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## PATRICK WHITE 1912-1990

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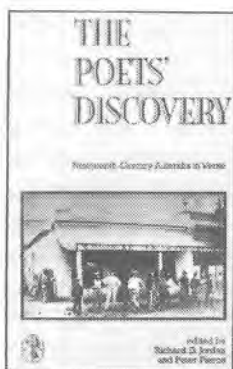
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 83, Jiri Tibor Novak 34, 40. Back cover: Jenny Watson  
 "Concert for One", 1989, oil and gouache on Belgium linen,  
 183 cm x 131 cm, courtesy City Gallery.

*Overland* is a quarterly literary magazine founded by Stephen Murray-Smith.

The subscription rate is \$18 plus postage and handling \$6, total \$24 a year (four issues). For pensioners and students there is a flat rate of \$18 (overseas \$40). Life subscriptions are available for \$240 each. Bankcard subscriptions and renewals are accepted (quote number). Manuscripts are welcomed, but a stamped self-addressed envelope is required, or two if poetry is sent with prose.

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*Overland* receives assistance from the Literature Board of the Australia Council and from the Victorian Ministry for the Arts. We pay minimum rates of sixty dollars for a story or feature and twenty dollars for a poem.

*Overland Index* is published within the magazine every two years. *Overland* is also indexed in APAIS (1963 +) and in *Australian Literary Studies* 'Annual Bibliography'.

*Overland* is available in microfilm and microfiche from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, U.S.A.

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Editor, *Overland*, PO Box 14146, Melbourne, Victoria 3000  
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Fax: (03) 852 0527



Printing: Australian Print Group, Maryborough

THOMAS SHAPCOTT

# ROCKS

*In Memoriam Patrick White*

I

In my father's bed, digging  
for the pale subterranean pith of potatoes  
I was dismayed to hoe-in the copious leaves,  
the watery stems and the solanum flowers.  
"It's what's below that counts", he instructed me  
and he shoved his wrist deep into the cloggy soil  
to tear up the green balls and nobbles of potato.  
The soil was shale, clay, new compost  
and when I tried my fingers grubbed only rocks.  
I got one in my fist and threw it aside.  
Later, when I was waiting for something else  
- the liquid manure, the enamel bucket -  
I came across that discarded unearthed pebble.  
Scraping the clay I discerned my first lesson  
from rock:  
a spring of fern imprinted as an entire fossil.  
Our hillside broke into a treasury then  
and filled my open mouth with lessons.

II

When did I first learn rocks as weapons?  
An older boy surely had it in for someone else?  
me?  
The feel of rock in your hand - weight, texture,  
its challenging deceit of power - it's taken for  
granted  
as if Goliath stumbled or the first shangai  
took invention at that moment of touch.  
Plump doves became another name on the  
tongue of your stone,  
grass-snakes on the hot shelves of cliff turned  
around  
to the object not the subject of danger  
the stone in your hand became its own teacher  
and it will throw you as hard as it can.

III

Rocks share a greater affinity with water  
than can sunlight or wind or any part of your  
body.  
A river in loam is merely the carrier of silt  
but a river through rocky gorges  
takes a new spurt, it surprises itself  
and its power of invention is only mastered  
by the dreamed-of hollows and bubbles and  
contours  
that the rock fits for itself in its patience.  
A river meditates for a long time  
to achieve the smooth pebble shallows and  
crossings  
that have invented bottlebrush and lillipilli  
shadows  
and the green darkness of black-bean gullies.  
Rainbow birds and kingfishers and green  
parakeets  
reach the spirit of such places  
and between the smallest layers of shelving  
pebbles  
there are ferns and plump spiders.  
On the sunny sides of such reaches  
there is the clink of energy slowed into leisure  
like the clicking jaws of insects and warm  
lizards.  
You dive in such places and like the water  
you make your own homage.  
You tap two egg-shaped river stones under  
water  
and feel the sound finding out hollow echo-  
chambers  
in all parts of your astonished body.



Rich Amor

Patrick White 1912-1990

IV

My brother looks at rocks and he sees  
chemicals.  
My cousin looks at rocks with a geigercounter.  
I have a friend who reminded me  
of the aboriginal power in rock crystal  
and another who showed me the rocks I could  
use  
to draw marks on the wider rock of the cliff-  
face.  
There are those who are the enemies of rocks;  
they have  
filtered gardens and specimens in pots and I  
imagine  
flower stems amputated in vases.

I have read of someone who threw all his rocks  
into the neighbour's  
allotment and someone who has painted rocks  
into 'cute' companions.  
On my desk I have a rock thunderegg, sliced  
and polished  
to reveal its many layers of story and history and  
what I  
can only describe as its some purpose.  
At its inner core is an area of simple, pure  
white.  
My eyes return and return to that. No,  
don't classify it or break it into components.

V

I think of the writer who dug the rocks  
of his insights and apprehensions  
and then crafted them to flintstones in our  
thoughts  
or held them out against the palm and fingers  
of his offering hands.  
"It's what's below that counts" - and he led  
over the ridge and through the quarry  
to the place of belonging  
that I had always thought ordinary  
or perhaps unsightly. Like the clink of river-  
stones  
his messages told me  
new approaches to the news of singing,  
new shapes to the unnameable One,  
and how, in the rock agate all layers hone in  
to the central crucible of white.

VI

The first time I used rocks as a foundation  
I crafted terraces on our hillside, thinking of  
gardens  
and a plan for reanimating our paddock -  
so many native trees and shrubs and bushes  
sprang  
from that rocky hillside  
that we seemed to have altered the micro-  
climate overnight.  
It took time, it took all our time for those years  
but the action of doing, stirring, learning  
was the real measurement, not clock hours.  
The children grew active and hardened their feet  
there,  
they learned the delight and caution of moth,  
spider,  
and multitudinous nature. "Let them be, let them  
be",  
I said when the snake was uncovered  
and the centipede and the scorpion.  
The rock terrace built up our hill  
and in an afternoon wind all the millions of small  
leaves  
on all the branches of all the thin-fingered  
bushes  
invented the song they had rubbed with their  
fibres  
- it was a song learned from very real ancestors  
and it was there to be taken for granted  
as if they were singing back the rocks  
as if rocks always held sounds of fossils  
as if there had never been a time  
when the rock had not been open  
its history the very ground we stood on.

DAVID MARR

## From: *Patrick White*

*This is a brief extract from the biography to be published in Australia and the United Kingdom by Jonathan Cape and in North America by Knopf.*

The *Overland* crowd was a little surprised when White turned up in Melbourne. Some months before, Stephen Murray-Smith had asked him to be guest of honour at the magazine's dinner in December. White said he would come to the annual shivoo if there were no speeches, but then he won the Prize and it seemed to *Overland* that in all the fuss the dinner would be forgotten. This was not so. White flew down to Melbourne alone on 10 December and stayed with John Sumner. None of the dozen guests at dinner that night realised that in Stockholm the King of Sweden was handing out the Nobel prizes.

All went well until White remarked that Lindsay Anderson's film *O Lucky Man* was a work of genius, indeed as good as any novel of the last ten years. "Come off it," said Barrett Reid and White was suddenly gripped by a paroxysm of invective.

"I said it and I meant it!"

Reid was an intimate of Cynthia Nolan's old adversary Sunday Reed, the last survivor of the old disciples at Heide. White knew this. "You," he thundered, "would be the one person in Australia I would disagree with everything about."

The critic and historian Ian Turner tried to calm things down but his intervention only made things worse. Had White, he asked, ever published in John and Sunday Reed's magazine *Angry Penguins* in the early days.

"Certainly not. But I would like to write a novel about her."

"About Sunday?" Reid asked. "Have you ever met her?"

"That woman! That woman! I don't need to meet her to write about her."

Reid invited him to come to Heide next day and have tea with John and Sunday Reed. He refused point-blank. "Well in that case your novel will be based on muddled mythology like your other novels."

The rage passed. When Murray-Smith later apologised for the brawling, White insisted he had enjoyed the dinner very much. "It wasn't nearly as noisy as some in my house which is sometimes referred to as Monkey Hill."

The night was important. Over coffee Murray-Smith and his wife Nita had told him something of the history of a strange figure they had discovered on Mornington Peninsula. Herbert Murphy, child of a Victorian grazing family, was raised in Suffolk where his uncle was Lord Lieutenant. He claimed the elderly Empress Eugénie befriended him as a boy; he was certainly dog-handler on Sir Douglas Mawson's 1911-1914 Antarctic expedition; and much of the time he lived as a woman under the name Edith. In great old age Murphy was entirely unashamed of his youthful transvestite life and boasted that the War Office had employed him for five years to travel round France in drag to spy on the French railway system. Herbert/Edith was photographed as a woman at Henley, lived with a retired ship's master in Kew, and claimed to be the fragile figure under a white parasol in E. Phillips Fox's huge canvas *The Arbour* hanging in the Victorian National Gallery.

How much of this bizarre history White heard on the night of the *Overland* dinner is not clear, but he was told the detail that sowed the seed of *The Twyborn Affair*: an exchange between Murphy and his mother. "Are you my son, Herbert?" Mrs Murphy asked this familiar figure in a dress.

"No, but I am your daughter Edith."

"I'm so glad. I always wanted a daughter."

The Stockholm ceremony, it must be said, outshone the Melbourne dinner. Indeed the scene in the Grand Auditorium of the Concert Hall might have come from the pages of Tolstoy or Stendhal. A line of laureates in black faced the King's party across the stage which was bare but for a large N on the pale blue carpet. Nolan, who had taken



advantage of his visit to Stockholm to clinch a major exhibition of paintings at the Moderna Museet, wore the rose pink and pearl grey ribbon of a Commander of the British Empire. Carl Gustav in evening dress and decorations stood in a little knot of Swedish nobility. Diamonds in swags on pale silk and bare throats drew fire from the arc lights. The royal party spilled over the stage into the first rows of the auditorium. a scene of confused hand-kissing and bowing. Across the back of the stage, Academicians sat in tiers like schoolboys about to be photographed around the bust of Alfred Nobel. The inventor of dynamite was bathed in a pool of pale blue light. Wreaths of spring flowers lay at his feet.

Artur Lundkvist came forward to read the official discourse on Patrick White. Traditionally this was the task of the secretary of the Swedish Academy, Karl Ragnar Gierow, but his fury at the award to White was unabated. Lundkvist took the job quoting

Gierow the old Swedish maxim: "He who lets the Devil in the boat, should row him ashore." Lundkvist spoke for a few minutes in Swedish and then English. Nolan crossed the stage, shook the King's hand, and took the box containing the medal. After each prize winner sat down the Stockholm Philharmonic in a gallery above the stage played an interlude of appropriate music. To honour Patrick White for introducing "a new continent to literature" the band played Percy Grainger's *English Country Garden*.

*David Marr is the author of Barwick, a life of the former Chief Justice, and of The Ivanov Trail, a study of ASIO, spy scares and the Hawke government. For eight years he worked on The National Times becoming one of its many sacked editors. He began his life of Patrick White in 1985 and finished it in July this year. In the weeks before he died Patrick White was able to read the completed work. David Marr now works on ABC Four Corners.*

## CHORUS & PROTAGONISTS

Over  
Centennial Park –  
where Patrick White  
used to walk – above  
where he wanted  
his ashes blent –  
in the middle distance, black birds  
flap & wrap themselves, as if  
round invisible lumps of air. They look like  
bits of coal-sheen washing:  
wind-caught undergarments from Greek tragedy.  
Cah, they cry, they are both  
chorus & protagonists,  
as they swoop & flap  
their underclothes of death  
low over the  
small birds darting into the tea-tree thickets.

At dusk a different  
conspicuous villain  
sits in the huge fig, he is black  
with a white tipped tail, gold  
rings round his eyes like a gypsy.  
Casually swinging from the tip of his beak  
like a silverblue sardine  
he has stabbed from the blue  
tin of the air, he holds, before taking up  
to dismember, on the upper branch,  
before the student-audience, his three  
gawky ignorant fledglings,  
one perfect  
Dusky Wood Swallow.  
The class is Dismemberment 1 (Life-Drama)  
for about-to-graduate Currawongs.

J. S. HARRY

ALEX MILLER

## From: *The Ancestor Game*

On the threshold I turned and looked back to see my reflection at the far end of his dark hall stepping into the bright rose-perfumed world of the mirror. Resolutely departing from it, I was entering more deeply into Lang Tzu's domain. Leaving him I was becoming the person inhabiting the landscape within his mirror. Suppressing a feeling that I was not quite in control of my situation, I closed the door and pulled it softly until the latch caught. As I left, above the lintel I noticed a sandstone relief set in the red and cream brickwork. It was circular and depicted a pair of dancing phoenixes. Beneath the mythical birds was the word RESURGAM, as if this were the family motto. The whole was surrounded by several bouquets of vine leaves.

Intending to read a few pages of the book he'd pressed upon me, so that I'd have something to say to him about it when I saw him in the morning, I took it to bed with me. It was an old hardcover. Though it must have once been a very smart edition it was now broken-backed and stained. Its cloth covers were a rich golden-yellow. On the upper cover there was a blind-stamped design. I'd been holding it closed in front of me, resting it on my raised thighs and wondering if I weren't too tired to read any of it at all, when I realised the design on the cover was the same as, or very similar to, the one in stone above the lintel of his front door. I held the book obliquely to the light. A pair of phoenixes confronted each other symmetrically. The birds appeared to be engaged upon a ritual dance preceding either mating or combat. I counted eight bouquets of vine leaves adorning the outer circle. There was no legend, no proclamation of faith, beneath this one. I opened the book. A pleasant musty smell was released. The title page bore the following, THE WINTER VISITOR. And beneath this a sub-title, *A Life in the Northern Hemisphere*. This was followed by the author's name, Victoria Feng. Then came a quotation from the Threnos, or lamentation verses, of Shakespeare's poem 'The Phoenix and the Turtle':

*Beauty, truth, and rarity  
Grace in all simplicity,  
Here enclos'd in cinders lie.*

*Death is now the phoenix' nest;*

Here was the explanation for the missing legend, RESURGAM. Unlike the builder of Lang's house, his great-grandfather, it seemed Victoria had not hoped for a resurrection from the cinders to which she had presumably consigned her own particular phoenix. I was tempted to look at the last page, and was on the point of doing so when my eye was held by one final piece of information at the bottom of the title page. This was the name of the publisher of the book. I stared at it. It was the name of my own publisher. Only the address differed, given here as The Strand. The date of publication of this book was 1912, so presumably The Strand had then been the location of my publisher's premises. I turned the page.

After absences lasting more than half a year he came to me each time as if from a strange apartment which communicated with the part of the house in which I lived by a hidden staircase or passage. When he was absent from us I spent many hours searching for the entrance to this secret way and often imagined I had found it. For a time after his departure I learnt to blunt the sharpness of my grief with a resort to the fantastic, and in my daydreams I joined him in a land of pure imaginings which, for me, must lie beyond the hidden doorway. Together he and I, like the mythical *feng* and *huang* of the Chinese other-world, the heavenly emissary which appears when the land enjoys the gods' favor, journeyed side by side and danced our benevolent dance in perfect harmony upon a land which blessed our presence. Daily reality in Coppin Grove in comparison to this fanciful world seemed to me for some years during my

childhood to be a meaningless folly pursued by persons of an unmitigated and grim practicality. A world of persons who did not deserve my compassion. No word from my mother or sisters, no matter how kind or well-intentioned, elicited anything from me for years but disdain. Until in the end, one by one, they reluctantly abandoned me to my folly, seeing in my presence among them not a daughter or a sister but a stranger in their midst.

On each subsequent visit he was always changed from when I had seen him last. And so, I am certain, was I. We met on each occasion as new people, freshly burnished from our travels. The father with whom I dwelt for months at a time in my imaginary landscape was forced to retreat into the shadows of fiction whenever my real father arrived. He always came unexpectedly.

On a bitterly cold day when I was eleven – it must have been the winter of 1889 – I was practising a new and difficult Schubert sonata. I was lost to my surroundings, struggling to master the unfamiliar fingering, when I became aware that someone was near me. I ceased playing at once and swung around upon the stool. He stood in the doorway. We gazed at each other. In that moment I felt for him the purest, the most distilled, love. We did not embrace. We never embraced. But gazed upon each other's beloved countenance in wonderment. We dwelt in splendor. Schubert's A minor chord loitered in the room as if it were the ghost of that great sadness that all humanity must bear.

"Please don't stop," my father implored me gently.

"I have just finished, father," I replied and I slipped quickly from the stool and hurried from the room by the door furthest from him.

He called to me, "Stay a moment Victoria. I have a present for you."

But I could not stay. I ran to my room and locked the door and stood dry-eyed before my mirror and solemnly announced to my faithful sister from the other-world, "The Phoenix has returned to us." I did not see him again until dinner. The formality of this occasion made our meeting easier for me. The ritual, that is, which was required from each of us shielded me from emotions which I might otherwise have found it difficult to deal with. I believed he too, and that he alone of all those present, understood this exactly as I understood it. His gift to me was waiting in my place. They watched while I opened it. For my eight sisters there were fine

silks from Hangchou and for my mother a carpet from Tibet.

From its bed of silvery wild grass, a grass so soft it was like the fur of a young rabbit against my fingers – a grass so unlike the coarse grasses that grew beside the Yarra and in the paddocks around Hawthorn that it could have come from the other-world – from this nest I drew forth an earthenware horse glazed with green and orange glazes. It was a horse of fine proportions, realistically formed. It stood with its head slightly turned and its mouth open, alert to the will of its rider. It was caparisoned with a Persian saddle and rosettes of green frogs on the harness. This tall, noble steed I recognised as none other than the legendary *Tianma*, the heavenly horse of the West. I looked at my horse with pride. This supernatural beast would carry me safely and swiftly to the furthest lands which my father might ever visit. It was a horse perfectly fashioned to inhabit the unearthly shadows of my fiction. Carefully I replaced it in its nest of wild grass and put it to one side. I did not need to look at my father in order to share the meaning of this gift. I understood that henceforth I was to travel with him.

After a moment my mother said, "I am sure Victoria wishes to thank you." I raised my eyes and looked at her with a contempt which the dead might well bear towards the living. How little you know or understand, this look was intended to convey. I remember she blushed. She was a loving and sensitive wife and the kindest mother ever blessed with eight dutiful daughters, an abundance of worldly goods and a robust constitution. But she was also Irish and her anger could be sudden, implacable and even violent in its expression. But I was not afraid of her. How should I be? For I had my secret. So I smiled and waited for her to tell me to leave the room and to go to bed without any dinner. I knew my father would not intervene. My mother was the empress of this world, the mistress of the house at Coppin Grove, her domain bounded by the road and the river and by the summer house and the edge of the trees yonder. But not extending beyond these boundaries. Beyond her domain lay my freedom. And his. I did not care for this world at all, nor for its rewards. I laughed at them. When Katherine married the mayor and they moved to their great house in Brighton I felt sorry for her. I saw only that she had been taken to a prison from which there could be no escape.

How many years was it from the gift of the horse to the terrible day I learned that not only

the existence of my mother and sisters but my own existence as well had never been mentioned to my father's Chinese wife and son in Shanghai? That day I learned I had not existed for him in the Northern Hemisphere, with his number one family, as it became clear. Though I am not certain that in his youth he meant this to be so. I believe it was something deeper than himself which eroded our validity for him over the years. There are some actions for which people should not be held personally accountable. There are ancient forces which make their way through us as rivers make their way through landscapes, reshaping features we had thought permanent, moving what we had thought to be stilled for ever, and wearing away resolves in us that are not touched even by our strangest imaginings. As my father I knew he loved me. But he was also a man from China.

This bright autumn day with the sun warm against my shoulders, the twenty-seventh of May 1908, he is dying. My half-brother from Shanghai, who is wholly Chinese, is with him. I can see my brother's shadow at the window. He stands behind my father's chair and waits to become the second Feng. He is a practical man. I believe Australia means nothing to him . . . I would like to cease writing and walk among the trees, among that remnant of bushland so precious to me which lies yonder, between the river bank and the road . . . The shadow of my brother has gone from the window. My father is dead. I am alone with my horse and my fiction. I am in my thirtieth year. I have been many years in preparation. Now even the Lord of Death herself could not be better mounted for this journey.

I was sitting in what seemed to be a quite pleasant bus shelter with Gertrude. But we were not waiting for a bus. Our position on top of a high escarpment overlooked an impressive series of forested valleys intersected by wide areas of open grassland. I recognised the country as being to the north and a little west of Melbourne, except that this might have been a landscape of that area painted in the nineteenth century, perhaps by Von Guerard or John Glover, for there were no signs of clearing on the steeper slopes and no roads or towns. The sun had just this moment set and a flat stratum of bulbous little clouds was touched with apricot on its underbelly. This warm hue was the very color of the bosom of the woman in Lindner's gallery. I was pleasurably reminded of the way the oily sheen of her pearls had lain against her skin. My awareness

of this tenuous connection between the scene before me as a painting and the woman in Tom Lindner's gallery lent to the dream a reassuring sense of its connectedness to history, indeed of my own connectedness to history. There was something a bit smug about this feeling, as if I wished to imply a claim for the importance of the dream, a claim for my own importance really and for my view of things. We were sitting on a wooden bench which was attached to a table, a heavy barbecue set of the sort found with fireplace rest areas beside highways. I was writing in a thick quarto pad with a pen that flowed very evenly over the paper. Gertrude was sitting to my right. She was looking at the view, particularly at the sunset. Although we weren't waiting for a bus, it seemed we were travelling together.

I finished writing. I had no sense of the content but felt pleased with myself nevertheless. I said to Gertrude, I look back now upon my behaviour as a young man with the feeling that it was all time wasted. Yet I cannot see how it might have been otherwise. I knew we both knew it was my fortieth birthday. She continued to look at the sunset without in any way acknowledging that she had heard me. I wasn't impatient. I accepted that she didn't want to miss a moment of the changing light. Her face was lit by it. I observed her with a feeling of gratitude, for it seemed to me she was the perfect practitioner of her art. I was aware that with a slightly greater effort of imagination I might heighten her skin to a pearlshell pink. I refrained from making this effort, and instead thought, "I shall not alter anything. She is like a pearl in the western sky." This banality struck me as being a beautiful poetic image of great originality and depth.

In a voice then which was extraordinarily clear, as if each word were being struck (were being cast individually) from a glass instrument, she said, "You have never dreamed of writing before." I knew this was true. As the last of her words were uttered they became tinkly and I was conscious of beginning to wake. I felt myself coming out of the dream and was already thinking what a good dream it had been, congratulating myself on it, when a voice from the public address system concealed somewhere in the tall gum trees nearby announced, "As you re-enter the dream you will think you are waking up." The dream then began to repeat itself, only this time in a rather more brittle way in which there was a certain feeling of menace. I hung on until the end, then I thought with relief, "Now I am waking up for sure." I felt I'd just missed having a really awful nightmare. At this point the bored



voice from the trees said again, "As you re-enter the dream you will think you are waking up." I realised with horror that I was stuck in the dream for ever. With crushing asthmatic panic the realisation went through me, I am stuck in this dream for ever! It is caught on something in me and can't get past it! It will keep clicking over again and again, getting thinner and thinner each time, until it fades me out completely! I struggled desperately. I was going into a terminal coma when I woke with a little shock.

I'd been sweating heavily into the pillow. I sat up. The lamp beside me was still on. The book lay on the bed. I picked it up, remembering I'd finished reading it before going to sleep. It was three-hundred-and-sixteen pages! Outside the window the sun was shining and the traffic was rushing past. I looked at my watch. It was ten-thirty. I got up and telephoned Lang and told him I'd been held up but would be over soon. He said, "Could you please hurry Steven. It is important." I went back into the bedroom and lay down again and closed my eyes, just for a minute. I was holding *The Winter Visitor* in both my hands, not sure what I intended by this possessive gesture - I thought of an ailing priest stumbling around in his deserted church clutching his breviary, the book a last treasured link with his divine office, an office from which all other meanings had been removed. The minute I closed my eyes it was all still there. I watched her cantering away on her orange and green horse through the patch of sunlit native bush. I watched her setting off on her journey, riding into the unknown landscape of her fiction, aware of her inevitable solitude, her long black hair streaming out behind her like a veil, the hooves of her supernatural horse throwing up a fine dust into the bright summer air among the tall gum trees and scattering the dry leaf litter. Watching her I was her, the way one is the person with whom one identifies, the way one strives with that person, as vulnerable as they are themselves to the dangers and difficulties which are encountered, hope and anxiety and fear dancing in one's brain together. Opposed to us was the dark sign with which she had announced her work, Beauty truth and rarity, grace in all simplicity, here enclosed in cinders lie.

*Alex Miller, winner of the Braille Book of the Year 1990, is the author of the novels The Tivington Nott (Robert Hale) and Watching the Climbers on the Mountain (Pan).*

JUDITH WRIGHT

## At The Point

*A further chapter of an autobiography-in-progress of which an earlier chapter 'Brisbane in Wartime' was published in Overland 100, p. 64+*

When the cottage at the Point was three-quarters finished, we moved there to clean up and do the painting. It was far enough north of Brisbane to be warm even in July, when frosts and winds chilled Tambourine Mountain and the weatherboard house let in the westerly.

There was no school nearer than the primary school at Demeter\* – a little town by-passed by the highway and living on the small incomes of farmers whose sandy, colorless farms scratched for survival like starving fowls. The wallum country, lovely in itself, was soon infertile when cleared and cropped, its thin content of humus washing out in every storm. The great kauri forest that had once covered it had long ago vanished downriver on timber barges and through sawmills; not much hardwood passed through the mills now.

The Point was a small outcrop of pink-cream rock stretching into the various blues of the lake. Tides struggled upriver through the series of little lakes, to die out where the river entered the big lake at its upper end. A couple of fishermen made a living out of its shallow, sandy reaches, but the mullet-run in spring was the only small surge of wealth the fishery offered. Maybe twenty holiday cottages, the post-office, the store that one-legged Martin kept (he was a sawmill casualty), and two small boarding-houses were dotted along the sand roads; FOR SALE notices studded the trees on most of the other too-small allotments. Our builder, Bert, was the local man of destiny, a developer with grandiose dreams and almost nothing in the kitty.

Bert had somehow got himself to the USA at the end of the war, seen the first rush of the motel business into avid little towns, and come back with ideas beyond his capacity. He had crashed and bankrupted himself with a first attempt, a series of concrete cottages built out of unsecured bank loans, above a beach so dangerous that nobody, after the first few drownings, wanted to live there. Still unquenched, he moved up the river to the lovely

but nearly roadless lake country, built another cottage with his own hands and no money, sold it and was now engaged in his second venture. Land there – because of the state of the only two access tracks – was astonishingly cheap; cottages, on Bert's method at least, were quick and easy to build; the sand of the Point was full of silica and needed little cement to build walls and floors. He now had visions – having sold two more cottages – of a chain of motels all up the coast to Cairns and a fortune ahead. He was employing one man to help him pour concrete and lug timber from the sawmill, and living on credit.

Our cottage was part of the building project. His little four-roomed design with a terrace made of that local pink sandstone looked like something from Mediterranean postcards of village life; and the walls stood sturdily because of that silica, though they were not much more than seven feet high, which, we were to learn, did not satisfy local building regulations.

We mixed buckets of whitewash with a bit of red powder and slapped them on the thirsty concrete surfaces; the cottage looked like something made of coconut ice and had a holiday air. Warm winds came whiffing in with a sea-smell, we could buy fish cheap under the counter (not declared to the Fish Board and sent off south to go stale), and pineapples from the farms. It was a good place to write in, no telephones, no proper roads, no bus except the daily school bus and the weekend bus that held maybe ten or twenty tourists.

It was the school bus that was our problem. Meredith was six years old; the Demeter school was ten miles (why should I translate that into kilometres when that is an anachronism?) off along a bad road; the school bus was the only answer. It passed from the sawmill about half a mile off. I decided to shepherd my daughter along that stretch of track, going and coming, to protect her from the local schoolkid push; there were only about nine

or ten of them, but most were boys and their reputation for toughness was well deserved.

So I met Lola, also taking her children along that stretch of track for the same purpose.

Lola and Joe lived in the smallest and most approximate of the cottages for rent, a fibro three-roomed affair up on high stumps with an array of broken bottles and tin cans under it, which Joe intended to take to town and sell for scrap one day. How had they got there? Joe was Aboriginal and very black; if he had been allowed out of one of the Aboriginal reserves it had not been because he could 'pass', as the Department put it. It must have been for good behaviour and earning power; unless he had 'made a bolt for it', as local murmurs suggested. But if he hadn't somehow got permission to stay where he was, Joe and Lola could not have stayed, for the resentment of their presence in this otherwise poor-white township on the make was more than enough for him to have been reported to the police station and ordered back to Murgon or wherever.

Lola on the other hand was a pale, glowing brown, velvety-eyed, with a mop-shaped head of Kanaky hair and a smile like sunlight on a white beach. The children were all around Meredith's age. Donnie was about eight, Rosie a year or two younger, Alan and Ellie strung out down to three years old, and only Ellie wasn't yet going to school. With the lack of girls on that bus Rosie and Meredith were natural allies. I was glad to enlist Donnie, a protective, beaming and strong child, as extra protection for my daughter. Donnie might be tough enough to deflect the attacks of the sawmiller and fisher kids, and seemed cheerful enough to take on much larger enemies.

So Lola and I got to be friendly, as we trailed with our children along the sandy track and waited

for the bus, and glared down the jeers of the white boys. And so, when Jack fell ill and the guttering still had to be fixed and the piping connected to the new galvanised iron tank, Joe came to take the job.

His main source of income was bean-picking in the crop season but now, in late winter, he and his family were presumably living on the Dowment for the four children, and whatever else anyone condescended to employ them for. Lola made lawyer-vine baskets for the store to sell (at a remarkable mark-up on what she got); there were fish in the lake and Joe walked a long way along the shore to places where the tourists didn't go and the fisher-boats couldn't reach through the shallows. For a bit of extra food, there were some old hens and a few lanky cabbages protected by netting from the dump.

I found myself being glared at in the store and post-office as a betrayer of white values - that was when I strolled down to the beachfront with Meredith and Rosie and the rest at weekends and bought everyone milkshakes. Our reputation for paying our bills, which few of the other residents apparently did, or did on time, helped us to stay on not-too-unfriendly terms, but clearly we were fringe characters, maybe communists, and not to be trusted. Writers, eh? Real snooty types, and probably lousy from those kids, too.

