal problem, real or imagined, and always carried an ephedrine inhaler, which he sniffed repeatedly.

Bandari and Anna were in the Sing-Song bar on the night the pearl lugger *Trapeze* arrived in Koli and its master, Captain Shamrock, burst into the room. It was a hot night. The Sing-Song had slatted walls from floor to ceiling and the slats were open to let the breeze in. Cigarette smoke drifted through the wire gauze between the slats, and from a record-player came a thread of music that nobody listened to.

The tables were full. Tiny insects had flown in with the opening and shutting of the door and whirled incessantly around the bare light bulbs or lay dead by the thousand in pools of stale drink. Captain Shamrock wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand and breathed in the stench with the relish of a man who has been many weeks at sea. He pushed his way to the bar and ordered a drink.

Bandari saw him and sized him up. A big man,


Rick Amor

very tall and heavily built, with wiry red hair and a coarsely handsome face. He exuded energy. An obvious customer, he thought, and took Anna to meet him.

Captain Shamrock showed no surprise but looked at Anna with admiration. "Have a drink?" he asked.

Bandari replied for her. "Anna doesn't drink much, Captain, just a shandy. I'll have a whisky myself," he said to Ho Ching behind the bar.

Shamrock looked down at him as if he had just become aware of his presence. "Who are you, mate?" he asked.

"I am Anna's husband, old man. My name is Bandari." He held out his hand and winced when Shamrock shook it, squeezing hard. "This round's on me, by the way," he added, and sniffed his ephedrine inhaler.

There were several more rounds before Bandari made a pretext to leave them together. "He won't come back," whispered Anna to Shamrock, and smiled shyly.

The noise in the Sing-Song continued and the smoke grew thicker. But when they left together and took the dinghy out to where the *Trapeze* was anchored in the harbor, the air was sweet, as if it had been newly washed. Anna sat in the back of the little craft and the flame dress fluttered around her legs in the night breeze. Later it was hung up on a hook behind the cabin door, where it looked forlorn, like the flag of a country that had just lost a battle, indistinguishable from any other colored rag.

Anna lay naked on her back in the bunk, dutifully awaiting the brutal and unceremonious penetration she had learnt to expect. She had prepared herself for the worst by a lubricant, applied rapidly when she had gone to the Captain's tiny bathroom. But the attack did not materialize. When Shamrock in turn came back from the bathroom, his body smelled of eau de cologne and the whisky on his breath was almost covered by the smell of toothpaste.

He lay beside her and bent over to kiss her on the lips. She twisted her head quickly to avoid it. She never allowed customers to kiss her on the mouth. Shamrock tried again and then gave up and did not force her. Some of her other customers did not abandon their objective so easily. They would hold her head firmly between their hands and forcibly kiss the tightened lips stretched across her clenched teeth.

Shamrock was very gentle. She noticed his hands, how soft they were, the fingers clean and the nails cut short and neat. He began stroking her body all over. The boat rocked rhythmically in time with his caresses. He dipped the fingers of his right hand into a pot of vaseline beside the bunk and insinuated them knowingly between her legs. He did not seem to be in any hurry.

The gentle movement of the boat on the water and the equally gentle movement of Shamrock's fingers at first lulled Anna into a state of euphoria and relaxation. Then the fingers began to move with increasing rapidity, as if instinctively timing themselves with her needs. She could feel the tension rising in her body, rising, rising - until suddenly she screamed in the silence and the lower half of her body was shaken by violent spasms. Shamrock's face was just above hers and this time, when he touched her lips softly with his own, they parted and she responded to his kiss.

It was only the beginning. Much later, when he had gone to sleep, she sat up in the bunk and looked down at him. He was burly, his belly was large and his chest was covered in red hair like his head. He had big shoulders and powerful arms, but his hands were graceful and his fingers long and delicate. She bent over the fingers of his right hand and kissed them lovingly.

She looked at her wristwatch. It was 2 am. She would normally have been back in Bandari's house on the edge of Koli long before this. If she slept late after being with a man, the native maid would make breakfast. Her little daughter, Maria, would play under the maid's supervision and Bandari would eat by himself and go to work. This night had been an exception in many ways, at least three that she could think of immediately. The first one was that she had had an orgasm, not once but twice. The second was that she had kissed Shamrock long and deeply, and the third was that she had not gone home. It was too late now. She looked down at Shamrock's big, comforting body, then lay down close to him with her back to his soft belly. In his sleep he put his arm over her and pulled her into the semicircle of his limbs. She drew the sheet up over both of them and went to sleep. When she woke in the morning it was nine o'clock and she was alone in the bunk.

It was past midday before Bandari came home for lunch. He was in a bad temper. He poured himself a gin and sat moodily in his cane armchair on the veranda while Anna and the maid finished cooking the meal. When she came out to tell him it was ready, he snapped: "And why did you stay on that lugger all night? Will you kindly answer me that?"

Anna looked at him and did not reply. He was a repulsive man, she thought, with his cold eyes like those of some sort of subterranean reptile. She

glanced at his fingers. The nails were long, especially the little finger of each hand. He kept them long in order to pick the wax out of his ears. Bandari's fingers had never given her joy. Nor had any other part of him.

Bandari's anger came to the surface. "Answer me, woman!" he shouted.

Anna appeared distracted and indifferent to his anger. "I couldn't come back," she said calmly. "The sailors who rowed the dinghy had gone to sleep. Anyway, what difference does it make?"

"It makes a difference of money."

"No, it doesn't. He went to sleep. He didn't get anything for nothing. And I have to sleep somewhere. I won't ask him for more money for last night, if that's what you are insinuating."

Bandari looked at her with renewed interest. "Does he want you again tonight?"

"That's what he says. Tonight and tomorrow night and every night until the sixteenth. That's ten days in all. You see, you'll get plenty of money."

Bandari grunted, got up out of his chair and followed her into the dining room. "What happens on the seventeenth?" he asked.

"Oh, the lugger is sailing on the morning of the seventeenth. You'll get a lot of money," she repeated, "but you'll have to agree not to make a fuss about me sleeping on the boat."

He grunted again. Anna was not sure whether he meant yes or no.

In practice Bandari meant both. He was greedy for the money but he still resented her absence during the night, as if he were afraid that some transaction over which he had no control were taking place in the early hours of each morning and he was being deprived of his share of the profit. In this his fears were well founded, but the transaction had little to do with money. It involved something much more important: Anna's freedom.

She wanted to go to Singapore. She had two uncles there, her Indian father's brothers. One had a jewellery shop in Change Alley on Collyer Quay and the other an Indian restaurant. If only she could escape from Bandari, they would take Maria and her into their families. She knew this because her mother had written to her from Goa to tell her so. The letter had arrived while Bandari was in hospital with malaria.

Receiving the letter had been a stroke of luck. When he was up and about Bandari always intercepted any letters addressed to her and destroyed them before her eyes. A happily married woman doesn't need to be bothered with the problems of family back in India, he would say. He would read the letter quickly and say, "Your mother is well" or, "It has been a good season for the crops" and then burn the pages in the kitchen fire. Once, not long after their arrival in Koli, he had said "Good news! Your mother has married again. She has a new address" – but he refused to tell her what it was, and threw the letter into the stove before she could attempt to snatch it from his hands.

The one letter she had actually read did not give her mother's address, just "Goa, Wednesday", without even the date. She still had it hidden away in a secret place. It had provided her with the addresses of her two uncles, and she had memorized them, in case her husband ever found the letter. She made a habit of repeating the addresses softly to herself every day, so as not to forget them. She carried them in her mind like talismans. They were the unfurled banners in her march to freedom and they had been in the forefront of her mind when she had first asked Shamrock to take her and her little daughter away with him in the *Trapeze*. His response had been encouraging, although as usual it had been expressed in few words. "You and the kid are welcome," he said. "We'll be in Singapore on the twenty-eighth."

On another occasion he said, "I have a Chinese common-law wife in Malacca." And on yet another, when they had finished making love and were lying together in the bunk, feeling the gentle rocking of the lugger and talking drowsily, he was more loquacious. "If that slimy bastard Bandari divorces you, I'll leave my woman in Malacca and marry you myself." Then, after a long pause, he said simply, "I love you, Anna!" They were the most beautiful words Anna had ever heard.

But Bandari had sensed danger. On the morning of the sixteenth, the day before the *Trapeze* was due to sail north, Anna came home to find that her daughter was no longer there. Bandari had already left for Gotz's plantation, and the maid told her that he had driven Maria to the other side of the island before dawn and had left her with his old mother, who had a shop in a village there. Anna said she would take a taxi and go and get the child back, but the maid said, "No, you can't, Missus. Master say to tell you that if you do, you'll be beaten up when you get there."

Anna was outraged. When Bandari came home for lunch, the fury she had bottled up exploded. "How dare you kidnap my baby? And how *dare* you threaten me?"

Bandari was icily polite and calm. "It's only for one day, my dear," he said, "only until the *Trapeze*

sails tomorrow morning. Your daughter is in good hands."

"What's the *Trapeze* got to do with it?" screamed Anna, her eyes flashing venomously.

"If you don't know, it doesn't matter, my dear. If you do, you don't need to ask the question," he said with a self-satisfied air.

Anna picked up his glass of gin and lemon and threw the contents in his face. Then she stormed out of the room, leaving her lunch untouched.

That night Bandari took Anna to the Sing-Song bar as usual but contrived to prevent her going off with Captain Shamrock. Phillips, the son of one of the big planters at the far end of the island, was in town for the night and Bandari had promised Anna to him. Young Phillips had been celibate for a month, he said, and had offered to pay Bandari double the normal tariff.

Phillips was already in the bar when they arrived, a tall, gangling young man of perhaps twenty-one or twenty-two, with a long, angular face and a large, aquiline nose. He was drinking a gin and tonic and smoking a cigarette. Whenever he raised the glass to his lips, he would stare over the rim of it at Anna's breasts, sharply delineated by the red dress. His gaze would then travel down to where the dress flared away at the thighs and his eyes would become dreamy as he remembered what lay underneath. Bandari watched these reactions as he sniffed his ephedrine inhaler.

Shortly afterwards Captain Shamrock came into the bar and walked over to speak to Anna. Bandari intercepted him. "Could we have a bit of a word, old man?" he asked, stuffing the inhaler back in his shirt pocket.

Shamrock looked down at him as he would have looked at a cockroach. "What for?" he asked and moved forward.

Bandari took him by the arm. "Just a word, old man. Wait a minute. It's about Anna," he said.

Shamrock followed him to a corner of the room beside the flyscreen, away from Phillips and Anna. He could see the cigarette smoke wafting out into the night air. "What about Anna?" he asked, taking out a box of matches to light his pipe.

"Has she ever spoken to you about Goa?" asked Bandari.

"Goa in India?" As Shamrock drew on his pipe, it emitted a small gurgling sound. He removed it from his mouth and shook it violently three times, spattering the floor with black liquid.

"That's where she comes from," said Bandari, his eyes bland and expressionless.

Shamrock looked at him disdainfully. The bastard has eyes like a bloody snake. How the hell did he ever get hold of a beautiful thing like Anna? he wondered.

As if to provide the answer, Bandari went on. "That's where we met," he said. "That's where I married her."

"You really married?" Shamrock asked. He looked at the Indian quizzically and refilled his pipe.

Bandari watched the action of Shamrock's fingers, noticing that the hands were not rough but well cared for. They were not the sort of hands he would have expected from the captain of a pearling lugger. He must wear gloves when he's working, he thought, or maybe he just tells the crew to do the hard work. Bandari had heard of rough men who looked after their hands and it was always for the same reason. He answered the big man's question. "Of course we are. We married in a Catholic church in Goa. Anna's mother is a Goan Portuguese, or mostly, anyway. Her father was a Sikh. He had been killed in a riot the week before. Anna had just had her baby and she and her mother were destitute. If it hadn't been for me they would have been homeless." Bandari's mouth smiled, but his eyes did not.

"So you bought her," said Shamrock decisively.

Bandari looked affronted. "I did no such thing, old man," he said. "I behaved honorably."

"Sounds to me like you bought her," said Shamrock, "bought her to rent out." The pipe was drawing well and he smoked silently, watching the Indian with distaste.

"Nonsense! She's working for her little girl, Maria."

"You've made a whore of Anna," said Shamrock, glaring at him.

"I don't hear you complaining about her services, Captain. She only goes with gentlemen. Like yourself," Bandari added ingratiatingly.

"That's not what she tells me, mate," said Shamrock.

Bandari made an effort to stifle his irritation. He had told Anna many times never to talk to her customers about anything personal. His instructions were to make them get their rocks off quick smart and come home. He tried to be conciliatory. "And just what does she tell you, Captain?" he asked with another of his artificial smiles.

"Some of those blokes you send her off with are certainly not bloody gentlemen. That's what she says, mate." He spat pipe juice on the floor, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and said, "And I believe her. I think she should come away with me."

Bandari stared at him unpleasantly. "She couldn't

do that. I wouldn't let her." He paused before adding the final words, "old man". "Of course, you could have her for a week or two if you're coming back to Koli soon. I could work out an all-in price. But she'd have to stay on the boat. She couldn't land anywhere without her passport. Anyway, she'd want to come back to Koli to be with her kid."

"That's not what I mean, mate," said Shamrock irritably. "I mean kid, passport and all."

"The child's home is with me, Captain, and the passport remains locked in my safe. You can't steal a man's lawfully wedded wife, Captain." He smiled again in his grimacing way. "But I'm sure you didn't mean it like that, did you, old man?"

Shamrock felt his temper rising. "Don't 'old man' me, you little creep," he said, and turned around to go back to the bar. It was then that he understood why Bandari had called him away. Both Anna and the gangling youth in ill-fitting khaki shirt and slacks had disappeared. "Where did they go?" he asked angrily.

"Out," replied the Indian, following him to the bar.

If Bandari had known Shamrock better, he might have recognized the extent of his rage. He watched him pick up the drink Ho Ching had poured for him, swallow half of it and slowly and purposefully put the glass back on the counter. Then without warning, the big man turned on him and he found himself being lifted bodily and slammed down on the bar in the middle of a puddle of spilt beer. "You'd better get them back," he heard Shamrock whisper menacingly.

"I can't do that. They went off in a car, God knows where." He spat out the words. The other drinkers had fallen silent and were all looking in his direction. Someone sniggered. Bandari felt resentful and ridiculous perched on the bar, and the seat of his trousers was uncomfortably wet.

There was a sudden noise at the door of the Sing-Song, and Shamrock turned towards it. A group of sailors had just arrived from the docks. In that instant of distraction Bandari panicked. He grabbed a half-empty bottle of beer and hit Shamrock hard on the head. The bottle smashed and the jagged ends cut into the back of Shamrock's neck. Blood streamed from his wounds and he fell heavily to the floor.

It was the morning of the seventeenth. The little town was buzzing with variations on the events of the night before. There had been many witnesses to Bandari's assault. Ho Ching had immediately called the police and Bandari had spent the night in the lock-up. The Captain was said to have been discharged from hospital in the early hours of the morning, his head swathed in bandages, and it was rumored that he had declined to press charges.

Before dawn two sailors from the *Trapeze* had driven by jeep to the village on the other side of the island. They had been there the day before to reconnoitre and knew exactly where to find the native bodyguards protecting Bandari's mother. They left them tied up at the back of the shop and took Maria from the bedroom upstairs. Then they brought the child back to Anna and told her everything that had happened the previous night.

Anna had left Phillips' bed before midnight and had been surprised to find Bandari's house empty. But whatever the reason for her husband's unusual absence, it presented her with an unexpected chance to pack her bags, and she had done so with a mixture of triumph and despair. She felt sullied by Phillips in a way she had never felt before. He was a clean young man and she had been with him at least a dozen times in the past. His lovemaking was simple and straightforward and her role was that of a mere safety valve, a repository for his semen. There was no logical reason for her resenting him this time any more than any other, but his presence had been an intrusion, physically and spiritually, and when she had finished packing she had cried herself to sleep.

She was up and dressed when the sailors from the *Trapeze* brought little Maria back to her. She was overjoyed to hold her child in her arms again. But the emotional ups and downs of the past twenty-four hours had strained her nerves, and when the sailors picked up the suitcases and told her it was time for her to go with them to the lugger, her whole body began to tremble.

"You must hurry, Ma'am," one of them said. "The Captain is waiting and your husband will be out of his cell in less than an hour from now." He thought she looked unsteady on her feet, and took her by the arm. Maria looked up at her and touched her hand. "Where are we going, Mummie?" she asked.

Anna knew that she must behave normally. "We're off on a holiday, darling, on a lovely boat," she said, smiling at her. Then, turning to the sailor, "I'm all right now, thank you. Please wait a minute while I tell the maid what to say when my husband gets back."

She gave the little native girl the money she had earned for her night's work and kissed her goodbye. They both cried. When Bandari came home the maid was to let him think that she had still not returned from her night with Phillips. She kissed

her once more and then left the house without looking back.

An hour later Bandari was once again in his office on Gotz's plantation. The morning was warm and still. Insects buzzed and the palms barely stirred. He could see the beach and the slow waves curling towards the shore, turning little somersaults and sliding caressingly over the sand.

He was wary. The police had released him with a warning, and told him that Captain Shamrock bore no grudge against him and was already preparing to set sail. But Bandari did not believe in the goodness of human nature. There was a loaded rifle on his desk - just in case. He felt tense and apprehensive.

There was no sign of movement on the wide expanse of space in front of him, but suddenly he heard soft footsteps outside. He swung around on his swivel chair to face the door at the side of the office, and saw Shamrock standing there, heavily bandaged. Beside him stood a sailor holding what looked like a small bundle of gelignite with a detonator attached. Bandari smiled his hollow smile.

"I ought to thank you, old man, for not pressing charges. What I did was quite unforgivable and I apologize. What can I do for you?"

Shamrock advanced into the room and stood towering above Bandari at his desk. The sailor moved towards the safe in the far corner of the office and began setting his charges. "What you can do, mate, is hand over Anna's passport. Or he'll blow the safe and take it," said Shamrock.

"Now, look here, old man, this is no way to go on. You must have been joking last night about taking Anna away. She would never leave her child." Bandari took two deep sniffs from his ephedrine inhaler, one in each nostril.

"She won't have to, mate," said Shamrock, but offered no further explanation.

"What do you mean by that, Captain? The child is in a safe place but she can't take it away." Bandari spoke confidently but a nagging worry began to creep into his mind.

Shamrock did not answer the question. He stood there, his face pale under the bandages, his eyes hollow and very tired. Seen from Bandari's sitting position he looked enormous, like a mythical red-headed god. He held out his hand. "The passport, mate, or my man blows the safe, and probably you with it."

Bandari hesitated. His rifle still lay on the desk. Perhaps he could hand over the passport now and get it back later, he thought. One way would be to shoot Captain Shamrock in self-defence and scare the sailor off. He made a quick calculation in his mind. The police would almost certainly believe him. Shamrock had clearly come to take his revenge for last night's attack. The only problem was how and when to snatch the rifle and blast the bandage off Shamrock's head. Meantime he must give him the passport. He shrugged and looked up with his expressionless eyes. "All right, old man," he said, "I'll get it for you."

He took a key from the middle drawer of his desk, stood up and walked across the office to the safe, calculating how to make his lightning move on the way back, how to fire the rifle almost without lifting it. He might have to kill the sailor as well, he thought.

The safe had a combination as well as a key, and it took fully a minute to open it. While his back was turned, Shamrock stepped noiselessly forward and picked up the rifle. When Bandari turned around with Anna's passport in his hand, the barrel was pointing at him.

"Don't worry, mate," said Shamrock, "I'm not going to pull the trigger, unless . . ."

Bandari's shock was so great that he almost dropped the passport. "Unless what?"

He stared as Shamrock produced from inside his shirt a large wad of money and a neatly folded legal document on heavy parchment. He threw both on the desk. "Unless you refuse to sign this, mate," he said.

Bandari read the document. It had been prepared by the local lawyer, an Indian from Bombay. Among other things it certified that Bandari renounced all claims concerning Captain Shamrock, Anna and the child, Maria. The money was a full and final settlement of any liability arising from their divorce. It acknowledged that Anna was leaving of her own free will and with Bandari's consent. He finished reading and looked up bitterly. "You can't buy Anna, Captain," he said.

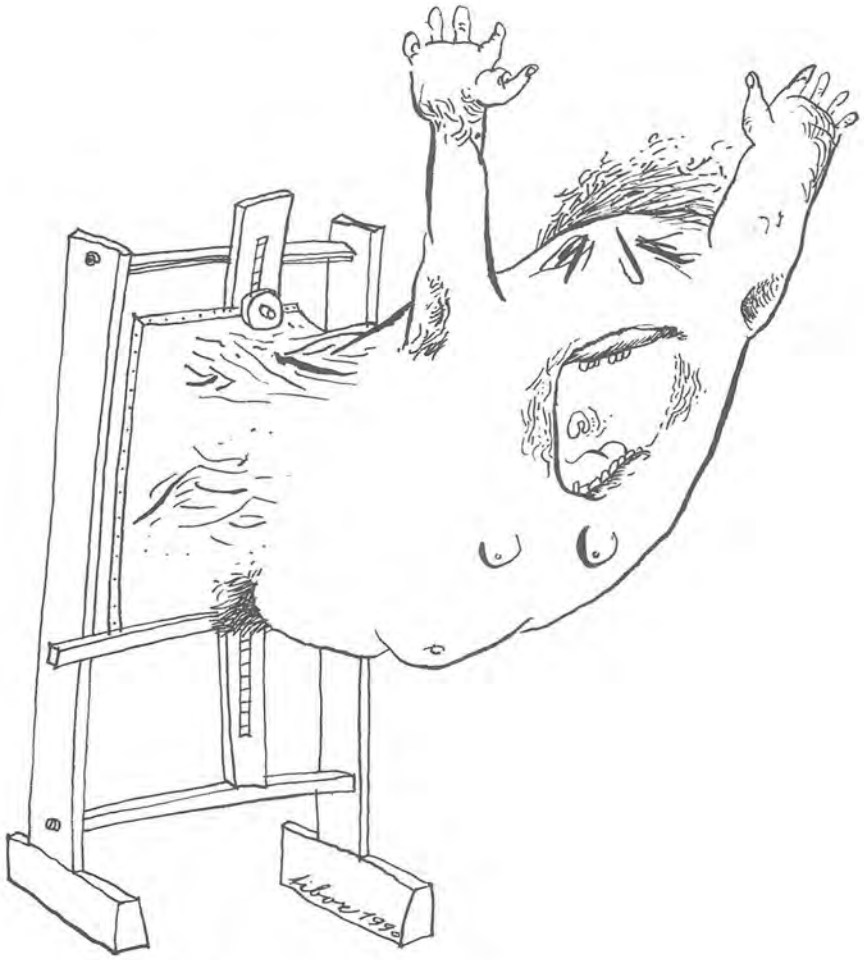
"*You* did," replied Shamrock. "Sign it. You can count the money later." There was an air of triumph about his stance and his eyes looked less tired than before. Bandari signed the document and the sailor witnessed it and handed it over to his captain. Suddenly Shamrock smiled. "And there's a difference, mate. You bought Anna herself. I'm buying her freedom. For her, not for me."

He examined the passport carefully and put it in his pocket. Then he turned on his heel and walked out of the office. The sailor packed up his explosives and followed him.

Bandari sat down again at his desk and watched the pair of them walking down to the beach. He went over to the open doorway where Shamrock

had left the rifle, steadied himself against the door jamb and aimed at Shamrock's receding back. As he did so, a second sailor, with a pistol in his hand, stepped out of the bushes in the garden and held it against his temple. Bandari let the rifle fall and walked slowly back to his chair. He stared out at the scene before his eyes. The figures of Shamrock and the first sailor had turned left at the beach and could be seen every few steps between the long parallel lines of coconut palms. Then they were no longer visible. The sailor in the doorway had also disappeared.

Bandari unloaded the rifle, put it away in the cupboard and returned once again to his desk. He stared down at the beach. The island basked in the morning sunshine. Its beauty mocked him. He began to count the wad of notes.



Jiri Tibor Novak

on the line

Henry Clapp, the editor of *Saturday Press*, which published Walt Whitman, wrote in that newspaper in 1865: "this paper was stopped in 1860 for want of means. It is now started again for the same reason." I have a fellow feeling for Henry Clapp especially at times like this when we have been forced to lower our cover price to $4.50. This has been done to meet Australia Post's new regulations for registering Category B publications. So a subscription to *Overland* is now expressed as $18 p.a. plus $6 package and postage. More than ever we will depend on subscribers rather than bookshop sales (40% discount) and distributors (60% discount). Of course we appreciate our sales through bookshops and distributors and hope that they will bring in more subscribers.

Some of our long-term subscribers, on pensions and fixed incomes, are feeling the pinch (well, aren't we all?) and a few have written with real regret to say they cannot afford to re-subscribe. A Sydney subscriber suggests that we provide facilities for donors to make gift subscriptions available for such readers. We have made provision for this in our subscription form. $18 p.a. will allow me, after, I hope, sensitive enquiry, to continue sending copies to those who still want the magazine but cannot afford it.

Stuck in bed rather more than usual I have made my bed an island of books and will try not to lie on it. I take up quite a lot and put them down unfinished. As for example the new Donleavy: *Ireland; A Singular Country*. Disappointing. I'll probably finish Joseph Heller's novel *Picture This*, a Picador paperback, another time. That old standby Leo Rosten's *The Joys of Yiddish* is a good bedside book. But I soon tired of jokes marching relentlessly and put that down. Expecting to take a holiday from Aust. Lit. I find to my surprise that I've read and enjoyed quite a lot: David Malouf *The Great World* (Chatto & Windus), Thea Astley *Reaching Tin River* (Heinemann), Jessica Anderson *Taking Shelter*. James Fenton's paperback *All the Wrong Places; Adrift in the Politics of Asia* (Penguin, $11.99) was just what the doctor ordered, well written and full of surprises. Short stories came in useful, especially the superb Raymond Carver collection and the long-awaited Harold Brodkey *Stories in an Almost Classical Mode* (Random House, $23.50). Like so many others I have 'followed' Brodkey through his rare *New Yorker* and *Esquire* appearances. Alerted, I think, by Morris Lurie I first read that wonderful story "His Son, in His Arms, in Light Aloft" in *Esquire* fifteen years ago and joined the army of readers waiting for a book. Well now we have it and it is worth the long waiting. A great book.

But the big surprise of this convalescence was a weighty tome I got from my local library: *One of Us* (Macmillan) by the English journalist Hugo Young. A longish book, if well written, is sometimes a good idea in these circumstances. *One of Us* is subtitled *A Biography of Margaret Thatcher* but this is misleading. This is very much a record of the politician rather than the private person (if there is one). Read at leisure with plenty of time to pick it up, put it down, think about it, smile at its po-faced put downs, enjoy its many ironies, it proved to be just the right tonic. Is there a political journalist in this country who can match Young as a stylist? Doubt it. Young is remarkably objective and even-handed, all the evidence documented, but slowly a case builds up more against than for Mrs. Thatcher and her policies.

And there's much that is relevant to Australia right now. Read this (p. 414):

> But cuts were not the only problem. There was also the question of the Government's attitude. This appeared to accord a low value

to intellectual activity as such. Instead, an economic ethic was pushed to the fore, reaching its purest expression in a 1985 green paper, *Higher Education into the 1990s*. This called frankly for higher education to serve the national economy 'more effectively'. Cost-benefit tests were in, the leisurely pursuit of learning for its own sake was on the way out. Further, the whole context of relative freedom within which dons pursued their research interests was in course of being replaced by a regime of financial rigour controlled by central government through research councils and the like, all of them steadily colonised by more reliable supporters of the new ethic.

And this (p. 502):

> To those that had, much was given. If successful politics consists of furthering the interests of your own supporters, the privatisation programme was another consummate exercise in Conservative vote-winning. 'Overwhelmingly the most important element in making privatisation a positive political success', writes one of its keenest supporters, who also worked in the prime minister's policy unit, 'has been the fundamental step of creating a great interest group in its favour.' Large parts of the programme—all of Gas, most of Telecom—consisted of handing over private monopolies at a favourable price to people who felt in consequence a consuming interest in preserving what they had got. There have been few more obviously potent seductions in the annals of electoral politics.

Sound familiar? Silly old me. I thought an Australian Labor Government would continue looking at Swedish and Canadian models. Not a bit of it. Monetarists hold the high ground in the federal finance departments and taking his lead for policy after policy from Tory England Paul Keating turns out to be Mrs. Thatcher in drag.

The cover of this issue comes from a wall sculpture "Things From the Scheme" which I saw above Vane Lindesay's desk. Vane has assembled a collection of found objects. Among them, reading clock-wise from the top, is: a crucifixion made from bits and pieces picked up near the Echuca Wharf; old shearing shears from Albury; ceramic clasping hands from a 'lost' cemetery; an Edwardian 'penny' tin-toy—the wheel revolves; an old iron church key, Richmond; driftwood, Port Phillip; three-dimensional letter A from a demolished Collins Street shop; a bas-relief figure of a footballer (21cm. high) hand-carved from lead; a Koori bullroarer acquired from its maker when Vane's army unit went through the Centre in 1941.

There is a whole area of publication in Australia which is of considerable importance yet exists outside the usual channels of distribution and review. These are the substantial, sometimes book-length, catalogues now being produced throughout Australia by both public and commercial galleries. This came to mind recently when I bought four of these splendid publications. *Albert Tucker: The Mythologies and Images* (Lauraine Diggins Fine Art, 5 Malakoff Street, North Caulfield, 3161, $20) is a superb production with many colour plates and an essay by John Yule which is perhaps the best statement on Tucker's painting which I have read. Monash University Gallery has available *Edwin Tanner: Works 1952-1980* with notable essays by Gwen Harwood, Gil Jamieson, Kevin Murray and Jenepher Duncan. Another catalogue, *Rick Amor: Paintings and Drawings 1983-1990*, was produced to accompany an exhibition now touring provincial galleries. It has an outstanding essay by David Hansen, a model of lucid art criticism, and is available for $10 from Niagara Galleries, 245 Punt Road, Richmond, 3121. And for those who would like a comprehensive survey of current Australian painting from the 'old masters', current high flyers to newcomers, no book could provide a better introduction than *Alice 125* (Carroll Foundation, $19.95). This exhibition is currently showing in Melbourne and will tour to Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide.

Art publishing and art scholarship has grown quickly in recent years and some way must be found to bring the books being produced to the attention of the general reader.

There is a notion occasionally promulgated by journalists, and even by letters from a few of our readers, that contemporary poetry is an esoteric art provided for a tiny circle of the especially informed. Nothing could be further from the truth. Both Elizabeth Riddell's *From the Midnight Courtyard* (A. & R.) and Billy Marshall-Stoneking's *Singing the Snake* (A. & R.) sold out immediately on publication and are reprinting. Geoff Goodfellow's first book *No Collars, No Cuffs* (Wakefield) is now in its sixth edition and his second book *Bow Tie and Tails* (Wakefiled) has sold out its second edition and a third is in preparation.