Jack and Joe got friendly. Jack's usual winter illnesses and the strain on his heart that had been entailed in climbing ladders and fixing guttering kept him propped up in bed for a while, and Joe, finding an audience, used to squat beside him while they discussed the world, its oddities and motives. Once, Joe had hung a piece of guttering wrong; he came in and confessed to this error with many apologies. Jack told him that everyone made



mistakes. "Even God makes mistakes," said Joe sadly, holding out his very black arm. "This color, that's a mistake." No amount of assurances would convince him otherwise; he had had that color dinned into him for too long.

Meredith, meanwhile, was suffering more than I had realised. To go about with Rosie was her own crime. At last she told me the problem. "They all say they won't talk to me if I talk to Rosie. They won't let me play games or go on the swing. They say if I stop talking to Rosie, I can."

Crossing my fingers, I asked her who she wanted for friends, Rosie or the others. She chose Rosie, swing or no swing.

When spring came and brought on the local show at Demeter (that town whose ripe autumnal name belied its scrawny insufficiencies), I asked Lola to come and bring Rosie and Donnie and Alan and maybe even Ellie if the car would hold them. Lola looked a bit wistful, but she had a job of cleaning at the boarding house that day, since it was a holiday weekend. So we set off, very clean as to clothes and shining as to faces – Lola scrubbed those children every morning under the tank tap, in spite of disadvantages as to soap and towels. Rosie did sometimes have 'things' in her hair, which, like her mother's was thick and golden-brown and frizzy, and hard to comb. But 'things' were rife among the white children, too, though only Rosie and Donnie and Alan were ever sent outside the schoolroom for this sin. Meredith caught them, too, but not being actually a 'boong', was not, as far as I know, persecuted for it except through my own fine-combing and kerosening.

The wonders of the Show kept us spellbound for a while, wandering from sideshows to swings and merry-go-round and horses and goats and cattle. Then we climbed the steps of the so-called pavilion – an unpainted timber structure with a series of display tables for crafts, cookery and flowers and a groundfloor (literally) for vegetables and the Pet Show. Upstairs, Donnie and Rosie dragged me to inspect the rows of school plasticine sculptures and the Art display. "Look, look, Donnie," cried Rosie, "I've won the Art prize!"

Sure enough, it appeared, she had, though the pictures were unsigned and the teachers, perhaps with such questions of discrimination in view, discreetly didn't name the winners on the cards. When Rosie pointed out her own, with its blue card attached, it was certainly much better than the rest. But Donnie grabbed her hand and shushed her fiercely. "If they know it's yours they'll take the prize away."

We dared not stand long to admire it, for Donnie

moved on and dragged us with him. No doubt he was right.

When spring grew really warm and the fields of green beans that supported the district farmers were in flower, Joe had an accident with an axe at the woodheap, and spent time in hospital. When he came out he was very lame. He got the Disability Pension, and had to go back to town for spells of treatment. We left, with the cottage more or less finished, and heard no more local news for a time.

When we did, it was bad. It was what Joanie, from the boarding house – who was looking after the cottage for us and finding us tenants – called Newspaper news.

In a place the size of the Point, newspaper news couldn't be anything but bad. Joe had gone off to town for his treatment, drawn the pension, spent it on drink and stayed away for weeks. When he came back, he found Lola, to keep the kids from starving, living with a local timberworker, and he killed her "just like that". He was coming up for trial next month, and he wasn't pleading Not Guilty; he was so broken up that he wanted to be hanged, but that of course wouldn't happen.

What had happened to the children? I telephoned the 'Protector' in Brisbane to ask. It took a long time, and several phone calls and letters, to get any information from that quarter, which specialised in grunts and snarls and remarks such as "kids like that have a rotten heredity, what do you want to know for?" Finally, it revealed that the children had been taken to Palm Island where Joe's mother would look after them.

From Palm Island there was no recall, no reprieve, no information and no word. Joe was a lifer, that was all we knew.

At the Point again, I was told that now I'd know better than to let niggers into my house again; "a wonder he didn't murder the lot of them and you, too".

Long ago, Joe had confided in Jack, when asked why he was living at the Point where he had no kin or friends and the family was isolated from any kind of support beyond seasonal jobs. "They tell us on the Reserve that we got to go out there and get simulated," said Joe; "we got no right to get supported by other people with taxes and that; we got to prove we can live like anyone else. We thought we'd try it, that's all."

*Judith Wright's A Human Pattern; Selected Poems (A. & R., \$12.95), her new definitive selection of her poetry, was published recently.*

*\* All names have been changed*



D. R. BURNS

## Filthy Fable as Visionary Monster Novel

(*The Definitive Role of David Ireland's  
A Woman of the Future*)

David Ireland's *A Woman of the Future*, which won the 1979 Miles Franklin Award, has suffered, as did Orwell's *1984*, the common fate of prophetic novels. The future it foretold, one where, in a state of open slather, totally indiscriminate, after-school-hours sex from childhood on was to be the norm, now seems rather dusty and left behind. The novel retains great interest, though, as a prime example of the sort of narrative, exclusive to Australia, which absorbed most critical attention and gained the loudest plaudits, from 1960 until very recently. It is a 'visionary monster' novel.

1960 saw the publication of the first visionary monster, Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot*. Other highly regarded specimens are White's *The Eye of the Storm* and Xavier Herbert's *Poor Fellow My Country*. A much more recent example, *Kisses of the Enemy* by Rodney Hall, shows the sub-species as enfeebled, in decline, near to extinction.

For the writer of the visionary monster novel, geographically limitless Australia offers equally unbounded imaginative possibilities. Such distance sets mirages before the eye and fills the creative mind with visions. These visions, of what lies beyond the usual limits of Time, Space and ordinary awareness, lead the writer to disregard formal narrative limits as well. And, in doing so, to create a monster.

The visionary monster novel, always a bulky beast, often gives the appearance of something put together by a process of somewhat random accumulation rather than in accord with some precise, overall plan. Parts may seem to have been simply added as visionary possibilities or anti-visionary evils multiplied to monstrous proportions.

More interestingly still, the visionary monster is composed - as was the Minatour, with its bull's head and man's body - of two totally discordant parts. This reflects the need to fit, within one narrative, both the timeless vision, and the time-

ridden circumstance from which it offers escape. The vision is likely to be so radiant-ineffable-exalted as to make day-to-day life seem more than ordinarily mundane-monotonous-messy. Where the author takes sides, as White and Herbert both plainly do, the monsterism shows in the difference of quality between high-level, celebratory and low-level, dismissive prose.

In *A Woman of the Future* the discord is between an earnest prophetic concern to present mystical portents and oracular pronouncements, to set forth the essential inward truths and outward possibilities of life in the Great South Land; and an erosive Aussie facetiousness, a reduction of matters to the rough-as-guts nitty-gritty, and to play up all the sexual antics. In this novel, though, there is no suggestion of disapproval in the presentation of the low life, the dirty details. On the contrary, they are set forth with great gusto, possibly in the confidence that shock force, exerted well below the navel, will always carry the day in the land of Oz.

The contrast between complete earnestness and total facetiousness is made greater by discarding realism, in regard to physical possibilities, while retaining it in the precise presentation of details, however fantastic. At the high point of her prophetic reaching up and out to "the silent land", the heroine, young Alethea Hunt becomes, or seems to become, a leopard. At the many low points, of what could be called the literary larrikinism, members of the inferior grade of citizenry, in this futuristic scheme of things, undergo body growths of an inconvenient and startling kind. Vaginas develop in the armpits, in the case of one young female. A cannon, a coffin and a lower female body grow to protrude from the midribs of three males. Some individuals, and sometimes whole families, are born with weird afflictions, such as feet that take root if these people stop moving.

What all this grotesquerie seems aimed to revive

is that taste for oddly constructed, misbegotten humans which once made sideshow exhibitions a legitimate and profitable enterprise. This same old-fashionedness (peculiar, in a futuristic novel) attaches to the description of the sexual doings throughout. These many, many episodes, all in messy super-close-up and mainly starring Alethea – variously staked out by the young and the middle-aged, the clean and the filthy – reveal a yearning forward to the days of liberation from that age, now way back, of sexual repression, when the dirty joke was in its heyday.

Here, past and future exist together, just as do earnestness and facetiousness – suggesting a further reason for finding *A Woman* of continuing socio-literary interest, as surely no other local novel celebrates Australia, to the same extent, as the home place of bold, barefaced, total contradiction.

An Australianism can certainly be seen in the way a close, often crudely comic, attention to bodily functions and grotesque physical deformities shares prominence with Alethea's developing sense of the mystery and the promise of *Terra Australis*, the untouched land with which she comes to identify. 'A fair go' for both high and low sorts of narrative is thus assured. *Per medium* of this prize-winning novel, our national ethic finds expression within our nation's Literature.

*A Woman* is most completely, quintessentially Australian, though, in a still more interesting and very obvious way. With all possible care, in finest detail, and from an enquiring young female first person narrator's point of view, the narrative takes in both basic and (just barely) possible events, like the rise and fall of sleeping Dad's penis when worked upon by studious little daughter's fingers and lips and vagina, as well as quite impossible grotesqueries of the sorts already mentioned. To present these different, but often equally messy, sorts of *physiologica* carefully, exactly and exhaustively, to place them before the readers' eyes and right under their noses, is to dramatise another sort of limitlessness with which the term 'Australian' is associated, that internationally-renowned, total disregard for *social* limits, for all acknowledged notions of restraint and good taste.

One consequence of the discord between earnest and facetious intention throughout is that Alethea Hunt must, as heroine, play the part of double agent. She does it with style and vigor from the first page. Here she records events on the day of her conception. Mother had "one" with Father before breakfast, and another after lunch. Alethea may, however, have been Boyce Hart's "little swimmer".

This is because Mother and Boyce, an old flame,

"did it quickly" in between times.

Two stolen minutes against the wall of the gear room! I know that lust means never having to say I love you, but my mother said he seemed uneasy, on edge, playing his role as if he expected someone to trump it.

He came quickly and released her. She took his handkerchief, wiped herself down there and gave it back to Boyce.

She walked back along the corridor . . . and stood in the door of the lounge and smiled into the room. . . . A trickle started between her legs.

Discharged semen, perhaps the most common material ingredient of David Ireland's many fictional stir-fries, acts here as reducing agent. It points up the accidental, grossly physical, inherently comic nature of Alethea's begetting. What is being got across, though, through all the basic-comic detail, can be thought of as an entirely serious observation: Alethea's paternity (and most others'), must remain uncertain since few men can protect their wives unceasingly from temptation, (cf. *The Father* by August Strindberg).

The totally contradictory parts of Alethea's nature are next made specific at her birth, by the caul on her head, which is "patched and marked with uterine material, like a small spotted cub". She is more emphatically animal than most, the marking indicates (and her sexual readiness will soon prove), but with the signs of the higher, leopard state she will enter at her apotheosis.

A clean-limbed, clear-minded Australian schoolgirl, Alethea lives in what seems to be an outer suburb of Sydney, with her father, an actor in regular employment, and her mother, a dedicated, unpublished writer. Normality of life proceeds here because of, rather than despite, abnormal circumstance. Mother has turned completely inward; father completely outward, both from his living self during working hours – to play "the dead body on stage for most of the performance" – and from the usual domestic leisure of the money-earning marital partner, to cooking and complete parental care.

Alethea lives in domestic and emotional security. Her easy, uninterrupted progress through primary and high school, the usual path of the gifted child with quite old-fashioned upward, competitive aspirations, will culminate in second-top place in the Final High School examinations, just a little before she (apparently) enters the leopard state rather than the tertiary one.

Our present-day reality, of home and school life, sends beams of conviction, of its own hard-edged

sort, out over all the surreal grotesquerie and the future this represents. Contrary-wise, the futuristic, the area of surreal possibilities, expands the terrain of the recognisable, the present, particularly in respect of the number, variety and *modus operandi* of Alethea's sexual experiences. The opposition throughout, and in all its forms, tends to be, indeed, of this rather supportive sort; thus contradiction itself is contradicted, in what might seem the revelation of another strand of Australianism.

Alethea's exceptionally high sexual score (her consistently fancy stroking on a very sticky wicket so to speak) raises a central question about a novel which must surely be the filthiest (the old-style term seems appropriate) ever to win the most prestigious literary award its country of origin has to offer. Do all these dirty details and grubby grotesqueries, this rank realism and sexy surrealism, really deserve serious critical attention? Or should they be simply be dismissed as facetiousness, the separate parts of one dirty big, dirty joke?

The moral justification for such attention is the view that a serious narrative purpose gains shape through all the monkey business. The totality of Alethea's sexual and visual experience comprises, in this view, the field where she is tried, or the furnace in which her spirit is forged and the fleshy dross burnt away. She cannot, on this interpretation, leave the human state for a higher, purer one until she knows it entirely. This includes the appalling capacity for sadism contained in official powers, and for masochism in the psyches of the victims of these powers. (The grotesque deformities manifest feelings of shame and inferiority.) The over-riding allegory, of Alethea, always intact though used and abused by many males while seeking her identity as 'Australia', the waiting land, seems to emerge logically enough from her individual human quest, which is to match and out-point the males on all scores.

This earnestness is both moral and literary (so further runs this argument for a general seriousness of purpose). Alethea is always moving towards the higher, the leopard state, with clues as to what will be, like the spotted caul, scattered throughout. Leaping into the rougher play-ground games she is competing with the males on what they see as their ground, but, more centrally, she is preparing for the vigorous, big cat way of life. On this reading, the leopard destiny represents linear purity, firm narrative intention coming to be in spite of all the lateral pulls and distractions. The leopard symbol, rich in heraldic and legendary associations, finally irradiates and gives purpose to all the preceding accumulation of what must often have seemed, to

Puzzled Reader, merely free fancy. It puts, what is more, our home-grown, deliberately Aussie novel into an international context with Lampedusa's splendid, panoramic study of Sicily's aristocracy, *Il Gattopardo* (The Leopard!) Surely the seal is thus set upon earnestness, *not* facetiousness as the book's fundamental driving force.

This statement of narrative intention certainly reads well. But it fails, of course, to answer a central and simple question: what has finding one's destiny as the emergent spirit of the Australia-to-be got to do with turning into a bloody leopard?

A reader with some local geographical awareness, still entertaining suspicions about that fundamental earnestness, might also ask quite another question. Wouldn't such a tree-climbing beast, while still capable of driving a car, head, in south eastern Australia, for the forests of northern Victoria rather than the largely pastoral "western plains", of New South Wales, as Alethea, according to the 'Editor's Note', was last known to have been doing? The answer to this is, possibly, no. The leopard might, quite sensibly, head straight for the flat, rather tree-less interior to join its fellows and live well, just outside Dubbo, at the splendidly organised, open-plan 'Western Plains' Zoo!

This answer arises from a willingness on the reader's part to look for the in-joke, to discover the signs of facetiousness, rather than earnestness, as the directing force. A large part of the novel's interest, for a local audience which prides itself on possessing a well-developed instinct for bullshit, is how completely this can be done.

The main switch is thrown, so to speak, and facetiousness shown to be (probably) the main spring, by taking account of what is said, in the text, about the inferior social class in this futuristic society. It is made up of the drones, those without any effective social task, nicely misnamed "The Frees". "The trivial occupations of freedom are their whole life." "The frees can be as idle as they wish or can fill the hosts of supportive positions . . . Nothing time consuming is despised: the consumption of time is the chief object of mock work done by the free." The joke in the centre of the bulging monster narrative, on this reading, is that it represents the time-consuming work undertaken by the one or more Free creators of the legend of Alethea Hunt, who has (have) fashioned it, laboriously and in somewhat random fashion, by adding piece to piece. The usual division of an Ireland narrative, as here, into very short, one- or two-page, only contingently related episodes, lends force to this interpretation. As does the fact that each mini-episode has, typically for Ireland again,

a heading only obliquely suited to the contents or else relevant in a crashingly obvious way.

Certainly, the vast field of incidents featuring the intimate bodily functions seems, also, at first sight, to argue, overwhelmingly, the case for facetiousness (dirty jokery) as the mainspring. In terms of that older, repressive-obsessive attitude to sex, when the tight-mouthed wouser and the loose-lipped larrikin were both very much about, the book is a veritable encyclopedia of laboriously contrived, sometimes filthy stories, many of them of the early adolescent sort.

The inevitable swing back towards seeing earnestness as the narrative mainspring, following that observation, begins with a question. What would be, what could be the comic force of such an elaborate exercise in ('pornographic') facetiousness at *this* point of literary and social history? To present all the raw details of cocks and cunts and fucking and sucking herein set forth as, intendedly, fundamentally, a cause of giggling and guffawing is surely to tickle a dead horse. The functions of the lower body, we, the Ireland reading public all know, are respected now rather than despised and feared. They have the stature accorded them in Freud's writings. They have gained, indeed, a certain socio-literary grandeur with their celebration in *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Remembering the monumental court judgements which permitted the public reading of these, one may see how the lower-body functions have played a crucial part in the further freeing of the human mind. The business of thinking, we can see and now may plainly say, owes a considerable debt to fucking and even to shitting. They must be taken seriously.

At this point, in the renewed statement of the case for earnestness as narrative mainspring, Alethea not only moves onto the ground opened by Molly Bloom and Lady Chatterley, she extends it. She pushes on, full of post-Freudian confidence, past impediments they never contemplated. While still merely on the way towards puberty, she gives all those precise details of her father's (perfectly ordinary) cock and balls, of sucking and fucking him while he drunkenly sleeps. She calmly performs those acts which most young cases of the Electra complex – given that there are any – presumably only dream about, even today. Or she says she does.

Father not being sexually available in his waking hours, Alethea, already bought and sold and rather badly served, in this futuristic, sexist scheme of things, by several immature schoolyard males, has herself taken by a middle-aged lecher. He, "Mr. Johnson", really works her up, down by the quarry (where the whole pupil population likes to assemble,

unclothed, at four p.m.), "my feet in the car straps, his face slightly rough with silvery stubble, and his lips and tongue wet with his spit and various moistures".

She must, in the course of her human pilgrimage, as already suggested, answering (earnestly) any and every challenge, come to know the male in many guises, pushing back the frontiers of repression ever further. She practises sexual dominance herself, initiating little boys ("I felt the tiny thing slip out and the liquid run down my anus"), experiences humiliation by getting herself gang banged, and throws off the hesitations induced by middle-class notions of cleanliness when she comes to climax with the filthy creature well met in the stadium change room, on the back of whose penis "when it was up . . . the dirt was so engrained it was studded with blackheads like black currants in a cake".

The earnestness with which Alethea seeks out the variety of sexual experience available in her very, very open society, is manifest in the care she takes to get the details all just right, "the cornflower and water look" of semen, the way the skin of the scrotum (of sleeping Dad) sometimes moves as though crawling, or, shifting up to eye level, with the cohesiveness and elasticity of a long snot dribble (in the case of one juvenile grotesque).

The fusing manifest, of fine care and gross object, rather reminds one of that meeting between adult concern and juvenile obsession found in near-contemporary art at its most explorative. The paradox here, though, is that sophistication is most evident when the stuff of which dirty jokes for the very young used to be made has been placed, steaming hot, right before the reader. Earnestness and facetiousness switch places, this is to say, at the lowest, the penis covered with blackheads level, just as they do at the highest, the leopard level.

Ranking with the bodily functions, as mainline exhibits for both cases, are the human grotesques. Most of these are detailed, fully fashioned, three-dimensional, tactile, sometimes palpating indeed. This graphic extremism certainly seems to convey a facetious intent. So, too, does the usual development of the sketch, in the case, as one example, of the shopkeeper who has become brittle. He is, with good reason of course, embarrassed about this and crushes underfoot the bits of himself, ear lobes and the like, which drop off in his customers' presence.

An *earnest* intention is equally apparent, though of the Aesop's fables sort. Evident in the case of the brittle shopkeeper, and many other episodes, is a lack of self-esteem, the desire to conform

completely on the part of the "Free" citizen even if it means self destruction.

In a minority of sketches, the move is made towards the (earnest) statement of a more complex moral point. The feelings of "Mario Julian" towards the female trunk and legs growing out of his midriff survive, in this one, the crude response they inevitably provoke.

Mario Julian by now had grown his girl-product to the extent of her legs; the buttocks were out and the long awaited pussy there. His friends came to see him . . . held his hands to keep him powerless, and used her.

He was shocked and gasped out to them: "You're doing *me!* You're doing *me!*" And they left.

He touched her constantly. His parents marvelled that he regarded her as part of himself: the way he protected her, the way he fingered her and knew her and thought of her all the time.

"He really loves that girl," his mother said.

Here, a statement is being made, a very earnest one, within the facetious arrangement, about romantic love, its growth from self-regard into selflessness, while retaining a narcissistic flavor. It is a truth, a truism rather, more notable for the absurd context in which it occurs than for anything radical about its substance. Of course, we would readily agree, of course that is the nature of romantic love, this coalescence of self and otherness, in opposition to the brute desire, associated with male sexuality, simply to possess, to obtain a tangible, and limited gratification, as Mario Julian's friends do.

Throughout the novel, it is just this intellectual obviousness which makes the rebound so swift from seeing earnestness to seeing facetiousness as the driving force. "This truth is so obvious it must be meant as a (rather subtle) joke" is the reader's response, more and more as Alethea becomes increasingly the prophet, letting fly with the great central truths of life in contemporary society and/or the Great South Land.

But reader rebound in the opposite direction occurs just as rapidly. As merely one example, the painfully blunt funniness of the Mario Julian episode excites the same response as all the other episodes featuring the physical with facetious intention, to wit, "this joke is so juvenile it must conceal a (rather profound) truth".

This bounce back, from one extreme to the other, the basic narrative feature in this enormously

extended revelation of Australia as the totally self-contradictory continent, has, as its generative source, what can be thought of as a further piece of hyper-Australianism, Alethea's itching for the obvious, a pain she clearly feels with equal force, in the cerebral and the clitoral areas. She likes to get it all out in the open – the way that Australia, the empty land, waits to be (ful)filled, and the way that father's scrotum seems to crawl about in that oddly arbitrary way. With the same obvious intent, she readily throws up socio-psychological generalisations so wide or platitudinous they just have to be true, with an eagerness-anxiety to get the matter settled as she rips off her knickers. Or she enthusiastically endorses established ones; as when she explains that the development of physical abnormalities is always by "Frees", by those who have not made it into the equally ironically named "serving" class, "those who have failed the Grading", for whom "failure reached deep into their bodies; . . . to the cells themselves which grew confused, their recognition signals faltering and forming, in a panic, some strange new thing." The notion that social pressure is of primary importance in the formation of the self and of self-esteem, that hardy generalisation trotted out by both right- and left-wing intelligentsia, is here earnestly endorsed. The ingenuity, of which there is lots and lots, lies in the graphic form the feelings of inferiority take.

Having laid out this accepted wisdom, Alethea, with the thrust she employs on all occasions, puts her own oar in. "But none of these things should be surprising," she declares, "in classes of individuals who are being turned over like sods by a plough, products of processes they cannot control, at the mercy of processes they can never understand."

This seems like a chunk of multi-purpose political rhetoric, equally usable by parties of the left and the right. For Alethea, though, it is one of the many ultimate truths she is duty-bound to pronounce, to dutifully give a run as, in these, the later pages of the long narrative, she becomes increasingly Voice of Australia. By now, however, the re-bound mechanism is so securely in place that the always opposing facetiousness sounds off, not in succession to this earnest sentiment but from right inside it. The heavy, spasmodic roll from comma to comma, the thumping reiteration of "processes", the bald, abrupt force of the simile "like sods by a plough", the knock-down insensitivity of the whole sentence renders, quite stridently, the very situation, the brute social momentum of the social processes it is intended to decry.

This is to invite attention, finally, to another such

convergence of opposites, to the (most) ultimate truth of the whole extended revelation, which is also the biggest, the central joke. The swift, pendular swing, earnestness to facetiousness to earnestness etc., is facilitated by the lack of any intervening impediment, any intermediate state. In her poetic *Last Words*, patriotically inspired, Alethea declares that "the secret is in the emptiness". The overt, and earnest reference is to the dry, bare continent of Australia, and could seem an optimistic, inspirational statement about a space that waits to be filled. The inward, facetious reference, in the light of the way things work throughout, is to the narrative mode itself, and is full of standard, Australian self-mockery. Without an emptiness between, there could certainly not be the unretarded swing. There would be gradations, a whole spectrum of responses. The present freedom of isolated extremes, to exceed all limits, in the way of being super-sexy-facetious or ultra-earnest-profound, would be drastically curtailed by modifying detail all across the middle. The bold, bald, bizarre contrast between totally opposing states would cease to be the quite astounding chief feature of *A Woman of the Future*. And that is what makes it, quite definitively, a monster, a prominent literary over-growth of the kind which has enjoyed such brief but blazing efflorescence in this limitless land, the visionary monster sub-genre.

The visionary monster novel flourished through the sixties and seventies, a time when the urge was universal to pass, eagerly, beyond all limits. It was a time suited, especially, to the fictionalised rushing

forth of all that was vaguely, strongly present in 'Australia', the boundless promise, mystery and short-term utilitarianism of the word, rather more than the largely desert land itself. (Those long, slow, very open vowels woven by soft *l* and *s*, calling up a vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended, but with stark, upright *t* stuck, like Hills Hoist or terrace-town dunny, right in the middle.) Now, of course, centre stage is held by the antithesis, quite an Other sort of fiction, of more-like-novella length, a strenuous statement of limits, often securely and safely set in countries or times far off or way back, guardedly remote from that hypnotic 'Australia'. The novelist as precisian rather than prophet.

*A Woman of the Future*, as the very model of the visionary monster novel, is likely to figure prominently in future accounts of local fiction. It will do so because, not in spite of being, overall, an aesthetic disaster. It is intendedly, the argument can be put, even self-sacrificially so. The glaring unmatchability of parts (cheerfully and unabashedly set forth), the searching, wistful, hopeful, unrestricted inclusiveness (incorporating a willing, if sometimes hopelessly inexperienced 'go' at explicating all that 'comes up'), certainly represent, with quite fearsome accuracy, *persona Australiensis* completely at home and all at sea in the wide brown land, where she or he seems to be, in a double and splendidly self-contradictory sense, rooted.

*Novelist and critic D. R. Burns is currently working on a thematic study of Australian fiction since 1960. This article will form the opening chapter.*



Lofa

## FOUR POEMS BY ELIZABETH RIDDELL

### COMING AND GOING

How many pretty little women there are  
wearing round glasses, coming and going from  
meetings.

putting us to rights.

Wire bangles tinkle on their wrists.

There is a suggestion of peacock feathers.

Here is one drinking a pale juice. She spills it on  
her skirt.

It leaves a stain and she must buy another  
at Rosie Tiger's shop, together with a nacreous  
belt

to readjust and bind her self-esteem.

This one flew out of a rubbish tip to school  
where they polished her and put her in a dress  
to match the others and taught her how to climb  
the jasmine ladder.

She will lead a delegation to a scented island  
where the sultan will receive her,  
such visits being welcome to reverse  
the lowering humid clouds of boredom, the tropic  
day.

She has a Ph.D and a diary  
ordered every year from the Financial Times  
in which she keeps her life.  
It has some maps, but not her personal map  
of gutters left behind.

### NOTICE OF PROCLAMATION

Notice of proclamation, death to these plants.  
Poison, uproot, burn, scatter the ash.  
Do not fail to comply. Murder xanthium, eubus,  
hypericum, carduus nutans, blackberry, dodder,  
wort and the nodding thistle,  
African boxthorn, silverleaf nightshade,

Delete their names, in virtue of the Act  
(section 472, sub-section 2)  
Virtue is something we must all respect.  
But what if, you aldermen (shire councillors etc)  
in the next year but one the nodding thistle  
or the silverleaf nightshade or the cockle burr  
blossom from random test tubes into something  
healing and therefore lovelier than the accepted  
rose?

Where shall we find it then, in what pasture cow-  
cropped  
long ago, silverleaf turned under the aggressive  
plough,  
nodding thistle wafted towards Malaysia  
dipping above a river where the hyacinth grows  
(also condemned) and is plucked from the mud,  
cleaned, chopped and sold on the leached bank  
to villagers in the shimmering noon.

In spite of the proclamation, watch what you kill -  
nassella trichotoma, pislia stratioides  
even cannabis sativa or the blowing bright  
papaver somniferum. You may need its dreams.

## AT THE CONFERENCE

1.  
On the lined paper on the plastic blotter  
she writes a poem. The conference breaks for  
coffee  
and cask wine, sandwiches, washroom  
adventures.

She goes downstairs, past paintings bought  
or hired or lent, following no footprints  
nor spoor, nor strewn paper, nor scarred trees,  
nor fallen arrows, nor aniseed scattered  
to confuse the hounds.

Here is a pillar (mock marble) and a desk (mock  
wood).  
She looks at landscape smarting under hail,  
drivers in sealed cars facing coercive signs.

She returns to targeted areas and bottom lines,  
forseeable futures and scenarios  
and level playing-fields.

Public service biscuits and an urn await the  
crack of three pm.  
There is crepitation and the soundless scream  
of dessicating bone.

She supports the last speaker, an agreeable  
man  
acceptable for a weekend in a warm room at  
some resort.  
Should his minister delay him he would  
telephone,  
send roses and suggest another rendezvous (his  
word).

Here is another speaker, tentative.  
Does she support him and if so, how far?  
To the hotel room with the noise of the air  
conditioner  
or, should she open a window, slammed car  
doors?

He is for literacy, and she's for literacy  
if only to know what words to leave unsaid,  
half said, conditional,  
modified, qualified, imprecise.

2.  
Does she support the next, the scientist?  
He is for flying out with nets  
to catch the romping galaxies, for putting salt  
on Jupiter's tail. He is said to have found  
four moons we didn't need.

She has forgotten why she came. She is tired of  
it all.  
She thinks she'd rather stay with poets  
because though dangerous in the role of lovers,  
teachers,  
fathers, friends they make powerful enemies  
to the high priests and oligarchs  
who are the governors and destroyers of us all.

## TODAY'S PORTRAIT

The photograph on the front page of the paper  
shows him looking aside, his gaze oblique as  
always.  
He has the good suit, the best watch, the right  
haircut,  
his mouth closed firmly on temper and no smile.

This is the look he does not quite turn  
on his car, his dog and his horse,  
his tennis coach who reminds him to use the  
wrist,  
his mother in town from the farm wearing tight  
shoes,  
and, in this picture, his woman.

He is not quite looking at his woman  
who has crimped and glistening hair  
bleached by grey type on grey newsprint  
but still glistening.

She stares at the camera while he looks away,  
as usual.  
Each is pinned to the shallow step of the  
courthouse  
where reputation and promise is denied.  
She does not care. She brought him beauty  
and the status of owning her. She has nothing to  
lose.  
He is the one who loses

But as always he is looking sideways as if to  
make no claim.  
His concern, he is not quite telling the camera,  
is not with her nor with the past acquaintance of  
her long thighs.  
He has met her on the steps of the courthouse  
To concede her worth for a little longer.  
He will let her go next day, perhaps in the next  
hour.



## LOOKING BACK

As a kid  
I always did  
things-attached-to-strings:  
yoyos and tetherballs,  
hammocks and swings,  
cat's cradle, bat-a-ball,  
and that's not all,  
I had a mini-parachuter  
and a paper kite.  
Strings,  
that's what I liked.

It was years later  
they discovered  
my sight  
wasn't quite right.  
It was true  
bean-sprouts and root-ginger,  
aubergine and yogurt  
didn't conjure up my childhood  
and memories of Mother's meals  
and her after-school snacks.  
The few brown paper bags  
humped in my fridge  
were no consolation.  
No, the food in my fridge  
offered Mother no comfort:  
there wasn't enough of it  
and it wasn't the right sort.  
It offended, it frightened,  
it filled mother with horror  
to think she'd raised a daughter  
who had a fridge  
like that!

HEATHER CAM

## MARK

wants to go to sea again

have the sea hire him  
for its rhythm's sake  
as he stares through the glass on watch  
at hours of nothing but his introspection  
the spray he rattles

but they say there are younger guys  
and he's been out too long

so he works on a city building site  
building office blocks into aquariums  
which he fills with oceans a room at a time  
floor at a time

going up?

and sails across girders the consistency of flat  
seas  
as he looks down on the gravity of shore  
where everyone's heavy with staying alive

and a wave of steel hangs its jaws above him  
like the moon  
swings him in its direction at will  
as he obeys its orders down to the last  
command  
as it rears above him  
its platforms of waves steps into space  
to take a dive from  
blood against a horizontal cliff

and the wave  
is a frankenstein of force he loves as he falls  
upwards

and refuses to sink  
into a city landscape

NEIL PAECH

## FROM THE AIR

It is apparent from the air just how geometrical man is. On the ground everything is square or rectangular or straight: houses, paddocks, roads, all

display a Euclidean order. Only nature is round or irregular. Those salt lakes, for instance. Or that creek, that winding welt of green, unbound

by boundary fences. I watch the landscape scroll smoothly from the back-edge of the plane's wing.

It is as if the grey metal were a great canvas roll slowly unfurling to reveal a quasi-cubist painting.

ANDREW LANSDOWN

## TRIFLES

Drama in the home:  
You nick yourself  
Or stub your toe  
There's the lost envelope  
Key-hat-sock-chain  
And hellfire's but  
Your glance away! The dog  
Melts to the floor, while walls  
Once solid, waver and grow faint.  
Your gun-mouth roars again;  
Outside they say "Those jets  
Are noisy overhead today."

And shaken still,  
Half-angry, half-afraid,  
I mutter "Childish nonsense"  
Setting the cushions straight.  
"Will Samuel never grow up?"  
I ask. And then you stayed  
A long time with the doctor,  
Came home laughing loud:  
"He's puzzled at my X-ray,  
Couldn't understand  
How I have crooked bones  
From years ago,

Forced labor in Shanghai  
- I worked too slow  
So the Jap wacked me  
A heavy sabre blow."  
"Ah that" I say knowingly  
"Must be the reason for  
The strange white scar  
I've seen. An ugly crack - "  
Your shoulder's shake,  
Your mouth is chuckling now:  
"How funny these sweet young  
Australians are!"  
"No no! That was at home  
In Königsberg - *that* mark  
Is where the Brownshirts  
Stabbed me in the back."

HILARY COHEN

## BALLAD OF AN AUSTRALIAN THINKER

When Stalin ruled in glory high  
I cheered his every smile,  
and hailed a radiant future here  
of the knout and the purge trial.

Then Khrushchev came. I hailed The Thaw  
until it all turned sour,  
called Stalin a mass-murderer,  
till Khrushchev fell from power.

Gladly I licked Great Brezhnev's boots  
in his joyous golden times,  
I cheered as Lenny's tanks in Prague  
crushed Dubcek's fascist crimes.

Now dimly apeing Gorbachev  
I cheer as it all crashes,  
and see all that defined my life  
dissolve in dust and ashes.

An Anti-Communist at last  
I cheer as walls come down.  
I'll toast His Majesty the Czar,  
if he resumes his crown.

In fact Max Headroom leads me now,  
as this at last I know:  
I live not as a human being,  
but a sort of video.

HAL COLEBATCH

## I WILL MAKE AN ART FILM

This is not the happy ending  
I had staged to music  
When I first burst on the scene  
All hunger for the world  
- With a pure heart, a reed -  
And moonlight colored  
Streetlamps spooned the pavement  
Dewed at dawn. Down  
Now to cash and mired in the moment,  
Exasperated God should mar  
The ear of his own instrument,  
Condemned to hear  
Myself, only myself, remembered  
Airs, in snatches  
And for what it fetches, I let  
The fops and boobs  
Butt in, but only in my study.  
They also suffer  
By their curiosity. They must copy  
Down their questions  
In my daybook, then await my trumpet  
Answer. Time enough  
To knit lead sweaters for  
Their little *mots*,  
Their titters.

I go out, buy drinks  
And drain them  
Slowly, like some plaster lion  
Strangers lean on,  
I, who have made genius blush  
And danced with bishops,  
Joked with dukes, can no more  
Tap my toe to oompah  
Bands or swap the clinkers in my hand,  
Than can the hero  
Of a silent movie sing a cowboy  
Ballad to his horse.  
The horse would hear.  
How's that?  
Once, I was improvising  
On the keyboard  
Following a dinner party:  
I looked up  
And saw the fools were weeping.  
I never played again.

LAURANCE WIEDER

## MRS OAKLEY AT THE THEATRE

Short circuiting the board room table,  
my chairman drops down several gears  
at an awkward stage, whispers that  
my spectacles are branded *Alfa Romeo*.  
A secretary takes the minutes  
and turns them into years.  
Arriving for lunch with friends  
of Genghis Khan, *Sinclair* pronounces  
my shoes are shinier than his:  
I scruff each toe on an abrasive sole.

Lounging with *Psyche* at the secretarial pool  
one doesn't notice shoes or glasses,  
measuring only tits and arses  
like an editor with an eye  
for a well rounded article.  
Ignoring the depths like a drowning man  
my visage lengthens with the day.  
Time makes its passes.  
At the theatre night Mrs *Oakley*  
stage whispers her hope that such a terrible man  
will never be Prime Minister.

LEON SLADE

## TUTORIAL

The girl giving the Calvino paper  
has moved away into her mist  
of words. Restless, we wait,  
scratching maps of things on empty pads,  
aware that Language is the threat  
which curves beyond the circled wagons  
of our texts.

She returns, pale and a touch astray.  
Led by our questions she speaks of open tracts  
where men are transparent and words opaque,  
teased by the shifting winds of meaning,  
and grows impatient with our trust  
in crafted closure, a future  
and the guarded self.

Outside, a pigeon is insisting  
that reality is linear. In here,  
we have new doubts.

KEVIN MURRAY

FIVE MEDITATIONS ON THE LANDSCAPE  
BY JOHN ANDERSON

I

Just as one can perhaps tell that some pieces were written at night from the way the thoughts land on the page so too there is a relation between the artefacts of the physical world that is more clearly the night's.

An existence registered in a fainter more playful ether, gathered and given force.

It is at night that the earth-based greens of the gums reveal their extra-planetary hues, and that the dingiest ravings on the goat moth's wings become eloquent and refulgent.

The weightless legerdemain of the gums is allowed by moonlight in which they were conjured up.

A world that seems to puff out from a further still point with the facility afforded thoughts at midnight and from the same source.

Thoughts drawn so deeply that even at midday there is something to suggest that the country is still more or less in the throes of the stars.

So must we place ourselves beyond the daylight to summon the fullpresences of things. Look at the stones, the grasses and the wildflowers, as if across vast reaches of space.

Each limb of the eucalypt is a laneway to the further reaches of the limberlost.

By day the gum eludes perspective, is sometimes little more than a two-dimensional screen, strangely without mass, hinged to its shadow. Its limbs are the sinews of a Balinese shadow puppet arrayed in an oriental frieze.

It sits in partial retreat, shyly turning its leaves to allow the sun to pass by, all the while

tapping the hidden meridians between the stones and the stars, sliding along them out of the earth.

Moonlight and the tree is embodied. It receives its shadows and dances with them in equality. Slips headlong into the fourth dimension.

Embodied and disembodied. It is the moon which dispenses clarity here. Forms pervade forms. Precise undappled abstractions sever silver trunks.

It is a corroboree that lasts all night. With each click of the clapsticks the moving crystals of the trees switch and grow in the ether.

Moonrise.

The gum's shadow falls on the moon.

The gums are rising.

The whispered version of the text is whispered back.

II

The red flowering gum  
The ancestress

South Western Australia, the oldest part of the continent, where the march of the gums began  
Where koalas were begotten

And where many lifeforms forsook the march and consolidated instead

Here the largest seed pods, the largest and most colorful flowers.

Gorgeous 'primitives', where some gums forsook the role of hero, empire, for that of the inner way

These are blooms perfected in the other side of our nature. Their show is numinous, beyond exuberance. In an introspective country these are the blooms of introspection. They do not come to meet us like the rose. We must come to them equal ourselves.

The red flowering gum. A villager sedentary in its habits. Its seedpods cauldrons rich with the lore of place. So heavy that they do not transport. Grow where they fall. Its natural distribution less than twenty square miles.

In ancient isolation it attends the rituals. Of all gums the most mannered, the most ornament with practice. The stilled Balinese gesture of the limbs. The flowers sitting impeccably as if in a vase. A correctness and stiffness in the disposition of the leaves. The image studied and miniature.

The tree with a shell of a tortoise.

Power of concentration.

Concentration of power.

### III

The river redgum. Secular. The traveller without baggage. Odysseus.

In youth lithe-limbed and lithe-minded. Leaves the freest strokes of a sumie painting.

Flowers and seedpods tiny and efficient

Borne on the stream

Here the tiers and foliage so typical of Western Australian vegetation dispersed. Dispersion.

Dispersion of form and habitat.

Energy that is expressed. An easy gentle strength that gives way to grandeur and grace in old age. The confident voice of the Murray Darling Basin. That beneficent Arcady that cradled the largest aboriginal population before the sheep and wheat.

"The redgum rivers by the river"

"The redgum arcades"

The river redgum. A dreamer too, like the ancestress. Quiet energies:

billabong, Deniliquin, grandiloquent, soliloquy.

Denny lilly quin

Deniliquin, a place of water lilies and billabongs

The dreamer dreamed:

"the earth dreaming of redgums and gliding waters".

### IV

cascades of stars tumbling down to the wide land

down from the wide sky

then scattering as far and tiny wildflowers from horizon to horizon  
held aloft on slender filaments trembling over the fragile earth,  
itself petalled with tiny pebbles and fine feelings.  
we step as guests of the stars into the tree tops:  
the star forms of the gum blossoms are held aloft on the fine wires of the branches,  
the earth and stars again falling freely through the arrangement.

we see repeated the spareness of Australian forms,  
their long career into the stars as slender trunks and stems.

the plants that only just exist:

below us a blue flowering vine with the tiniest leaves. From a slight distance it is no more than a pool of light or filter hovering over the sand and branches, drawing the whole picture through it  
Earth, stars and flowers, the imagination of each working on each

and allowing each their fuller corruscation

### V

Ayer's Rock

The impression is one of an instant creation. A ballooning. Not one of endless reduction seen elsewhere in this desert. The rock appears to have formed like a bubble of very fine paste briefly blown about in some atmospheric tumult, perhaps of its own devising.

Mt Conner

Mountains with their alluvial fans seem the almost comical end product of a process of self-preoccupation. They have so probed, combed and sifted themselves internally that all their weight now rests in their feet.

Alice Springs

The rocky hillocks around Alice seem inexpressibly ancient, dirty, greasy, frayed and fretted. As if they had survived some incredible calamity, even to the order of having been pressed through from a mirror world. They are not at peace. Wafers of mica tightly packed and bent are picked over by heavily scented shrubs flowering in violent colors and exuding sweet and nauseous perfumes.

Up from the water the wind comes in gasps. It hurls itself at the people standing by the bus stop, sighing around their legs and tickling their perspiration before falling back, exhausted. The first day of spring. Twenty-eight degrees. Out come the poppy-colored sunfrocks and strappy sandals; into the newspapers go the beach girls.

Oh Brisbane! Here, flung at your feet is your prodigal daughter and this is how you receive her! With prodigal *sun*? Laughing at her Sydney boots, her leather trousers, her silk shirt and blazer. She should have known, she should have had the wit to wear a bikini underneath it all, to step out of the plane and lazily strip, her arms and legs like a swimmer's loosing long waves, shedding all the skins she has put on in the time she has been away, slowly parting the heat, the years, sending them about her in ripples, all the way across the tarmac.

Oh Brisbane.

Dripping, waiting for a bus to the Bay, Narelle leans into the gusts of river blowing up like skirts. She leans over the embankment, unable to glimpse the water below, and she wonders: *am I mad to be back here?*

Queen Street looks so empty. Everything is so slow. Queen Victoria, with pigeons on her head, still reigns in her park. Waiting for the bus, the other women, all of pension age, wilt above their shopping bags. The streets are drugged, less vivid than in memories, a slow drift of heat and sunfrocks and pigeons, half-dazed by the sun, cooing desultorily – *you do not – you do not – belong* – the only pulse through the day, the only movement where the wind does not reach, this fanning of feathers, high on a ledge above the street.

Narelle is twenty-eight years old. Tall and diet-slim; sleek, even in the heat. A Sydneysider now. A woman with more Dash than Cash, but independent and with a home of her own, a long way from here.

And yet now she watches the traffic, what little there is, creep down William Street. When the bus for the Bay arrives, too hopefully she scans that small label above the blank, sun-slapped grin of windscreen. Today all the council buses are on strike – today only this slow monster, heaving like a fake whale back toward the ocean, goes anywhere.

In the darkness at the front of the bus, the driver is severe. For a moment, he reminds Narelle of a man who drove the school bus once, a man whose brother, so *The Sunday Mail* said, had murdered his wife and left her in the lantana at the bottom of Mt Cootha. Standing on the roadside with her school port, scuffling up red dust under the pink and yellow flowers, for weeks after that Narelle trembled as she waited for the bus. But then the man disappeared. Just as the vision of him does now, as the brakes wheeze and the bus rocks to a stop in the hot gasps of wind, drifting up reluctantly from the river.

Only a handful of the waiting people climb aboard. As Narelle clammers on, her suitcase and basket and shoulderbag contradict the rise of her feet. Even trying to get knee-high off the ground, she totters, so how could that aeroplane magic her through clouds, back to here?

"To the Bay? One dollar and nine cents," grunts the driver.

How wonderfully quirky! How cheap! Oh where but here would you be charged such a fare . . . Narelle's purse is in her shoulderbag. She cannot get it out. She fishes about, the way she used to grab for eugris in the mud – closes her eyes, darts her hands into deep, secret darkness – and in no time at all she has extricated the purse, knocked the shoulderbag and sent it tumbling into the bus driver. The purse flaps open and small change falls, ringing alarms all over the floor.

Bending down to retrieve a hairbrush, a ball of wool, scattered coins, in all her awkwardness Narelle might as well be six again. The driver is

bent double, his menacing body turned to lumps of dough, his severe face between his knees, scrounging for silver on the floor. Behind Narelle, a woman stamps on a twenty-cent piece, about to roll off the step, down into the street. As Narelle turns to receive the coin, she expects to see a look she remembers forever-frozen on freckled faces in the glare of a blistering schoolyard; she expects to see the woman and the rest of the queue sneering. She is shaken to find instead that the woman looks meek, almost humble. As she hands over the coin she smiles, kindly.

The driver motions to all Narelle's luggage; her woollen clothes. "Where d'ya come from with that lot?" he grunts. "The North Pole?"

"No, Sydney," Narelle says, trying to laugh it off, trying to scoff at herself before he can.

"Aah." He turns down his mouth and tilts his head, nodding. *That* figures.

Down the aisle Narelle bumps against the seats, letting her luggage pass before her and all around her. She stops halfway down, trying not to look embarrassed as the others enter. When the bus pulls away from the kerb, out of the white cornet of a paper bag, drily she munches the remains of what the owner of that In Place sandwich shop so persuasively and untruthfully called a "ham and cheese croissant". She sits there, halfway down the bus, a little distance from everyone else, in a belljar of silence.

Five minutes after William Street, already there is a crack in the glass. A second handful of passengers hails the bus. A group of subnormal schoolchildren: girls, fresh from cookery class, clutching plastic bags precarious with gooey cakes; a spastic boy tottering on the arm of a beanstalk girl with crooked eyes. Into the bus they tumble, and back-to-front in the seat in front of Narelle one small cinnamon-dusted boy perches. Rocking to and fro, staring at her, eyeball to eyeball, at the top of his voice he sings, over and over: "Rockin' and rollin' - in my semi - rock-in and roll-in in my semi -"

It's a long time since Narelle lived in this world. But here - why does it always surprise her? - how quickly the years flake away.

Down the endless corridors of their schools, shaky children roll the air, their bodies tumbling towards her, their slow voices tugging the world out of synch. Against the blue sky, bauhinias are tearing their rose petals. Unnaturally co-ordinated, she steps too quickly along grey concrete. In the room where she sits at last, skilfully typing, her body is too still.

One day, in the lunchroom, she hands a small boy a sandwich. James grins. His tongue creeps

pink and wet through his teeth. The clock ticks, and ticks, but James persists. He swivels in his chair and as his arm moves through its perilous dive, underneath the table, his legs flail and kick. In his hands, the sandwich has a life of its own. It floats above his head, in front of Narelle's nose, down, down, only to slip and then fly up, with awful speed towards the door.

At the end of each day, at home in her new flat a flying fox's swoop from the big Moreton Bay figs by the river, Narelle listens to the suburban hum - the faint clamor of the newly-married couple, fighting briefly, in the flat upstairs; the clicks and squeals of sun-glowing children riding skateboards; Bob Dylan and Bubblegum, neighborly on radios. Through the dusk, dark flutterings of wings. She walks too easily to flick on a light and a memory of drawling voices ripples, painfully, around her. Humbled, she practises magnanimity, trying not to look for bruises on her shins.

This is her first job after business college; two years after she left the Bay. Every day she learns how little she knows. Suddenly she is rich, but superiority and wisdom do not come as bonuses in her pay packet. In these corridors of buckled space, she feels her way warily; her instincts reach out before her, reading the bruised air like braille.

This dark-faced youth, drooping by her door, has been discovered by sex. His fan-hands flutter, reaching out to touch. When she walks from one end of the school to the other, he follows, with dreadful slow deliberateness, a long way behind. Narelle is frightened. She's a hypocrite. She remembers ringing her boyfriend, last weekend. Lying on hot sheets, naked, waiting for him. Now, three times a day, she wants *this* male locked up. His brain is only a little damaged - isn't that what the tests say? Isn't it only his body which sprawls and leers, with no logic to hold it back? In the mid-morning break, he lolls against glass walls where the sun floods in like a tropical downpour. One of the older girls, fourteen, sidles up to him. She grins and giggles. Their hands twine together like jungle vines.

"Tommy!" A sharp-eyed teacher, emerging from a classroom with a new child cowering behind her, calls out. "Tommy, come here please."

It takes a long time for their swaying hands to fall apart. A long time before Tommy splashes through the sun and away, his head swivelled backwards, his eyes still on the girl; a long time before he drags around a corner, sent off on some suddenly urgent errand.

The teacher reaches Narelle's door and shrugs in Tommy's direction. "I've been meaning to warn

you," he says. He doesn't know quite how to elaborate. Why isn't he rolling up his drive in Kenmore, open-sesame-ing the garage door? His children, perfect and unblemished, roll and chatter in the sandpit. His wife kneads bread in the kitchen, flowing after a morning's golf. "Tommy's been a bit of a problem for the women here lately," he says. His eyes ski down Narelle's long legs, barely covered by her mini skirt. He starts to blush and then turns brisk. "He's harmless, of course." Of course. "But watch out, anyway."

In the doorway, a little girl is crouching. She wants to run away, but she settles slowly into a chair as the teacher leaves, closing the door behind him. "This is Pammy," he says. "Our new girl. Could you look after her till the guidance officer arrives . . ."

Pammy's skin is very pale, but shadowy. Oddly gritty. Like Dennis's hands, though he'd scrub and scrub after a day at the garage. Her eyes are dark and never still. She watches Narelle and is ready to move, quickly. She is as alert as a bee-eater, one of those rainbow birds arcing out of the mangroves, hovering above electric wires, flicking its beak and eating sandflies. It takes Narelle by surprise when Pammy opens her mouth and the sounds she makes have no shape.

Later, Narelle types a report for Pammy's file. For nine years, it says, Pammy lived in a shed of corrugated iron. She slept on a floor of dirt, locked up in the backyard of a chicken farm, until she was discovered by a neighbor. The address which Narelle types is just a few paddocks away from her parents' home.

That night, Narelle dreams she is back at the Bay. The big lacy shawls of poincianas are flung against the sky and in the distance she hears the soothing lap, lap of water, persistent and familiar as a heart-beat, catching her attention for a moment and then fading away. In the back garden, mangoes are getting ready to drop. On the shady verandah, while black boats push across the glitter of the sea, she is waiting for exam results. She knows she has failed, although the papers will say otherwise. Why else did she give up her university studies and become a secretary - something more in keeping with the lives of all the people she has known till now? While it is still grey and quiet in the city streets, she wakes in panic and sits up, wondering: *Why hasn't anyone realised this yet? When will I be sent back where I belong?*

Later, when the sun has risen, she tries to shake off the dream along with her crumpled sheet and her nightie - neither of which she really needs

because the sea breeze never creeps here, the nights just stay hot. As she walks a little less quickly, a little less easily, along the grey concrete under the bauhinia blossoms, she is torn between wanting to be here - wanting to see Pammy and Tommy and James - and turning on the heel of her sandal and going - she doesn't know where. She reminds herself that she is not going to stay here forever. This is just a job for Now. She is saving her money. And then, one day - depending on her nerve - she will go Overseas. Or, at least, join the Air Force.

What is your secret? She thinks of asking someone. Do you see your life planned out before you? Oh, and by the way - what do you *feel* about these children and their random suffering?

But the other people here - psychologists and teachers - live in a land she has not reached yet. With short hair and shiny confidence, they swing into their private routines. Mostly ancient (skidding towards thirty), while Narelle was falling in the gravel, watching gingery boys pinching the colored dust off butterflies' wings, they were growing up under the umbrella of Grandpa Menzies, jiving away from home to songs about white sports coats and pink carnations. Now they own houses and keep Valium in their desk drawers. Beside them, Narelle looks like a flower child; a still-idealistic refugee from Hicksville. It never occurs to her that one day she could be like them.

And now she is in the bus for the Bay. She has the windows ajar because of the heat and the breeze blows in fullblast: part of the small boy's song gets caught in that wind and disappears past the edge of the glass.

At the next stop, sound assaults like a headline threatening war. School is out and by the queue on the footpath every single adolescent in history wants to catch this bus. Up the stairs past the driver they file - and file - and file, until they are standing in the aisles as well. Narelle's luggage is on the floor and on her lap and a dark, burly youth is beside her . . . only the young pop singer with bulging eyes has left his case deliberately beside him and he sits with one leg sprawled over the seat, so that he is left with his wide green bench all to himself - rockin and rollin, in his semi.

The bus reels with smells of sweat and cheap perfume. There are only a few girls reaching for the metal hoops, their already-hitched tunics creeping higher above black stockings or bare legs, smooth and religiously tanned. One of them giggles to her friend as she passes the apelike creature beside Narelle, so that she turns, half-expecting to



see Sheryl. This is not the high school they travelled to for five years.

That was halfway between here and the Bay. There was more bare asphalt, a greater waste of dazzling, browning sun between the high classrooms and the newly-planted hedges of shocked, rustling bottlebrushes and paperbarks. Until eternity, no doubt, the ghost of a girl who looks rather like Narelle will be stretched out there, on the grass behind the science lab, anointed with coconut oil at lunchtime.

She always freckles. Or burns. Sheryl doesn't. She lives with sun and salt water as if she's been bred for it. Which, of course, she has. *The Terrible Twins*, people call them, in spite of their differences. Sheryl and Neryl. *Are you sisters?* sometimes strangers query. The girls' parents must be appalled. But, no doubt, Narelle thinks now, it's because they're both the same awful shape, big-busted and fat-thighed in spite of their identical, stranglehold panty girdles. They also have the same straight blonde hair, fringed to their eyebrows – and at the back (because it's 1966 or thereabouts), a perfectly shining fall, without a kink, right down to the starts of their mini-shifts.

Right until the end of high school – from just after the death of J.F.K. almost until the first man on the moon – right until the last school dance in their crimplene hipster dresses – Narelle's is musk pink, Sheryl's acid yellow – right until the results of their last exams, they are friends too close for parents or any mere boy to jostle apart. Though Sheryl flirts on the bus. And at weekends, towards the end (while Narelle is studying), she leaves the orchard and goes across to Stradbroke to lie on the white sand with some creep who's left school already. "He's a mechanic," she tells Narelle, as if her voice has been oiled. "So?" Narelle sneers. One of those dumb boys from primary school, it turns out. Gawky then, his pockets bulging and clinking with marbles. He rode his bike with no hands. Listening to Sheryl, Narelle develops the grim belief that this will be the highlight of Dennis's life – on a mauve summer evening, coasting for the first time down a poincianaed hill, his arms in the sea-scented air outstretched like Christ.

Although she's grown up like them, barefoot on the mudflats, suddenly Narelle hates the way fertilizer and red dust blow up against the sides of their houses, making them look like relics, places of decay. Behind the ripe stacks of fruit, Sheryl's mother bustles slowly, a fag drooping from her mouth. Narelle is shocked by her disgust.

"What are you going to *do* now?" the same Narelle demands angrily when the papers print their

results. In the long lunch hours dedicated to golden legs, they never discussed *that*.

Sheryl shrugs off all suggestions for her future.

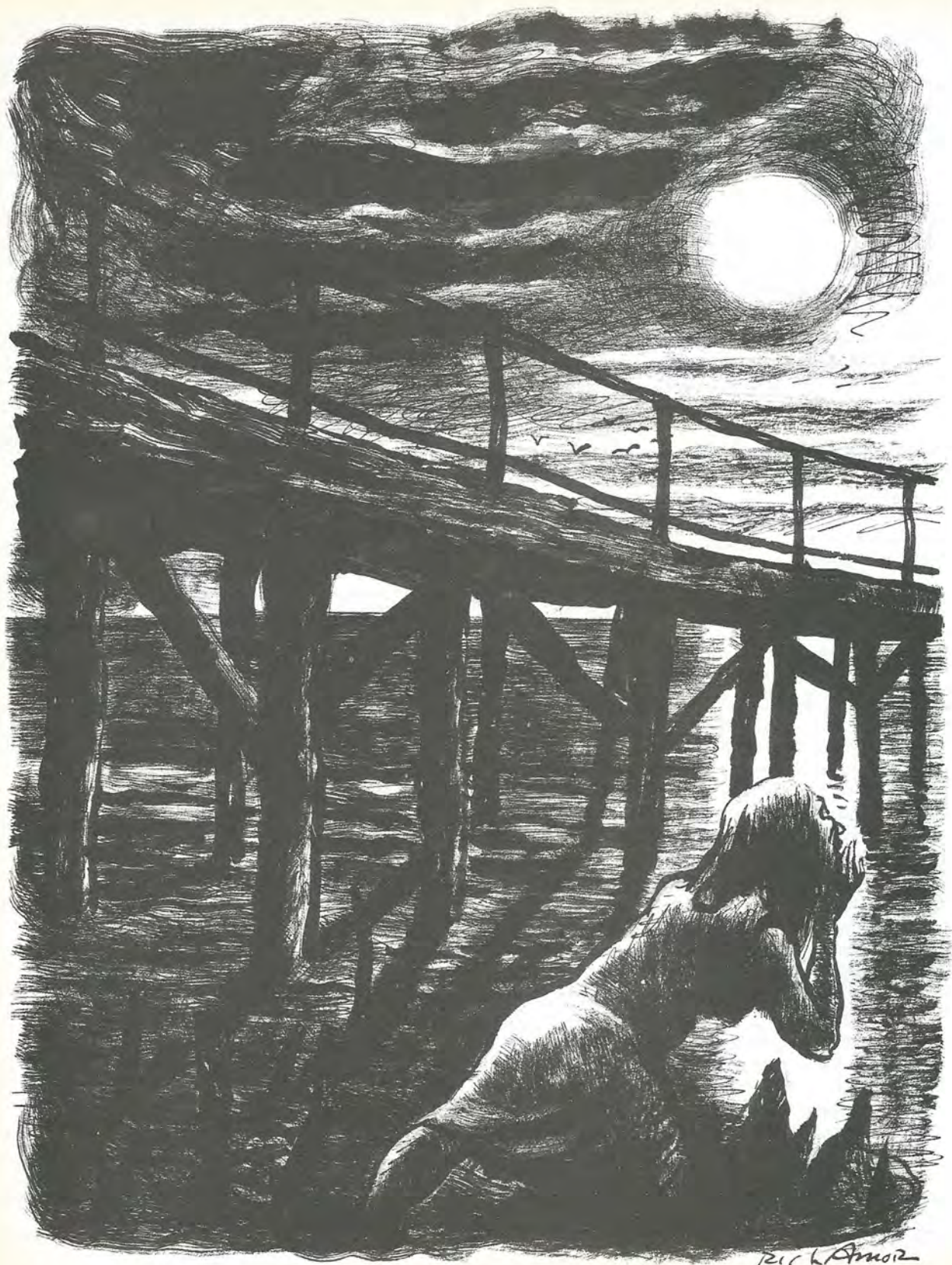
"Well, Nar-elle, I suppose you'll be getting all inter-leck-chewull now," she says, putting down the new Simon and Garfunkel record in the same way Narelle has started shaking off the dust after visiting her place.