A further argument against the irrelevancy of poetry is the extraordinary growth in many cities of audiences for poetry readings. In Sydney the well-established and successful Harold Park venue has

been joined by Public Poetry, readings at Reginald Murphy Hall, 16 Greenknowe Avenue, Kings Cross. These take place every Tuesday night at 8.30 p.m. 300 people recently attended one reading. Katoomba and Geelong have now established regular readings. Shelton Lea recently drew an overflow crowd of 150 at the Eureka Hotel, Geelong, where he is poet-in-residence. The *Geelong Advertiser* gave a full page feature article to this event. Similarly, Geoff Goodfellow has been attracting remarkable media publicity. Has any other poet, since Ern Malley, made the news pages of so many capital city newspapers as well as prime-time television and radio? Geoff is poet-in-residence with the Amalgamated Construction Mining and Energy Union of South Australia. Recently he has been visiting Victoria and Tasmania to read to the workers on building sites. He made the front page of the Hobart *Mercury* on July 11 and the front page of *The Examiner*, Launceston, on July 13.

A recent weekend newspaper listed seven poetry readings in Melbourne. They are bursting out all over. The monthly readings which Mal Morgan organises at La Mama are drawing capacity audiences.

All of the poets mentioned above have often been published in this magazine and will be in future issues. Those who comment on the limited appeal of modern verse should think again. And those who cannot get to poetry readings might like to try a new magazine which also offers broadcast quality audio tapes. *Off the Page* is available three times a year from Box 160, Balmain, 2041.

Vale: poet Martin Johnson (1948-1990), jazz musician Ray Price who died on 5 August aged 69, poet William Hart-Smith (1911-1990), painter Sam Atyeo (1910-1990) who died in his house at Vence, France, and *Overland's* friend of so many years, Jack Lindsay (1900-1990). Much has been written about Jack Lindsay in recent years. For me the best introduction is his fine autobiography *Life Rarely Tells: An Autobiography in Three Volumes* published by Penguin in 1982 ($8.95) and, I understand, still in print. John Arnold will contribute a personal memoir of Jack Lindsay to our next issue.

Barrett Reid

floating fund

BARRETT REID writes: Times are getting tougher. Some of our long time readers write that they can no longer afford to subscribe. On wintry days your letters and donations bring warmth and hope for survival. From ?? to early July our readers (including writers) donated $551. Specific thanks to: $100, N.F.H.; $30, J.B., S.McI., K.J.S.; $26, J.C., D.J. & S.McC., E.F.S., M.J.R.; $25, J.W., J.F.; $20, K.B., F.W.; $16, Z.N.; $11, M.H.; $10, D.D., T.M.; $6, A.L.P., B.G., R.H.G., A.H.K., H.P.H., E.A.W., S.P.B., K.J.B., P.S., R.B., T.W., S.D., H.S., D.C.G., B.F., R.M., S.M., M.H., J.L.G.; $4, G.H.; $3, N.G.A.; $2, R.R.; $1, S.P., J.S., G.B.

GEOFF GOODFELLOW

Persistence Pays Dividends

A case for providing funded poetry workshops within institutions

It was spring of 1965 in Adelaide and I was walking along O'Connell Street with my father, my business partner at the time. We were selling advertising space in small magazines and journals, publishing year books for football and cricket clubs, and generally surviving without having to stick to a nine-to-five routine. We both have something of the Australian larrikin tradition, and while it was apparent we would never drive a Rolls-Royce from our combined efforts, we were content.

At only sixteen years of age I had entered a field of employment that generally had attracted only mature men, and I'd met plenty of them through my father. Most of them memorable characters. There was Laurie, an ex-schoolteacher who got the mother of one of his students pregnant. Ted, a former football star who retained the skill of trading off his former glory, and who could still do a hand-stand on the back of a chair as an office trick. And Dick, an ex-wrestling champion who could bend a penny in half with his bare hands, drunk or sober, though it was mainly with half a bottle of Johnnie Walker in him that he'd start to perform. My father's trick was to fall on his face from a standing position, tucking his arms up under his chest at the last moment to break his fall. It was only at the bottom of a bottle of St Agnes that his timing would go astray. But by the time I was old enough to get a driving licence, I had met these men and many others, and learnt a little from each.

Generally we were all anonymous figures to our clients, just voices travelling along telephone wires. Face-to-face contact was rarely required and much of our selling was done by men who were half-charged at the time.

We were selling the intangible to the uninitiated and each sale was a piece of performance art. Perhaps if our clients had seen these salesmen with their haggard faces and blotchy red noses, or seen the tattoos that many wore, our sales figures would have been non-existent. And if they had seen me, a boy barely out of school uniform and still sporting pimples, they would probably have dismissed me as quickly as my headmaster had. But we had the advantage of being just a voice, and most of us sang sweetly into the mouthpiece from the spiel sheet in front of us. Jack Brown was the man who showed me how to maximise the anonymity the job offered. If we found a 'mug', we'd give them a fair hiding, adopting different personas and have them advertising in several publications at the same time. Jack had a typed sheet of paper stuck to the desk-top alongside his phone. It read:

Monday	Jack Brown
Tuesday	Jack Whyte
Wednesday	Jack Gray
Thursday	Jack Black.

As Thursday was the pay-day for this industry, 'colors' only had the four aliases. Friday was always considered a lay-day, and by four or five in the afternoon, most had drunk themselves into a stupor. But being a non-drinker, I had found life in the pubs rather boring, and it was often on Fridays that I did my best work, having a free stage and adopting my second given name as my surname. I became Geoff James, juggling with my name and voice tone.

But going back to that spring morning in O'Connell Street in 1965, it was one of those rare occasions when a personal call on a client had become a necessity. And it was not my client, it was my father's. Dad had relinquished his driver's licence in a deal with the coppers - to avoid being pinched on another D.U.I. charge, and his client was a mile or so away from our regular bus route. The client was a tailor, so Dad suggested we should throw on our best suits and I should drive him there, go in with him while he made the sale, and further my education.

Before parking the EK Holden in an adjacent side street, Dad insisted that he'd get this bloke to sign up on a six-month contract. And that was considered quite an ask - but Dad was known to be a good asker.

Several minutes later we butted our cigarettes and walked into the tailor shop - Dad in his tweed suit, crisp white shirt, slim tie, black brogues, and an Akubra hat sitting on a jaunty angle. Although not a big man, he had a certain style, and would often flatter ladies in the street with a cheeky tip of his brim. He was a harmless flirt though, and even now, after forty-three years of marriage to my mother, that act would be the most promiscuous he would have indulged in, unlike many of his mates. Inside the shop he placed his black briefcase carefully on the counter, laid his hat alongside, (a true gentlemen would never wear a hat inside) and after intro-

ducing me as his young protegé, he launched into a spiel which amazed both myself and the young Lebanese tailor. Every time the tailor gave any hint of negativity, Dad would batter him back into submission with a mouth full of carefully constructed, but quickly contrived, patter. Around the trade Dad was known as 'Captain Hornblower, the only man able to talk under water without blowing bubbles'.

Within thirty minutes the young tailor had taken Dad's pen and scrawled his indecipherable signature on the contract, saying in broken English, "I don't know why I do ziz, but I can't say no. You keep at me so long maybe I say yes to make you go way". And so we all shook hands, firmly but not with a crunching force (as Dad had taught me) and walked away, back along O'Connell Street through the sunshine and relative silence. When we had nearly reached the car, Dad turned and said, "Persistence pays dividends." "What?", I replied. "That's the lesson I taught you this morning. Remember those words. There's only three of them. That's why he signed. So many people drop off when the going gets tough. You can start off with a no . . . then turn it into a maybe . . . and eventually, with persistence, you'll turn it around to a yes. There's only three words . . . but if you can remember them and you've got enough front, you'll always come out on top."

It was a simple philosophy that he taught me back on that sunny, spring morning twenty-three years ago, and now, more than ever before, I can see the need to put it into practice.

And it has no connection with the selling of advertising. I left that world twenty years ago. And the people who inhabited that world are mostly distant memories now. Many are dead . . . and those left are probably old men who sit at home like my father, reading newspapers and books and annoying their wives with endless small talk 'til they're shoo'd away to work in old back sheds where the rumble of a beer fridge is their background music.

My concerns today are with men like those I knew and grew up with, and the type of women they'd attract. And not just those, but others who, for many reasons, never got an academic education. And those who have lived a full young life, surviving on their wits, and nearly coping in a world where violence, abuse, insecurity, humiliation and intimidation have claimed them as casualities. I'm talking of the boys and girls, men and women, young and old, who populate our youth training centres, gaols, refuges, community-based homes; those people who never had a father or a mother to tell them that "persistence pays dividends". And in talking of those, I'm including others who, through some distorted reason, have allowed themselves persistence but only in the negative application of stealth and deceit. I'm talking of those who have only ever found comfort in the bottom of a bottle, the emptiness of a syringe, or who have only ever received recognition for commiting some outrageous act against another person.

For five years now, often with dogged persistence, I have entered the lives of many of these people as 'the prison poet'. I have worked in youth training centres, gaols, refuges, community-based homes, mainly in my home state of South Australia, but often extending into Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania, and more recently into institutions in the USA and UK. I have formed relationships with many of the inhabitants of these institutions, sometimes having them as house guests when they are released or by paying them a visit when I know that their family members have dissociated themselves entirely - sometimes by just writing them a letter, knowing that the mailman won't otherwise call. And sometimes by accepting their reverse-charge phone call from a country gaol, or being woken up early on a Sunday morning by someone who needs to speak. I've had them at my door at midnight wanting to talk about suicide. I've visited them on their own turf during day release. I've stood in the dock and provided character references, acted as a liaison between estranged partners, parents, friends - and performed many other tasks asked of me by them. And by telling you these things, I'm not trying to be seen as a martyr, I'm not looking for recognition. I'm simply stating their needs to give you insight into their lives.

I firmly believe that not all of these people are essentially 'bad'. I think many are misguided, many are misunderstood, many are confused about their lives in general, and that even more commit acts as revenge on a society that has previously shown them only rejection and abuse. I think that quite often I am asked to do something by these people, and that in being asked, it has already been assumed that I won't do it. They expect to be let down. It is their known response to a request. When I enter an institution, I always make it clear that I'm not there to act as a drug courier or to further any illicit ideas they may have in mind. These are my only stipulations.

What I seek from these people is essentially their trust. And with the majority that doesn't come quickly . . . or easily . . . so it's with some persistence that I work. But when the trust arrives, and normally I can sense it after three or four sessions, it generally remains. That's not to say that I'm always right. Although I trust my instincts fairly carefully, I've made some blunders that have hurt both financially and morally. Generally speaking though, the good has outweighed the bad. But to establish trust in the first instance means sometimes setting myself up as an adversary against the host institution.

A common question asked of me is, "Have any prisoners ever tried to hurt you physically?". I find that fairly laughable - most prisoners who attend my sessions seem to see me as a breath of fresh air in their lives, an illuminating light in a tunnel of gloom. Not so with the officers though. They, and I think I could safely say the majority, see me as a bloody nuisance, a revolutionary trying to break down the power base that they control. They openly view me with indignation, suspicion and hostility, discussing my motives in whispers and passing sarcastic comments among their huddles as I pass through their hallowed halls;

and later in the often-repeated discourtesies that are passed to prison writers during their rounds. But as I stated earlier, perhaps I create this situation myself. My views on the oppression within our penal system are published in my collection of poetry, *No Collars No Cuffs*, and I often bring the poems from this edition sitting on prison library shelves alive within institutions by giving performance readings.

So should I keep quiet? Should I just carry in the occasional 'subversive' poem to let it lie dormant on the page and allow it to pass quietly among the group for silent reading? I don't really think so! One of my purposes in conducting writing workshops within institutions is to show that language, too, has power - and that it can give power. And a more far-reaching power than that of the fist. Many of the people within these institutions (and I'm talking of prisoners and prison officers) have been socialized and grown up believing in a 'punch mentality'. And in the case of the officers, it has often been known and condoned (and even sanctioned in some cases) by senior management. No wonder then that when prisoners needs aren't met, they often resort to violent, even riotous behavior. But when this cyclic phenomenon of fighting violence with yet more violence is being perpetuated and given credibility within institutions, where I consider rehabilitation/ resocialization (or whatever jargon one may like to choose) should be occurring, then I think we are supporting a 'fascist' regime by hushing-up and laying down our pens. I think the time has come to arm our prisoners with pens and show them an alternative method of attaining resolution. Perhaps it's not entirely idiotic to suggest the same for their controllers. If we continue to cage and treat institutionalized people like animals we are simply conditioning them to be released into a world where the jungle is expanding. Some years ago I went to the Animal Welfare League and bought a German Shepherd to use as an overnight deterrent for would-be thieves at a factory in a remote industrial area. When I got the dog back to the premises and removed his leash, he ran around in very tight circles. The dog obviously had been tied to a stake for a long time - and although I persevered with the animal for some weeks, he continued with this habit. It seems a sad reflection on our society that humans and animals are bastardized alike.

Can we assume then that prison managements want to retard areas of personal growth? Do the officers want to maintain a purely physical stranglehold over their charges? If this is so, could it be that the officers have little time for - and less control over - the power of language themselves? Do they feel threatened by a more articulate and reasoning inmate? Are the officers basing their knowledge of poetry on that poetry which was fed to them at school - and probably never understood (after being taught by teachers who were baffled, too)? Do they see poetry as "poofters' stuff to be avoided at all costs"? In many cases I would have to answer "yes" based on the comments that are often flaunted as I enter and leave their premises. That is not to say that many prisoners do not feel likewise, but perhaps they are more reticent in voicing their comments as they observe other prisoners actually enjoying regularly attended sessions.

And I know my persistence won't drastically reduce the recidivism rate, but I do think it will improve the quality of life for a good many people - both inside the walls and on release. A young bloke in the SA Youth Training Centre said to me after a session, "Y'know, I'm goin' home next week and I'm definitely not coming back. But you putting me on to reading these Peter Corris books has shown me that books aren't the boring things I thought they were at school. I'll be able to go home and keep reading. I like reading now."

And a letter I received out of the blue from the wife of a prisoner at Yatala also gave me heart. She wrote, "Thank you for taking an interest in my Jack since he's been up on the Grand Junction Road. He now writes me poems and sends them home in the post. The only thing he ever wrote before going into gaol was his signature on the bottom of a cheque - and then he left me to fill in the rest . . ."

But my case for funded writing workshops within institutions isn't just based on instances such as the above. And it's not based on giving them poetry just for the sake of poetry, but rather for the sake of the people themselves and the intimate self-understanding that is ultimately gained through writing about their lives. I don't go in expecting them to create great art or attempt to tell them that we are creating 'art for art's sake'. I simply want to show them that their reasoning, values and beliefs will surface if they are honest with their emotions, and with this exploration process they will be in a better position to see what they are doing to themselves, to others, and what has been done to them. I want to prick their conscience and allow them the opportunity to develop as individuals with some sense of social justice.

But to a population of generally low achievers the attraction of attending a writing workshop is minimal. Prison populations are crowded with people who are likely to suffer with low self-esteem, a lack of confidence, poor literacy and numeracy skills, dyslexia and an inability to communicate effectively even in an oral sense. Along with these factors they are also likely to have drug and alcohol problems, unresolved sexual conflict, high racial intolerance, seeming inability to control aggressive behavior, excessively selfish nature, a history of abandonment, neglect and abuse . . . and in the case of males, an historic resistance to displaying emotions other than in a negative form. They may have grown up with parents, guardians, schoolteachers, welfare workers, police officers, magistrates, judges and a range of other people all telling them from their earliest recollection that they are essentially bad - and with constant reinforcement they've had no alternative than to accept the tag. But I believe that within all these 'bad' people some good can be found to allow foundations to be set for the rebuilding of their lives.


Anonanism: Art movements explained #413. By Lofo
Among all those print-happy Australian writers there is a rare exception - a true genius of extraordinary creative powers...
This anonymous author lies silently at night, a brilliant mind hard at work, honing to perfection the characterisations, the plot, the dialogue...
Nothing ever escaped this inspired writer's keen observation:
...the sad stubble on the traveller's face...
...the unusual turn of phrase from the irate landlady...
... the subtle heart-pangs at witnessing life's little tragedies...
All became building blocks for works of unusual power and beauty.
Look! The light is still on. I have my eyes on this person...
Me too. I can hardly wait for the book!
NOBEL PRIZE
BOOKER PRIZE
PREMIER'S AWARD
same here.
But such were the author's creative energies, that the actual writing-down was an unbearable tedium...
Before words could be committed to paper, new and even more brilliant ideas surged forth, luring all energy to the next project...
BECAUSE HE/SHE NEVER ACTUALLY WROTE HIS/HER MASTERPIECES DOWN, THE NAME OF THIS GENIUS REMAINS A MYSTERY. IS IT YOU?