They can't go to university together, that's certain. Sheryl's real options – nursing, teacher's college, Tech – are all in Brisbane, aren't they? And hasn't she always said: *The city stinks! Wild horses wouldn't drag me there!*

Somewhere, the sound of Dennis revving an engine must be disturbing the slow slap of water under a jetty. But Sheryl, you can't always live here, Narelle starts to think, but she stops being seventeen for just long enough to remember a moment when a bird of paradise tree drooped its hectic red blooms all over her hands while Sheryl, younger, was running off with bare feet over oyster-knuckled rocks. "But, Sheryl –" she says. They're about to run different ways – the prospect makes them unnaturally vicious. "Anyway, I'll probably get married soon," Sheryl says. "It's the *normal* thing for a girl to do. Here." Narelle just stares. And stares. Then she switches up the volume of *The Sounds of Silence* without offering another word.

The city is thinning now. The woman in winter clothes is trying to survive by closing her eyes and ears and concentrating on the breeze taking away the heat and her threatening headache; she is feeling wind stiffen the roots of her hair and watching the foreign houses and suburbs crawl sleepily by.

On and on the bus creeps, stopping at every second corner to let one, perhaps two, of its passengers alight. The boys up the back yell and fight and make fun of one another, and of other boys in similar uniforms standing on the footpaths outside the shops. Schoolboys – pimplly, gross, their greatest pride the swear words and dirty stories they flaunt, wearing them as a kind of compensation for the thin beards which their schools order them to shave off. Loathsome creatures. As soon as they get their pimples, do they also start to fester inside? No longer capable of being friends – not like the silly ones who made Narelle giggle – years, oh years ago, when they sat in small groups outside the Grade 5 classroom, reading of daffodils in England, while all around them the mangroves put down their roots and the tang of the bay blew through everything they learnt and they were all still young enough to pull crazy faces and not feel fools.



RIC L. AMOR

Now schoolboys yell and make farting noises in the bus.

"Hey, are you mental?" they shout from the back.

The beanstalk girl with skew-whiff eyes snaps around and says: "Who, me?"

Beside her, the spastic boy lets his bottom lip droop as he squirms a little closer to the window.

I no longer know where I am, Narelle thinks. This is not the usual road to the Bay. It is a new highway gouged out of a hillside. Four lanes! And nothing moves on the long, hot bitumen but this bus. Where is she going? Back to the past? Hardly, not this route. If that house by the water with the smell of mangroves and the view of islands floating up to its verandahs still sits at the end of this road, if the ghosts of her parents still tug at the wooden blinds and slap at sandflies, talking over their shoulders of rain and the cost of tractors and pesticides and of nothing else of importance, it will be a trick, a flutter from a magician's sleeve – she has no faith that the vision will not slide away down a line of mudflats or underneath a new Marina.

Slowly the children disappear. More get on as other high schools are passed. The city peters out into new suburbs stuck on as afterthoughts and old towns soon to be gobbled up as part of the metropolis. Cast up on bare estates, in brick castles, now Sheryls and Narelles who never left here must be putting down hissing irons, holding hoses over breathless petunias, waiting for the rumble of a bus, bringing their children home . . .

Narelle stands at the entrance to Sheryl's house. Beside the Corinthian front door, there is a white button, like a plastic aspirin. With her finger centimetres from the button, she hesitates, looking at the walls of sharp brick and the concrete path which skids straight from the mailbox to the house. Her eyes hurt. In the windows of the rooms on either side of the door, sheets have been hung. They are patterned in flowery clouds of blue and mauve, fading in the sun.

She will ring the bell. Ding, dong! "Avon calling!" she will say as the house opens and there in the darkness is Sheryl.

From this house, there is no glimpse of the sea. Even if Narelle lifts a corner of the sheet and squints past the orange rose bush, the purple lasiandra, the pink hibiscus – past the dust which is still bare and blowing up between the house and the footpath – past the other brick castles all over the estate – in the distance there is only the non-committal blue of the sky. She cannot see the jetty or the mudflats where Sheryl's mother walked three years ago, across the broken bottles and sharp man-

grove stalks at low tide, keeping on, and on, through the low, dark ripples and the retreats of soldier crabs until the water was all around her, silvered in the moonlight, turning slowly over her like milk.

What happened then? What happened *before* that? In her letters, in her phonecalls, what was the news Narelle's mother passed on? "Sheryl's mother . . . found on the mudflats . . . in hospital now . . ." walked out of the fruit shop, through the orchard, past the cane toads and the orange blossom and the blood and bone, into the dawn haze and over the water, halfway to Stradbroke. Sometimes, at that hour, only the sky kept its shimmer. Below it the water was so still it might have been a dream to disappear in.

Floating through the wooden door, Narelle tries to remember what her mother said. Is Sheryl's mother dead? Did she come home? And afterwards, who had the baby prematurely? Sheryl? Or someone else? It is too long ago, too much has happened, too far away from here. Now all the news of here lands like spots of rain on Narelle's roof. It patters briefly, darkens the Sydney sky . . . the next morning, on her way to work, there is no room on the bus, she dangles from a strap listening to the Vietnamese, the Lebanese, the Greeks, the Glebies. She has a hundred and two things to do before tomorrow, friends are coming to visit at the weekend and, in a fortnight's time, the man in the flat next door will hang himself.

About Sheryl – about Sheryl's mother – what were the things Narelle's mother said?

They've blown away, several southerly busters ago. Now Narelle sits in the bus and wishes she could remember, wishes she could find her way through the new streets and subdivisions, back to some place where she and Sheryl could meet.

Sheryl is pressing her Spray of Steam button *hard*. Or she is buying prawns at the Co-Op and while Dennis's uncle wraps them in newspaper, flicking their pink whiskers away from his big, soft, pink hands, she is not looking at the mudflats. She is shrieking at a Girls' Night Out at the RSL Club. On the back steps of her house, her knees up under her chin, before her a view of washing on the line and passionfruit and chokos crawling over her neighbour's fence, she could be sitting, smoking. Memories of poincianas shade her face.

Clouds blow up over the strawberry farms; gusts of fertilizer and red dust cling to the bare arms and legs of lanky adventurers, loitering in the long streets. They swing yoyos. Or dare one another to

climb the frangipanis, knocking off branches and leaves and tumbling back to earth with milky sap, sticky and smelly, turning black all over their freckles. By the houses with their rickety shelters out the front - benches offering ruby tomatoes, cabbages bigger than heads and glowing, fragrant mandarins - the children's voices fly up, hovering in the dusty light. Forever they sit in the clover and study their gravel rash and forget the time.

From the bus, Narelle can no longer see these places. A great silence swamps their territory, somewhere beyond this road. From here, ramshackle houses radiate from shops with bold signs saying BAIT; chicken farms and nurseries are selling potpourris of produce, grafted avocados, lychees and mangoes to those who can afford them - newcomers, no doubt, for the locals probably would not care - never used to - take for granted or have grown tired of the funny trees in their back yards, every summer so prodigally dropping fruit.

The Bus to the Bay. Eventually it has rid itself of all but its original load, plus one or two children. Now the women with shopping bags begin to descend, disappearing up dirt roads behind poincianas with long black pods, snaking from those

roofs of green. The children cling along the corridor. Headed for farms, they clasp the shiny posts inside the bus and tilt their faces towards the distance. They get off. Loiter by the fences. Soon it will be Narelle's turn, as it was years ago, every afternoon, just like this . . .

Up the front, standing impatiently by the driver, a small girl hauls the weight of a school port from one hand across to the other. Her shoulder droops. When she gets off, looking grumpy, she stomps alongside the bus through raw, red earth, rough and overgrown where the council mower still has not reached.

As she passes the part of the bus where Narelle is sitting, the child stumbles over a clod. Her ankle gives way. She stoops, tightening her shoe lace, fastidiously flicking red dust from her sock.

Suddenly, she stops. As still as a plant which has put down roots. A brown butterfly, shuddering a cloud of color from its wings, flaps over the child's hands.

Against the window, sun buckets suddenly, dazzling the glass, blinding Narelle, who squints, looking back, trying to keep in view that picture - a child, stooped, reaching for something - as the empty bus swerves out, pulls back onto the road and hurtles down to the Bay.



Jiri Tibor

BEATRICE FAUST

## One Crowded Hour in Literature's Ecology

In 1956, in *Quadrant*, Alec Hope published an essay called 'The Discursive Mode' that is still relevant to criticism. Discussing the ecology of poetry, Professor Hope argued that the rise of the novel precipitated a decline in epic poetry and verse tragedy. This shift, aggravated by the eighteenth century dominance of satire and adaptation, eventually led to a decline, first in lyrical and minor forms, then, in the nineteenth century, to a reaction that freed the idea of pure poetry and a tendency to equate poetry with excitement. The details of this *schema* are problematic but the outline is certainly right.

We are now well into a period of similar ecological shifts in prose forms. The emergence of behavioural sciences – psychology, sociology, political science, ethology and even economics – has eroded many cachements of the English serious novel. Even the European novel is affected. *Middlemarch* is no longer viable. Subject Millie Teale to Transaction Analysis and you erode her high moral ground. It is no longer possible to see a sunset through, kill a whale, discuss the New Criticism or fight the battle of Borodino in the novel.

As Mary McCarthy puts it, novelists can no longer bring the news or produce "a single compendious sacred writing".<sup>1</sup> She detects a few literary ruses for retaining the authoritative authorial voice: writing historical novels where details, events and ideas have a legitimate place, pretend you're Jewish, or write non-fiction. By this she does not mean 'faction', which is too constrained by the limits of what happened to allow for the free exercise of the authoritative imagination. She has in mind something like Robert Persig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, a book combining elements of the road novel with philosophical interludes.

With the exception of popular fiction, panoramic novels have lost their authority, so that an opus like Frank Dalby-Davison's *The White Thorn Tree*

is greeted with oohs and ahs – not for its literary merit, but for its sheer length. Meanwhile, the serious novel runs in ever narrowing, ever more shallow tributaries of the ego.

Contrary to intellectual prejudice, the popular novel, from Ouida to Frederick Forsyth and beyond, has always dealt with serious issues, significant topical branches of knowledge, and the moral questions of everyday life. An early Asimov addict would have acquired a basic knowledge of ethics while a devotee even of late Cartland gets a workout in commonsense, positive thinking and do-it-yourself religion.

Currently, writer's-workshop and word-processor novels are overgrowing more personally inspired writing. Even the common reader can tell a workshopped piece by its standard opening: "Sebastian struggled to consciousness in the fetid atmosphere of his Balmain flat on a smoggy morning in April. 'Oh shit!' he said groggily, 'I've forgotten my appointment at the STD Clinic!'" (*Who, where, when, how and what.*) Where Proust determined that none of his characters would ever walk into a room and lean his forehead on a window-pane, workshop protagonists do it all the time.

The word processor is not so inimical to literature as the workshop, but it does tend towards a similar blandness and possibly towards a weakness in overall structure, unless the writer can use, and then disguise, the same mathematical orderliness in points, sub-points and sub-sub-points that the computer uses in volumes, directories, sub-directories and files.

These cultivars are sufficiently like species of literature to be amenable to traditional criticism. Indeed, I get morbid pleasure from watching academics using the same methods that they apply to Edith Wharton and Edward Thomas to demonstrate the merit of workshopper. Nevertheless, they do present problems in evaluation.

How do we criticise a hybrid like oral history? How do we even recognise it? Virginia Woolf, confronted with an anthology of working women's written testimonies that were only twenty years away from oral history proper, at first refused to write a preface for it. "This book," she reflected, "is not a book . . . what is this book then, if it is not a book? What quality has it? What idea does it suggest?"<sup>2</sup> Woolf only came to terms with the form when she rested the case of literature versus non-literature, placing the anthology in the context of her own recollected experience (which is where it should have been in the first place).

It seems that the closer a book is to oral history, the less likely it is to be thought of as having literary merit while the more effective a book is as literature, the more suspect it will be as history. Stuart Rintoul's *Ashes of Vietnam* is unequivocally oral history – the authentic words of plain men telling us how it was, over there, when . . . but the material is too unworked for literature, the hiss and click of the tape recorder is too obtrusive, the authorial voice all but indiscernible.

*My Place*, by Sally Morgan, is altogether more stylish. Ms Morgan includes substantial passages of tape-recorded material but embeds it in a story of her own search for her beginnings. She devises a prose style that is apparently as guileless as her informants' speech but is really the sort of speech we use when we are telling ourselves stories. Longueurs, *mauvaise foie* and sheer silliness are forgiven because the book is read as a true-life story. When the truth of art confronts the truth of record, either or both may be comprised. In *My Place*, truth of record yields.

*With Its Hat About Its Ears: Recollections of the Bush School*<sup>3</sup> manages to respect both truths, assimilating a considerable amount of repetitive material into comprehensive generalisations as well as illustrating these by particular quotations.

Tim Bowden's *One Crowded Hour* is a biography of Neil Davis written around comprehensive tapes supplied by the subject before his death.<sup>4</sup> It is more actively authored than *Ashes of Vietnam* and less calculated than *My Place* but more true to its source and less elegant than *With Its Hat About Its Ears*. Bowden locates all his transcribed material in a carefully researched historical environment, confronting us with a slide rule dilemma: what is the optimal ration between original material and background? When does a work cease to be oral history and become book-length journalism? How do we measure the fact that Bowden is not a print journalist but a radio journalist?

An analysis of how Bowden's book works and

where it fails suggests that oral history and fine prose are mutually exclusive – unless the subject happens to speak an exquisite dialect or to have been raised on Elizabethan love lyrics, Bunyan and Winston Churchill. For interviews, and when introspecting, Davis spoke to the tape recorder very much as he did when he was recording the commentaries for his news films. His style was dispassionate, unembroidered, terse, precise and documentary. Not literary.

I suspect that Hank Nelson faced a more intractable strain of this problem when he interviewed his teachers and ex-pupils. His subjects had interesting information but did not convey it interestingly. Nelson's solution was to polish the connective prose and reduce the quotations to the minimum. His own prose is simple but nicely turned, contrasting pleasantly with the subjects' pedestrian dialect.

Returning to Bowden's book, I acknowledge that any discussion of Australian-ness involves stereotyping and other vices. Nevertheless, we all do it sometimes. To me, Davis was essentially Australian. The fact that he spent his adult life in Asia and worked in a cosmopolitan medium – combat cine-photography – is neither here nor there.

Davis's childhood in rural Tasmania, his aggressive sportsmanship, his shyness with and cock-eyed chivalry towards women, his respect for ethnic culture (including cannibalism), his lack of deference towards authority, his charm, his *caritas*, his carelessness with money, his modesty, his capacity for mateship and his unschooled, self-educated intelligence all smell like billy tea.

Bowden works all the data for this into *One Crowded Hour*. Predictable feminists accuse him of celebrating machismo. He doesn't. He doesn't even celebrate Neil Davis. His tone is so deflationary, his style so plain and his stance so laboriously truthful that some literati accuse him of not celebrating anything. Others simply say the book is boring. Its sales – 50,000 in the first year and still climbing – show that a substantial public disagree; they are not bored by oral history or radio-journalism in print.

They accept Bowden's simple portrait of a hero. They want to know that a man existed who could leave school before he was fourteen and achieve international renown in his medium, conquer polio, tow a seaplane through icy surf, play a mean game of tennis, drink prodigiously, whore enthusiastically, survive solitary confinement and combat injuries, produce exquisitely judged film in appalling conditions and die in the way he had always dreaded. They are probably the same hungry public

who shed a tear for 'Beauty of the Brigades' during his long exile and mobbed the foyers of Hoyts to get an autographed copy of *Beau Geste*.

Bowden's book is especially provocative because radio was the original medium for oral history, before the tape recorder had been devised – even before the genre was named. The book's crucial weakness as literature derives from its strength as oral history. Bowden splices the taped word, letters and historical background into a neat, well integrated and generally pacy narrative. He should have culled a lot of clichés and a few jokes of the type that are desperately funny to participants and yawny to everyone else. These superficial blemishes could have been corrected by a sensitive editor. There is, however, a more fundamental problem in the transition from speech to writing.

On radio, the living voice provides warmth, drama, rhythm and variety. The voice is its own color. With all but the rarest subjects, this is lost in transcription. The author – or perhaps we should call him/her the redactor – must somehow compensate for this loss by tactful ornament, add a few deft trills and grace notes. Reading time is not the same as listening time. When people read, they can regulate the pace, scan a page, go back to check something, dwell on an idea, pause to assimilate an emotion. This is impossible with spoken narrative. Writers speed up the pace here, slow it down there – if necessary, re-arrange times and dates. Bowden refuses to compromise the truth of record. Here is the book's real weakness, one serious enough to prejudice it as literature.

This is most irksome in the section on Davis and the Aquinos. Walking with kings and keeping the common touch is alright except that the kings, and dictators, and messiahs tend to come down to common size. Davis's relationship with the couple, his prescience about Corazon's aptitude for leadership, and his experience of Benigno's assassination seem flat. The account leaves out the significant small details that draw us into the big picture. The big event is diminished by trivia. The pace is wrong.

The even pace with which events succeed each other in the radio narrative is inimical both to the truth of art and the truth of record. The truth of

record deals with events that may call up emotions but does not deal easily with emotions as such. There is one option open to the oral historian who wants to write literature and has not been blessed with an Irish subject: to try for truth of art in the prose links and leave truth of record to the subject. This is more or less the option Sally Morgan chooses but her transcribed passages are undigested, ill-proportioned and repetitive. In narrative terms, they are tangential or even obstructive to her quest.

Hank Nelson's transcribed passages function exactly like textual quotes in an academic work – which his book is, in a way: an outstanding document in social history. Their indifference as literature is made up for by the usefulness of their content and by the grace and fluency of the surrounding text.

Tim Bowden has elected to meld his links to Davis's testimony – obviously both men have always worked within enormous time constraints. Most of Davis's news stories were crafted to fit into slots of five minutes or less. The broadcaster's success in matching his style to the cameraman's tells against him when his script comes to be read. There is just too much of the measured tone and the regularly turned anecdote. We need something of Davis's voice when he was tired, or drunk, or angry or amorous.

*One Crowded Hour* is not, then a book in Virginia Woolf's sense of the word but it is a bloody good read. Perhaps this is all that oral history can be.

*Beatrice Faust works in the Distance Education Centre of Monash Gippsland. She has served on the Literature Board of the Australia Council and as a judge in the non-fiction category of the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards. Her latest book, Apprenticeship in Liberty, is currently in press with Collins/Angus & Robertson.*

1. Mary McCarthy, *Ideas and the Novel*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1981.
2. Virginia Woolf, preface to Margaret Llewellyn-Davis, *Life as We Have Known It*, Hogarth Press, 1931, reprinted Virago, London, 1977.
3. Hank Nelson: *With Its Hat About Its Ears: Recollections of the Bush School*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Crows Nest (NSW), 1989.
4. Tim Bowden: *One Crowded Hour: Neil Davis: Combat Cameraman 1934–1985*, Collins, Sydney, 1987.

## on the line

When Patrick White died on September 30 at his home in Centennial Park, Sydney, aged 78 it was as if a mountain range had disappeared from the familiar scene. Some of us found, perhaps to our surprise, that we were mourning and we were mourning the man not the books which after all remain and many of which will endure. He had become, despite his fierce wish for privacy, a public figure, a kind of icon of conscience, drawn hesitantly to certain public platforms because there was no choice but to speak out.

James McClelland spoke for many of us when he wrote: "The Patrick White I knew for nearly thirty years was a fierce and fearsome moralist, bountifully generous and sometimes mean-spirited, sage about human weakness and waspishly intolerant, sophisticated and naive, lovable and unbearable. In short, a human being, but in his case all his virtues and foibles were multiplied by his genius."

His association with *Overland* was a long one. His "Credo" which we published in no. 111 was one of his last published works. The cover of that issue carried a fine colour photograph of White standing in front of the aboriginal flag taken by his friend Barry Jones. For our 100th issue Patrick surprised and moved us by sending a poem "Defending the Right to Offend" which, of course, we were proud to publish.

My own slight and rocky friendship with him went back nearly forty years. I think it was a year or two after he had published *The Aunt's Story* (1948) which, together with *Happy Valley*, I had read before I met him and which I had no doubt then, as I have no doubt now, is a work of genius. He got rather irritated at my later references to it as he was immensely irritated when over lunch in the old Balzac restaurant in East Melbourne, I dared to tell him, with a cheek I haven't got now (I hope), that I didn't much like his plays except *The Ham Funeral*.

In his memory we have commissioned a poem by Thomas Shapcott and a drawing by Rick Amor. We are indebted to them and also to Patrick White's biographer David Marr for permission to print a short excerpt from his forthcoming biography. The excerpt includes a description of a row I had with the great man. It is a true account if shortened. Most people who from time to time shared a meal with Patrick White usually, sooner or later, had a row with him. Readers will be relieved to know that, later that night, I gave him a book I admired and that on later occasions when we met all went well.

Of the many tributes paid to Patrick White which I have seen, two stand out: the unsigned obituary in the *Age*, Melbourne, Monday, 1 October (p. 9) which seemed to me to be as true as it was comprehensive. Other media cannibalised this fine essay. The other tribute which should be mentioned is that paid by Barry Jones in a speech to the House of Representatives on 9 October. Tony Wright in the *Canberra Times* said; "It was the best speech to the Parliament in months, perhaps years. It was at once funny, informed, erudite and entertaining." Barry Jones wanted to dispell four myths about Patrick White: that "he was misanthropic, misogynous, humorless and difficult to read." Barry Jones pointed out that White "could be bitter and bitchy but he was also extraordinarily funny with a unique gift for satire and mimicry. My last recollection is of his laughter as we talked barely a month ago."

Only three others, apart from parliamentarians, have been honoured as was Patrick White by the Hawke Government with condolence motions: Sir Macfarlane Burnett, Sir Robert Helpmann and Lloyd Rees. In concluding his remarkable speech Barry Jones paid his condolences, as we do, to Manoly Lascaris "the 'central mandala' of Patrick's life who contributed uniquely to his creativity.



Another long-standing friend of *Overland*, the painter Clifton Pugh, died in Melbourne on October 14, after suffering a heart attack. He was sixty five. Patrick White, in a most private way, was extraordinarily generous. So was Clif. In a typical and well-thought out gesture he has left his beloved bushland with its houses and studios to his fellow artists. We hope to pay tribute to our friend in the next issue.

My concern about the effect on Australian life and culture of the monetarists who hold the high ground of policy in the federal finance departments continues. In his recent brilliant book of essays *The Selling of the Australian Mind* Stephen Knight gives further evidence of the erosion of values caused by the 'pragmatists'. Who, indeed, will value the valuers? Knight writes: "the selling of the mind occurs when people in those areas are not allowed to work under conditions that set free the possibilities of their minds, when intellectual powers are only allowed to operate towards specific and short-term ends directed by government, administrators and businessmen."

One of our leading scientists, Dr. J. R. Philip F.R.S., Director of the Centre for Environmental Mechanics, takes up this concern, and others contingent on it, in a notable paper prepared for the 75th Anniversary issue of *Soil Science* to be published early next year. Philip argues that scientists are indeed accountable to society, he acknowledges that autonomy of the scientific community carries no implication of indifference to practical problems. "Indeed, any scientist worth his salt is on the alert to identify practical problems within his present and potential range of competence, and to extend his work in those directions." Philip continues:

Karl Marx imagined he was a friend of science, but his pronouncements have done it much damage. As Bertrand Russell (1951) put it: "Science used to be valued as a means of getting to *know* the world; now [after Marx] . . . it is conceived as showing how to *change* the world." The actual words of Marx (1845) were: "Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways, but the real task is to *alter* it." [For Marx's "philosopher" read "scientist", a word not yet in general currency in 1845.] . . .

Unsurprisingly, this Marxist view of science is immensely attractive to people dominated by the love of power; and this holds good regardless of their nominal political convictions. This scientific Marxism is more readily accepted and, I think, more prevalent outside the ranks of practicing scientists than within them. But, in

a world where politicians, administrators, and literate laymen are hooked on scientific Marxism, scientists who are *not* are under constant pressure.

There is no doubt that the Western world no longer holds in the highest esteem the one-time self-evident virtues of the life of the mind, the pursuit of understanding, and the love of ideas. Today their place is taken all too often by simplistic materialism, the pursuit of economic advantage, and the lust for power. It is noteworthy that Eastern communism has lost out to the West, not in consequence of any unsuppressable yearning of the human spirit for freedom, but rather because Western materialism looks more efficient than the Eastern variant.

In a percipient review Noel Annan (1988) charts the shift in values with special reference to the British scene. He attributes the Thatcherite enshrinement of things over ideas as, in part, a conscious effort to punish the intelligentsia for being snobbish about trade and unresponsive to the plight of Britain's moribund industries. A similar shift has certainly happened in Australia and also, insofar as I can see, in North America and (perhaps in lesser degree) Western Europe.

Philip then goes on to examine the destructive nexus between materialism and managerialism. His attack on the culture of 'management' is devastating and relevant not only to science but to all areas central to the life of the mind: libraries, museums, art galleries, cultural policy. Harvard set up its Graduate School of Business Administration in 1908. Philip himself has often been a distinguished guest of Harvard and he thinks the Harvard Business School has much to answer for:

By the 1940s management had become the thrust of the Harvard Business School: and management continues to be enshrined as its central theme and its gift to humanity. Well-scrubbed young MBAs march out across the world spreading a management doctrine based on the totally false premises that what is important about all tasks is what they have in common; and that the bottom line must be measured and expressed in dollars.

Even when the task is as obviously unique and peculiar as scientific research, these disciples are not diverted from their doctrine and their purpose: they simply outdo Procrustes in lopping and stretching the anatomy of research to fit a schema based on the freezing of peas or the bottling of beer.

The consequences for science of instituting managerialism are saddening to behold. Unnerved scientific administrators, cowed by their management consultants, dismember

scientific teams of world stature and set up systems of line management. With rare exceptions, the top rungs are occupied by failed scientists, by flawed scientists who have abandoned understanding in favor of power, and by grey bureaucrats blissful in their ignorance of what science is about. Almost all have forgotten (or never knew) that "Research is not a hierarchical activity in which purposes are generated at the top and gradually refined and made specific as they filter down to the level of the bench worker" (OECD, 1971); and that in creative and productive research environments there must be as much freedom as possible at as low a level as possible.

Harvard's sin is to have conferred its academic authority and respectability on a trivial, damaging, and degrading approach to one of man's greatest enterprises.

To happier matters. We are proud and pleased to note that Vane Lindesay, the designer of this magazine, author and designer of many books, will be presented with an Award of Honour, 1990, by the Australian Book Publishers Association. The award is in recognition of outstanding and continued contribution to Australian book production and design. The Award will be presented in a ceremony in Sydney on 13 March next year. Congratulations, Vane.

A reader wrote to say there was no point in my rabbiting on about the excellent sales of some books of poetry if I gave number of editions only and

not the print run. Quite so. Still, one does not lightly ask publishers about print runs! I can tell you this. *No Collars, No Cuffs* by Geoff Goodfellow is now in its sixth edition, each edition being 1000 copies. His *Bow Tie and Tails* had a first edition of 2500 and a reprint of 2000 copies. His latest booklet *No Ticket, No Start* (Wakefield Press, \$5.95) has in a few weeks sold 4000 of its first edition of 5000. Point taken?

Dr. Ross Fitzgerald, Division of Humanities, Griffith University, Nathan, Qld., 4111, is writing a biography of E.G. 'Red Ted' Theodore, north Queensland union organiser, Queensland premier, federal treasurer, co-founder (with Sir Frank Packer) of the *Women's Weekly*, Fiji goldminer and director of the Allied War Council during World War 2. He would be grateful if readers with reminiscences about Theodore or access to newspaper cuttings, diaries, photographs or film, would get in touch with him.

In the previous "on the line" I noted that some long-term readers had been forced by hard times to stop subscribing. A number of readers have responded by donating subscriptions, one superbly donated four subs., and we thank them most warmly. The subscriptions are being allocated with care and consideration.

Barrett Reid



Jiri Tibor

## Cover Stories

# A Letter From Turkey Creek

ROSEMARY CRUMLIN

*[I asked Rosemary Crumlin to write about recent aboriginal paintings which we saw together and from which was selected the painting reproduced on our cover. Rosemary is working with Anthony Knight on a major exhibition, Aboriginal Art and Spirituality, which will open at the High Court, Canberra, in February 1991 and then be shown in Victoria. I had a wonderful time with Rosemary and Anthony looking at some hundreds of recent paintings. - Ed.]*

Turkey Creek,  
The Kimberleys,  
Western Australia.  
23 September, 1990

Dear Barrett,

I am sitting again in the Merrilngki Conference room. It is only 10.15am but already the day is unbearably hot. Up at 5.00 to have sculptures ready for Chris and the film crew. They want to work in the clear morning light. Soft light. Like at dusk last night when we shuddered along in the 4 wheel with Hector Sundaloo to the foot of a hill beyond top camp. We talked together, this old man and I. Or rather, he talked and I listened. His talk was about his concern for the children and that they learn their own stories as well as the white fellas stories about Napunyi (God). We sat on the ground while the film crew moved around, shifting lens and focus, moving the microphone. He didn't mind. *Whitefellas don't see us unless in a film*, he'd told Peter earlier on, *in big mob, they don't see us, just each other*.

Quickly the light shifted so we climbed the hill and watched with the camera, as the sun went down and the films of purple floating in front of the far hills faded.

Earlier yesterday I'd gone to the school to ask Denise, the Principal, for permission to take the works for the exhibition to Melbourne to be photographed.

The school is small, remote, and in a real way tries to be a community

school. George Mung Mung and Hector were there with their paintings. Most days these two old men, respected elders, take their paintings to talk story with the children. Mothers go with the kids too. But the school isn't quiet and each time I go I think how hard a task this is - never a week without outside visitors - anthropologists, education officers, film crew, students, relatives of the community all needing time and attention.

I was a little afraid that when I saw the works again that we'd selected at Easter, that they wouldn't be so great after all. No need to fear. George Mung had repaired his huge *Ord River Country* - 6' x 3', a landscape of immense power done with local clays and ochres on an old board. For binder he uses gum from the trees so the surface is very fragile. The crickets love it. The other works are likewise magnificent, filled with the dignity and drama of this group of people. Strong, simple shapes, profoundly layered stories.

Turkey Creek stuff.

But I find myself concerned about revealing these works to the world. What will be the effect on this small community? The film makers share this concern. They have lived here for a couple of weeks now and have got to know the people a bit. They wonder if this exposure will be good for the people. Eventually we remind each other that these people were here thousands of years before us and, as hunters and gatherers, have adapted to us and look like being here

for thousands of years more - they walk through life lightly, for the most part.

But real theoretical questions have been raised for me.

One of these is about ownership. Is the work of art, the great work of art, in some sense the heritage of all people? Isn't the symbolic power of the work such that it can energize, reveal and enlighten across language, culture and age? What if the world had never seen a Van Gogh or a Picasso or a Greek statue? What if each art work were hidden in a private collection or small community to be seen and cherished by the few?

One Turkey Creek work for this exhibition throws these questions into strong relief.

The *Pregnant Mary* stands almost a metre tall. She is carved from a single tree trunk cut off deep in the bush in the Bungle Bungles and shaped with a sharpened steel spring from a derelict car.

On a shield under her heart she holds the child in her womb. He stands like a warrior with his arms and legs outstretched, touching the edges of the shield-shape, but encompassed safely in the strong sweep of her arms.

She, this Mary, is a young woman, a slip of a girl and her body is painted with the body paint designs reserved for young Aboriginal women.

The work is a masterpiece and, I believe, holds its own with the great madonnas of history - with Lipchitz's wonderful Madonna at Assy,

and with the Gothic carved figures of Chartres. It is a work of incredible power which communicates a timelessness and serenity beyond this place.

But it is cherished in the community. It is in a place of meditation and contemplation, and the Sisters who care for it are afraid to let it go to Canberra for the world to see and to have it in the book/catalogue of the Exhibition. It is a part of their life, it belongs to the Warmun community, and is a great point of unity for them.

So I tell them of the German "Gegenwart Ewigkeit", the 1990 Exhibition of post-1945 Religious Art which I saw in Martin-Gropius-

Bav in Berlin. And of the people who lent works to that, and of its power, and the way an exhibition can bring unlikely people together to look and reflect and to talk in new ways.

And I hope they can agree with all this. And I wait for them to come back tomorrow from Kununurra.

Rosemary

P.S. I've just realized I haven't talked about the Willie and Moima Gudipi on your cover. Ngukurr's tradition and history is as different from Turkey Creek's as is their art. The Gudipi is opulent with colour. Turkey Creek paintings are sombre with brown ochres and clay. In the Gudipi the stories push each other over for

attention and seem to sing and dance; Turkey Creek paintings usually focus a single image or idea and chant with rhythms. Between these two areas lie the paintings of the Central Desert - the dots and circles and the solemn layered iconographies.

*Rosemary Crumlin is the author of Images of Religion in Australian Art (Bay Books). She was the curator of the exhibition of that name held at the National Gallery of Victoria, December 1988-1989 which accompanied the book. She is now preparing the book to accompany the High Court exhibition, for which she and Anthony Knight are curators.*

## ANTHONY KNIGHT

## Willie Gudipi (Kuribi)

Born 1916

Group: Mamutjulu (*Namutjulu*) - Language group: Alawa

Ngukurr was formerly a Mission Station established by the Church of England in 1908 on the Roper River, and known as the Roper River Mission. This Anglican regime was replaced by a Government agency in 1968 and its name changed to Ngukurr, which means a place of many stones.

Willie Gudipi paints with his wife Moima, and together they tell elaborate stories about the ritualistic activities surrounding circumcision and mortuary ceremonies. Gudipi's paintings can be read as traditional maps and depict intertribal boundary disputes over custodianship of ritual estates.

As in most Aboriginal cultures in ancient time men metamorphose into totemic animals and his explanations always include 'This bird telling this crocodile "this my country, you go to your own country"', or 'This man trying to go to his country and this crocodile telling him "this my country" and trying to stop him.' Gudipi can explain whole canvases in this way and casually mention 'Here is this devil man getting ready for ceremony'. The men and boys

usually carry ceremonial dilly bags which denote the significance of the Yabuduruwa ritual. Groups of footprints mean a ceremony is to take place or has taken place. Most of the Gudipi canvases are crowded with events and usually involve more than one story, the illustrations of which are interwoven.

The Gudipis explain that all animals have their own law and these narrative canvases are a way of recording and explaining the maintenance, teaching and defence of that law. Frequently the meaning of this law can be mentioned only in passing or, if secret, not at all - with the explanation that there are things we cannot talk about. The degree of revelation depends on who is listening. When Gudipi is telling his paintings people, especially the young, crowd around and listen intently, often becoming involved in the storytelling themselves and making sure the legends and myths are correctly understood and recorded.

Some of the legends involve the Rainbow Serpent, a mythological being who exists in many stories in Aboriginal culture. In Gudipi's case

the Rainbow Serpent comes out of the water and kills people. Another story tells about mosquitoes and sandflies who arrange circumcision ceremonies, and there is a kangaroo who follows the sun and eats flowers. The sun tells him what route to follow. Most of Gudipi's stories end with the explanation that 'This is all I can say'.

Willie Gudipi is a very old man in Aboriginal terms, and for this reason is accorded considerable respect within his community.

Willie and Moima have been painting for about three years and are very proud of the narrative content of their stories. Willie Gudipi also makes very fine traditional boomerangs. The paintings are represented in the collection of the Australian National Gallery and in major private collections.

*Anthony Knight is director of the Alcaston House Gallery of Aboriginal art and co-curator of the forthcoming Aboriginal Art and Spirituality exhibition.*

A more bracing treatment of *Nation* was well in order after the various friendly remarks called forth by the appearance of Professor K. S. Inglis' anthology. It is a bit awkward for a *Nation* editor to have to suggest, however, that Wendy Bacon has taken the adversarial line to absurdity in *Overland* 118, and done little for the repute of her brand of radicalism. A distinctive feature of her critical procedure calls for some analysis, since uninformed readers could hardly be aware of what is happening. The method is to produce a whopping distortion of another person's meaning (rather, it seems, as though some preconception had been waiting for impregnation in the recesses of her mind), and to promote the misrepresentation flat out, regardless of the evidence that tells against it.

Harsh words, no doubt, but an example may explain them. Ms Bacon says of *Nation* in the later 1960s, "The journal was out-flanked to the left, and even, at times in the mainstream press. Nothing could demonstrate this better than a statement by Fitzgerald in that same last editorial that 'after all the atrocities and waste of life [in the Vietnam war] moral and intellectual victory' belonged to the United States!"

There are no ifs or maybes about what I am supposed to have said. It must have taken real determination in Wendy Bacon not to see what was before her eyes, the very opposite of what she asserts and takes as basis for wider conclusions.

The editorial she refers to (*Nation*, 22 July, 1972) itemized examples that had caused us concern in Sir Robert Menzies' "fatal reactionary tendencies . . . shown in the Suez affair and in his government's attitudes on China and Indonesia . . . shortly to be shown again over Sharpeville, and

later in the Vietnam commitment." (Emphasis now added.) It proceeded to recall one of *Nation's* persistent obligations: "The lack of a distinctive stance in foreign policy had to be exposed again and again . . ." This led to the passage that excites Ms Bacon, though she did not quote it fully; it reads:

The passage of time has made many of these objectives acceptable, but the actual circumstances have not changed very materially. In Vietnam and China, the initiative has been left to the United States right to the end to get the message and transmit it to us, and Vietnam has naturally brought new sharpness to a younger generation. Nevertheless, after all the atrocities and waste of life, the moral and intellectual victory has been theirs.

To misrepresent the tenor of the passage, Wendy Bacon had, first, to show semantic agility, jumping over the aroused "younger generation" which is the proximate subject to the pronoun "theirs" (their victory, despite having been victimized) and to fasten on to the United States as a personal plural. But more remarkably, she also had to steer well clear of taking into account (let alone quoting from) the last preceding editorial of *Nation* to be reprinted in the anthology (pages 214-5). That editorial of 13 June, 1970, had spelled out an example of the wretched Australian government habit of waiting permissively on America for a belated lead in the direction of a less immoral attitude to the conditions of war service. It had said:

When a remote war, fought during peacetime conditions at home, involves deep moral differences of view, with repugnance in some quarters and dis-

belief that the war is in the interest of the home country, then a democratic society can expect to send only as many servicemen as are willing to go on the terms offered. The American authorities have learned this lesson now. Hardly a voice in that country disputes it . . . But in Australia the light is not breaking . . .

The editorial referred to "the insensitiveness and stupidity of the Federal Government and the elderly Establishment it attempts to serve." (The last phrase led a director of John Fairfax to wonder whether I was getting at him.)

For *Nation*, the June, 1970, editorial was itself old-hat in opposing conscription for Vietnam. It was one of a long series of leaders in similar vein, not included in the anthology, beginning on 10 July, 1965, before there was clear indication that the Government proposed conscripting for that war. I am not sure whether Wendy Bacon means to imply that an editorial of 14 November, 1964, from which she quotes selectively, was a response to a Government proposal to send conscripts to Vietnam, but that was not so. No such conscription was expected even as late as May, 1965, when Maxwell Newton broke the news in our pages that some force was going to Vietnam. "It is thought," he wrote on inside information, "that the availability of seven Army battalions by early 1966 will not make necessary an expansion of conscription to accommodate our new responsibilities in Vietnam . . ." The passage is on page 136 of the anthology. (The November, 1964, editorial was dealing with a range of possible simultaneous contingencies in south-east Asia and New Guinea, based partly on uncertainties as to Sukarno's adventurist impulses.)

Wendy Bacon acknowledges

that she did not test her impression of a "muted" *Nation* line on Vietnam conscription by going to the files. If anyone still entertains ideas of that kind, they could start by glancing at just three of the 1966 editorials: those for 19 March (an excerpt: "Whatever dilemmas the Vietnam conflict poses, our young men should not be conscripted into doing the dirty work."); for 15 October ("The vileness of the Vietnam war is not something to be inured to; it increases with time . . . The most practical concern for Australians now is . . . to unseat a Government that is imposing conscription for the Vietnam war . . ."); and for 12 November ("This deserves to be the central issue of the 1966 elections.") I can supply plenty of

other references to anyone interested in the reality.

I don't want to belabor Wendy Bacon with every aberration or disputable statement I see. Her high regard for George Munster is warming, though I would shy well away from seeing such an Andersonian impress as she has evidently been told on that least categorizable of powerful intelligences that I have known. And it still seems wilful on her part not to have acknowledged that my long-range hope "to affect the general consciousness by gradual, intermittent suggestion," which she eagerly quotes from the valedictory editorial, was directed to one very specific and intricate problem: as to how affluent countries such as this one might be made to help raise

the standards of desperately poor peoples. That specific problem has worsened as our economic sovereignty has been eroded.

If *Nation* were going today it would be exercising itself over the economic policies of this Labor Government, including the financial deregulation. As far as human frailty permits, it would be trying to uphold accuracy as another name for honesty and as involving exact attention to the arguments of opponents. I wish there was more evidence that today's radicals were managing to make a dent in the Government's policies.

*Tom Fitzgerald was the editor of Nation 1958-1972. He gave the A.B.C. Boyer Lectures, 1990.*

JOSEPH DAVIS

## D. H. Lawrence at Thirroul: a Reply to Andrew Moore

There are many issues raised by Andrew Moore's review of my *D. H. Lawrence at Thirroul* (*Overland* 120), but I'll focus on just a few.

Dr Moore takes surprising umbrage at my pointing out that he too readily accepted a suggestion proffered by Robert Darroch without first ascertaining whether there was any evidence to support it.

And although he does graciously grant that my "local knowledge allows" me "to do some things very well", this praise sounds a little insincere coming after several paragraphs attempting to stigmatise me as the semi-literate 'son of a wharfie' - an attempt which, in itself, is pretty curious coming from a Marxist historian.

The really big shadow Moore casts over my research, however, concerns the burning question of whether there was a Sunday train to Thirroul on May 28, 1922?

Dr Moore's 'distinguished ferro-quinologist' assures him there wasn't. But if Moore had personally

gone to the Railway Archives Office at Wynyard, like I did last year, he would have found that there are no timetables extant for the South Coast line for May 28, 1922. As with so much of the material relating to Lawrence's first few days in Sydney, there's no hard evidence to go on.

So I'm sticking to what I say in my book: "Darroch . . . assumes the Lawrences went to Manly on Sunday May 28 and to Thirroul on Monday, May 29. He may well be right, but it's impossible to be absolutely certain". But I'm bit surprised that Moore requires me to defend such a hesitant position.

The only generous explanation I can offer for his embittered response to *D. H. Lawrence at Thirroul* is that Moore's contumely is a product of the frustration felt by all researchers into Lawrence's Australian stay - a frustration stemming from the difficulty of establishing that Lawrence encountered the leaders of a secret army.

Indeed, the difficulty of the task

is such that Moore is forced to use the very inconclusive fruits of my own research on W. S. Friend & Co., combined with some equally inconclusive findings of his own, to prop up his critique of my book.

I would be delighted if my hunch that one of the family of W. S. Friend gave Lawrence details about the secret army was correct. But the evidence necessary to turn this hunch into proof has simply not yet surfaced, despite either Moore's or my own best efforts.

Intriguingly, for all his efforts to belittle my findings, Moore and I differ on only one major issue. He believes that "*Kangaroo* remains a principal source for . . . Australia's secret history of the inter-war period" whereas I have my doubts. For when it comes to Lawrence's portrayal of the secret army in *Kangaroo*, like Michael Cathcart I feel that it's "impossible to know at what point Lawrence started to dislocate or enhance his material in order to dramatize his experience."

This difference aside, we have much in common. Principally, we share a belief that there is a real likelihood that throughout Australian history some covert form of military or paramilitary organization has almost always been waiting in the wings to protect the interests of whichever form of capital has been dominant at the time.

Fortunately, at least one reviewer has been able to see this. Marcus Hellyer (*Editions*, Sept/90, pp. 35-6) concludes: "... what Lawrence did or did not know is just as irrelevant for Moore as it is for Davis. Moore's aim is to discuss right-wing secret armies, which existed from 1919... This phenomenon does not need an encounter with DH Lawrence to

grant it significance."

Hellyer's very reasonable summation is that "It is likely the 'who did Lawrence meet' debate will never be resolved. But as Davis, Moore and Cathcart reveal, there are far more interesting matters with which to concern ourselves."

And, in any sensible world, this would be what everyone felt.

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KEVIN HART

## After Poetry 7, A Quarterly Account of Recent Poetry

### THE PLACE OF POETRY

The word 'place' alerts us to something very important about poetry. But before it can begin to help us understand anything at all, several presumptions must be cleared away: the trite views that there is a right place where poetry is written (in a garret), suitable places it is written about (having natural or historical significance), and even a fitting place and time for reading it (at home, at night). Such ideas, even when not completely hardened into clichés, hark back to a Romanticism they idealise and distort. Putting them behind us, we can meditate more deeply about place in poetry. We can think, for instance, about why the ancient Greeks talked about *topikos*, of that which pertains to place, when considering speeches and poetry. First of all, the *topoi* might come to mind, those rhetorical commonplaces which have informed poetry, directly or indirectly, from Isocrates to the present day. The topics of inexpressibility, of the world's topsy-turviness, of extolling youth and honoring age – all these name familiar poetic sites. And yet this is only the beginning of what *topikos* says. It also tells us that events and places are always given together: a poem solicits what is absent, forgotten or overlooked, and grounds it locally. A poem does not picture or embody a place; it conducts reality here or there. So place is not static, not a mere stretch of land or sea which simply precedes human engagement with it. Place is something that happens; it is the afterlife of events, and the occasion for new events. A place is where things occur, in fact or fiction. It is, for example, Flinders Street Railway Station where people travel from home to work, or where they agree to meet under the clocks, or where a story is set, with its own agendas and acts. Only rarely is a place defined by just one incident; but it does happen, as we all know. The names 'Glenrowan', 'Eureka' and 'Norfolk Island' may speak to different people in

different ways, yet each has a distinctive undertone.

Place and poetry intersect at various times and in many ways. As we think about the classical *topoi*, and about how places are formed and reformed in stories and images, so too we might wonder what takes place in poetry. We are on the right track when saying that a poem localises. Even at the furthest reaches of the imagination, as in the lyrics of Paul Eluard, or in the most abstract meditations, as in Wallace Stevens' long poems, there is a quest for the particular. It may reveal itself in a longing to register the peculiar tang of *this* thing or *that* moment; or it may be heard in a voice, a special timbre, a curious weave of syntax, or an unmatched idiom. Place occurs in poetry: not in the precise recording of a landscape or a cityscape, but in the event of the singular. And yet no event occurs once and for all time, in a poem or anywhere. For poems, like all writings, are never fully complete in themselves; they require the attention, alertness and openness of good readers who, in hearing a poem, receive it as speaking uniquely to them. The reader brings a time and a place to the poem, and receives it as time and place. That reception is not always easy, nor always possible: it supposes that the poem meets you at a right time and a right place. But how often does that occur? We all have stories of how, perhaps for many years, we could not read a writer, then, out of the blue, we grasp his or her voice, and the poetry sparkles. Some poems may pass us by for a lifetime, following different paths; others may get lost in the ear's labyrinth; and only those which speak a unique message, one we are prepared to hear, are the poems which abide.

To talk of singularity in this way is not to appeal to modernism, subjectivism or even to the avant garde. An idiom may be absolutely distinctive yet do nothing new in terms of form. Conversely, eccentricity and caprice may be guarantees of



gaining notice from reviewers, yet they have no necessary links with originality or poetic force. The question of place, in all its richness and illusiveness, is posed time and time again when reading David Campbell's *Collected Poems*. In 'Hotel Marine', for instance, place does not function as a background, or even as a ground against which the lyric cuts a figure; it is an unknown element which the poem keeps trying to approach and caress, now whimsically, now urgently:

Lost in glass gullies, searching for a suitcase:  
The white sun shatters in ten thousand windows,  
And splinters scatter, colouring the crowd  
Looking for the Hotel Marine.

Our books are there, small treasures, a transistor  
And all our marvellous clothes. I guess that's why  
We wander naked through the rush-hour traffic  
Looking for the Hotel Marine.

We use our hands as shields but no one sees us  
In this steel garden with its paper leaves.  
Their eyes are twenty blocks before them  
Looking for the Hotel Marine.

We keep together, eyes wide for a policeman,  
But no one cares. Perhaps they are not here  
But somewhere in the past or in the future  
Looking for the Hotel Marine.

Maybe it's round the corner, sunlit, floating:  
The doorman smiles and cats are on the sofas –  
How should it vanish, leaving us with nothing,  
Looking for the Hotel Marine?

Lines of power radiate from this lyric: some leading to Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, some to Cavafy's 'Ithaca', and others to the Beatles' 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds'. And yet, for all its dreaminess, 'Hotel Marine' keeps in close contact with the world around us: and that is entirely characteristic of Campbell's vision. His poetic is wide and generous enough to accommodate both the real and the surreal, and to let them rub up against each other a little. Early and late you find this, from 'Harry Pearce' to 'The Red Telephone Box', and the current that links them is a peculiarly Australian perception of place. As Campbell once observed, "The surrealism of our landscape shimmers in the Australian mind".

Reading through this thick *Collected Poems* one cannot avoid noting changes as well as continuities. From the late sixties, there is a relaxation of form (though not of discipline), a developing intimacy

with other arts and with other ways of exploring Campbell's own art. The pivotal book in this regard is *The Branch of Dodona*, from which 'Hotel Marine' comes. It and the four slim collections which follow convince me that Campbell is the most enduring legacy of the much-vaunted 'generation of sixty-eight'. Which is not to say that he follows a single trajectory in his later years, for he drew more broadly, as well as more deeply, from poetry than any of the younger writers he read. If he looked with fresh interest to American and English poets, he also gazed fondly at writers from eastern as well as western Europe, not to mention the opportune sidelong glance to Chinese and Japanese poets. A poem like 'The Broken Mask' could not have been written without a Vasko Popa or a Zbigniew Herbert, yet the poem remains Campbell's from beginning to end:

The mask by the hall mirror  
Has fallen and broken  
It cannot be mended.

It was a comic mask  
With a grin for all occasions  
It made us feel better

It smiled at meeting and parting  
At births and by sickbeds  
And encouragingly at funerals.

What a tragedy people say  
The mask has fallen  
And they frown in the hall mirror

In a heap of rubble  
The mask looks up from the floor  
With a broken smile.

The poem begins by taking several tiny steps, then strides out once or twice before sharply contracting once again. Nothing could be more simple, more elegant, or more economical in gesture. We see a subtle interplay of human acts being placed socially, while people are themselves being placed by social rituals. We also see how the borderline between art and life twists and turns, never remains constant, and at times seems to vanish altogether.

It is those moments just before or just after that borderline fades which many of Campbell's most piercing lyrics evoke. Reading these poems we slip into a world where times and places shimmer: a rich and varied world, yet one carefully lighted by the simplest words. A line from Wallace Stevens, from his great death song 'Of Mere Being', keeps

ringing in my ear while pondering Campbell's last poems. The line reads, "The bird sings. Its feathers shine." It is that kind of simplicity and associative richness which gleams in these pages. Campbell believed in what Keats called "negative capability", that feeling all poets relish, of being "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." These are moments of tremendous freedom, like the runner's elation after passing the threshold of pain: a universe can be summoned in an image, and you know the poem in hand is whole and good even before it is barely begun. In a lyric such as 'Yellow Lines', for instance, there is a lightness, a warmth, and a deep clarity that go well beyond the seeing eye:

The city is full of rose-coloured Volkswagens  
They stream down the highways  
Between the lots of used rose cars

They are all driven by the same girl  
Her blond hair blows  
She toots to herself in a snarl of rose traffic

I wave my hand to each car  
She waves back – my car swerves dangerously  
She does not wave – my car swerves dangerously

I drive a canary-yellow Ford  
It makes me conspicuous  
Look where you're going calls the girl from the  
rose cars

I sing to my girl in her frail rose world  
A yellow love song  
From the cage of my yellow Ford.

We have had to wait ten years for this *Collected Poems*, too long a time when Campbell's individual collections have been out of print. As an edition, it is an equivocal success, at best. To begin with, it is not a 'collected poems' in any rigorous sense of the expression: only eleven of one-hundred-and-eight poems Campbell published, yet chose not to reprint in individual collections, appear here; and twenty-four poems, published posthumously in *Poetry Australia* in 1981, do not appear. None of Campbell's translations from the Russian is represented. Also puzzling is that the collection is arbitrarily divided into four sections (1937-1957, 1958-1970, 1971-1975, 1976-1979). In neither case is an explanation or justification offered by the editor, Leonie Kramer. Although Arthur Boyd's 'Red Cow and Ghost Figure' adorns the cover, and

beautifully conjures Campbell's pastoral world, the poems run on one after the other as though on ticker-tape. No attention is given to stanza breaks (and one poem, 'Looking Down on Canberra', is mistakenly divided into two stanzas). Compare the look and feel of this book with anything similar published by Atheneum, Braziller, Ecco, Farrar Straus Giroux, Harper and Row, or Wesleyan, and you will soon realise that Australian publishers of poetry are at best amateurish and at worst mean-spirited. It is a shame they have to be trusted with work of this quality.

One writer whom Campbell esteemed, and was influenced by in his later years, is the English poet Ted Hughes. Above all, Campbell brooded on *Wodwo*, Hughes' powerful 1967 collection, which suggested vibrant possibilities for his own verse. Hughes' admirers (and I am one of them) may argue amongst themselves whether *Wodwo* represents this writer at his best – some may prefer *Lupercal*, some *Crow*, others *Cave Birds* or even *Season Songs* – yet only a very few, I think, would make large claims for the subsequent volumes. All too often these later collections shown an exhausted voice and vision, all the more tiresome when they become strident or lapse into involuntary self-parody. At times the original, potent influence of D. H. Lawrence appears to reclaim and mock what is now ventured under Hughes' signature. True, Hughes can still vividly extemporise on a theme, yet we have heard the tune before, played better by the same person. 'A Sparrow Hawk', for instance, is sufficiently lively to gain attention. We are told of those "eyes in their helmet/Still wired direct/To the nuclear core", and then we find him,

Materialized by twilight and dew  
Still as a listener –

The warrior

Blue shoulder-cloak wrapped about him  
Leaning, hunched,  
Among the oaks of the harp.

If that final image reminds us of how much Hughes continues to draw from Shakespeare, it also recalls how less a power is now his to command. Returning to *Wodwo* a quarter of a century ago, we hear a more magnificent strain, a raw music that comes directly from *Macbeth* or *King Lear*. In 'Out', for instance, Hughes illumines a sodden battlefield, of men "under rain that goes on drumming its rods and thickening/Its kingdom, which the sun has

abandoned, and where nobody/Can ever again  
move from shelter.”

‘Out’ explores how war has touched the poet’s family, especially his father; it offers a portrait of suffering, and a critique of remembrance which is also a hymn to survival. In *Wolfwatching*, Hughes’ most recent collection, the same theme is revisited, although treated in more subdued, tender tones. At its best, as in ‘Slump Sundays’, it is finely localised. We hear that “The valley god/Was pulling itself together/In the smoker’s haze”, and feel that “Souls were mouldering/Inside those great barns – the seed-corn/Lugged back from the Somme.” A feeling for Hughes’ native Yorkshire is everywhere apparent: the place is felt with all five senses, and within the poem’s elected limits it works well. ‘Out’ pictures the speaker’s father listening to a clock’s tick which “Dragged him bodily from under/The mortised four-year strata of dead Englishmen/He belonged with.” In *Wolfwatching*’s ‘Dust as we Are’, though, that rhetoric is toned right down:

My post-war father was so silent  
He seemed to be listening. I eavesdropped  
On the hot line. His lonely sittings  
Mangled me, in secret – like TV  
Watched too long, my nerves lasered.  
Then, an after image of the incessant  
Mowing passage of machine-gun effects,  
What it filled a trench with. And his laugh  
(How had that survived – so nearly intact?)  
Twitched the curtain never quite deftly enough  
Over the hospital wards  
Crowded with his (photographed) shock-eyed  
pals.

This is a poetry which regards rhetoric as a negative force, to be stripped from the lines, with the result that the verse is limp and lifeless. To be sure, there are moments in ‘Out’ when the rhetoric far outreaches poetic vision; but this passage from the poem’s final section strikes me as more compelling than anything on the same theme in his new collection:

The poppy is a wound, the poppy is the mouth  
Of the grave, maybe of the womb searching –

A canvas-beauty puppet on a wire  
Today whoring everywhere. It is years since I  
wore one.

It is more years  
The shrapnel that shattered my father’s paybook

Gripped me, and all his dead  
Gripped him to a time

He no more than they could outgrow, but, cast  
into one, like iron,  
Hung deeper than refreshing of ploughs

In the woe-dark under my mother’s eye –

There are always places where poetry is more honored than elsewhere, and Adelaide’s Friendly Street is one of them. There have now been fourteen Friendly Street Readers, jubilant commemorations of the readings held there year by year. No place remains the same over a period of time, and what ‘Friendly Street’ meant a dozen years ago is little indication of what it means now. Poetry never develops but it changes all the time, from generation to generation and, thankfully, even in individual poets. Augustine once prayed, “Make me chaste, Lord, but not yet”; and almost every poet is likewise tempted to pray, “Make me change, Lord, but not yet.” Luckily for poetry, though, God does not always answer our prayers in the ways we hope. With enough grace, we learn to accept change as a gift. There’s a good deal of verve in this fourteenth Reader. One of my favorites is Caroline Cleland’s ‘Going Out Dancing’ which is great fun from beginning to end. “I want to dance the cha cha cha when I’m ninety two”, it begins, and carries on elatedly:

I want to turn and twist in tangoes, flaunt neck  
cords strand by strand  
to fondle wine glass stems like ankles with a  
gnarled and leathered hand.

I’m going to rumba past the band and bar, shriek  
out for more and more  
and quickstep from Time’s chariot lying waiting  
at the door.

*The Inner Courtyard*, also published under the genial sign of the Friendly Street Poets, treats us to a collection of love poetry. Love takes many forms, occurs in likely and unlikely places, yet is always associated with special sites. Christine Churches’ keenly observed ‘My Mother and the Trees’ moves through a dense, familiar world; we encounter “fibres of air” and a mother who “shook the doormat free of dogs” before getting started on raising trees. Written in quite another key, Christopher Mooney’s ‘Café Paradiso’ calls up a prized place in that most exotic and bewitching

of forms, the sestina. The poem asks to be quoted in full, but here are the opening stanzas as a taste:

We used to talk for hours in that café  
touring with ease like twelve-metre yachts.  
I'd rave about some important subject,  
while she spooned the froth off my coffee.  
She'd say: *do you want the rest, Sweet?*  
I'd shake my head pursuing my theme.

The cobalt harbour was an easy theme –  
its garbage barges, slow-motion yachts,  
the ferry coming and going as we drank coffee,  
ate baklava, read poems – sometimes sweet,  
sometimes piercing. But Poetry was the subject.  
We spooned it down like sugar in that café.

Every poet has a special place to which he or she returns time and time again when writing. Sometimes you hardly know the place is so important until you notice how often it figures in your work; and sometimes it may be a place you have never actually visited. A chance image from a photograph, a painting, an advertisement can beguile its way into your mind, and can inform and structure your life for years. Perhaps the place is no more than a fragrance, a touch, or a curve; and perhaps it exists in the distant past. Classical Greece is the true place of John Bray's poetry, even when he is not engaged in translating its poets. The poems in *Seventy Seven* are obedient to the laws of metre and rhyme, though not always to the values of middle-class society. Witness 'Non-Event', collected in *The Inner Courtyard*:

Let's agree to sever,  
Saving grief and gloom.  
You want a freehold property,  
I want a motel room.

Better abort the friendship  
Before it's too old to kill.  
You want Barbara Cartland,  
I want Fanny Hill.

We would never have been concordant,  
Either in heart or head.  
You want a lifelong union,  
I want an hour in bed.

You can't say I deceived you.  
I never promised rings.  
You want Tristan and Isolde,  
I want a twang on the strings.

When a writer as acute as this turns to translating from the Greek, we expect lines that bristle, and we are not disappointed. Here is 'Deduction', by Julianus of Egypt:

You have a face exactly resembling the face of  
an ostrich.  
I can only conclude that you have been accepting  
spiked drinks from a biochemist.

At other times, though, a poem's edge is blunted by wordiness. My feeling is that the last line of 'Chagrin' by Theognis is a little too relaxed while not being sufficiently colloquial:

I did the right thing and lost all my money.  
I did the wrong thing and got it all back again.  
It is hard to say which of these events is more  
embittering.

To my ear, 'of these events' needlessly draws out the final line, while 'embittering' is a wee bit stilted.