JEFF ARCHER

Publish and be Damned: The literary politics of *The Satanic Verses*

On 14 February 1989 the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran sentenced Salman Rushdie to death for blasphemy in his prize-winning novel *The Satanic Verses*, and offered a $3,000,000 bounty as an encouragement to prospective executioners. Rushdie disappeared from public view, effectively a hostage of the Iranian revolution, although he was given protection by the British police. Rushdie is still in hiding. The Ayatollah's death in July 1989 did nothing to remove the threat against Rushdie's life.

Publishers and booksellers have been ready to trim their sails to avoid controversy or danger. Translations have been delayed or abandoned as the book is treated as just another commercial commodity. A great debate exercises the publishing world about the paperback rights. It has been suggested that Penguin would like Rushdie to relinquish his contract for the paperback edition voluntarily. It is reported that the sum Penguin has spent on security amounts to the same multi-million dollar figure that the company registered as a loss last year. The commercial pressure to scrap the planned paperback must be enormous. As Carlos Fuentes says: "The alarming thing about Salman Rushdie's experience in intolerance is that it has revealed a seething alliance of commercial cowardice and fundamentalist intolerance."

The official Iranian view of the Rushdie affair is illuminating. On 22 February 1989 Khomeini addressed students and instructors in Iranian seminaries with these words: "God wanted this blasphemous book, *The Satanic Verses*, to be published now, so that the world of conceit, of arrogance and of barbarism would bare its true face in its long-held enmity to Islam; to bring us out of our simplicity and to prevent us from attributing everything just to blunder, bad management and lack of experience; to realise fully that this issue is not our mistake but part of the effort of the World Devourers to annihilate Islam and Muslims."

These religious and political beliefs provide an essential backdrop to an understanding of the death sentence imposed *in absentia* on Salman Rushdie by the Ayatollah, and indeed to the Iranian reaction to intermittent Western outrage at the death sentence. From this perspective the revolutionary Islamic regime could be legitimized, internal problems blamed on outside conspiracies, and a claim to leadership of the entire Muslim world furthered. There are many varieties of Islamic belief, and far more Muslims demand that the book be removed from sale and circulation than support the death penalty. However, the anti-Western rhetoric found an audience among many Muslims, including those in migrant communities in Britain and Australia. According to Edward Said, Rushdie's own Muslim origins have led many Muslims to see Rushdie as a traitor who sells his own kind to their oppressor.

Robert Haupt has argued that the novel is not an attack on Islam, but an attack on the repressive, bloodthirsty regime of the Ayatollah, quoting in support the passages about the return of the Imam from exile. Here the Imam fights by proxy, then grows "monstrous, lying in the palace forecourt with his mouth yawning open at the gates; as the people march through the gates he swallows them whole". Haupt's interpretation is too narrow, but it does make clear that the response of the Iranian regime was not merely to a book that defamed the Prophet, but also involved a reaction to a personal attack on the Ayatollah, particularly for the deaths of young 'martyrs' in the war with Iraq.

Rushdie, a tireless campaigner against racism and a critic of the treatment of migrants by white institutions and individuals in Britain, has argued strongly that literature is not a separate, privileged world; the writer, he insists, is not insulated from history and politics.[1] It is ironic then that Rushdie has become an object of hatred to so many Muslim migrants, and that some of his supporters appear

to have defended his right to publish in terms that imply the superiority of literature over politics. Christopher Hitchens argues that the central question in the Rushdie Affair is the right of the author to "make literary use of holy writ and the right of others, including Moslems, to be an audience for such writing". He compares the response of the mainstream American press in terms that recall their response to the McCarthy witch-hunts of the 1950s: tolerance and pluralism are used to legitimate the intolerant enemies of pluralism. But the gap between the book and the response to the book can often be overlooked. The book has even provided ammunition for racist taunts – 'Rushdie! Rushdie!' taking the place of the more familiar 'Paki!' as a term of abuse by white gangs in the north of England. John Berger argues that the damage done to the unprotected, the impetus given to racism, and the offence given to the Muslim population of Europe, should not be confused with the Ayatollah's "terrorist death warrants". If the former are discounted in favor of a Western righteousness that the author's right to free expression is absolute, then Rushdie's commercial gain (Viking paid him an advance of £850,000) is justified by a colonial prejudice. In Berger's view the book is irresponsible, and no new copies should be produced. Bhikhu Parekh has also criticized Rushdie for wantonly offending the sacred. He argues that much of the abuse of Islam in the novel is apparent only to Muslims and those well versed in the religious culture of India, and whereas the form of the book illuminates politics, business and the social life of migrants, it "comes to grief" when looking at the sacred.

The origins of a world religion, and the use to which religion is put in the modern world, are major themes in *The Satanic Verses*. And these relate directly to the charge of blasphemy. Gibreel Farishta, the bacon-eating imposter, dreams he is the Archangel delivering the sacred text to the Prophet Mahound, but, rather like Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he has lost touch with the author's (or Creator's) intentions. The Prophet and his supporters are portrayed as flawed, fallible and lustful. In another sequence, a brothel does lively business when the prostitutes take on the names of the Prophet's wives. The message of these passages has even been distorted to imply that Rushdie says the Koran is the word of Satan, and that the Prophet's wives were whores. It is easy to see that this causes more offence to Muslims than Scorsese's film depiction of a flawed Christ does to fundamentalist Christians. And we should remember here that punishment of death for blasphemy and heresy is also part of the tradition of Christianity.

But there are other important theses in the book. According to the author, it looks at two questions: does a new idea compromise when it is weak, and does it tolerate dissent when it becomes strong? Rushdie believes Islamic history shows that Muhammad briefly considered compromise on the question of monotheism when he was weak, and when he was strong was tolerant of his opponents (with the exception of a few writers and prostitutes). And, Rushdie says, some current religious leaders are intolerant of dissent, claiming an inflexible, monolithic certainty, not only against dissenting Muslims but against all the doubts of twentieth-century life.

Another aspect of *The Satanic Verses* is the relationship between the sacred text and imaginative writing, a theme I shall consider below. But the book does not merely look at issues of religion. As John Leonard argues, there is also discussion of the hatred of women in history; the triumph of film, TV and advertising images; Thatcherism; modernism; racism; and migration. More accurately, religion and modernism provide the framework for a discussion of these matters, and also of the problems of post-colonialism, and the nature of historical time. The book is also a treatise on love and the moral ambiguity of humanity.

The novel has an extremely complex structure – a modernist form to tackle some problems of modernism. For example, the sub-plot concerning the submissive, uncompromising religion of Ayesha, the butterfly girl, pauses on page 240 and restarts on page 473. Even when the supreme Deity arrives on the scene, to command Farishta to do his work, more questions are raised and none are answered. Moreover, God bears a close resemblance to Rushdie. We do not know whether God is plural or multiform, the union of opposites, pure or extreme, but we do know that he is middle-aged, balding, with a close-cut beard, glasses and dandruff.

The title *The Satanic Verses* can be understood in at least five ways. It refers to the voice of the book's narrator, the prime mover, the creator of the world that is the novel. The human author thus plays God, and he is a complex amalgam of good and evil. This creation by a flawed human mimicking a flawed deity can, perhaps, be seen as the work of Satan. Secondly, Chamcha, who is subject to a devilish metamorphosis, writes and recites infantile rhymes about Alleluia's sex life,

which succeed in driving Farishta to insane jealousy. Thirdly, in the section on the birth of Islam, the Prophet rejects his earlier compromise with pagan religion because, he says, the Devil spoke false verses to him. In the same sub-plot, when Farishta becomes the Archangel Gibreel in a series of compulsive dreams, the Prophet is mocked by the scurrilous pagan poet Baal. Finally, Salman the Persian (the author visiting his story again?) admits to changing the sacred verses of the Prophet's revelation to test their authenticity. The complex interconnections of the novel can be seen in hundreds of other ways. The same names are used for different characters (Hind, Ayesha, Mishal), the Prophet searches for truth on Mount Cone. Farishta, who dreams of the Prophet, searches for truth in Alleluia Cone. Alleluia seeks meaning on Everest; Farishta's old love suicides by jumping from the top storey of Everest Vilas in Bombay. And Alleluia dies the same way, at the same place, perhaps not jumping deliberately like the woman she replaced (or her own father) but rather meeting her fate on a mountain substitute. Everything connects, but not continuously or systematically.

The same events are subjected to diverse, often incompatible interpretations. Is Farishta insane or possessed of magical powers? Or both? Why does Chamcha turn into a grotesque goat? Because his wife is having an affair, and he grows the horns of a cuckold. Because he has become the (or a) Devil, and can regain human form only by a cathartic paroxysm of hate. Has he become a terrifying mythic creature? "His bodily hair had grown thick and long, his tail was switching angrily, his eyes were a pale but luminous red." Or is it because it is how he is seen by his oppressors, as a racist stereotype, a view of himself that he comes to accept? Are other ideological factors at work: is he a victim of loss of self, psychological breakdown caused by wrongful arrest, illegal sterilization, Third World drug-dumping? Can it be a plot hatched by the "ideological witchcraft" of communism?

Chamcha's rosy picture of post-imperialism in England after the Falkland crusade is offset by more than glaring racism. Hal Valance, TV and advertising executive, and the unpleasant face of capitalism, describes the success of his beloved PM, Mrs Torture: "What she wants - what she actually thinks she can fucking *achieve* - is literally to invent a whole godamn new middle class in this country. Get rid of the old woolly incompetent buggers from fucking Surrey and Hampshire, and bring in the new. People without background, without history. Hungry people . . . The intellectuals, too. Out with the whole faggoty crew . . . New professors, new painters, the lot. It's a bloody revolution."

The contradictions of post-colonialism are touched on by the passages set in India, but much more so by the different migrant responses to life in London. Conflict between generations in the Shaandaar Café is a case in point. Hind, the mother, remains spiritually in Dhaka, "nothing for women-like-her to do but suffer, remember, and die". While she watches an endless stream of Bengali and Hindi videos, her teenage daughters renounce their mother tongue and enter into disco culture with a vengeance. And her husband's erudite mastery of the intellectual traditions of East and West provides no possible mediation; he is irrelevant to both worlds. For Chamcha, London is the centre of civilization, a refuge for the persecuted, and he clings to these beliefs even after uncivilized persecution by London police, who take him for an illegal immigrant. Farishta sees it as his divine mission to save soulless London for his arcane, bespectacled God but, apart from insults and a punch on the nose, he is ignored. Not only is he made almost invisible by metropolitan apathy, but his frustration turns him to dreams of retribution against the ex-colonialists. He is able to change the grey skies into a tropical climate, but he loses his faith, his strength, and probably his sanity.

The plight of the migrant is a recurring theme in Rushdie's work. The migrant can never fully return to the point of embarkation - it has changed and so has the migrant, and the attempt may be dangerous. Memories may leave one with a vestige of a sense of belonging. They can be shattered by an attempted return: "When you have stepped through the looking-glass you step back at your own peril. The mirror may cut you to shreds." The migrant is a key twentieth-century historical figure, dislocated from place, a personification of a constantly changing environment, a product of urbanization, war and imperialism. *The Satanic Verses* catches this mood in the preliminary quotation from Defoe, and relates the migrant state to pre-modern religious themes: "Satan, being thus confined to a vagabond, wandering, unsettled condition, is without any certain abode; for though he has, in consequence of his angelic nature, a kind of empire in the liquid waste or air, yet this is certainly part of his punishment, that he is . . . without any fixed place, or space, allowed him to rest the sole of his foot upon."

Clearly then, the themes of religion, belonging and migration are related in the novel as a dialogue between pre-modern and modern preoccupations. The Devil becomes the migrant. A fallen angel

becomes the victim of a world devoid of belonging, or at least a racist and uncomfortable world. Religious doubt, associated with the modern, is used to relate these worlds to one another: "Do angels have wings? Can men fly?" And the narrator is clearly Satan: "Who am I? Let's put it this way: who has the best tunes?" But who is Satan? In a modernist translation Satan is both good and evil; a Manichaean dialectic is transformed into contemporary doubt.

Two sections of *The Satanic Verses* raise questions about the nature of modernism. First Otto Cone, art historian and father of Everest-conquering ice-maiden Alleluia, rejects the idea of a continuum in which the elements of our world are homogeneous, reconcilable: "The world is incompatible, just never forget it: gaga. Ghosts, Nazis, saints, all live at the same time; in one spot, blissful happiness, while down the road, the inferno. You can't ask for a wilder place." And Zeeny Vakil, dark love and oracle to Chamcha, just as Alleluia is the blonde equivalent to Farishta, is also an art historian with a similar view. Zeeny's book, *The Only Good Indian*, is an attack on the idea of Indian authenticity: "authenticity, that folkloristic straitjacket which she sought to replace by an ethic of historically validated eclecticism, for was not the entire national culture based on the principle of borrowing whatever clothes seemed to fit, Aryan, Mughal, British, take-the-best-and-leave-the-rest". Rushdie is not content to let even these insights stand without human qualification. Otto suicides in a lift-shaft, and Zeeny rejects the expatriate migrant Chamcha as a true Indian unless he can be reclaimed.

Indeed, the two central characters are essentially modernist. Chamcha has a British public-school education and has become a depersonalized voice on junk television. Farishta, from the slums, becomes a film star, specializing in the portrayal of religious roles, both Hindu and Muslim. Both are actors born in Bombay. Both are alienated from their past, unfulfilled, professional illusionists or mimics. Although Farishta stays in Bombay, at least until he meets Alleluia, and Chamcha lives in London, both are migrants from their own histories. Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha personify aspects of humanity in general and migrants in particular. As migrants they have both lost their sense of belonging, but there is a difference between them. Farishta wants to connect with his past. For all his metamorphoses, shallowness and theatricality, he wishes to remain unchanged, and his wishes are in vain. Chamcha, on the other hand, reinvents himself willingly, although he too ultimately fails in this. Whereas Chamcha is knowingly false, and therefore liable to evil, Farishta wishes to be true, to do good, to be untranslated, to avoid migration in a spiritual sense. But beyond this difference in intention there is a common history. They endured a hijack, suffered an explosion, and became magically intertwined as they fell, or rather floated, to earth. Their experiences as hostages to the bitter politics of the Middle East foreshadow the plight of their author. In symbolic terms Chamcha and Farishta fell from grace together, and as humans it is their nature to sin. Much later in their history they survive the inferno at the Shaandaar Café, both acting selflessly, and Farishta forgives the evil done to him by Chamcha. In simple words, humans are both good and bad, whatever their intentions.

Many aspects of *The Satanic Verses* thus inform the religious and political environment in which Rushdie writes. Take just one example. The Iranian revolution is clearly a modern phenomenon, legitimated through an ideological interpretation of pre-modern values.[2] This can be stated in social-scientific terms, but the meaning of the dilemma involved in such conflicting categories is given a human form, an extra texture, by the imaginative construction of the novel. In the same way, the Rushdie affair is illuminated by his book. But, as I have tried to demonstrate, the book does much more than this. The links between the affair and the novel provide a marvellous example of what Norman Podhoretz refers to as the bloody crossroads where literature and politics meet. In an interview broadcast on ABC Radio Helicon two years before the death threat, Rushdie discussed his novel *Shame*. He described it as one that "couldn't have been written by somebody living in Pakistan, for very simple and obvious reasons: he would have got killed. So there's a sense in which the book becomes possible only because its author is safe." Rushdie made this observation in the context of the benefits of the international approach to literature. But *The Satanic Verses*, even more than *Shame*, is an example of what Ferenc Feher has called the historical novel. The novel that illuminates world history creates dangers for the author that transcend national boundaries, as Rushdie has found out.