From ancient Greece to contemporary Israel, and to its supreme poet, Yehuda Amichai. Many readers will remember an earlier selection of Amichai's work in the Penguin Modern European Poets series; and if that labile and biddable voice appealed then, it will do so now. This is not simply an expansion of the earlier edition, but a fresh look at a protean writer. Reading this *Selected Poems*, I found myself looking for favorite poems from the earlier selection, occasionally not finding them, yet being distracted and delighted by poems I had not encountered before. What Amichai's admirers need is a stout *Collected Poems* in English translation, and I trust it will not be years and years in coming. For Amichai is one of those poets (like Tranströmer, like Drummond de Andrade) whose each work is of interest, because even minor poems are part of a restless, dialectical imagination that compels and focusses attention. Any writer who lives in Israel must be deeply aware of the prerogative and power of place in literature. Yet so far as I can tell (not being able to read the poems in the original language) Amichai resists using historically or religiously charged place names to generate easy poetic effects. His vision is more particular, more driven, than that. An early lyric makes the point:

Of three or four in a room  
there is always one who stands beside the window  
He must see the evil among thorns  
and the fires on the hill.

And how people who went out their houses whole  
are given back in the evening like small change.

Of three or four in a room  
there is always one who stands beside the window,  
his dark hair above his thoughts.  
Behind him, words.  
And in front of him, voices wandering without  
a knapsack,  
hearts without provisions, prophecies without  
water,  
large stones that have been returned  
and stay sealed, like letters that have no  
address and no one to receive them.

The poem talks of one who stands apart, a witness  
to suffering and someone who must suffer to  
become an authentic witness. A true witness stands  
apart, alone, inviolable in his or her singularity; and  
yet no one is closer to the other – this forsaken  
community, that crying child, those who mourn –  
than the witness.

How can one speak of the other, let alone for  
the other? In what place could one conceivably  
stand? These are questions which touch Amichai  
time and again, when talking of private pain or  
public horror. They stir in a recent poem, 'Inside  
the Apple':

You visit me inside the apple.  
Together we can hear the knife  
paring around and around us, carefully,  
so the peel won't tear.

You speak to me. I trust your voice  
because it has lumps of hard pain in it  
the way real honey  
has lumps of wax from the honeycomb.

I touch your lips with my fingers  
that too is a prophetic gesture.  
And your lips are red, the way a burnt field is  
black.  
It's all true.

You visit me inside the apple  
and you'll stay with me inside the apple  
until the knife finishes its work.

There are times when abstraction is the only  
available vehicle for particularity, and this is one  
of them. Of course, the image of the apple is not  
neutral: it tows an enormous weight of mythology  
by the thin thread of Eve's temptation of Adam.  
That the poem's significance in Hebrew differs

somewhat from its meaning in English is just one  
indication of what is lost and gained in translation.  
The poems by Amichai that we read are not the  
same poems available to his Hebrew-speaking  
readers.

And that brings us, inevitably, to questions of  
nationalism. I would like to emphasise the plural,  
*questions*, for two reasons: first, because  
'nationalism' suggests a wide range of questions –  
political, social and cultural, all of which are  
questions of place; and second, because nationalism  
itself does not always mean the same thing: there  
are worlds of difference between Soviet or German  
nationalism and that of Scotland or Wales. In some  
cases nationalism is of a piece with imperialism  
and totality; in other cases, with cultural indepen-  
dence and difference. Robert Crawford selects as  
an epigraph to his first collection, *A Scottish  
Assembly*, these apposite words from Margaret  
Atwood: "Some people think that the word  
Nationalism means 'let's put on jackboots and kill  
everybody else', but our cultural nationalism has  
a very modest mandate – namely, that we exist. It  
seems to threaten some people."

Some of Crawford's poems recall Scottish history  
and Scottish writers. The task of remembering,  
needless to say, is always an act of piecing things  
together that have worked loose or been torn apart.  
And sometimes, as these lines suggest, it is hard  
to tell whether one is restoring or constructing a  
whole:

Mr Carnegie has bought Skibo Castle.  
His union jack's sewn to the stars and stripes.  
James Murray combs the dialect from his beard  
And files slips for his massive *Dictionary*.  
Closing a fine biography of mother,  
Remembering Dumfries, and liking boys,  
James Barrie, caught in pregnant London silence,  
Begins to conceive the Never Never Land.

It is not hard to tell, though, that Crawford is happier  
with images of home than with catalogues of  
dislocation and dispersal. For nationalism is at root  
an economic concept, a matter of managing the  
family home or *oikos*. As critique, it functions by  
persistently raising issues of cultural appropriation  
and expropriation; while affirmatively, it hymns  
what is proper, intimate and natural to a particular  
land. No surprise then to find nationalism working  
in a private space, within the familial home, even  
in the marital bed (in one poem a wife rolls toward  
her husband, whispering, "I've become a  
nationalist".)

Many of these poems try to resolve the opposing pulls of public and private, exterior and interior: "Home/Is where we hang up our clothes and surnames/Without thought", we are told, while another poem records how the shorelights "Spread beyond Millport, beckon us to marry,/To lie along the bowsprits of our lives." One of the most poignant poems here, 'On the Way Home', is a translation from the Vietnamese of Che-Lan-Vien. "On a clear day I abandoned the city", the poem begins, "To go back to the mountains of the race called Hoi":

Their towers were here, gone thin with waiting,  
Temples eroded under long rain.  
Deserted, the river dragged in shadow. Statues  
Whimpered at their open blisters.

At evening, surrounded by bending treetops,  
Crowds of blind spirits linked their hands  
To grope through the forest. Shadows dissolved  
in chaos,  
Waves of scent fluttered with the sound of  
farewells.

Just as Che-Lan-Vien mourns the conquest of the Hoi people and the inevitable loss of their property and culture, so Robert Crawford laments the sad history of Scotland in recent centuries – the Act of Union, the battle of Culloden, the Highland Clearances and their long aftermath – while also resisting what John Duncan Makie once called, all too correctly, the "neo-Jacobite never-never land beloved of the American or Continental tourist".

There are some poets who use place to help them understand themselves, their own situations; and others who prefer to register the singularities of the place itself. Edwin Wilson is one of the latter. In *Songs of the Forest* he looks at nature with a botanist's eye. So we hear that "The 'coolamon', expelled from the garden,/bleeds flowers from old wounds", and are directed to a footnote which begins "The 'Coolamon' or 'Rose apple', *Syzygium móorei*, had a different aboriginal name in each river valley" and goes on informing us about its appeal for parrots and its use in jam. The enthusiasm and precision which inform the footnotes is rarely apparent in the verse itself, which is a tissue of commonplaces:

A village of old women and dogs,  
horse paddock and bullock train;  
smithy's forge, sawmill and logs,  
peaked roofs of corrugated iron.

There is nothing here, either in visual detail or in the speaker's voice, which distinguishes it from any amount of similar material.

Jeff Guess, by contrast, uses a very specific cluster of places – four Adelaide museums – as back-grounds and foregrounds in a quest for understanding the self and its shifting relations with time. *Rites of Arrival* is the consequence of his association with several historians at the History Trust of South Australia. Most poets are rightly dubious about engaging in highly specific projects, for it seems to blur the hallowed distinction between poetry and journalism; but museums have a peculiar appeal for many writers. For Guess they provide a range of particulars half-charged with significance, and his desire is to supplement that lack with details of ordinary human lives. Thus a poem entitled 'The Great Depression' focusses on "a single jar of stiff and sugary jam". Guess's project is to restore the idiom of historical events. For we tend to prize the pattern of a day or year, not the lived moments themselves. As he says in 'Train Journeys':

If we were later to report the day,  
explain the hours – we would leave it out,  
and defend such action as a sensible omission,  
with little purpose in the pattern of our lives.

And yet I am persuaded differently:  
the weather we passed through was real;  
wind from the doorway left open was wind –  
and afterwards there was rain on my face.

Museums are remarkable for much more than their acquisitions. There is the fascination of how they organise knowledge about the past, first removing objects from their natural surroundings then arranging them by codes which hide their cultural specificity in the glamor and ease of abstraction. Museums show us how Western society regards itself and its relations with our past or with other cultures. Walking around a museum we view structures of power; in cabinets, cases and exhibits we meet the historian's gaze, the anthropologist's curiosity; and we witness their programmed ability to turn a living history or a culture into a system of objects. These thoughts lead us to 'Two Meditations on Guanajuato', one of the many prose poems in John Yau's *Radiant Silhouette*. The first meditation begins:

Postcards are fragments of an encyclopedia;  
and typical of one announcing a town whose  
existence concerns only its tenacious  
inhabitants, this one's a photograph of its rather

unique main attraction. San Antonio has its fort, Lugano its lake. But for those stopping in Guanajuato to take in the sights, the main attraction seems to be a little graveyard museum. The treasures lining its walls are some former citizens, all recently deceased. For the photograph, seven mummies have been carefully posed: three adults and four infants.

What makes Yau's poem remarkable is not so much the oddity of this museum as in moments such as that understated final detail, "three adults and four infants". As the poem continues, a link is forged between biography, autobiography, and visting museums, especially the macabre museum of Guanajuato. And so the second meditation concludes:

Nothing seems to remove this distraction. And yet, if I am going to dig up the recent past and place it in a museum, if I am going to endow its banality with meaning, as anyone who writes about themselves does, I want it done quickly and efficiently, like the men who push their spades into the warm soil of Guanajuato. For it will be a museum I have no desire to visit. Arranging it will be enough.

In an earlier poem Yau observes, "I look for what I have overlooked"; and in prose poems such as 'Two Meditations on Guanajuato' and 'Carp and Goldfish' he raises that casual remark into a compelling poetic.

We like to think that places can easily be circumscribed, that spaces are enclosed, that outsides will always remain distinct from insides. But borders do not always respect our wishes. Firm for a while or under certain conditions, they can fade, break, or twist back upon themselves. What was inside suddenly reveals itself to be a pocket of an outside; or it becomes clear that an exterior is an interior turned inside-out. If some poetry is a topography, other poetry is a topology. C. K. Williams is alert to the strange behaviour of borderlines, and 'In There' shows him consciously observing them shift and slide:

Here I am, walking along your eyelid again  
toward your tear duct. Here are your eyelashes  
like elephant grass and one tear  
blocking the way like a boulder.

Other borders are transgressed in 'The Hard Part', another poem from the sixties. Notice the pull

between the pure insistence of the voice and the odd conjunctions it obsessively lists:

Do you remember when we dreamed about the  
owl  
and the skeleton, and the shoe  
opened and there was the angel  
with his finger in the book, his smile like  
chocolate?

And remember? Everything that had been crushed  
or burned, we changed back.  
We turned the heart around  
in the beginning, we closed the blossom, we let  
the drum go.

But you're missing now. Every night I feel us  
crying  
together, but it's late -  
the white bear and the lawyer  
are locking the house up and where are you?

The wind walking, the rock turning over with worms  
stuck to its haunches -  
how will I know what loves me now  
and what doesn't? How will I forgive you?

Towards the end of *Poems 1963-1983*, Williams makes a decisive shift in his poetic stance; it is as though his poetic energy suddenly reverses its direction: once centripetal, it becomes centrifugal. The writer of implosive, surreal lyrics turns into someone greatly concerned with expansive forms, inclusive narratives and realist codes. A poem such as 'The Dog', for instance, observes a woman who cruelly keeps a sick pet alive. The long lines move out relentlessly, like tentacles gathering in every telling detail of the place, and the events which make it significant. We meet the woman in a rush of adjectives - "Handsome, busty, chunky, early middle-aged, very black, with a stiff, exotic dignity" - which, when you think about it, mimic the speaker's increasingly detailed sense of her. And then we meet the dog:

Her dog, a grinning mongrel, rib and knob, gristle  
and grizzle, wasn't terribly offensive.  
The trouble was that he was ill, or the trouble  
more exactly was that I had to know about it.  
She used to walk him on a lot I overlooked, he  
must have had a tumor or a blockage of some  
sort  
because every time he moved his bowels, he  
shrieked, a chilling, almost human scream of  
anguish.

It nearly always caught me unawares, but even when I'd seen them first, it wasn't better. The limp leash coiled in her hand, the woman would be profiled to the dog, staring into the distance, apparently oblivious, those breasts of hers like stone, while he, not a step away, laboring, trying to eject the feeble, mucus-coated, blood-flecked chains that finally spurted from him, would set himself on tiptoe and hump into a question mark, one quivering back leg grotesquely lifted.

Perhaps the best comment on Williams' late poetry comes from one of the poems themselves: "sometimes when you go to speak about life it's as though your mouth's full of nails/but other times it's so easy that it's ridiculous even to bother".

Admirers of Yves Bonnefoy's verse would hardly be surprised by the title of his selected essays in English, *The Act and the Place of Poetry*. For place has always been a touchstone of his poetic. The concluding section of his magnificent first book, *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*, is entitled 'True Place', and that strange notion weaves its way throughout his life's work. "In the true place," he writes in the title essay, "elementary realities reveal that they are not confined to place and moment; that they partake less of the nature of being than of language; that they can compel whatever appears beside them to speak to us, in a whisper, of an unforeseeable future." It is a statement of almost religious faith in the simple forms of life, and it should not surprise us to hear a little later that "a longing for the true place is the vow made by poetry".

The poetry Bonnefoy values speaks of 'essences', and this implies for him a specially consecrated poetic vocabulary: "Thus the word *brick* speaks less clearly to the spirit of poetry than *stone*, because the calling to mind of the manufacturing process prevails, in the reality of this word, over its own being as 'brick' - and all the more so because it is the opposite of *stone* in verbal structure." Similarly, the verbs *to cry* and *to laugh* are warmly commended

to us, while we are warned against the verbs *to grimace* and *to sneer*; for "those words take hold of the human act too clearly from the outside; they only describe it; their only signified is an *appearance*, which is difficult to maintain through the interiorization that is poetry's task to accomplish." One might well wonder whether poetry is, or ever has been, committed to quite this programme; and certainly the idea of an elect vocabulary for poetry seems a bit dotty to those of us who grew up on modernism and post-modernism. But every poet needs to believe a fiction about literature to keep writing, and Bonnefoy's own fiction surely enables him to compose marvellous poems where those 'elementary presences' abide and brood. The true place of poetry, for Bonnefoy as for every vital writer, is his own poetry: only there does he see the world in all its singularity, and hear it evoked in an unmatched idiom. True enough, Bonnefoy has all manner of acute things to say in these essays about Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Rimbaud; but they are all the more interesting when read as displaced glosses on his own *Poèmes*.

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*Kevin Hart's most recent book of poetry was Your Shadow. He teaches at Deakin University. His Trespass of The Sign has recently been published in England by Cambridge University Press.*



JON WEAVING

## Dragons and Fairies and Torn-up Tigers

There's a tiger in a glass box. My kid squats in front of it, cocks his head and growls. My kid is only three. He's still cute. People still smile when they watch him.

This particular tiger is pretty mouldy around the edges, is cut off behind the front legs, is walking out of a make believe jungle, is stuffed. I don't say a word. I wait, just like I did when my kid found his first dead thing and puzzled over it. My kid frowns and starts pushing around behind as if he's going to peer right up inside its shoulders. People watch, a guard comes over and asks me to get him out. I say he's learning something and it's important and I think the guy couldn't possibly mind, but he does. He doesn't know what I'm talking about and tells me you're only supposed to look from the front.

I say "Oh", and we move on. Unsure, my kid keeps looking back at the half-tiger.

We last an hour in the museum and I think that's really good. After all, so little of what my kid looks at is real to him or makes any sense. This doesn't bother him. He just isn't interested. As we walk back past the tiger I tell him to go and have a quick look, to see for himself. The guard doesn't notice, but my kid does. He sees the truth, but I know he doesn't understand why I want him to. Perhaps seeing it is enough for now. We both grin and then run off, away. Christ, it's pouring out here.

Down in Collins Street we perch on stools and drink cappuccino. We talk a lot and we scrunch our faces up imagining things we don't like. My kid decides that what he hates most in the world is stepping in crocodile poop. As we leave we tip-toe through piles of it, up to the register, out the door. This is serious business and when people stare my kid nods earnestly, points to my shoes and tells me it's because I missed. I wonder if this is more important than reality.

Sometimes I cry when I watch him and I don't know why. It feels like fear. My father told me

there'd be fear. My kid won't talk about the half-tiger.

The boy's name is Ash. He sits outside, his back hard up against the wall. In the house his parents are deciding who's taking what and he's only just realised it. He's seven, but in 1960 kids are blind.

Armed with a ruler, Ash launches tiny pebbles up into the winter, toys with the line of wet that parallels the narrow overhang of roof along the verandah and, despite everything, we can still see dragons and fairies around the edge of his life. When it rains there's always more wet than dry on this side of the house, but Ash never seems to mind. This verandah is one of his favorite places. He and his dad sit here often. They move chairs out from inside and look across the hills to Melbourne, which his dad always says looks shithouse, and they talk and play. Sitting here, his dad lets him taste beer.

Ash is waiting for his dad now, to see if it's true. He tells himself it isn't.

Pete appears, skirts the wet and parks his bum next to Ash's. He's taller than Ash and has to pull his knees up to stop his feet from getting wet. He knows what's going on, heard his old man tell it last night, and now he sits there but doesn't know what to say and wishes he'd never come, even though Ash is his best friend. After a few minutes he gets up and runs, stopping only once to offer without looking, "Maybe you'll get an uncle?" Then he shoots away home.

Ash stares at the city, spits a gob rather than cry, and loyally parrots his father. "Shit'ouse," he says.

In a dream my kid is gone. I get up and look and, of course, he isn't. Still, I can't help sitting there for a while. I end up sitting on his bed for ages and my father comes out onto the verandah and he's carrying a suitcase and suddenly I know. It's like opening your eyes into the sun.

Cold, blunt, St Kilda bites. We play on the beach, chase tracks that scallop along the sand, stomp on castles and shriek back at ruffled gulls. I worry about needles, about teaching him and losing him, about stupid things that will never happen, others that are sure to. I wonder how people ever go on. Maybe they don't. Gilly and I are crashing and I'm scared shitless.

We eat at the window, my kid's favorite spot. From here you can stare into Luna Park standing weary and slut-like across from us. We've never been here with Gilly before. Not her style. Our kid is excited. He babbles, annoys her and sees it despite her smile. She tries but he goes quiet, quieter than me. All three of us are quiet now.

Back on the beach we walk. He runs at everything, tempts waves and gathers tiny shells for a precious collection. Gilly and I hold hands, a habit, a balance point of indifference that our kid keeps turning round to check on. And of course we smile for him.

We walk for an hour and the only words spoken are to him. Spike Milligan wrote: A thousand hairy savages sitting down to lunch. Gobble gobble glup

glup munch munch munch - and my kid loves it. We make up others, each one more ridiculous than the last and we cack ourselves and roll around the sand while Gilly sits and stares through it. I should worry about her, too, but I can't. She's not three, she's not my kid, she's not the one staying and she doesn't see dragons now anyway. My father is standing there with the suitcase but it's not him that I hate. I run through her calls and, later, my mother tries to explain, but only later. Too late. I don't believe her stories any more.

I want our kid to understand, but he doesn't. I want Gilly to stay longer, but she says she can't. My kid tugs at me, to play some more, to come back from where I've run to. We drive home in silence and I'm scared for him.

Gilly leaves and I take my kid to see his grandmother. While he's playing outside I tell her and it breaks her heart. The hills are sprayed with houses now and I sit on the verandah with my kid while my mother cries inside and I tell him how you used to be able to see the city from here. He doesn't believe me, it's too far away, he says, and I hope that he's right, that everything I remember is wrong.

**COMING IN OVERLAND 122  
AUTUMN 1991**

"The Muses are Silent", contemporary literature in Poland, by Jan Walc tr. by Janet Phillips.  
New poems from Poland, by Creslaw Milosz, Zbigniew Herbert and others tr. by Kevin Windle.

Nancy Phelan on Louise Mack  
June M. Hearn on Dorothy Hewett  
Kevin Hart: O America, America

Stories by Janine Burke, Chester Eagle and others  
Poems by Robert Clark, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Philip Salom, J. S. Harry, and much more

Two volumes of poetry in the same twelve month period, a *Selected Poems* (University of Queensland Press, \$19.95) and an eleventh book, *The Clean Dark* (Paperbark Press, \$35), mark a milestone in Robert Adamson's work. We have the opportunity to look back over, and into, what is by now an extensive *oeuvre*. When the two books are taken together, there is an air of a plateau having been reached, of "the end of the beginning". It becomes clearer, before an output that would satisfy many poets as a lifetime's production, just how prolific Adamson has been.

What also stands out in this *Selected Poems* is the early stage at which Adamson drew his original blueprint, and the consistency with which he has followed his central line of inquiry. This was set, almost from the word go, in his first volume *Canticles on the Skin*. There are long looping forays to come, into the poetry of memory in *Where I Come From* and into a frank domestic love poetry in *The Law at Heart's Desire*, but Adamson has consistently returned to a question opened in his early poem "Between the Silver & the Glass" in which a figure of the poet suffers:

Functional symbols: for it was he who made the  
lake a mirror.

We cannot go hunting this season, our limbs are  
glass.

The only possibilities for the poet and his counterpart, the man of action, are to create more mirrors or to go to war, respectively. Composed during Australia's involvement in Vietnam, the poem is deeply sceptical about the narrowness of these choices. They are viewed as functions which pre-determine and limit human outcomes. Nor does the private world of romantic love provide a way out:

We have watched a million lovers plodding  
through the sand;

They have passed us on Sundays, and they have  
followed us to war

on Mondays . . .

His search has begun for a poetry free from disastrous coercions: Law, in Adamson's language. The ground of this search is initially no more than the all but imaginary space between the silver and glass in a mirror. Yet here, everything that appears is held to scrutiny and all natural images, no matter how accessible, are understood to appear in reverse. That is, charged with abstract significance.

The need to define this zone, and to re-unify the consciousness which holds both thought and action, drives 'The Rumour', the title poem of Adamson's second book. The opening page of 'Part One' reads with a mystic intensity reminiscent of Traherne, but as a charter for the autonomy of poetry before religion and political power complexes. Included is a debatable assertion that John of Patmos was writing against the Trinity in "Revelation"; fortunately the central forward development of the poem is not impeded, the continuation of anti-war themes at a systematic level. The freedom of poetry is associated with the image of Wormwood, which my copy of Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* explains in part as "figuratively suggestive of calamity". Poetry and language are virtually synonymous, it is poetry which, because of its independence, can ultimately shake governments, and poetry which undertakes the human calamity.

Prescient of post-modernism, 'The Rumour' takes up the mobility of intelligence and the renewal of choices offered in language. This renewal is inevitable, for while Coleridge's Christabel can be produced as a motif for the actions of mind in poetry, by their nature these actions must relinquish established figures and move on. The resolution of this complex, even labyrinthine, poem lies in the



When my Granny was dying  
I'd go into her bedroom  
and look at her

she'd tell me to get out of it  
leave this foul river

....

she said the prawns will eat you  
when you die on the Hawkesbury River

Although *The Clean Dark* is represented in his *Selected Poems*, this essay will treat it separately. In this book Adamson has summarised his previous volumes and broken new, disturbing ground that needs to be given detailed attention. Some themes will by now be recognisable; we find them fully extended here. The initial imaginary zone has widened to include the entire day.

Quotes from Wittgenstein and Mallarmé establish *The Clean Dark's* perspectives. They are to the effect that in the clean dark of inquiry a metonymy is in play which will render conventional perception (and moralism) inapt, and that "musically arising" will be 'an idea' that is more than the sum of the images and locations from which it is formed. Photographs by Juno Gemes which precede each of the book's four parts act as further signposts. The first, at the beginning of 'Part One', 'Re-Writing the Hawkesbury' shows a camera on a tripod which has been erected to photograph a river shack. However naturalistic Adamson's surface, the wider literary and environmental contexts are declared. Like Mallarmé, Adamson will rediscover myth (in this case his river, the Hawkesbury) as the action in language. It will return as a resource to the wider affairs of poetry.

And so we have in 'The Trophy', Adamson at his most relentlessly observant:

.... a man cuts the belly open, then in acid  
some fish, a squid and mangled seagull  
sludge into the air. The stench  
scatters the crowd and a boy convulses on  
sand.

The poem goes on to note the man who made the kill being photographed with it by his son. It's the kind of anger that can rest on the bare relation of events and, along with other fishing poems, this one figures early in the book near 'Songs For Juno'. In these celebrations of personal love:

Dressed up for the new ritual, we move  
the circle more than dance it(.) (Song iii)

the couple's capacity to initiate events in their world returns them to its familiar images. The fourth song is made entirely of the latter, while the fifth consists of a single line "The new list begins". At the outset, an impermeable, barely interpretable exterior world; a professional fisherman's dislike of a tourist blood sport, and the terms set for an outbreak from, and a new blending of, the poet's preoccupation with Mallarméan art, where preconceptions are nullified and the poem's symbols appear without fingerprints.

The object is not a simple (or fraudulent) dispensing with self-consciousness but its enlistment in the poet's broader involvement with the ideal locus of the Hawkesbury. By the end of 'Part Two', 'The Speaking Page', a sense of impending crisis is in the air. On one hand, there is the river, instinct with Koori mythical potentials, the element of water as a figure for healing and life, the poet's process - almost his passage - to speech; on the other, fundamentalism, literary isolation, as in 'The Kiss':

Some . . . singing like great owls  
Who to know Who to trust Who for now

and the Milperra massacre wastage of industrialised urban rebels in 'Angel's Own Kind'. A poem on the attractions of American popular culture summarises these divisions below a nostalgic-confessional tone. 'The Difference Looking Back' exposes the internalisation of mass desire for a world of gleaming Customlines (Adamson wasn't alone, as child, in his admiration for these glamorous cars) and it is the moralist (as distinct from moraliser) in Adamson who takes over, speaking of America as his shiny dark and beckoning surreal Eden. This is the Hawkesbury after the Fall.

The crisis about to break forth is based on Adamson's recognition of present and historical evils, as in 'The Wild Colonial Boys':

After storms and at low tide you'd see  
the details of their hate; the score, a tally  
and what they called their stake;  
the sacred remnants of an ancient tribe's  
estate.

The crisis of economy that threatens earth and landscape is related to the intellectual economy of the present. It comes as accusation, with the poem 'Lady Faith' (to A. D. Hope on his 80th birthday) at the opening of 'Part Three':

What makes poetry for me these days of fear

is the faith a well made sentence brings about

in the song of our being; poetry in these  
post-modern days of crazes that take the  
philosophers

of language like brainstorm, where they  
mistake  
language for mathematics . . .

Literary Theory has not only proven critically  
obtuse, "where the muse gets deconstructed like  
a toy", it has become complicit in the oppression  
of imagination:

Poetry comes through the times, even though  
a muse  
these days gets treated like those

'talented girls who found that the disgrace  
of being a woman made genius a crime'.

The quote is from Hope's 'Advice To Young  
Ladies'; the faith of poetry in a well-made sentence  
becomes, as the poem concludes, faith "in our own  
mystery". So far, a Christian-liberal humanist  
contour marked by reliance on literary virtues. It  
doesn't disturb the intellectual hegemony very  
much. But the real attack is on two heads, contained  
in the lines that lead to this assertion:

in this age that thinks everything can finally  
be explained away if it's not seen to be a form;

though formlessness, including this, in the hands  
of a poet, is faith in our own mystery.

Formalism in poetry is a kind of intellectual's con-  
sumerist commodity. It is continuous with other  
social and economic currency, and part of the pre-  
dominant materialism.

Hope, with the greatest respect on Adamson's  
part, is chided for his attacks on *vers libre*, attacks  
that even now make irksome reading and seem  
to carry an undisclosed objection to Eliot's content,  
possibly his Edwardian politics, alongside the  
preference for metrics. Within the same poem the  
literary interpreters of movements descended from  
Russian Formalism, locked in an ideological  
struggle over the social processes of academy, are  
themselves seen as mechanistic and transmitters of  
a totalitarianism derived from Czarist/Revolution-  
ary Russia. Inclusion in syllabi has made poetry  
a feature of this battleground where it is con-  
temptuously treated because it is allegedly aligned

with bourgeois academic processes. Adamson is  
reminding anyone who cares to listen that there  
are prior social and artistic grounds from which  
poetry arises, and that literary ideologies have failed  
to come to terms with these. We are back to a  
circle of dance and song which serves deeper needs  
than a relatively evanescent social institution. If they  
are read as metaphors in this discussion, two trans-  
lations from the Hungarian of Miklós Radnoti  
convey a related preference for:

poppyseed, purple fleshed  
black forest cherries  
and not this honeywalnut cake  
that all the smooth young men go for.

Radnoti, a poet on the Budapest-Paris axis and  
a friend of Apollinaire who died on a Nazi forced  
march, has previously been neglected in the West.

'An Elm Tree in Paddington' is occupied with  
aversions to poetry in conventional, as distinct from  
radical, literary discussion. Contrasting Brennan  
"soured by love/ and Symbolism" with Lawson:

he knew the price of a beer  
cost more than the blackest sonnet

the poet remarks an absurdity, "American whiskey  
from a champagne flute". These are images of a  
poetic culture divided by a high and a low diction.  
As ancient as the division between Bards and  
Gleemen, these lines are discernible in colonial  
poetry, Ogilvie and Boake on one side of the fence,  
Harpur and Brennan on the other. Lawson traverses  
the dictions, as many poets do, and so the drinkers  
around him

. . . choose not to hear  
parody in a voice . . .

or to

know the terrible hour it took  
to shave up and comb for this sad front.

The old elm, poetry, shoots out from the "acid  
dirt" of a literary caste system with classist  
overtones:

where form eats content to a gloss.

The bardic references to the muse and the elm  
are an insistence on the autonomy of poetry among  
disciplines and perceptions which share a stake in  
its raw material, language.

This is why Mallarmé, who promises artifice in place of “the old lyrical blast or the enthusiastic personal direction of the phrase” (*Crise de Vers*) is of such importance to Adamson. He promises transcendence of these traditional dichotomies, and a transposition from commercially subservient or personally colored usages to “words mobilised by the shock of their inequality”. The unconscious prejudices of both the high and the low traditions, the bib and bob of opposites which determine one another, can be set aside. Instead of subjected, occasional poetry, we might, by this means, return the poem to its original status as pictogram, and possess in each poem “a new word”, as Adamson has recently written. The problem, however, is with the inevitable impasse at which the pure Mallarméan compositional method arrives, immobilised eventually by the most fleeting *apercu* at every throw of the dice. Nadezdha Mandelstam spends some time on a related issue in *Hope Abandoned*, the fascination of the present century with stream-of-consciousness and the domination of composition by external phenomena and repetition. (Many video clips screened every weekend on ‘Rage’ bear her out!)

These large questions hover around Adamson as ‘Clear Water Reckoning’ opens with some lines spent on the poet’s sense of literary alienation from a Sydney book launching. He sits in his house on the Hawkesbury, writing a self-referential poem of suggestions with words, “unused where they fell” strewn around the room “as bait”. As words are allowed to impinge on him:

... satin bower-birds  
scratching out the seeds from bottlebrush

the ideal of Mallarmé’s methodology is united to the outdoor, experiential world from which the words themselves arise, until he is able to:

look out over the incoming tide,  
(of compositional thinking and see that)  
dark racks of oysters jut from its ink.

It’s a hard won modification and it provides the controlling context for Adamson’s poems about the Hawkesbury, which culminate in ‘Part Four’.

The sense of alarm in these poems is characterised by ‘Blue Feathered Sonnet’ in which a wounded pigeon is stranded in a cage of lynxes at a zoo. ‘Phasing Out The Mangroves’ widens the theme:

The great hunched mangroves

will no longer tend  
the instincts of kingfishers;

... where old wood knocks on jetties  
will be echoes of graphite  
and tending the keyboards on decks  
of the river-craft, the swamp children  
speaking a language of arithmetic in cracked  
syllables.

Coercive intellection is the engine of coercive, de-humanising architecture, the technocrats of literary theory are continuous with a technocracy estranged from, and hating, nature. Social effects of this continuum are suggested by the final poem, ‘Canticle For The Bicentennial Dead’. Echoing Lowell’s tribute to black soldiers of the American Civil War, the title jumps off into a poem which speaks forcefully, stingingly and clearly of the oppression of Koori people as it continues, witlessly and wittingly enough, in Australia today. They are drinking in “government coloured parks” while “the clean handed ones” gather “strange facts” and “Uniforms are finding the dead”. Adamson’s attack is potentially the most enduring of a number of recent poems on the subject because it owns a metaphoric interior; in the poem a court reporter’s hands moving over the papers are an extension of anti-poetics at large. The mirror again, as the connection is established in reverse-image between a court functionary and the belles-lettrist and philosopher. Poets who write no elegies, “unable to express the shape of their grief” are in “the original slavery” as Mallarmé had it of the Press of his day (*Quant Au Livre*). All this is far from an exercise in patronage, or a self-identification with a victimised underclass in order to win exemption from their criticism. Rather, what is happening to Koori people is illustrative of forces at work, differently enough, and much less awfully, on the rest of us and on the globe.

Kevin Hart has advanced the view that ‘Canticle For The Bicentennial Dead’ was influenced by Les Murray’s ‘Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle’, which in turn is derived from the great Arnhem land poem, ‘The Song of the Moon-Bone Cycle’. Since the latter has been in the public domain for many decades and is deservedly well known among poets, nothing is added to Murray’s considerable achievements by inserting him here as a transmitter of what was already freely available to Adamson. ‘Canticle For The Bicentennial Dead’ repeats several phrases and key words, for example, “the calm clean-handed ones” from a poem composed in 1976 by Adamson and dedicated to Bruce Beaver

'Fallen Among Enemies'. It would seem, then, that a derivation from either the Arnhem land song, or Murray's poem, is a critical furphy and that the poem's rhythms and phrasings are native to Adamson himself. Even a poet who acknowledges derivation ought not to be deprived of his or her signature at every step.

'Sonnets For Robert Duncan 1919-1988' can be read as a step back from Duncan's "holy gibberish". Adamson is elsewhere in *The Clean Dark* unimpressed by Pentacostalist fundamentalism, which he regards as a side show (see 'The Jesus Bird'). He is willing only to affirm the intellectual acts of writing; germinal, critical, compositional, rejective and declarative. His chief attachment and interest lies in the heroism of the mind, with its potential for creation rather than destruction, its humiliation in death and its alienation and integrity amid:

black homilies and jingles for the State:  
have safe sex and spoil the reaper's fun.

Instead of the wholesale incorporation of Duncan's poetics which has for years been attributed to Adamson, we see the underlying distance, and that Adamson has maintained an essentially sceptical outlook since his appropriation

of 'Wormwood' as a literary symbol in the middle 1960s. His faith is in his language, not in Duncan's theosophy.

It would be very idle to characterise *The Clean Dark* as a romantic work. The floor of this poetry is lit with a sub-epical radiance, it is decidedly classical in spirit, Adamson's "fish-fire" and "light (coming in) from everywhere" are more reminiscent of Virgil's king wave, "the Altar rising from the waves" than of anything in Shelley. The Hawkesbury has become interpretable, and alive, not by a fiat of will but by the action and processes of art. This is a further distinction away from Romanticism. In a volume that brings the poet's several idioms into unity, which seeks and finds a coherent, mobile poetic diction, the poet is revealed as a radical analyst of what he calls "War-headed malformation of the intellect". Photographic collaborator Gemes has introduced Part Three with a picture that shows a lion jumping through a hoop of fire. Emblematically, action, imagination and coercion. The quality of relation between these terms, and the distances between them, are revealed as the crucial issues in Robert Adamson's poetry.

*Robert Harris' most recent book of poetry was The Cloud Passes Over (A & R). He is on the Editorial Board of Overland.*

## TWO POEMS BY ROBERT HARRIS

### CAGE

Rich suicides console the poor. It's  
that sort of town, the scantlings  
and scaffold follow the core. We've, y'know,  
buidled, as they used to say,

these post-modernismo money traps,  
bitched our way up concrete stairs,  
blueys oho and union tickets current.  
Coffee in filmic styrene to go

of mornings, shouts up and down  
the lift well, press my buttons  
I'll press yours back  
as the blue external cage crawls

up the face, climbing high as  
phenomena. Ten men laughing in scary steel,  
wolf-whistle alow because a girl  
has lazily curled her tongue

at whom? At me, dipstick! She  
just ignored you! We aren't loved, it  
goes with the territory, as  
so often, in so many things,

but to laugh, like a man with big teeth,  
at the flu, the bolts by 9.6 volts drive  
chunk into my steel frames  
there are fights chunk friendship

light as Tess in her dairy,  
the frames come already countersunk.  
And a subbie can tell you  
as you drive past a month after

"you do it or we do: mafia".  
The round shouldered overalled workman  
shovelling crud into a skip  
swivels a half turn from point to point

and does not expect to exhaust his antithetics.



## NOTATIONS OF N.Y.C.

### 1. *Come Flying (Continental)*

How good it was  
after Alban,  
after the White Island,  
how good to get on  
an American plane.  
Fat kid sits down  
by a window  
and three seats lift.  
Conference develops:  
steward, chief –  
steward, purser,  
co-pilot,  
captain.  
Their politics  
must work  
for them,  
the fat kid  
sits there  
unabashed.  
And the upshot  
is  
we take off  
anyway.

### 2. *South Ferry*

The warming  
pretzels fuel  
moonwalk,  
flip  
Carnavarels  
form  
in the roasting  
peanuts, that's  
already  
hundreds of  
years ago.  
And fables,  
in commerce's  
teeth, of love.  
Whenever a photo  
is snapped  
with the cutout  
Madonna.  
And gleaming smile,  
Why,  
that'll be fi' dollar.  
The content,  
not the apology,  
the realised  
object not  
the place reserved.

### 3. *Liberty Island*

Lorca,  
through the leaves  
of blood,  
knew himself sane  
to find in smut's  
besetting  
proximity,  
a hygiene.  
Ezra Pound  
knew himself  
finally mad  
to have found  
this city  
'a maiden'.  
Hart Crane,  
lost in spoil,  
continues (how  
we like a line)  
naked Marlovian drive,  
they say, – or was  
that Emma Lazarus?  
The Green Woman  
sets gold  
fire over the harbor  
and the light-  
hearted ferries  
that cross to her  
are packed.  
But I am most  
pleased  
by a whiff  
of the grey Atlantic.

### 4. *Rock Around and Round*

So much saxophone  
through the window,  
divisible  
as bread  
comes touchstone  
song,  
but after  
the process,  
the statuary,  
poets, wandering,  
kissed  
in the brain,  
their difficult  
Republics  
in abeyance,  
after the

obligatory  
structural  
reference  
to Pindar's IX  
Pythian Ode,  
the saxophone  
speaks  
a looser  
stride.

Months later,  
Lauper  
in Melbourne, live.  
Upstage to cough,  
down stage  
to lift  
the roof  
above  
bronchitis.

### 5. *The North American Color-Field*

The cowboy shirt,  
the nerd peaked  
cap, their angle  
less life gets away  
but that, ideally,  
one can let it go,  
verbal and alert and free.  
Comes bowling  
out of the energy  
suave  
as shades,  
asking what  
was it first  
to you, some math?  
It was your dying  
mother's smile,  
the last time  
as you left  
her, home-free,  
safe. Your anger  
about an omitted  
intonation, or  
no longer  
missing it.  
The crimes  
which have  
attracted you,  
what metonym  
and what violence  
did they  
answer?

## EVANGELEIA

Evangeleia has lost her daughter  
who was only forty and within two months  
of her own daughter's wedding.

She relives that day twelve months ago,  
hearing the cries above the stairs,  
*yiaya yiaya,*  
but her knee is still, she is troubled  
by the stairs, and when she gets there,  
to the room of little heirlooms,  
her daughter is on the floor,  
her still mouth open.

There is no wedding.

With a gulping, brushing, turning away,  
Evangeleia tells the story  
to everyone who climbs to her house.  
She is an old Greek lady who cannot care  
that the eyes of those she tells are blank  
with an absence of understanding - she  
can always see her daughter  
climbing the stairs to the room  
where her granddaughter comes  
to look at the heirlooms.

JOHN CROYSTON

## THREE POEMS BY KEITH HARRISON

### SNAIL-TRACKS

Your dawn call  
Startled me. After  
I lay still,

Wondering:  
Such hunger at ten  
Thousand miles.

\*

Jealousy  
Has so fine an ear  
It can catch

The creak of  
Bedsprings, clear across  
Five counties.

\*

## UPTOWN ASSASSIN, MANHATTAN

he lives in this building  
he enters its arrogant pink interior  
he smiles at the doorman  
and says, in a voice dry with meaning,  
"the snow's piling up again Jim".  
he strolls past the marble fountain  
and thinks how long the elevator takes  
to the 15th.  
another minute  
before he looks down  
on the Park  
where only the squirrels  
play with certainty.  
he aims the crosshairs  
of his binoculars  
down 5th Avenue  
finds his mark on the corner of 56th  
a panhandler  
either Indian or Latino  
who's beard is a shag of despair &  
eyes the color of pain.  
he squeezes the imagery trigger  
as he blinks  
then walks to the bar  
a killer's smile  
he could do something for  
New York's homeless alright.

STEVEN HERRICK

Ezra Pound  
Taught us to think hard  
About sound:

The shuttle  
Of live syllables:  
That was all.

Love occurs  
Variously: bears  
Rub their fur

Backwards, till  
Sparks fly. Then they romp  
And tumble.

\*

When I'm gone  
Think of me when snail  
-tracks appear;

I have tried,  
These years, to make such  
Frail silver.

## WIMMERA SNAKE-TIME

Drove this road,  
Forty years ago:  
Remember

How, at dawn  
In the uncertain light  
I saw the

Tiger-snake  
Stretched out, there, on the  
Tar, rising

At me, fast.  
Stood up, terrified,  
Braking hard.

If my wheels  
Flick him up, over  
My trunk, he'll

Bite my neck!  
Too late: my tires bump  
His back-bone,

And I wait.  
Nothing. Already  
Many wheels

Had ruined him.  
His bright striations  
All ripped and

Bloodied, he  
Lay there, receding  
In my mind.

And was it  
Five miles back, I passed  
A struck roo

Dreaming on  
His side, a big grey  
Sung by flies?

I pull up.  
I look all around.  
Nothing moves.

Grass whitens  
In the migraine heat,  
The same dead

Ghost-gums on  
The singed hill-top crack  
Without sound.

What snakes I  
Know have made their home  
Inside me.

Drive on. Time  
Is the queerest place  
We live in.

## FOR MOTHER AND DAD, NEARING NINETY

My father's  
Winding down, who once  
Lifted me

High, to watch  
An old monkey scratch  
His fleas, and

Higher, for  
Great music, and more,  
And much more.

Forgive me,  
Dad, I would lift you  
In my turn

But the zoos  
Are shut and my arms  
Fail me. Rest

Easy here,  
Riding high through your  
Ninetieth year

As you dream  
Of snaring eels in  
Your wide stream.

\*

What to say  
Of my old mother,  
Jess, who can

Turn a heel  
Fast, without looking,  
And still scan

A mishit  
Backhand? She can hear  
Owls blinking,

Halve wopping  
Turnips, and skin eels -  
Yes, but not

Those that Dad  
Goes hunting each night  
In his head.

PAUL CARTER

## From: *Vagrancy*

### EDDIES

I am hiding behind a corner. He rushes down the street, passes me and goes hurtling on. I step out and make off the way he came before he can slow down and turn to catch me. Or I have retreated too far and he blocks off this escape and I have to run on down the side street uncertain of where I am going . . .

The choice between hiding *inside* the orbit of the hunt and attempting to retreat *beyond* my pursuer did not belong to the order of nightmare. I was not haunted by implacable alternatives, unable in the end to resist. These spatial fantasies belonged as much to my reveries as they did to the playground or the football field. Nor was the pursuer necessarily human, or I the quarry. Whether doodling curves in the corner of a page or watching martens sweep up to the eaves, I delighted in laws of motion, studied the resistance of matter. At my bedroom window I imagined a flood pouring over my head, the foremost crests curving over the roof edge and crashing down, drowning the world below; crouched, in my cocoon, under the lip of the roof, within a hammock of air the flood in its fury overlooked, I remained secure: but not quite secure – there was always the danger that the water's force might break away the roof edge, as tidal water crumbles estuarine sandbanks.

These fantasies belonged to my imaginary body, the body of me at play. To play was to display the history of space. The parabola of the football suggested as surely as the marten's flight a natural equation, a perfect match of mass and force. To see the ball spin, to dance round an opponent, to balance a tennis ball on the tip of a cane, these solitary pleasures fascinated me as did the clouds slowly peeling off and forming ephemeral nebulae before dissolving against the blue. My own play belonged to the natural order of space, I invested

myself with its grandeur, its repertoire of material transformations. I veered round imaginary corners with the intense concentration of a hawk hooked to the wind; I hid behind walls while the wind streamed overhead and, cupping in my hand a petal, extended it until the first eddy of air, wall-shaved, curled back and whirled it away. To hide from the wind, but also to belong to its passage. I used to hang about on its edges, in tree-tops, at windows, flying a kite, or leaning a towering ball against its cataract on the cloudy field.

The copling water in the lee of Radcot Bridge, displaying the attraction of stone, the diffraction of current into bubbles, threads of light, slowly whirling eyes of autumn leaves, mesmerised outside the water's current, was the visible proof of these invisible currents I habitually inhabited. It is all very well to urge us to escape from the watery sphere, to spread our wings, but to try to fly without an intimate knowledge of the air's centres and vortices, its windy diffusion through trees and rafters, along lanes and in the foxglove's bell would be pointless. For even as we emerge, we submerge ourselves in a more congenial element.

At that age, between about seven and eleven, before I entered on formal schooling in physics, my body and the body of the world were one: I idealised myself in the bird's flight. There was little correspondence between the columns of notes I kept, recording from my hide the appearance and disappearance of the sitting thrush. I studied to know the bird's other life, its life in flight. Its appearance marked its disappearance from the field of imagination. On its nest it ceased to engage, but sweeping between branches, it proposed *ingui* paths, variations, even contradictions: Euclidean propositions the body could test. To follow the bird with binoculars through a maze of trees was to enter into the bird's calculations, to study a living projectile, to hunt it, not to kill, but so as to speed

it on its way. Such identification rendered bird life, like the flight of the cricket ball, not an ulterior motive of loneliness, but central means of knowing the world. This was the mind's first 'idealising' impulse: to anticipate the flight of objects, to attribute to the country of air the principle of imagination.

Striking a cricket ball, one sought to make space; one released into the neighborhood a magnetic field – which the fielders obeyed. Throwing a ball back to the keeper's nesting hands, one aimed to display a new convergence, an extrapolation beyond all imagining and a demonstration, not of physical strength, but of imaginative superiority. At this level, sport was a form of worship, not of aggression. It belonged to the same sphere of aerial ritual as the marten's upward sweep to its nest or the eddies winding back round the bridge's diaphragm. These were curvatures as material as the veering course of the imagination itself, inventing pursuers to partner one's flight.

Later one ascribed these qualities to works of art, to the flurry of Scarlatti's sonatas or the scrolls of Roman baroque. Here were artists who made out the edges of things, studying the surface where a swarm of notes broke off into motes in the wider air, where clouds had alighted but scarcely become stone, let alone reflexive windows. But, first of all, lying in bed, the rain pouring down on the slate roof, or sighing in the chimney, it was the imagination of curves united me to the world's natural body.

## SHEETS

They hang languidly near walls or swaying eclipse the sunlight trapped in a puddle. Kicking up their heels, these ghosts of suburban lawns expose their whiteness to the sky. And the ineffable sky responds with its own lines of puffy clouds, bodies in sheets. They dance, these cut-out men, between high windows. After the inferno of washing, after long service to our dreams, they are displayed for all to see. Naked thoughts with clipped wings, imaginings unable to escape history, outlining the blank appearance of things in time of peace.

To a child, bruised beneath bruised sky, they were a middle country, between heaven and earth. I ran against them, burying my face in their cool dampness. Indoors, they were houses: they carried dreams into the living room. Draped over the clothes-horse, they furnished me rooms within rooms, places where I could demonstrate my privacy. I spun my cocoons there like a caterpillar

in a shoebox. Against prying eyes, I held the tent flaps tightly closed. I could imagine rain falling on their tender slopes. I could hear the wind pulse in their rippling skin. It was trees, not legs, which dappled their screens. Making the world invisible, their taut cotton diaphragms projected it, focused it on me where I sat.

Outside, it was different. Despoiled of my cover, I had to grow up and become a spectator. Kites in harbor, injured eagles, dancers entangled in their own gestures, I attributed to them the freedom of flight when they were, like me, envious spectators. They climbed on their swing when the wind pushed them from the west and glanced over neighbors' shoulders. In May, they belonged to the order of blossom. I banished the thought of my mother pegging out the stars.

Their history of usage evaporates into a distant tree where a song thrush unburdens its throat. Their tongues lick the blue air into a knot, a kestrel hovering there, tiny as a summer gnat. Running down their snaking hems, I could sympathise with their pent-up emotion. Later, sitting on the island of lawn at their feet, composing a conceit of hearts and arrows from the heavy fuchsia flowers, they shaded my eyes. Their blankness, looking down, on my childhood, on my adolescence, preserved me from the truth of history.

Peculiarly ungracious sails, they flapped at my window all night. They shook their rigging against the metal post and the wheel which hauled them aloft. The concrete base rocked in the black earth and the hook and ring which held them firm up there wrangled and strained. It was a pirate hook, an absent arm, welded like a wall telephone to the post and a material hindrance to climbing the mast: if I have fantasies of castration they are connected with that hook, and the agony of sliding down too quickly! The post was a dead place, un-tree-like, and the sails which might have reached out into the encyclopaedic world of clippers, remained sullenly aloof, spinning lyrics out of their deprivation.

Sheets were another place which had been etherialised. The labor of them had been refined into this regime of evanescent hygiene. Not for them the destiny of Gangetic silk, measuring its colored length on the human earth. They withstood water as they resisted the tugging wind. They stood like photo-mounts at the corners of my life. Row upon row of them on Mondays (traditionally) or Fridays behind the facades of Gravel Walk and Coxwell Street, lording it over straggling rows of brussel sprouts, lean-to-sheds, chrysanthus tied up against the wind, and abandoned chairs. The orchard was

grubbed up, and they remained, phantom foliage. And I took their scent to bed – or was it the smell of detergent I took to bed?

Other times, they hung there with a limp satisfaction, as if for all their lightness, they had found their destiny – to hang there straight as walls by virtue of gravity alone. They affected to ignore the air. They assumed the arrogance of light. They looked back at the windows, parading themselves as houses of – what? – emptiness. At least they did not fall to the solipsism of projecting clouds back at the sky. Very bureaucratic, these sheets, pretending the laws of nature were a convenience designed for them alone. Apologists of the status quo, survivors, forgetting as quickly as they could . . . and, suddenly, no longer clinging to their own adhesive dampness, they flutter, hop and squirm, begin to giggle, show their teeth, begin to flirt with butterflies. The past is forgotten and forgiven. Give us a good time, boys. Women in high heels, they cannot take a step forward without neck and spine jerking back; their silent laughter is the embarrassment of being pegged. Their mouths are open, blank radio grilles, broadcasting white noise.

I agonised over liberty. When the sheets no longer served me, I tore them apart and knotted them into ropes. What was left, I turned into sheets of writing paper. Other strips became seagulls which drifted into the furrows down Lechlade Road on misty February mornings and stood there amid the litter of flint and shells, stars against the black soil. One of these, packed in quatrains, took me over the sunset down to the western sea; another dissolved in that western blood. Chance offspring of my sheeted imagination, their trajectories criss-crossed my writing when I was fourteen or fifteen.

The dance of folding them up, of piling them up like little packets, was dismal. It was like closing a book. A route of escape was closed off. Shovelling them back in the airing cupboard brought me no pleasure of possession: they did not sit there like honey or wine, maturing their memories of the year, but like debris: folded into little squares, their pretensions to flight rudely broken, their delicate reticulation of white bones had been crushed. And when – in another ritual which brought us together – my mother and I ‘made the beds’ the reluctance of sheets to do as they were told seemed to me natural.

### SKETCHING THE BACKGROUND

*“My childhood in Puerto de Santa Maria was shaped and enriched by a gamut of azure.”*

Rafael Alberti

And what would it be to sketch that blue before it became anchored in objects, before it had to be recovered fleetingly in the robes of Bellini’s Madonnas, in the kingfisher’s back, in the husky blue lines of a lover’s wrist? To capture childhood is to capture the sky: only the reflective lake can do it and a house, perhaps, across the water where someone is setting up an easel.

Searching for a spot to set up my easel, I had two things in mind: to paint a picture which would capture my patron’s house as he had never seen it before, so that, through my image, its name might acquire a lustre and substance it lacked before. I had no wish to compose the scene picturesquely – a photograph of the house would have enabled me to do that. I did not want to lapse into the easy ploy of painting the house as if it were already there, had already been composed by the gardener, the architect or even the surveyor creating a memorable rise in the road whence it might be viewed and remembered. I saw myself instead like an explorer, coming before, not so much to cultivate a place but to find it.

Presumptuously, no doubt, I did not see my painting reproducing a house and its surrounds, but as originating them *uniquely as a place*. For, little as they might differ in matters of architectural style, topographical convenience and the like, the houses I painted differed from each other from the point of view of their inhabitants: each was uniquely the place where my patron lived. This was emblemised by the different names these properties bore. What I aimed to do with my image was to name where they lived, to concentrate the spreading space into a singular place.

But that was only one of my aims. It would have been absurd to divorce so intimate a desire from the brute fact of my own presence on the picture. I, after all, had sought out the commission. I, after all, had a painter’s eye for the shapeliness of space. Nameless undulations which shepherds might curse for their lack of shade were to me as prominent in my field of vision as marker pegs in the surveyor’s view of things. Where green shaded into blue was a boundary quite as necessary to the illusion of here and there as any line of trees marking any actual river. The width of lakes was a widening and closing fan which, as I approached or retreated, composed the scene more rapidly than any theoretical position. My second aim was an unavoidable consequence of this intention: it was to ensure that whatever I painted would be an

unmistakable record of the place where I stood to paint.

A cloud crosses the sky or a century or two and I find myself imagining this monologue, standing where the painter stood, giving words to the empty space, attempting to account for the devotion of his vision. It seems a strange form of respect – to give back to invisibility what he strove to make clear. But history has come between the painting and the scene. (I have myself moved on from my first preoccupation with the Venetian Lagoon to meditate upon the blank pool which is childhood.) The children of those days have grown up and their eyes evaporated in their sockets like jellyfish on the sand. Any clarity they may once have possessed has been entangled in the creepers of genealogy; any distant view has been obscured by additions and lofty cedar trees. So to preserve the painter's vision as it was means re-inventing it; imagining it. I imagine him saying,

I would not have intruded these autobiographical reflections but for two reasons – both arising from the misunderstanding of my work. The first misapprehension is enshrined in the claim that my work owes much to a Romantic theory. While I deplore this indifference to the difference of my painting, I can understand it. My misty distances, my sublime outlines, the miniscule objects in a vast landscape: all these, though trappings of a Romantic sensibility, were not, in my paintings, offspring of a metaphysical persuasion. They were, dare I say it, simple optical facts – facts strange to the picturesque painter, his eye jaded by the camera's lense, but perfectly familiar to the explorer, the hunter and, I like to think, the child who as yet has not learnt to level his gaze to the narrow sphere of his human activity, but inspects the stars, leaf-pattern and water-light with equal dispassionate attention – as widening fields of knowledge, not images.

The question I set myself was not how to enoble the barren scene, but *how to identify it*. And the answer, I found, was to widen the cone of vision from its habitual, narrow focus of, say, fifteen to twenty degrees – a breadth of vision which the picture frame tacitly reinforces – to fan it out to something approaching a right angle. The reason for this was simple: it enabled me to depict sufficient of the horizon to locate the house and my viewpoint precisely. While one distant hill looks very much like another and, in any case, changes its shape rapidly as one rides by, a series of hills amounted to a unique definition of the

orientation of the observer's eye. There could be no mistaking the place.

The Romantic sublimities followed from this simple adherence to a wide-angle gaze. For, in synthesising the number of view points which necessarily occur as one's eye crosses the ninety-degree arc, I found that, in order to project that rounded space on to the flat picture-space of the canvas, I had to increase the size of the objects towards the edges of the visual cone and diminish those near the centre. The central objects of my paintings, the homesteads, seems more than ever lapped in the distance *and* the distance itself more than ever grandly remote. I believe Leonardo has described this distortion and the method of correcting it. And quite recently a book has identified this practice (called there 'reversed perspective') in the work of the great Venetian masters. It may be out of place, but I cannot refrain from adding that, if there was anything Romantic about my solution, it was in the profound sense of release I felt when I gave myself up to the many-angled world, when I folded up my easel, mounted, turned head and rode off; to feel wherever I went a light suspension of neighborly lines, radiating, criss-crossing my journey, like the dapple of overhanging limbs where a stone has burst the blue surface.

This misunderstanding of my work by people who have not taken the trouble to reflect on their own habits of seeing – or to visit the sites I used – also extends to my foregrounds. How often I have read that, however accurate the rest of my painting, my foregrounds are 'imaginary'. It does not occur to my critics that, if the viewpoint is imaginary, then so is the whole of the painting. But the solution is simple: my foregrounds attempt to render the place where I stood and, as anyone who cares to visit my viewpoints can ascertain for himself, correspond closely to real features of the place. I have merely made visible what was invisible from where the painter stood. Making the painter's viewpoint visible, I ensured that the observer saw the view exactly as I experienced it: I included in the picture frame my viewpoint. In a sense I painted myself there, but I painted myself invisibly.

Perhaps when landscapes grow up, when houses acquire characters of their own, we can afford the luxury of depicting what is there. But in the age of childhood, the narrow, monocular vision of the camera is foreign. We judge the ground as we ride. The air is a forest of possible flights.

Laurie Hergenhan

## Recovering American Connections

Historical and critical studies of the various contexts of Australian literature have centred on Australia itself, with some outside reference to ties with England and Europe. Recently an interest is developing in comparative studies with other ex-British colonies. Notably missing is any sustained comparisons with the experience of the United States. A real and perceptible change came with Vietnam, with the commonality of a new generation's anti-war resistance and its alternative counter-cultures.

Not that important if intermittent cultural links with the United States were lacking from Australia's white beginnings, as general studies by the American scholar Joseph Jones (*Radical Cousins*) and Australian historian Noel McLachlan (*Waiting for the Revolution*) have shown. Joan Kirkby's *The American Model* explores post-Vietnam links. But literary studies have concentrated on the literatures rather than on their criticism and history. Indeed, while there has been an upsurge in literary historiography in Australia in the 1980s, there has been surprisingly little comparison with the way American literature, along with its history, was constructed (or 'theorized') and institutionalized - with how it became accepted and respectable. This did not happen until the 1920s to 1940s, and it spread outside the United States even later, post-1940. There is not such a large time gap, then, between the American and Australian (and other post-colonial) experience, which makes it even more surprising that comparative possibilities remain unexplored.

A way of taking up the challenge of comparative study is to examine neglected connections in the areas of literary criticism and history. An important one is the career of C. Hartley Grattan (1902-1980) who wrote persistently about Australian society and culture from 1927 through the 1960s. His writings are of interest not simply for what they have to say but for the ways in which they look at his

subjects; that is, as historiography, and also for Australian and American responses.

A study of one man might seem too narrow, but without making Grattan into a 'representative' American, one can see him as expressing more than an individual viewpoint. Belonging to the varied intellectual world of New York, he played a part in the 1920s in the earlier-based movement towards the recognition at 'home' of American literature and culture. He brought these experiences to bear on his Australian studies. In addition, Grattan, who relished the role of polemicist - "a fight always draws a crowd", he once commented - acted as a gadfly or stimulant. Both the welcome he received, and his provocations, offer new perspectives on Australian attitudes. For instance, the radical-nationalism of the young Geoffrey Serle and Stephen Murray-Smith was stirred when, as soldiers in New Guinea,<sup>1</sup> they read Grattan's *Introducing Australia* (1942). They wished an Australian had written it, for it introduced Australians to themselves as well as awakening some passing, war-time American interest. Again, in Peter Cowan's recent novel about the pre-war Thirties in Australia, *The Hills of Apollo Bay*, a speech Grattan made in Perth in 1938 is alluded to as representing the kind of new impulse from outside (America) that could have nourished the stirrings of cultural change which war involvement extinguished.

Grattan's writings have the additional interest as those of someone who was an 'author-journalist' from the extra-mural world. These days, now that Australian literature is established, academics, in pursuing their role as custodians tend to address themselves increasingly to one another and stress predecessors of their own kind. A similar process is observable in Russell Reising's useful book *The Unusable Past* (1986), a very selective study of the theorizing of American literature. Grattan offers a way of letting in some fresh air by connecting with a wider, more various world. As 'author' he



wrote cultural and political books and hundreds of articles as well as literary criticism; and he was a 'journalist' in a different sense from the Australian conception – usually a pejorative one – where journalist has faced restricted possibilities. Grattan wrote for leading New York magazines as well as newspapers, beginning in the 1920s as a protégé of H. L. Mencken in the latter's *American Mercury*.