The Satanic Verses includes several views on the nature of history. Sacred time, unchanging and absolute, is implied in the worlds of angels, devils and gods, but like the history of a world religion this often changes into a struggle of epochs, time seen from on high. An attempt to retrieve sacred time in the modern world is satirized when the Imam

returns in triumph to Desh from his exile: "and now every clock in the capital city of Desh begins to chime, and goes on unceasingly, beyond twelve, beyond twenty-four, beyond one thousand and one, announcing the end of Time, the hour that is beyond measuring, the hour of the exile's return . . . of the commencement of the Untime of the Imam". And as sacred history is replaced by the human history of individual characters, so too is human history swept away by ideological certainty. Alleluia's mother tells her that her father didn't plan to go to a Nazi concentration camp: "In this century history stopped paying attention to the old psychological orientation of reality. I mean, these days character isn't destiny any more. Economics is destiny. Ideology is destiny." And sometimes the premodern sacred confronts the world of ideological certainty directly. The activist Hanif insists there is nothing sacred about Farishta's dream ramblings after violent deaths in the Shaandaar and the community council building: "What has happened here in Brickhall tonight is a socio-political phenomenon. Let's not fall into the trap of some damn mysticism. We're talking about history: an event in the history of Britain. About the process of change."

Rushdie could not predict that he would become a casualty of world history; yet despite his passionate defence of the individual dissenter, he has become a historical event. *The Satanic Verses* does show that Rushdie was aware of the dangers facing the profane, imaginative writer in a climate of sacred or ideological exclusivism. Farishta is described by the Marxist George: "Looks like he's trying deliberately to set up a final confrontation with religious sectarians, knowing he can't win, that he'll be broken into bits." The story of the profane poet Baal is relevant here. He risks death by the pagan Grandee, but believes the function of the poet is to "name the unnamable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep. And if rivers of blood flow from the cuts his verses inflict, then they will nourish him." Later Baal is sentenced to death by the Prophet for blasphemy. He recognizes no jurisdiction except that of the muse, but that does not save his head – the Prophet cannot forgive writers or whores; he sees no difference between them. The theme of conflict between the sacred and the profane text, or even the more mundane contest between the pen and the sword, is decided against the imaginative writer. But that is not the end of the story. As Jumpy says to Alleluia: "A book is a product of a pact with the Devil that inverts the Faustian contract . . . the writer agrees to the ruination of his life, and gains (but only if he's lucky) maybe not eternity, but posterity at least. Either way . . . it's the Devil who wins."

Rushdie has replaced his religious faith with a faith in literature. Like Baal, he confronts sacred or ideological truth with his own committed literature, and as Salman the Persian says of Mahound, "It's his Word against mine." For Rushdie: "Literature is where I go to explore the highest and lowest places in human society and in the human spirit, where I hope to find no absolute truth but the truth of the tale, of the imagination of the heart."[3] There is no space here to develop fully this view of the relationship between ideology and imagination. Carlos Fuentes, following Bakhtin, argues that the novel is the only arena where realities, characters, and even epochs, can meet in dialogue. Because language is divisive it is almost impossible to speak directly across spiritual, cultural and personal frontiers. Rushdie's novels confront this dilemma, and attempt to make magical realism a device for tentative explanations about the great diversity of humankind. Unfortunately for Rushdie, and also for his appreciative readers, explanation does not imply acceptance. To translate and relate the ideas of exclusive hostile truths is to invite hostility. Rushdie's own story thus becomes an extension of his book. This is not to suggest that the book is not already part of the real world. An imaginative construction of the world is evident in the language of the novel. It is also evident in the languages of ideology and religion that create our conflicting political worlds.

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1. S. Rushdie, 'Outside the Whale', *Granta* (Penguin, Middlesex, 1984).
2. For a discussion of this point see V. Moghadam, 'One Revolution or Two? The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic', in R. Miliband, L. Panitch and J. Saville (eds), *Socialist Register 1989* (Merlin Press, London, 1989), pp. 74–101.
3. S. Rushdie, 'The Book Burning', *New York Review Of Books*, 2 March 1989.

TWO POEMS BY BARBARA GILES

"YOU CANNOT COME AS A CHILD TO YOUR FATHER'S HOUSE" *Gwen Harwood*

I know what you mean, but I needed to come as
a woman
to sort the sullen secrets of that house,
solid and warm - but empty, till my father came,
of all affection shown. My mother could shut my
mouth
with a word of disparagement cut to the quick.
Her reasons for proper behaviour were
pragmatic.
"People won't like you", and "All the best people
go to church". And, pouncing, "Not even a good
liar".
I was moral enough to reject this, though too
young
to argue on ethics. I better respected
my grandmother's gentle, "God wouldn't like you
to do that," implying some choice on my part.
My father, a man who loved children
while they were children, charmed us, we loved
him back
till we out-topped him, saw then all his faults,
were sadly unforgiving many years.
By then I'd cracked my mother's code,
and we were closer. I'd figured out
what made her as she was . . . Such grinding
poverty
with a sick father and a lengthening family
living, needs must, in a poor neighbourhood
(where mates were hard to come by, marriage
late).

Weak, sentimental or indulgent is the child
who looks with child-eyes at his childhood's
house.
A grownup eye is needed, and remembrance
that our own children keep their tally of
our crimes against them, be we just or unjust.
The playhouse is pulled down, the swing hangs
by one rope.
We live elsehwere now, we have other hopes.

GROWN

Now that I'm older than ever she was
I think of my mother's wisdoms,
her frugality. She spent, the butcher said,
less than any other family. French chefs
and poverty taught her
it was all in the cooking. The best cuts
weren't needed. But as she grew older
it was strength that she saved.
One keep-clean's
worth a dozen make-cleans. Soak the pans,
save scrubbing. Fold the sheets
as they come off the line.

Bent, thread-thin, she battled in wartime
with the milking, she and my father
alone, kept the farm for their airman son.
Suddenly - out like a candle.

A grown child could sense her affection
without hugs and caresses. How could
a youngling? I'm glad we were open together
the last years of her life, though she still scolded
for things left undone and slack tricks.
She'd be proud, I think, but surprised
if she knew how I've done. I'm surprised myself.
She'd be over a hundred by now.

ON THIS CHIME OF AN EVENING

Thursday is over
Friday is beginning
I must excuse myself
From the margin of my thoughts.
For what resides in me
On this chime of an evening
Is the question of modality.

If I were to wish
To say to you 'I love you'
From the bottom of my heart
Without saying it at all,
What would you have me say
When on this chime of an evening
All my roads have gutters?

And in the vortex outside language
What do the creatures speak?
What is the state of their humour?
What is the rhythm of their phrase?
Must I speak in tongues
On this chime of an evening
To escape the shadow?

There's a native voice within me
Peering out from the back of my throat
He watches the speech fly past
And waits for the basin to empty
When it does he might say gently,
My listening has past.

GREGORY DAY

READING TRANTER WITHOUT TRAINING WHEELS

I'm under the influence
not of Berlin, or anything as earthy
as Cooper's, but Tranter and his cocktails.
Dry. More gin than vermouth.
Their fumes have shouldered back the clouds,
the morning sun shines groggily
and my daughter opts to do without
her training wheels. She's got a lot to learn
of balance and the glitterati. The hip
cool sophisticates, the whole world's America's
and America's your oyster.
Only a naif would expect compassion,
the blade is cool and sharp.
Everything's corrupt, lowdown sex
in a motel shack, smack and spasms
cops in dark glasses (FBI) on the take,
pounding on the door.
For an hour or so
we pedal over grass & toes & concrete, always
at a glittering tangent to the road
with wheels so wobbly you'd think the mob
had cornered that market too. As the sun
gets vertical, perspiration drips as never
from a cool Tranter poem. The sixties
pass from me: the times I thought I had
the birds, the booze, the scorching up the strip
laying the rubber (that fond nostalgic mirror)
was all uncool, suburban. At halfpast twelve
I push her onto the grass and let her go.
She veers towards the gutter, trying nervelessly
to stay upright, together.

RON PRETTY

WITNESS

(to Diana Diodati)

the engine of the car stops
    & a tyre blocks the lights
on the bent steel pole
    changing green & the mirror
flakes as the yellow sports car
    bananas & from the radio
Cindi Lauper sings

a big semi with steel boxes
    on its back bumps over the line
& the little truck with fruit
    brakes & sways & an apple rolls
so a baby reaches from his pram
    while his mother stands & watches
the blood meander to the gutter
    & a boy on a skateboard slides
through the people outside the
    empty bank

You're burning me up insi - i - de
    all the cars & trucks are horning
the policeman comes he is angry
    & the air shakes to the music
he looks at the driver pressed
    into the wheel glass diamonds
in his black hair
    & the policeman turns the button
when Cindi stops singing & the
    street goes quiet

RAE DESMOND JONES

WINTER SOLSTICE

Already you've been dead two years!

The first year I was a saint.
The next, a drunk.

What forgotten child
crying through me, begged:
If I be very good . . .?

You stayed dead.
Bribes got swapped for blackmail:
Look how I wreck, how I shred,
if you don't come back.

You're still unmoved
up there, bland as an angel.
Another year of grief
peaks to its wintry
end and beginning.

A tantrum to shriek the unbearable.
Now the child's exhausted -
wanting your arms, warm,
to comfort her to sleep.

I'm old enough to know
this bad dream will not be gone by morning.
I remember insisting, once:

I, not you, am responsible for me.
Sighing, I grow

to hold myself.

ROSEMARY NISSEN

TWO POEMS BY STEPHEN J. WILLIAMS

EXPOSED

For James, who died of AIDS on 18 September 1987.

When death starts its process first we resist,
hard to watch
everything familiar and beautiful about the body
shrink.
We say to ourselves "I want him back" or "Give
me back
that firm, healthy person!" When we are in the
room with him
all of us want to shout "But where is David?!
Where has he gone?!"

Then, all together, we have the knotted pain in
the eyes,
recognising him among us as a poor remaking
of the other man
we knew. "Michael, is that you I see? Is it really
you?"
Bringing gifts and asking questions we have
brought and asked
many times before, when he was still himself, is
a test.
"Here are some chocolates I thought you might
like, and yellow roses."
Are these pleasures the new Paul knows? And
who are you now?

In the last year his head is full of creatures and
animal hate,
wide-eyed and terrified to live in the world where
everything dies.
If he is fresh and strong in the morning, he is
warm-blooded, huge,
growling in the garden. Afternoons in the heat he
is worn blue
as a slim lizard, lies about, breathless, bumps
into the furniture.

The old friends leave him, while he makes the
real ones new.

No-one dares come near who cannot answer
questions:
"Are you friend or foe? Will you fight me, even
now,
in the middle of all this?" and "Will I die? Will I
truly die?"

Before the visiting hours the family takes a few
stiff drinks,
wanders in the numb maze of the hospital, with
threads hanging
behind them. All our tongues are pins and
needles for lack of use,
or telling lies. "Oh, he has cancer, a tragic
disease; I did tell him
not to smoke." "Thanyou for the card. He likes it
very much,
and sends you all his love." "He is better and we
hope for a remission."

Afterwards, alone, he practises the scavenging
happiness
of birds, picks up crumbs from his own story,
cries and laughs,
vomits the soft dinner, starves quietly and more
surely
than anyone who waits for justice. Every
sleepless night
some part is stolen and in the morning he is less
there.

Here is awake behind closed lids, while we
dream
of planting onions, and hope for death. Even
those who don't
believe can see he becomes more real; the soul
is exposed
and visible, resting on a cracked edge before it
goes.

FLOWERS FOR THE DEAD

Ask me why I write so many poems about the dead
And I tell you it is because there are so many of them.
Ask me why these poems must be written and I tell you
It is because other poems are wrong and must be corrected.

What is wrong about these other poems? you want to know.
I heard one say, "My friend, who is dead now, sat with me
All afternoon and there was nothing to say, and when I was leaving
He stopped to take a flower from his tree and gave it to me."

I heard another say, "Don't be sad - This is only as This is,
Things growing and things dying in their cycle, all
In their own time and in their own way dying. The dead
Are dead and gone. Life goes on. So, go."

The purpose of a poem is to say what is - with the force
Of a hammer. When it comes down, this hammer, the poem
That comes with it, about that dead lover or that dead father,
Should strike you in the throat and make you speechless.

So, when someone has died, do not take flowers with you.
When it is your turn to write about the dead do not write
About flowers, or afternoons in the sun, or cycles, or God.
Tell it as it was. Get out your hammer and drive the nail in.

For example, the poem of a father says, "He preferred
Pain to morphine, hiding pills the doctor gave because pain
Told him he was still alive. He died in a hospital bed.
His cleaning woman was standing beside him.

Yes. That's right. *The cleaning woman.* Fearing love more
Than death, Daddy would not let the family know
He was human and in need of love. We read about it
In the classified columns of the daily newspaper."

For example, the poem of a lover says, "I thought -
Who the fuck is this man with bones sticking up under
The skin of his back, who looks jagged and cold as a lizard?
When you said you were hungry and I made dinner,

I knew you were going to throw up, and you did
- In my lap. Thanks. Let's make a deal. I forgive you
For looking at me with those weightless, jealous eyes, if
You forgive me for hoping you would die more quickly."

When someone has died, do not take flowers with you.
Make poems in the teeth of your grinding jaw and bursting head.
The dead don't need flowers or poems about flowers.
The dead leave pain behind them so we know we are still alive.

STEVEN J. WILLIAMS

Man in Loft

Joseph Z.
(Bach, Emerson, Shakespeare, Schopenhauer, Mirabeau, Foucault)

"I have been taught to identify the mad, and to say, '*This person is mad and should be avoided,*' or '*That person is not like us. He must be mad*'; though the lesson I have learned, in fact, is that people we wish to avoid are, consequently, mad, or that people who do not choose to be, or cannot be, like us, are mad." "You have to be schizophrenic to understand what it is like," he says. "If I were to describe what goes on in my head you'd think it was crazy. When I am thinking it, it is very real." In our first conversation he tells me "I love music. Classical Music. And pornography. That's all. Just classical music and pornography." Inside his flat there are clothes on the floor, along with a lot of dirt. It is not possible to wash yourself clean in the bathroom, though the bath itself is clean. "I clean the bath. The bath is clean," he says. He plays the guitar, and then the mandolin, and then the banjo, and I notice there is a violin in a case on the floor of the living room. - But he does not get to the violin: suddenly there is no more music and it is time for pornography. "You'll like this," he says, as if by affirmation it would be true. A woman whose breasts are clearly too large for her costume gazes through a window. He goes to the record collection and asks, "What would you prefer - Shakespeare or, I know, yes, this will be great, Emerson." He shakes with excitement. He takes out the spoken word recording of Ralph Waldo Emerson's poems. The woman who was gazing through the window is lying on a sofa, masturbating. "*Thy trivial harp will never please Or fill my craving ear; Its chords should ring as blows the breeze.*" Yes, Ralph - of course. *There is an invisible world.* He introduces me to a friend, also schizophrenic, but one who, unlike him, refuses to take his medication. John was a mathematician, and is still brilliant. Now he is Jesus. We sit in a café with Jesus, and I ask, "What makes God laugh?" - immediately having to mask my wonder at hearing a precise and reasonable answer. *There is a more perfect world than the one in which we live.* Inevitably, he will refer the woman he wants to love, by way of introduction to the disciplined and misogynist world of Arthur Schopenhauer, to a bifurcation of that world into the mundane and the transcendent. In the commonplace part he is only one of many. By a choice which appears to be not entirely conscious he keeps the windows of his flat covered day and night, day after day, and always. Lonely, only early in the afternoons, when he is tired of practising a difficult piece by Bach, he says to himself, "Now, what shall I do with my penis?" and, in the absence of the woman whom he loves, it is time for pornography. The exceptional part meets the ordinary and, here, anything is possible. He takes the opportunity to improve Shakespeare. Once, in the asylum, he had read, "*Such civil war is in my love and hate That I an accessary needs must be To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.*" Years later, in the afternoon, in a nausea induced by less than two milligrams of Cogentine, he remembers, "*As a necessity my needs must be To that sweet thief which hourly robs me.*" Which is taking what from whom? Desire steals a part of everyone. There are moments I feel he is about to say, "*The world is my idea,*" and he would, as he did the moment the windows were closed and covered, look up at the sky, thinking to fly there, panic, look around him for something to hold on to; or he will, looking down at his feet, believe the world to be just a ball which will stop turning if he stops walking. "*You should read Jean Paul's* ***Selina*** *to see how a mind of the first order tries to deal with what he comes to think nonsensical in a false concept which he does not want to relinquish because he has set his heart upon it, although he is continually troubled by absurdities he cannot stomach.*" He decides "I cannot love anyone" but has set his heart upon it. One woman tells him, "You sound like a text book. You think too much." These words come out of the mouths of people who *love their own*

oppression, who have become insensible after having administered to their bodies *a sufficient amount of pleasure* (tennis once a week, nightly television, cheap but effective wine, a modicum of Faith). You cannot utter such words to a man who has lived in another world, where *infamous excesses are committed upon the very person of the prisoner; vices which the propriety of modern times does not permit us to name.* In a word, you cannot say something so stupid to a man who has been mad with *Desire*. His psychiatrist asks, "How are you feeling today?" and he replieds "*I shall instruct my madness to be proud, For psychiatrists are proud and make their clients stoop.*" A small, typed sign is stuck to the door of his flat; it says, '*Psychoanalysis: device allowing pigeon to enter but not leave loft.*'

Leigh Hobbs

from NULLARBOR SONG CYCLE

If only the savage one with so few legs would come,
I'd say my prayers out of my mouth, as usual.
Where are his notes that I loved?
John Berryman, "Snow Line".

mamu meat-trap

whose desert is this? it's not enough
to scratch snakes around your soles
with a dry stick i charm the dust
sinking my wife's teeth into kangaroo

i cook it over campfire to lure the hunters.
soothing them with Dreaming scents until
they swallow the tained meat. her teeth
tear open their hearts for me to chew

so little life

Entranced by spinifex, she didn't expect
the goanna to be crossing the road with so little
life around. Her brakes made no difference
to a lizard already pancaked into past tense.

Until the crows came it would play the part
of a sad speed hump, a brief caesura just two
hours west of Balladonia on the longest stretch
of unbroken breath ever committed to bitumen.

her poisonous blood

when i threw my grinding stone at the gabidji
it skittered away so I warmed my wandiri seeds
for damper until it crept inside my wind-break
again, simpering like a spirit this so frightened

me i camped without smoke by the waterhole
that night then native cat man spilled noise
to bedevil me from sleep to waiting spears
and all who smelt my blood hardened into rock

the truck disappeared

He left a question in Koonalda cave *are these*
really your bones? and swore he heard a wall
cough behind him as he quickened his pace
out of the stale air. His ignition key finally

sparked a sluggish motor. As he sped back
toward the Eyre, he passed a sputtering truck
with a dingo snarling at him from the wheel
But when he gaped in the mirror it was gone.

spitting out pearlshells

these two goannas climbed eaglehawk tree
before a mamu shouted them down then
he said "the feathers are mine but the meat
can be yours" he meant to bite the humans

while they slept but they spit out pearlshells
to make it rain the mamu fled their inma
for a cave so the goannas blew green smoke
inside to choke them stiff between the walls

the trees wave like sirens

It's when the trees begin to wave like sirens
that he wonders what his wife's been up to
while he's driving his rig shore to shore
and when their leaves curl back like tongues

the thought of someone in her knickers
rubs him hard then it's the *three* of them
jerking, spilling sex onto the peat while
the sirens above lick their mirages dry.

wichetty grubs in their bag

they came with wichetty grubs in their bag
and i asked one of those girls to sit with me
but uncle took them both because they said
my feathers make me ugly as a lump of wood

DAVID P. REITER

books

Koories: an Important Historical Document

Eve Mumewa D. Fesl. (Gabbi Gabbi & Gangulu Clans).

Bain Attwood: *The Making of the Aborigines* (Allen & Unwin, $16.95).

It is a pity that Bain Attwood used the word 'Making' in the title, as his semantic interpretation of the word is one that is not usual in contemporary use. Current use is associated with 'making' a person a success in public life, not virtually destroying then attempting reconstruction for a menial role. It was the title which originally inhibited me from reading the book, and may do so for many Koories, as we are sick of hearing how good it was for us that the English (rather than anyone else) arrived here and took over our land, and how good it was that Christianity was brought to us.

The book is not about this, however, and I am pleased to say, belies my interpretation of the title. However, what Attwood set out to do, and what he has achieved may be two different things. Or perhaps I see it differently because of my own cultural perspective. The book in my opinion is about missionaries, not about my people. If one views it in this light, it is an important contribution to existing literature.

I strongly resent the use of the label 'Aborigines', applied to us by a people who did not have the courtesy to find out our names and use them. In this discussion I will use the word 'Koorie'.[1]

The strength of the book lies in the fact that it addresses the issue of missionary attitudes, and their behavior in the quests for power in two directions, (a) power over a people who were weaker in material terms because of the British invasion; and (b) their power within the white community itself. For this reason, in the early pages, it would have been useful to have had more information about Moravians generally, their philosophy and reasons for coming to Australia. Comments upon, and some historical background to Moravian statements such as, "For long this mission had examined the world in search of the most degraded people and had discovered them in Victoria . . ." (Werner 1959, p. 1)[2], would have been a useful lead into the discussions on Hagenauer.

Attwood has avoided the mistake made by many non-Koorie writers in this area, that is of purporting to interpret Koorie behavior and thinking. In sticking to the facts, without interpretation, I believe he has strengthened the historical statement.

Often in considering historical facts, one can find the roots of problems embedded in the present. In relating the story of Bessy Flower, whose "persona was that of a young lady, well-mannered, genteel and shy . . .", an important point is made which has relevance to race relations between Anglo-Australians and Koories in Australia today. That is, that whatever we may achieve in Anglo terms, and however *we* perceive ourselves within non-Koorie society, the same situation as Bessy's applies, viz.: "whoever Bessy understood herself to be she was nonetheless regarded . . . as 'native' . . ." (p. 34). It is worth noting that the Camfields' ambitions for Bessy were that she would get a respectable domestic job or marry a Koorie and live on a reserve with 'Aborigines'; in other words her place in white society was to be that of a servant.

The deliberate and successful attempt by Bjelke-Petersen to oust my Uncle Neville Bonner from the Senate and the attitudes to Koorie University graduates, who cannot be 'proved' to be intellectually inferior, provide a further extension of the Bessy Flower story. Koories who achieve highly are said to be 'not real' Koories. Koories who are fair in appearance and achieve highly academically, like Michael Mansell, but who still identify as Koorie, cause an almost maniacal response from many whites. Is it the lack of power

to define boundaries for the 'natives' that causes such paranoia?

Such thinking has been used as a tool to inhibit the implementation of government policies designed to give Koories powers of self-determination and self-management. It has thus maintained contemporary 'Hagenauers' in positions of power.

The Bessy Flower story gives some historical insights into this question.

The chapter on the 'Humanitarians' is an interesting one which touches upon a number of quite disparate issues, viz.:

(a) The missionaries' personal concerns – "self-interested concern with their honour and their future souls . . ." (p. 82): an expansion of philosophical and historical data on this issue could have proved useful;
(b) their attitudes to Koories – "that the blacks should, where necessary, be coerced just as we coerce children and lunatics who cannot take care of themselves . . ." (p. 83).
(c) The vested interests of the State – although he does mention that "they would become useful to 'the state and themselves' . . ." (p. 83). An important omission is, however, the author's failure to follow up the segregationist attitude and its links with the needs of the white economy, particularly in the light of Cecil Rhodes' call in the British Parliament for the labour of the 'natives' to be used to enhance British monetary interests.

The question needed to be asked at this point is, "Were the humanitarians used by the government to attain ends which it had not been able to obtain in other ways?"

I found the author's statement, "They cast themselves as the experts . . ." (p. 84) particularly pertinent as we enter the 1990s. One of the biggest problems Koories who are academically qualified face is unseating many self-proclaimed 'white experts on Koories', who became entrenched in positions which they obtained on the basis that Koories were not suitably qualified.

The chapter dealing with the 'Great Principle' highlights the shift in the definitions applied to 'Aborigines'; i.e., superior versus inferior and half-caste versus blacks, as well as the bases upon which Koories were assessed in class and racial terms. Had the missionaries and others in the community ascertained the names of clan groups instead of applying 'Aborigine', definitions would no doubt have been quite different. However, it seems to be the policies of oppressors not to recognize the names of those to be colonized and oppressed.

Fewer questions and less concern are likely to be aroused over massacres of the unknown.

In this chapter it would have been useful to consider the shifts in definition in relation to white economic needs.

I believe Attwood is wrong in one of the few interpretations he makes, that Koories "developed a different consciousness of themselves, as 'Coranderrk Aborigines' rather than 'the Kulin' . . .". In order to communicate, Koories frequently use terms which whites can understand, rather than have to explain complicated names and pronunciations which are difficult for whites to grasp. In the political struggle, it was important that the whites understood. Nor was a grouping of Koorie clans unusual – the Kulin, the Ganai (as well as Koorie groups in other States), were in fact groups of various clans who had at various times come together under one name for a specific purpose.

Koories' society has always been highly political – the author makes too much of the fact that our people came together under one banner. The Australia Day march in 1988 is a recent national example. To presume that clan affiliations have been dropped in favor of a politically useful public affiliation is incorrect. The other point is, was there in fact any choice – from no name to answering to a label?

Chapter six addresses the issue of drunkenness and the whites' fear of 'drunken blacks'. Is this perhaps mirrored today in the large number of arrests of Koorie people for this minor offence? A Koorie is three times as likely to be arrested for being drunk in a public place as a white person.

The extent of rape of Koorie women by white men is not mentioned in this chapter, nor are missionaries' attitude to those rapists. This had many ramifications in colonial society and would have provided a wider perspective.

I do not agree with Attwood's premise that Europeans "made Aborigines". Certainly the British invasion caused change, to which Koories adapted. There had been, however, enforced change and adaptation for millennia prior to the British arrival. The difference was the swiftness and ferocity that accompanied this change.

Europeans deliberately applied the term 'Aborigine'. It was they who failed to acknowledge or recognize the diversity of Koorie clans, languages and cultures.

Many of us still say we are 'Aborigines' (although this is changing), because the white man doesn't

understand Koorie, Murri, Yolngu, Nungga and the many other clan names.

In summary, I found the book to be an important historical document. Although it is 'heavy going' in parts, it gives some very relevant insights into Anglo behavior towards Koories today.

Dr Eve Fesl is head of the Koorie Research Centre, Monash University, Victoria.

1. The name 'Koorie' is used by our people in four States, and is known to our people in other States. It means 'our people', and in this document will be used in the national sense to replace the term 'Aborigine', which is an English term used to deny us our identity as citizens of the world. 'Koorie' will not be used to replace the names we have for our groups such as Murri, Yolngu - only to replace 'Aborigine'.
2. Werner, A. B., *Early Mission Work at Antwerp - Victoria*, Dimboola: Banner Print, 1959.

The Windsor Group

Vane Lindesay

Roderick Shaw: *The Windsor Group, 1935-1945* (Edwards & Shaw, 339 Windsor Street, Richmond, N.S.W. 2753: $25 post free).

Roderick Shaw - painter, typographer, book designer and de luxe edition printer - wears another fine hat as author of an elegant book presenting an account of nine young Sydney artists who, during the mid-1930s, were painting the slum but picturesque streets of inner Sydney during the week, and the streets, buildings and bridges in the Hawkesbury district of Emu Plains, Richmond, and Windsor at the weekends. They were the little-known Windsor Group.

The Windsor Group - so named because visits to that area provided camping weekends and painting subjects - were students of Fred Leist, who had been a World War I Official War Artist, then teaching at the National Art School in the converted, convict-built Darlinghurst Gaol.

They mounted their first exhibition as a group in 1939.

This text and the historic photographs, together with sixty-two beautiful color plates and some black and white drawings, celebrate not only this first exhibition, but also the retrospective showing held at the Windsor Shire Cultural Centre in 1988.

The Windsor Group worked together from 1935 to 1945, during which time the European and Pacific hostilities scattered them - one who painted with the group was killed on a forced march while a Prisoner of War in the Japanese Changi camp. After the war, the group was never to re-form.

Bernard Smith, who was present at the Windsor Group 1939 exhibition sees, in his warmly appreciative introduction to this book, their contribution "as a significant trend in Australian painting that began to emerge in the years immediately prior to World War II, when artists began to turn away from the dominance of pastoral landscape in a new awareness of the urban environment".

The superb color plates in this remarkably inexpensive book demonstrate a disciplined attitude to the plein-air tonal impressionism of their time. This is especially evident in the wintery nocturnal study of the approaches to the Sydney Harbour Bridge - a minor masterpiece of its kind. If this, or any of these paintings of the Windsor Group are on offer, this writer, let it be known, is keenly interested to purchase.

Vane Lindesay is the author, among much else, of The Inked-in Image *(Hutchinson).*

Bunyip Compradores

Rupert Lockwood

Pat Mackie with Elizabeth Vassilieff: *Mount Isa The Story of a Dispute* (Hudson, $19.95).

Survivals of the cringe may be more marked in economic than cultural fields . . . When Mount Isa Mines Ltd, majority owned by American Refining and Smelting Corporation (ARSCO), locked out its workforce of 47 nationalities in 1965 and closed down production to enhance copper cartel prices and profits, our compradore Establishment formed ranks to serve the foreign multi-national against Australian national interest.

Conservative, Labor and DLP politicians, arbitration judges, business tycoons, TV, radio and newspaper commentators from the red-light districts of journalism, ASIO, Federal and State police and their special branches, right-wing union officials and lawyers anxious for their dirt money were instant volunteers in support of the multi-national whose stratospheric profits founded the Guggenheim fortune.

Pat Mackie, legendary leader of the 1964-65 Mount Isa confrontation, taped his story soon after the struggle ended – or rather went into suspense, for the wounds throbbed for years. With talented help from Elizabeth Vassilieff, lecturer in modern literature, peace activist and civil libertarian, we are offered the most exciting and competent chronicle of an industrial clash that shook the nation.

Politicians, media and the Australian Workers Union hierarchy worked overtime to accord Mackie a blacksheep image. He was depicted as some kind of intruding American gangster who, on his own, stopped, by intimidation and manipulation of miners, one of the world's greatest copper producers. Prime Minister Menzies, habituated to misrepresentation in industrial disputes, lamented that the Mount Isa enterprise of foreign capital "could be snuffed out at short notice by one curious character, this man Mackie, not even an Australian, I believe!" (Mackie was born in New Zealand of Australian parents, and had worked in America and Canada.)

Mount Isa miners were not on strike, as ARSCO's Australian collaborators charged, though they had cruel deprivations. They lived 600 miles inland, in a town of fierce summer heat, insect plagues, dear food and clothes, in half-paid-for company houses, breathing toxic smelter fumes day and night, ordered into unsafe working practices (outlawed in the USA and other lands) by "American boy wonder engineers" and sometimes denied sufficient bathwater to wash off lead-laden dust. Instead of tolerating the harrowing contract system, miners opted to work for wages, as they were entitled under their award. Mount Isa Mines Ltd locked them out.

Industrial Court President Judge Mostyn Hanger sanctified the lie that they were on strike by ruling that reversion from contract to wages "constituted a strike". (His wife held 1250 shares in Mount Isa Mines Ltd).

From the time of Meyer Guggenheim, who started at Leadville, Colorado, in 1880, and founded an empire that was to embrace copper and other metal mines in the USA, Chile, Peru, Africa and Australia, ARSCO learned not only to buy politicians, police, judges and scabs, but to restrict production and raise prices through provoked strikes or lockouts. The world copper cartel, in which ARSCO had a decisive stake, got production down sufficiently, despite over-capacity and reduced demand, to keep the copper price at £236 a ton from 1961 to 1964, and to lift it to £390 a ton on the eve of the Mount Isa shutdown. ARSCO's Mount Isa provocations were duplicated in Chile, North America and some other areas to cause stoppages about the same time. The "strange coincidence" of these stoppages stirred Queensland Labor Council's solicitors. In a letter to Premier Nicklin (unanswered) they pointed to the damning evidence that world copper market commentators were able, several months beforehand "to predict that these disputes would take place". The London *Economist* showed that the expected stoppages were increasing the price of copper. Interruption of supplies "would swell the incomes of stockholders and speculators," the *Economist* said.

Mount Isa was shut down on Thursday, February 9, 1965, by ARSCO. As the Mackie-Vassilieff chronicle says, "when the London copper market opened on that momentous Thursday, the price of copper rose by £52 15s. per ton, the biggest rise ever recorded in a single day. This was on top of other rises which had taken it from the level of £390 per share a month earlier. The desired effect had been achieved, and work could resume."

"Thus," the authors conclude, "there is only one explanation for the company's irrational behavior. This was that they were under instructions from ARSCO to stop production until the price of copper rose." Queensland University economics lecturer G. G. Palmer thought likewise. ARSCO, he noted, had used this tactic in the USA and Chile to force up copper prices. "There seemed to be no other reason

for the closedown of all surface and development operations."

Miners began their 3000-foot ascent for air and to battle, away from the lead dust and exhaust fumes. They faced hopeless odds – an international front of the world copper cartel and Australian government, judicial and police institutions and a media that evaded obligations of investigative journalism in favor of smear and slander against the cartel's opponents. The Queensland Government snatched the opportunity to come shambling into one more offensive against the trade unions, tampering flagrantly with the truth, in line with ARSCO. Anti-union laws already smelled of police-stateism; the new laws allowed miners to be exiled from Mount Isa at police whim, arrests and house searches without warrant, court trials – not in Mount Isa but in faraway Brisbane – in which convictions depended not on evidence but police opinion, and also allowed power to confiscate anything considered of help to the miners. Labor Minister A. D. Herbert offered this screaming alibi for ARSCO's dirty work: "The whole dispute is part of a communist plot to weaken the national economy, disrupt the defence program and lay Australia open to the threat from China, Indonesia and North Vietnam that is growing day by day." Premier Nicklin in his scripted performances improved on these whoppers.

It is advisable for Mackie to depart police-infested Mount Isa on a fund-raising tour. He had been sacked by Mount Isa Mines Ltd and expelled from the AWU. He had helped to break through the unseemly structures of AWU 'unionism', and became representative of the AWU rank and file by leaders' forfeit. Mackie raised the money and found unprecedented solidarity, outwitted the multi-national's mercenaries of Federal and State police, ASIO and media ("chasing me like vultures"). He even won £30,000 in libel from Frank Packer's *Daily Telegraph*, with the help of Jim Staples and Mary Gaudron, barristers who became judges. Mackie in his red baseball cap and dungarees was something of a folk hero.

No victory, not even a 'settlement', followed. Militants were victimised. Probably about 2000 people left Mount Isa, sick of life in this polluted company town. ARSCO companies world-wide profited mightily by share and price rises. "The AWU," said Mackie, "emerged as undemocratic as ever."

But the swing of public opinion and the fighting spirit of miners warned ARSCO that it could not get away with such bastardries as before. MIM managers and supervisors, particularly Americans, had to show more respect to workers. Safety improved, so did wage bargaining arrangements.

Perhaps of most portent in an era of festering race prejudice was the benefit to relations between Austral-Anglo-Celts and ethnics among the 47 nationalities, who had shown courage and integrity during the lock-out. Exchanges like this at a union meeting, described by Mackie, would not occur again:

> A Finnish miner in his accented English complained he was cheated of his pay. "Oh, sit down, ya wog bastard, and shut up!" said the Australian miner. The Finn, with great dignity and passion, replied: "Ve focken wogs, ve union men, too. Ve pay union dues all like you. Ve got like you the same troubles and ve must talk of our troubles."

One of Australia's best-known journalists, Rupert Lockwood lives in Sydney. His political and historical books include Black Armada, *a standard work on Australian-Indonesian relations during the establishment of the Indonesian Republic.*

Autobiographical Reflections

Judith Rodriguez

Lolo Houbein: *Wrong Face in the Mirror: An Autobiography of Race and Identity* (University of Queensland Press, $12.95).

What makes an autobiography interesting? Thousands take part in odd, or notable, or extra-ordinary events. The use of words and print is available to more people in book-oriented societies than ever before. Yet few offer more than anecdotal attractions in the story of their lives.

Lolo Houbein has taken part in an extraordinary event: the twentieth-century phase of the European diaspora. Her autobiography is of riveting interest because her journeying is a diaspora of the imagination – because she explores and manipulates coordinates that many people take as fixed, given: family, personality, and allegiances of place, race and culture.

Home-grown and self-discovered, for her, is the mobility and manifold nature of personality. On page one she observes, "When I'm with a meek person, I adjust the situation by being firmly assertive . . . when with aggressive characters I counteract them by being calm and peaceful and tolerant." We nod at this; when she theorizes about

her nine lives and describes her project, we may be struck by her originality and abundance - it would be extravagance in anyone who was not so serious:

> I am planning to write eight accounts of my half of this century, each with its own 'leitmotiv' to show that, depending from what standpoint you look back over your shoulder, you see a different landscape - or should I say 'lifescape' - every time.

Early in her exploration of race and identity, she quotes the sage's phrase, "To be perfect is to have changed often". This calls into dispute notions of fixity as excellence - presence, lack of vacillation, stability, reliability, unquestioning fidelity. What about being already changed - different from the beginning? Houbein identifies in herself a sense of dislocation by comparison with people who are born 'in situ', in a place that feels right and where they can remain.

Her own awareness that she was not 'in situ', her "cruelly mislaid memory store", was awakened by encounters in early childhood in Holland - with an old Chinaman, with Gypsies ("these splendid leathery women" — with a costumed festival figure in black-face, with a photo of the Dalai Lama. "I had discovered the diversity of the human race and with it came the knowledge that I was born into the wrong tribe", she writes. So she pursued her tribe, at first poring over the Bos atlas and later taking post-war opportunities to travel and know different peoples. "There are now on the face of the earth too many children who peer into crowds, hoping to spot the features of an unknown ancestor."

Living an age-old motif at the same time as she questions stock classifications of identity, Houbein makes her life a quest. She emerged from the privations of World War II with three secret wishes. This may seem a childish way to keep oneself going; the wishes themselves have the authentic oddness of fairytales - wanting to sit under a palm tree in a tropical country, to meet the Dalai Lama, and to be found by a life partner with whom she could live as she needed. It would be misleading to summarize the courses in her life - in Holland, Australia, Tibet, and New Guinea - which refine her adaptability, her understanding and her self-understanding.

Anyone who suspects that Houbein may be humorless should read why she did not follow an early ambition to become an air stewardess ("No-one in our family was as tall as I promised to be. No-one in our family started to wear reading glasses at thirteen"), or her ideas about going to Port Moresby to study the cultures of Papua New Guinea. Anyone who points out that her vision is simplicity itself must add that the way it is arrived at is not; by going and seeing for herself, Houbein was refusing to shirk the process of purposeful choice.

The struggle leading to her decision to abandon a heroic affair with a selfish African intellectual, and her successful insistence on the unloading of her 'lost' consignment of Tibetan rugs, both make good reading. This, however, is not their main point. It must be called a particular skill of narration that even these incidents enrich our knowledge of her developing, down-to-earth thought and spirituality.

Her housekeeping with bats and snakes at Koonalda, the place of the snake, concludes in a departure that is an act of conviction. So is her conjecture that "Aboriginal peoples who find themselves custodians of a rainforest may soon get more money to maintain their traditional lifestyle than Aboriginal peoples who inhabit deserts", and her suggestion that most police records pertaining to Aboriginals should be destroyed. So is her choice to live poor and to grow herbs and vegetables (as well as write). Her remarks on culture shock in Cairns ("where the people were fat and pink beyond belief"), on Darwin's society and on Adelaide's International Market should be read seriously, because Houbein's hopes for even "the copycat urban society Australia has become", are the product of many living experiments, each made in hope and goodwill.

Houbein is not the first and she won't be the last citizen of the world to report on her quest. She is unusual in the frank clarity of her talk and she is rare in living out her connected theories. From asking where she herself belongs and how she must live, she goes on to develop ideas about Earth's peoples and where a well-guided polity might fit into Earth's own continuing "survival plan". Fulfilment of personal need? A forecast for the human race? Both are included, for her, in the diverse "faces of future Australia" and the perception that, using her own term, they are all 'in situ'.

Judith Rodriguez's most recent book is New and Selected Poems *(University of Queensland Press). She edited and introduced* The Collected Poems of Jennifer Rankin *(UQP) published last month.*

H. H. Richardson: The First Volume

Brenda Niall

Axel Clark: *Henry Handel Richardson; Fiction in the Making* (Simon & Schuster, $29.95).

Henry Handel Richardson did not make it easy for her biographers, nor did she intend to. When she spoke of her need to have a "mask to hide behind", or when she wondered whether anyone would ever read her diary, she showed her ambivalence about revealing her private self. It is thought that she produced the curiously evasive memoir *Myself When Young* in order to deter Nettie Palmer from writing a biography. Yet it was in that memoir that she let it be known how closely she had modelled the characters and events of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* on her own parents' lives. It was there, too, that she remarked that in drawing Richard Mahony's portrait she had drawn her own.

Richardson was only eighteen when she left Australia, with her mother and sister, to study music in Leipzig. From the time of her marriage seven years later until her death in 1946, she led a quiet and increasingly secluded life. She had few friends; she wrote under a pseudonym and was almost unknown in literary circles. As an expatriate Australian, married to a Scot and living in England, she had removed herself physically from the people and places of her early years, without finding any new social context. As a writer she lived intensely in an inhospitable past: her unhappy childhood in Melbourne and various Victorian country towns. Her novels, especially *The Getting of Wisdom* and *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* - which are so obviously drawn from her own and her family's experiences - are rich sources of insight for a biographer. Yet they present problems too.

In his lucid and scholarly biography of Richardson, Axel Clark makes careful discriminations between the life and the fiction: he does not equate the Mahonys with the Richardsons, nor Laura, of *The Getting of Wisdom*, with her creator. He has added much to our knowledge of Richardson's family life. Her parents Walter and Mary Richardson emerge in convincing detail, especially from the many letters they exchanged before their marriage and during subsequent brief separations. Clark has made good use of the material given to the National Library in the 1980s. Although much of this material (which includes some of Richardson's diaries) was discussed by Dorothy Green in the Afterword of the revised (1986) edition of her magnificent *Ulysses Bound*, Clark has had the benefit of working with these papers from the first. He has made many discoveries of his own. From the early section on Walter Richardson's medical career in Britain, to the late chapters which evoke the Leipzig of Ettie Richardson's time as a music student, there is much that is new and fascinating in this compact study.

It must be noted that this is the first volume only. Axel Clark has chosen to divide his life of Richardson into two sections. This one ends with the death of her mother in Munich in December 1896. A year later, Richardson began her first novel, *Maurice Guest*. Clark sees this as the beginning of her journey back into the past:

> In the process of writing successively *Maurice Guest, The Getting of Wisdom*, and *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, she would be driving down within herself, first to the memories of her life and aspirations as a music student, then of her adolescent years at boarding school in Melbourne, and at last to the terrible bedrock memories of her childhood (p. 255).

Given the decision to make two volumes of the life, this was the right place to make the break between them. Clark's skill in organising his complex material ensures that his readers will wait - however impatiently - for the conclusion. After all, Richardson made her readers wait for the end of *Richard Mahony*.

It seems likely that, as Clark embarks on his second volume, he will be given all manner of advice by the readers he has caught up in the drama of Richardson's early life. Having read this volume with much pleasure and admiration I cannot resist a complaint and a plea. I think that Clark neglects a key figure when he accepts more or less at face value the version of Lilian Richardson given by her sister in *Myself When Young*. Lil's fictional counterparts, Pin in *The Getting of Wisdom* and the twins Lucie and Lallie in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, are minor figures: they exist as sources of comedy and pathos, contestants for parental love and attention with Laura and Cuffy.

Although Clark notes Ettie Richardson's jealousy of her younger sister as well as the closeness of their bond, he doesn't look at the possible implications. *Myself When Young* is virtually his only source for knowledge of Lilian as a child. In discussing the effect of Walter Richardson's mental and physical collapse and Mary's absences from the children, he describes Lil as "the more frightened of the two" and as "paralysed by fear". Later she is "timid and nervy . . . often burdensome company" for Ettie. Later still this "chronic weeper"

becomes "an amusing but somewhat injudicious coquette". When ten-year-old Lilian signs a letter to her mother as "your loving little Lilly", Clark inexplicably sees the phrase as "designing".

By the time Ettie wrote about Lilian in *Myself When Young*, this apparently weak and vapid young person had led a much more venturesome life (at least in the external sense) than her older sister. Lilian married twice; she had a son by her first marriage; she was active in the suffragette movement and imprisoned after a demonstration in London. With her second husband A. S. Neill she helped to found and run the experimental school Summerhill in England. In Ettie's account of her sister, the gaps and silences are at least as significant as the statements.

Part of Clark's problem comes from the fact that *Myself When Young* is his main source for the Richardsons' childhood. But it needs to be used with as much caution as do the novels. Presumably Lilian will emerge more clearly in the second volume, but more could have been done here with the early years.

Another source which I would see as suspect, although for different reasons, is a memoir by Isobel Macdonald who described the schoolgirl Ettie as "a great liar". Perhaps she was, but Clark makes nothing of the fact that the phrase was used sixty years after their schooldays at Presbyterian Ladies College. In the meantime Richardson had published *The Getting of Wisdom* which deeply offended those close to the school. Isobel Macdonald made her career as a teacher; she was a senior member of staff at Presbyterian Ladies College when *The Getting of Wisdom* was published. She was understandably angry at the "cruel" portraits of the former headmistress and other teachers, as well as the unflattering account of the kind of education offered by the school. It would not be surprising if her phrase "a great liar" derived from her sense of Richardson the author rather than Richardson the schoolgirl. It is mainly from Isobel Macdonald's 1946 article that Clark derives his idea of an "irritating and insidious" Ettie whom no one liked:

> Students and teachers recoiled from the exhibitionism of this poorly dressed, undernourished looking girl who, it was said, "insisted on being right in the middle of the picture every time" (p. 138).

As Kathleen Fitzpatrick, the historian of PLC, has noted, Isobel Macdonald was a daygirl who would scarcely have come into contact with Ettie Richardson. She is thus a less informed witness than Mary Robertson (later Mary Kernot), a fellow boarder who became Richardson's life-long friend and confidante. By taking his chapter title 'A Great Liar' from Isobel Macdonald, Clark foregrounds the evidence of a hostile witness without cautioning the jury. Perhaps he is less wary of Macdonald's testimony because the version of self in *Myself When Young* seems to offer corroboration. The portrait of the sharp, angular, unloved and unloving Ettie of the autobiography is the more persuasive because it does not seem to flatter or evade.

"How I do hate the ordinary sleek biography", Richardson once wrote. It was the biographer's task, she said, "to clear away myths and exaggerations" and bring out "every tricky trait and petty meanness. The great writers are great enough to bear it."

She was writing of George Eliot; but the comment applies equally well to herself. The creator of *Maurice Guest* and *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* is great enough to bear close scrutiny. Axel Clark has not written a "sleek" biography. But in this volume he has not quite succeeded in clearing away some myths that were of Richardson's own making.

Brenda Niall teaches English at Monash University. She is the author of Martin Boyd: a Life *(Melbourne University Press, 1988).*

The Conduct of Narrative

Helen Daniel

David Brooks: *Sheep and The Diva* (McPhee Gribble, $12.99).

In a story called 'The Misbehaviour of Things', in David Brooks' acclaimed first collection, *The Book of Sei and Other Stories*, recalcitrant things like a falling leaf or a glass of wine break the laws of nature. In his new collection, *Sheep and The Diva*, there is again much misbehavior of things and Brooks' conduct of narrative is recalcitrant too, discontented with the conventions and coordinates of fiction.

According to the cover, *Sheep and the Diva* is a new collection of "stories", but the term has to expand and mutate to encompass this blend of intellectual energy and imaginative quest, fiction playing over and under philosophical webbing. Here meanings slide and elide, mutate and litigate, while possibilities, enlarged and emboldened, transgress old laws of time and space. Like rents in the surface of things, many are apertures into other worlds or ruptures of the familiar, exploring the flicker of between.

Although *Sheep and the Diva* has shadowy affinities with the early work of Murray Bail and Peter Carey and, more recently, some of the short fiction of Richard Lunn, Brooks engages in a kind of narrative behavior which is rare in Australian writing. Much of his work reminds me of the title of a Julio Cortazar collection, *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds*. Although Brooks' work has not the immediacy nor the afterglow of Borges' *ficciones*, his conduct of narrative suggests the work of Borges, Calvino and Cortazar.

While much of Brooks' work is intellectually austere, it is also curiously passionate, with the suppleness and glow of passionate intellectual quest. It seems fitting then that the opening piece is about passion and power. In 'Letters from Tandelo', Ursula has powers of transforming things around her - lifting sheep into trees, creating snow, willing the return of dead family. Her powers depend on "a particular pitch of passion", "a measure of uncontrol", in which passion transmutes. And throughout *Sheep and the Diva*, there is an interplay between a measure of uncontrol and the controlling intellect.

Some pieces have a profoundly spatial construct - as if plotting a geography of the imagination, mapping exotic terrains and locating fabulous cities. Some are exactly that: in 'City of Labyrinths', a Byzantine complexity of structures, the citizens have a mistrust of surfaces; in 'City of Arches', a city of fabulous architecture, spectral and luminous at night, there are glimpses of monastic, cloaked figures who suggest cloaked premises of order.

More elusively, there is Mysander, the ancient city renowned for its maze - the maze-without-walls, which leaves no traces except in its legacy of memory. Here Brooks meditates on the concept of the maze, its promise of entrance, its assurance of exit. In 'The Avenues of Lost Time', there is the notion of parallel histories, other avenues of time, glimpsed down cross streets running to some other "great, ghostly city". Underlying *Sheep and the Diva*, there is a sense of mapping and journey, of the labyrinths and arches of a city shaping the imagination of its inhabitants.

Yet the journeying is not always a matter of map and longitude, but sometimes more a matter of slipping into a rival dimension, a shadow world furtively keeping pace with the real. At times, the instability of things public and private suggests more a geometry than a geography of the imagination. Much seems lateral and tangential, as if planes tilt into each other, or as if one order, by some weird osmosis, seeps through into another, or is fed by morsels from 'above', as in the story 'Nadia's Lover':

> For most of us, the real is the life of the surface, the patina, the visible meniscus. But for some, far below, it must be something quite different, lived under a pressure many would find intolerable, fed, as are some of the deepest-sea creatures, by the discarded and decaying matter that drifts slowly and inevitably downward, fathom by fathom, into their inconceivable dark.

From this beginning, a story unfolds of a cleaning lady who lives in the basement of an apartment block, sustained by tidbits from the 'real life' in the apartment above.

Many pieces begin with a proposition, a single notion which splits and multiplies in unexpected ways. 'Disappearing' opens thus: "Few of us had ever thought that Being itself might require vigilance." From such a beginning, the story of Professor R., who fades, in a gradual diminution of substance, to a silver figure in a poster. Another begins, "One morning, after a night of particularly disturbing dreams, Dr B. awoke to find he had become a text" and becomes a story of words and bodily illness, literary places of rupture which afflict the bodies of a class of students.

Behind many of the pieces is a meditation on the afflictions of the present, on fragmentation and absence, often with a sense of loss and mourning. Here we live in an era cramped and confining, an era where "the habit of doubt" manifests itself in bodily ills, where there are "infectious places of blankness", where "gangs of self-righteous realists" smash "tape-recorders of dreams", where a contagion is blighting the old stable meanings. In 'Disease', Brooks explores the notion of contemporary *dis-ease*, a plague transmitted through a whole society, a symptom of contemporary disorder.

There are other stories of mystery and intrigue: of disappearances, of a family growing scales, and lichen and sea creatures within their bodies, of a gardener whose inner life is manifested in the life of his garden, a shepherd whose sheep are across borders of reality, a diva whose voice transports all who hear it, like the transports wrought by the poetry reading in the pub in 'Pentecost'.

Not all the pieces work. Some, such as 'The Wood', I found stolid and tedious. But the best of them are remarkable in their reach, somehow retaining an urgency and an intrigue in the midst of intellectual meditations. The best recall the visual paradoxes in the work of the Dutch graphic artist, Escher, conjuring up the properties of rival worlds through a *trompe l'oeil* contradiction of perspective.

At one point, Brooks writes of "thunder eggs", stones found in the Australian desert which

> break open to reveal a nest of shimmering crystals, glistening forms which, catching whatever light there is, so throw it about amongst themselves that they create, from the slightest ray, a tiny crucible of fire.

So too, much of Brooks' work glistens with the light tossed about from piece to piece. And in the end there is a paradoxical sense of unity about this most multiple collection – not only because of its pervasive sense of travelling through terrains improbably contiguous, and not only because of the intellectual passion that informs the whole, but also because of the way each piece, like the desert stones, catches the light of all the other pieces.

Although the intellectual energies of Brooks' work will not appeal to everyone, *Sheep and the Diva* seems to me an important and powerful book. His discontent with the given lines of narrative manifests itself in ways alluring, stimulating and – that promiscuous word ever in search of congress – new. A collection of Brooks' essays will be published later this year and I hope the terrains he maps there will be as chameleon as here, his conduct as intellectually passionate and recalcitrant.

Helen Daniel's most recent books are Expressway *(Penguin, $12.99) and* The Good Reading Guide *(McPhee Gribble, $16.99).*

Across The Western Plains

Hugh Anderson

Ron Edwards (editor): *The Overlander Songbook* (University of Queensland Press, $16.95).

I have the four editions, plus the two reprints, of *The Overlander Songbook* beside me as I write a brief note on the paperback just issued. All copies since the first edition of 1956 are enlivened by many of the line drawings for which Edwards is noted, and it has been a particularly handsome publication since Rigby published their edition in 1971, which contained the same 220 songs (including variants) as the 1969 Rams Skull Press issue, but with minor additions to the introductory notes and with the thematic index now (properly) up-front as a contents list. This UQP paperback is the same book as before, with new preliminary pages and an attractive new cover design, slightly reduced photographically from the Rigby editions.

Although there has been a fourfold increase in the number of songs and a stated preference for "material collected in the field", rather than follow the aim of the first edition – to present an anthology of songs from many sources "intended primarily for people interested in singing" – the editions since 1969 appear to retain a large proportion of texts originally from printed sources. More importantly, the cut-off point for this particular collection is some 20 years back, which does not detract from its continuing usefulness, as reflected in the number of editions, but does say something about progress in song collection in Australia, or at least about the few opportunities available for publications of this kind.

What I do find very strange about this publication, as indeed I do about the treatment of most books relating to folklore in Australia, are the suggested catalogue headings obtained from the National Library. How anyone could put *The Overlander Songbook* under 'Folk-songs, English-Australia' and 'Ballads, English-Australia', is beyond my comprehension.

The great loss from the 1956 edition is the nine pages of very sensible comment by R. G. Edwards under the heading of 'Preface', in which he deals with aspects of the difficult question of sources for songs in Australia, although he does not really give many answers. Another omission pointed out by Wendy Lowenstein in *Tradition* in 1972 (No. 28, p. 23) is the lack of an index of first lines in all editions since 1969 – which is especially relevant where similar songs have different titles.

The Overlander Songbook, apart from any other use it serves, is historically important, as it demonstrates a stage in documenting and presenting our lore – where we are more concerned with entertainment or performance potential than in developing theoretical premises about folklore. This stage of simply collecting has been, of course, a crucial one, and depended upon the unrewarded dedication of a few people, including Ron Edwards. But there remains the failure, nevertheless, to distinguish between a random collector or performer and one who has been a folklorist since the 1960s.

The comments of the distinguished American folklorist Richard Dorson, in a submission on the historical validity of oral tradition to an Indian Land Claim Commission in 1961, are applicable still in Australia:

> For better or worse, the genius of American folklore study has so far expressed itself in the wayward individual collector (with) the illus-

trious names being those of solitary figures, unacademic and nonprofessional (in the sense of having an avocation rather than an occupation), who drift into some special groove of interest and collect assiduously along that line, with little heed to other traditions, other collectors, or considerations of bibliography, scholarship and theory.

For Dorson the great change from "amateurs or (even) academics studying folklore as a secondary interest" to those "considering themselves folklorists first and foremost" came about by an "infusion into the American academic bloodstream" of PhDs in folklore from the universities of Indiania and Pennsylvania. While we in Australia wait and wait and hope for such a transformation, we will continue to seek sustenance from roots first uncovered by the wayward collectors.

Hugh Anderson is the author or editor of many books, including several on aspects of Australian folklore. He chaired the Inquiry into Folklife in Australia (1986), of which nothing has since been heard.

Jiri Tibor Novak

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FANG LIZHI, LI SHUXION,
WANG HUEGHI and HOU
DEJIAN, CHINA.
NGUGI WA THIONG'O, KENYA.
JACK MAPANJE, MALAWI.

Writers in Prison, 6

Echoes from the Tiananmen Square massacre continue to be heard, just over a year after the event which some Australian journalists insist never took place. Not this time through the work of individuals and relatively small organizations but as a result of complex negotiations between the Chinese and United States governments, a few of the many thousands of dissidents still incarcerated are beginning to be released from jail.

Recently an announcement was made of the release of Professor Fang Lizhi and his wife, Professor Li Shuxion, who have been allowed to fly to England on what the Chinese government calls "humanitarian grounds". Fang Lizhi will take up an appointment at Cambridge University. He has been described as the Sakharov of China and one of its most outstandingly courageous intellectuals.

Among others who have been released are the prominent teacher, Wang Hueghi, who will reside in France, and the dissident singer Hou Dejian who has surfaced in Taiwan. A tip of the iceberg, perhaps?

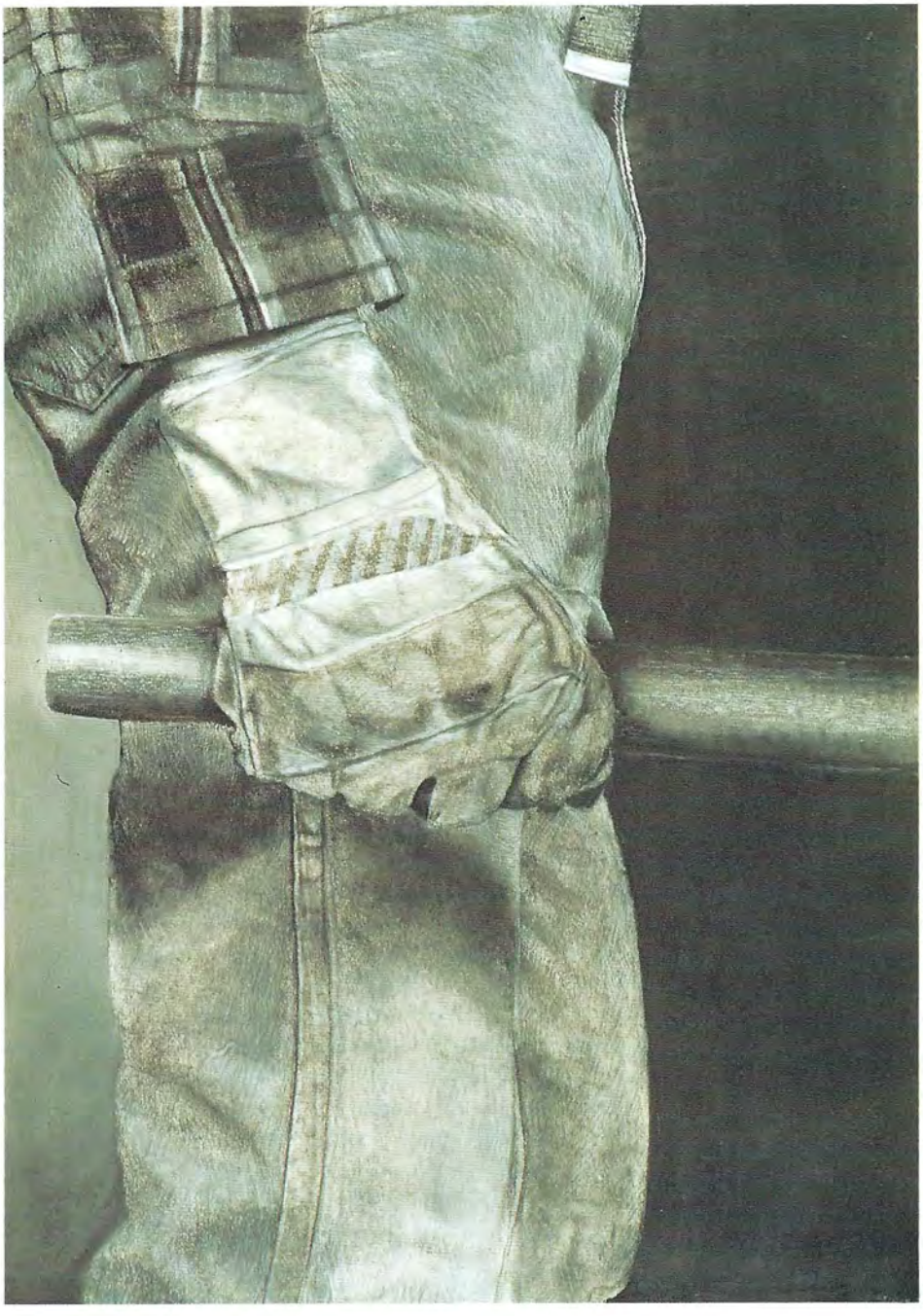
One piece of good news, a success story, is the forthcoming visit to Australia of the distinguished and prolific Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o who is coming for the Melbourne Writers' Festival. Ngugi was imprisoned for six years during the 1970s under the Public Security Act so he can speak at first hand of the experiences of writers in prison.

And finally, a prisoner whose case might have come to your attention before.

Jack Mapanje is Malawi's best-known poet and a distinguished scholar; he was head of the Department of Language and Literature at Malawi. He was arrested in 1987 and has been held incommunicado since then, without being charged. The Malawi Government has not responded to requests for information but it is believed that his Detention Order was signed personally by the President. This coincided with the publication of his book of poetry, *Of Chameleons and Gods*.

Requests for information for his release should be sent to the following address:

His Excellency, Life President Ngwazi
Doctor H. Camuza Banda
Life President of the Republic of Malawi
Office of the President and Cabinet
Private Bag 388, Lilongwe 3
Malawi



PETER NEILSON: *Abandoned Worker*, 1989,
charcoal and chalk on paper, 900 × 750 mm.