I want to focus on one early work of Grattan's, his slim pamphlet *Australian Literature* (1929), originally published in slightly different form in New York in the *Bookman*, (August 1928). This was one outcome of his first visit to Australia in 1927. Not his best piece of work, it nevertheless indicates the basic approach he would use for the future; and, along with its reception, also shows some unexpected aspects of what is considered (unlike the same period of its American counterpart) one of the 'dark ages' of Australian literature, the Twenties. *Australian Literature* has usually been seen as a bibliographical curiosity, but strategically placed as it is between H.M. Green's much-better-known *An Outline of Australian Literature* (1930) on the one hand, and two histories from the 1890s, Desmond Byrne's *Australian Writers* (1896) and Turner and Sutherland's *The Development of Australian Literature* (1898), on the other, it offers the first historical synthesis of Australian literature from its beginnings into the twentieth century. Grattan's work was preceded by Nettie Palmer's *Modern Australian Literature* (1923, a prize essay and also a pamphlet) which split literary history between the two centuries, and it was succeeded by the first substantial modern general history, Keith Hancock's *Australia* (1930).

Grattan remarked on his 1927 visit that Australian historiography was "at its embryonic state". All that was available to him was "Ernest Scott's school book", and "the only up-to-date literary history" was not between covers but appeared in the columns of the *Age* during 'Authors' Week'. Accordingly, he began collecting books, laying the foundations of a famous Australian collection, now the cornerstone of the Edward A. Clark Center for Australian Studies (1988), Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas. In writing *Australian Literature*, then, Grattan was in the familiar situation of writing to fill a gap, if not a void. Its nature was cultural history, and not of the kind confronting Australian creative writers, or say visitors like D. H. Lawrence in his Australian novels.

Before I can consider *Australian Literature* in detail, it needs to be seen briefly in the context of Grattan's American background. As a first-

generation American, of Nova Scotia parentage, and born and bred in New England in the Boston area, he was predisposed to be something of an outsider. He developed an agin'-the-government, dissenting temperament which may also have owed something to his New England roots and education as well as to his disappointment at not getting into Harvard. His name was originally French-Swiss, not, he insisted, Irish, and his Canadian forbears were Scottish and English migrants. He grew up, he said, with a keen realization that he "was not a proper New Englander, better than an Irishman, but without doubt still an offsider and outsider".<sup>2</sup> Comparing himself with his friend of the 1930s, V. F. Calverton, another outsider who allied himself with communism and anti-Semitism, and who was pro-negro at a time when this was unpopular, Grattan saw them both as "'adventurers', parvenus of the intellectual life. Neither of us had any attachment to the [American] past of a family kind but came into it from outside." As Grattan commented, rather than being unusual, this represented an American pattern.<sup>3</sup> One can see, then, Grattan's 'multi-cultural' origins, which at the same time were part of his Americanism, as enabling him to step outside American culture while still remaining part of it. The result was to send him in two radical directions: social protest and an interest in 'new' cultures.

Grattan attended a progressive New England College, Clark. Here in the early 1920s, especially through his favorite teacher, Harry Elmer Barnes, crusader for many radical causes, Grattan became (in his own words) perforce one of the generation deeply influenced by the liberal tradition originated by James Harvey Robinson (author of *The Development of Modern Europe*, 1907, *The New History*, 1911), Charles Beard (*An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (1913) and Thorstein Veblen (*The Theory of the Leisure Class*). These thinkers, and also Thomas Dewey who was important to Grattan, espoused pragmatism, economic determinism, and the study of institutions in order to break through formalist, traditional approaches and come to grips with 'modern' life: an age transformed by industry, technology and science. This involved a new approach to culture and history: to regard it as an organism (a concept influenced by evolutionary science), to be studied by reaching out into the surrounding cultural space in order to integrate knowledge, especially the social sciences, and also by reaching back into the past to explain the present. Veblen undertook a cross-sectional study of institutional context and economic behavior; Robinson and Beard related

political growth to the social and economic realities of *environment*. They all broke down barriers between disciplines.

By the later Thirties Grattan was a "left liberal", sympathetic with much of communism if not with the American Communist Party. He was "soviet conscious" before publishers were interested, and when, "according to the mythologists", writers were "concerned exclusively with gin and poetry and Dada fights, [he] was writing a treatise on William Jennings Bryan" and a revisionary book on the war (*Why We Fought*, 1929) which (he said) was better received by the communist and socialist press than the *New York Times* and the *Infantry Journal*. (*American Mercury*, June 1933)

Grattan's American 'left liberal' inheritance and career shaped the attitudes he brought to his Australian studies. He took an embracing view of culture which he saw as shaped by social 'environment'. He consequently saw cultures as different rather than hierarchical and he concentrated on the specific rather than the 'universal'. This opened the way for the new. An example is his dedication to his experimental biography, *The Three Jameses: A Family of Minds* (1932, Henry the novelist, his father, and his brother William).

This book is dedicated to my grandfather George Campbell 1843-1925 Nova Scotia laborer and farmer whose remembered sayings are humorous and luminous truths.

This is not only an assertion of extra-American roots but of a political approach to culture. The high culture of the Jameses, it is implied, is no more 'real' than the working-class culture of Grattan's grandfather. Also, rather than remaining poles apart, the one could help him to understand the other. A sense of the reality and heterogeneity of all cultures is again borne out by the inscription he wrote in his gift copy of *The Three Jameses* for Australian novelist Miles Franklin. In this he referred to her Australian pioneering characters [who] have a "culture quite different from the Jameses but just as real and important". Franklin, who had just completed her pioneer saga *All That Swagger*, was buoyed up by this 'outside' vote of confidence.

Grattan was sympathetic to the national dimension of culture as part of its specificity, though he knew the dangers of nationalism, as in its contribution to World War I. Harold Stearns' *Civilization in the United States* (1922) supposedly demonstrated that there wasn't any. One response was for American writers to go and live in Paris,

another (that of Bourne and Grattan) was to establish a true American literary and cultural tradition by dismantling the old and recovering what was genuine. This Grattan had done in his earliest articles for Mencken's *The American Mercury* in his attacks on the genteel New England tradition. Grattan noted in *Why We Fought* (1939-40) that "it was not until the close of the war that there was any concerted movement in literary circles to question the absolute validity of the proposition that American intellectual life was basically and rightly derivative of the British. And even when it was questioned it could hardly be denied." The similarity with Australian literature is apparent, but the effect of the war in Australia was to deepen conservatism.

Grattan's first visit to Australia in 1927 was accidental. He came not in his own right as a promising New York journalist but in the train of a theatrical company - as the husband of Beatrice Kay, later famous as a 'gay Nineties' singer, who was playing in a musical, *Sunny*, in Sydney and Melbourne. In another sense the visit was not accidental: he had never wanted to go to Europe, the Mecca of American exiles and visitors, and he only ever visited it briefly. Instead his intellectual interests favored 'new' worlds.

His initial reaction to Australia was predictable. It was intellectually a desert. He got the cold shoulder from Australian newspaper editors (for example the *Sydney Morning Herald*) to whom he offered his services, not the first example of anti-Americanism he met. An Englishman with equivalent qualifications would hardly have received the same treatment. Anti-Americanism also took the form of racism (a reaction against the impurity of America as a melting pot) and resistance to American culture.<sup>4</sup> (In 1933 the editor of the *Argus* turned down an article by Nettie Palmer on Edmund Wilson, Burton Rascoe and Grattan.) With time on his hands, Grattan turned in American style to "studying" the strange country. As a twenty-four-year-old, "full of intellectual beans", he thought it could not be as dull as it looked. He proceeded to study it by reading books of all kinds, for he was no literary purist. As he remarked later to Miles Franklin, he wanted to "read anything that relates to Australia... A significant bit of propaganda will be as fascinating to me as a book of fiction."

Grattan also hoped to learn by talking to Australians he met - journalists, 'ordinary' people, theatrical people, not academics (whom he met on his second visit 1936-38). He found that those he talked with were usually not knowledgeable and not interested. For instance, they knew all about

the Aborigines without having to read about them – “what could books tell them?” – and one wanted to know what anthropology was.

Grattan did not let this put him off, rather it spurred him on, reinforcing the idea – again in an American style – that there was much waiting to be written about. As he put it later, in a phrase relished by Miles Franklin, there was a need to “interest Australians in themselves”. Thus his writings served a double audience, not simply aiming to introduce Australia to American readers. If there was something in his purpose of an American missionary spirit, this was overshadowed by the rationalist who was also an adventurer. For instance, he lamented Woodrow Wilson’s missionary spirit on behalf of American democracy.

Nettie Palmer wrote in her introduction to *Australian Literature* that, while a number of English writers had written their impressions of Australia – for example Trollope, Froude and D. H. Lawrence – “it has remained for Mr Grattan to examine us through our most significant books and to show the characteristic thread running through them. No English critic could have done this for our *growing literature*” (my italics).

Grattan was indeed the first (and still remains the most perceptive) outsider to pay any sustained attention, as Geoffrey Serle has pointed out. This would have been beneath an English critic’s notice, as Palmer suggests, for Australia was still regarded as ‘colonial’. The difference was that Grattan, with his approach to culture, was predisposed to see potential in the ‘new’, however limited. A new democracy was an ‘experiment’ which must arouse curiosity. This sense of Australian culture as a growing one appealed to Nettie Palmer, Miles Franklin and to many writers who were Grattan’s most appreciative early readers. If in 1990 many (and I include myself) are distrustful of organic metaphors of literary history, it is hard to see what other terms could have been used at this stage. And we should remember that for Grattan and others growth meant process, change, without any simplistic idea of progress. What follows from Grattan’s position, and this is partly a matter of its all-important tone, is that *Australian Literature* was unflattering yet positive. He took Australian culture seriously; his critical comments were not condescending or dismissive, as English disapproval tended to be. As Cecil Mann wrote, with some exaggeration in the *Bulletin* (30 October 1928, reviewing the *Bookman* version): “Mr Grattan indulges a critical right too often waived in this land of pawky reviewers – the right to be honestly savage. His article is almost entirely derogatory [an

exaggeration], but it is without malice . . . better than the pap of overpraise or backscratching.” Louis Esson thought Grattan “a kindly critic . . . [making] the best of what little there is and taking a sympathetic view of our literary difficulties.”

*Australian Literature* is distinctive not simply in synthesising nineteenth-century (or ‘colonial’) and twentieth-century literary history, which had been compartmentalized, but also in using an informing idea to sustain the synthesis. In a sense the form this took was not new, for it involved a touchstone of what was ‘characteristically’ Australian, of connecting a national literature to a national ethos. But Grattan was more thoroughgoing and more complex than Australian nationalists and did not use his approach to deny dependence on English culture. In fact this dependence was for Grattan an opening and underlying premise, though it was not an excuse or rationalization as it could be for, say, Vance Palmer and other embattled writers. When Grattan concluded his essay: “Australia is getting what it demands – only a tiny trickle of worth-while native literature”, this was a challenge, not a writing off. While Grattan was not duplicating Australian nationalism he was nevertheless expressing a sense of the specificity of national cultures arising out of his sense of America’s colonial and post-colonial experience (which he explicitly offered as a neglected model) and out of his broader conception of culture. Similarly, Grattan’s social radicalism bore an American stamp. He believed that neither America nor Australia possessed a real radicalism.

Grattan’s approach in *Australian Literature* can be exemplified in his treatment of Furphy’s *Such Is Life*. This was already being made into a ‘foundation’ classic expressing egalitarianism and the realities of bush life. Grattan’s comments were often taken and quoted as a succinct expression of this nationalistic view. But this is a simplification. Grattan reserved his highest praise – “a superb book” – for *Such Is Life* and he did value it for its “aggressive insistence on the worth and unique importance of the common man . . . one of the fundamental Australian characteristics”. But he sees this as a “local development”, one that is “not obviously related to Rousseau”. For Grattan the common man was a construction which varied from culture to culture. He rightly detects not simply an “insistence” on the egalitarian but an “aggressive” (i.e., a defensive) one. He sees this, however, in relation to other values and literary qualities – whereas the later history of the novel’s reputation shows a battle for its appropriation between radical nationalists and those who emphasised its innova-

tive, self-conscious art. The one school stressed a political message, the other, influenced by new criticism, stressed metaphysical rather than social questionings. Grattan sees something of both aspects in combination. He found the novel reminiscent of Melville in its capacity for mingling abstruse speculative-discursive essays in history, sociology, morals, anthropology and Shakespearean criticism – with “veridic glimpses of actuality”. The narrator, Tom Collins, was “the great literary philosopher of the common man. He was an adventurer of the mind as well as of the body. He was a speculative materialist . . .” Grattan may not have been sensitive to all the nuances and ironies of the novel that later academic criticism has labored to uncover, but he does see the way it combines apparently opposed qualities, speculation and materialism, and also that actuality is rendered through the “complex mind” of an “adventurous” narrator. And Grattan valued the intellectual quality of the novel, an element some radical nationalists neglected or played down. He implied that Furphy was superior to Lawson, the other hero of this tradition, because the former portrayed the same bush types “but seen through a tremendously complex mind”. Yet Tom Collins, in spite of his undoubted intellectual superiority [within the novel] was “an aggressive defender of the common man . . .” Grattan’s own New York intellectualism responded to this quality in the novel, and he was to champion it throughout his career, even managing to get an edition published by the University of Chicago Press. His 1929 comments (and later similar ones) were used during the 1930s-40s in the battle for recognition of Australian literature (for example by Miles Franklin for whom *Such Is Life* was a touchstone of Australianness).

The criterion of ‘Australianness’ today seems limiting or disabling, though we are no nearer to reconciling the aesthetic (or linguistic) and social claims of literature. The criterion is not as limiting in Grattan’s hands, as in those of some contemporary and later Australian critics, because his approach to national cultures was more inclusive and not defensive. Hence he had no difficulty in *Australian Literature* in accommodating some nineteenth century works as outstanding in terms of the history of the culture, not in any intrinsic or universal sense.

Grattan’s flexibility is seen in the prominence he gives in *Australian Literature* to literature outside the genres of poetry, fiction and drama – to books of travel, first-hand experience and essays. If, with hindsight, he gives undue prominence to Mrs Gunn, this is understandable given the time Grattan wrote.

She gave “the most sympathetic view of the Aboriginal in Australian literature” and she was among “the most hopeful writers because she was supposedly writing a dictated life-story of an aged Aboriginal”. Unfortunately, fifty years had to elapse before Sally Morgan’s *My Place* provided Aboriginals’ own stories.

Grattan’s *Australian Literature* had more impact on Australian writers at the time than on later criticism, mainly through the publicizing efforts of Nettie Palmer and others. The essay’s effect was twofold. It acted as a call to arms in difficult times, a boosting of confidence in the cause if not the achievement of Australian literature. Secondly, it assisted the construction and publicizing of the radical-nationalist version of the literary tradition. For instance, Kate Baker, who nursed the reputation of *Such Is Life*, greeted Grattan’s comments almost rapturously and “broadcasted [sic] his pamphlet throughout the land” by letter, from Perth to Broken Hill. The latter’s *Barrier Truth* newspaper carried a long and favorable review by communist Edgar Ross, brother of trade-union leader and Labor politician Lloyd Ross, who later became a friend of Grattan’s. Grattan said the *Barrier Truth*’s review – two and a quarter columns – took more space than he could get in a New York paper for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica!* Nettie Palmer orchestrated a debate in the Brisbane *Saturday Night Telegraph* in 1931, beginning with an open letter to Grattan from her, and followed by his long reply, in which he was billed as “the American publicist and literary critic”.<sup>5</sup> This was to win Grattan two friendships: with Miles Franklin (who sent a contribution to the debate) and Alice Henry, an expatriate who helped to pioneer the women’s movement in America.

The impact of the essay in America was, of course, slighter and is harder to gauge. It coincided with the great popularity of the American edition of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930) and, according to Grattan, contributed to American publishing interest in contemporary Australian novels. These included K. S. Prichard’s *Coonardoo* and *Fay’s Circus (Haxby’s Circus)* for which Grattan was a publisher’s adviser: “I have read my booklet and got leads on what to look for” [Grattan’s italics]. He became an unofficial New York agent and adviser for some Australian writers.

Grattan’s *Australian Literature* can be usefully compared with H. M. Green’s *An Outline of Australian Literature* (1930), which has overshadowed it. In fact, Grattan reviewed Green’s book in the *Saturday Review of Literature* (31 January, 1931) welcoming it as a useful handbook of

information. This points to its strengths and limitations. As an informational *survey*, the most popular form of Australian literary history until recently, it lacked both critical bite in its pursuit of even-handedness and inclusiveness, and also an informing historical approach that was in any way challenging. In contrast to Grattan's essay, it was content to see Australian literature as essentially a branch of English literature.

Two remaining points need to be discussed: the limitations of Grattan's sociological approach and the institution of journalism through which he partly operated. The two issues are related. Nettie Palmer sketched the Australian scene, agreeing with Grattan that "literary journalism is an absurdity here".

I've made myself a couple of weekly pulpits - one in Brisbane, one in Hobart - and the Red Page gives me a free run. But in Melbourne the *Herald* buys up every paper in sight and has a catacomb of journalists . . . so that everything is done on the staff: and the *Herald* is buying the indigenous papers in the other capitals and syndicating everything. My pulpits totter.

Palmer, like Grattan, was a freelance, but he had much more scope in New York.

In his freelance role, Grattan could act as publicist as well as critic, especially where his subject matter was 'new'. Palmer appreciated the usefulness of this role, lamenting that the Australian Minister for External Affairs would not understand that "Grattan has been paying us our first compliments and giving us our 'best advertisement'".

On the other hand, Palmer, who favored the aesthetic approach to literary criticism, had reservations about Grattan, though she kept them mainly to herself. She confided to Frank Dalby Davison that she thought Grattan was "more of a psychologist than a critic: [he] rips the inside out of a book not savouring the aesthetic qualities".

Palmer nevertheless quoted her husband, Vance, as pointing out Grattan's usefulness at the time (the early 1930s): his "significance as a critic is that he recognizes literature as a *social function*, an *important* one [Nettie Palmer's italics]. This makes him valuable especially when he uses his emphasis in favour of *Such Is Life* and against some mere best seller". But her own ambivalence toward him paradoxically included a pejorative view of journalism: ". . . he has curiously little 'literary sense' . . . And he's primarily a journalist". The difference for her must have been that she felt forced

into journalism, or that her own work did not really belong in that category.

This supposed split between 'social' and 'aesthetic' literary criticism continues to this day. The ascendancy of new criticism in America in the late 1930s (paralleled by the rise of 'theory' there and elsewhere from the 1960s) helps to account (though involvement with the social problems of the 1930s was a more pressing reason) for Grattan's concentration, from this time, on social and political commentary more than on literary criticism. It also contributed, as he realized, to the overshadowing of his earlier contributions, in both America and Australia. New criticism had a positive and negative effect on the recognition of post-colonial literatures: emphasis on *individual* work was beneficial, but the devaluing of historical context and of the social element in literature was a set-back to the work of Grattan and others.<sup>6</sup>

There was a great difference between journalism in America and in Australia at the time Grattan wrote *Australian Literature*. "Since 'from Emerson and Thoreau to Mencken and [Van Wyck] Brooks [and one could add a 1930s figure like Edmund Wilson] criticism had been the great American lay philosophy, the intellectual carry-all . . . the secret intermediary between literature and society in America', a curious vacuum has been created, bounded by journalism on the one hand and social science on the other."<sup>7</sup> This mediation between literature and society in the 1920s and '30s was filled by writers associated, in part at least, with journalism - Mencken, Cowley, Wilson, and writers like Grattan. In non-metropolitan Australia, because of the different status and forms of journalism, such mediation of 'criticism' in the larger sense was slight and intermittent, with some improvement later through a mingling of the mural and extra-mural worlds in the magazines *Meanjin*, *Overland*, *Quadrant* and *Nation*.

The role of Grattan in Australian culture, as well as of his writings, is useful in recovering lost perspectives on the social and literary life of the time, its contexts and its institutions. At the same time it can remind us that literary approaches or theories are not generated by literature alone or in isolation. Rather, their very expression is shaped by contexts and by their involvement in staking a claim for themselves, although this seems to be often at the expense of other claims.

*This is a version of a paper given at the EACLALS conference at Lecce, Italy, April 1990, organized by Professor Bernard Hickey. Footnoting has been minimized at the request of the editor. The undocumented quotations are from the following collections of correspondence: the C. Hartley Grattan MS collection at the Harry*

Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, USA; the Miles Franklin Collection, Mitchell Library; the Palmer Papers, National Library (some Palmer letters are reprinted in Vivian Smith, ed., *Letters of Fance & Nettie Palmer* (Canberra: N.L., 1977); the Harry Barnes Collection, University of Wyoming Library. Thanks are due to all institutions and to Mrs Marjorie Grattan (for Grattan correspondence) for permission to use and quote from these collections). Grattan's article "A Garrulity About Australian Literature", *Meanjin*, 24, (1965) outlines his visits to Australia.

1. Geoffrey Serle: "I lent him [Murray Smith] Hartley Grattan's *Introducing Australia*, a book that had much to do with starting us both on our Australian jag", 'Stephen Murray-Smith, 1922-1988'. *Overland*, 112 (October 1988), 9.
2. Grattan to Keith Nelson, 6 July 1967.
3. Grattan's MS memoir of Calverton, Grattan Collection.
4. The racist element in Australian anti-Americanism was pointed out by Grattan in his article, 'Australia Examines the Future', *New York Times Book Review*, 8 January 1928.
5. Grattan, 'Australian Literature. An American Criticism. Mediocrity to Be Fought', *Saturday Night Telegraph* (Brisbane), 18 December, 1931. This was an answer to Nettie

Palmer's 'Reply to an American Critic', 4 July, 1931. No copies of the late edition of the *Saturday Night Telegraph* appear to survive in Australian Archives, but a copy of Grattan's reply is preserved in the newspaper clippings of the Palmer Collection, ANL, 1174/28/239. In his MS bibliography of Grattan's writings (HRHC Library, University of Texas), J. J. Healy lists Nettie Palmer's 'Answer'. Miles Franklin's contribution to the debate remains untraced.

6. See Russell Reising, *The Unusable Past* (New York & London: Methuen, 1986), 15-17. Also Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 1990), 160-61.
7. Geoffrey Hartman, quoting Alfred Kazin's *On Native Grounds in Criticism in the Wilderness* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1980), 289, fn.

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I first came across the name Jack Lindsay at a sale in the Monash University Bookroom in 1974 when I was in my mid-twenties. Amongst the offerings was a three-volume autobiography by an Australian writer whose name was unfamiliar to me. My brother, a bookseller, told me that the author had written numerous books and was the son of Norman Lindsay. I bought the three volumes for one dollar each.

A year or two later when I was undertaking some post-graduate study, I chose to do a paper on Norman Lindsay. The second volume of his son's autobiography, *The Roaring Twenties*, was on the reading list. Remembering that I had the three volumes on my shelves I decided to read them. It was a most significant decision and affected much of what I have done outside working hours ever since.

What struck me while reading the trilogy, especially *Fanfrolico and After*, was the commitment of the writer. In his youth it was the general commitment to poetry; in his twenties and living in Sydney it was the commitment to the philosophy and artistic values of his father; in England running the Fanfrolico Press in the late Twenties and early Thirties it was his commitment to Elza de Locre, a relationship that started as an ordinary affair and ended with his subjection to her schizophrenia. Finally, it was his commitment to Marxism. It seemed to me, a product of the Vietnam era, that to believe in an ideal was fairly easy, but to live and work totally for it was both admirable and something to be envied.

I decided to find out more about Jack Lindsay. I soon learnt that he had written well over a hundred books and I began to collect them. There appeared to be so little written about him that I decided to compile a bibliography of his published work. In 1976 I finally plucked up the courage to write to Jack and inform him of my project. My letter told him, somewhat naively, that I planned to have the bibliography finished in around eighteen months

or so. Back came a friendly letter saying that I was a brave man to attempt such an enterprise but he would be happy to answer any questions. He also enclosed some ephemeral items for my collection.

We agreed that I would send him photocopies of the work together with questions and back would come the answers. I made my first trip to England in late 1977. Long hours were spent in the British Library searching for Jack Lindsay writings and, of course, I made the pilgrimage to his house at Castle Hedingham in Essex.

Although only sixty odd miles north-east of London, the journey required two train trips and then a bus or taxi from nearby Braintree. I arrived around four in the afternoon. A handshake, introductions to his family and coffee soon overcame my reservations and hesitation. We talked over tea and well into the night. I remember voicing my opinions on writers in whom I was interested at the time: he had glanced at an odd volume of Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*, did not think much of Virginia Woolf (the Bloomsbury fad was then in full swing) and Hemingway, although he wrote well, did not have much to say. Around 10 p.m. he retired and I worked on, examining and making notes on items in his library before sleeping on a portable bed in the living-room.

Back in Australia, I completed a detailed listing of Lindsay's writings until 1926, when he left for England. I posted him the typescript and, in return, he sent me a copy of his book on Cleopatra inscribed "with the gratitude of Jack Lindsay". It naturally became a treasured possession.

Our correspondence continued and I was fortunate enough to spend much of 1980 in England. Besides more hours in the British Library I made three or four visits to Castle Hedingham. I remember feeling how easy it was to fall into conversation with Jack. I might add that by this time I knew a lot about his life and activities. I

also noted with amusement that he received – or took, to use the English phrase – two morning papers, *The Times* and the communist *Morning Star*. He was an occasional writer of letters to the editor of the former, and had long been a regular reviewer for the latter.

I saw Jack again regularly in 1982 when I spent five weeks in England working on the bibliography and interviewing him about his life and work. We did over three hours of interviews, on tape. As usual he was happy to co-operate, always agreeing to fit into my schedule. At no time did he object to any questions or ask me to turn off the tape. His only worry was that I might ask for his assistance to work the recorder. Despite his time as a printer and doing handy work on his cottage, he was somewhat of a Luddite when it came to modern technology. He did not have a licence to drive and had only been in the driver's seat once, some sixty years previously.

The last bus had gone before we finished one of our interviews, so I had to walk a mile or so to the neighboring village to catch a connecting bus. Jack walked with me and I recall noting with wry amusement and wonder that here was an eighty-two-year-old man comfortably keeping pace with another fifty years his junior. I also remember saying that one of the rewards of searching for his writings was that one learnt about such a variety of subjects and people. He replied with words to the effect that to him, this was the whole point of writing. The commitment was still there.

While delving into his library I found the original of a long letter which his brother Ray had written to him early in 1959. It dealt in considerable detail with their lives and activities together in Sydney in the early Twenties. The letter was vitriolic, potent and brilliant in its vivid description. Jack had used it extensively in *The Roaring Twenties* but I felt that it deserved publication in its own right.

Back in Australia I spoke to Robert Littlewood of the Jester Press about the letter and he agreed to publish it. Jack obligingly sent me a photocopy which I typed out but did not proof properly – much to the publisher's chagrin – as I discovered when I carefully went through the galleys. I asked Jack whether he would like some controversial bits omitted but he said not: "I don't want any cuts. It's against my principles anyway to censor anyone. If necessary, I reserve the right to contradict or correct elsewhere." *A Letter from Sydney* was published late in 1983.

We continued to correspond throughout the eighties. In conjunction with Bernard Smith and the Sydney book-collector, Nancy Johnson, I gave him



a copy of the Fanfrolico Press edition of William Morris's *Defence of Guenevere* for his eighty-second birthday. Jack had once told me that it was one of his favorite Fanfrolico books but that he no longer had a copy. His letter of thanks gave me much pleasure with its statement that "no book could have better pleased me".

Various circumstances prevented me from seeing him again. In 1984 he moved to nearby Cambridge. The change appears to have disorientated Jack. His daily routine – including morning tea with a cousin of Graham Greene – in the village he had lived in for over thirty years was broken. The Cambridge house proved to be unsatisfactory and he and his wife, Meta, were forced to move again. My last letter from Jack came in mid-1988 and was written to thank me for sending him details of an exhibition of Fanfrolico Books which I had helped organize at Monash University. In it he said that "for the first time in my life, have no work at hand or planned. Feel empty. Don't know if I'll get down to something."

During 1989 I heard various reports that he was fading and I wondered whether he would have the strength as well as the desire to live longer than his father. This was not to be and his death in March



of this year came as no real surprise. Nor did the overall lack of attention given to his passing in the Australian media. His whole life had been spent outside the mainstream. Why should it acknowledge him now?

There is this sense of paradox with Lindsay and his work. Here was a writer who called himself an Australian, and yet never saw the Sydney Harbour Bridge, despite the fact that he lived in Sydney just before becoming an expatriate. Here was a man who wrote on so many subjects and who, therefore, his critics say, cannot be considered an expert in any. Here was a person who was a committed member of the British Communist Party for more than fifty years and yet was several times on the verge of expulsion, even before he publicly opposed the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

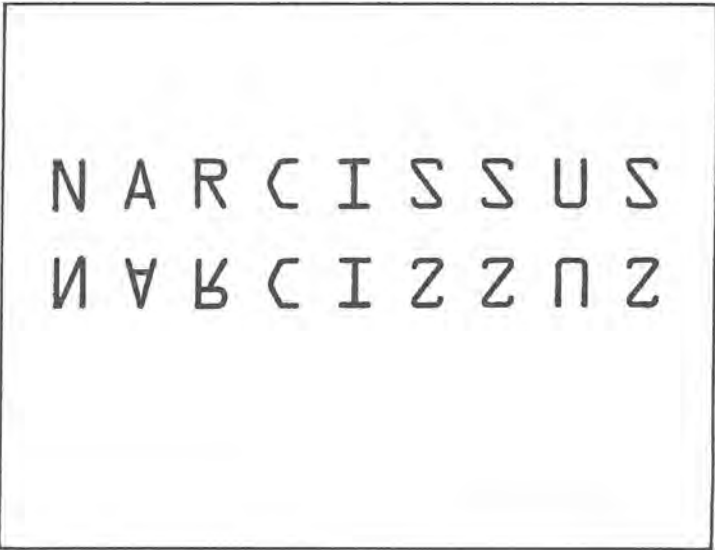
One could go on. Fortunately there are many who have admired and promoted Jack's work. In Australia these include such figures as Bernard Smith, Michael Wilding, Clem Christensen and the late editor of this journal, Stephen Murray-Smith. I shall leave posterity to decide on the value of Jack Lindsay's writings. Obviously there are works that stand out – the biographies of artists, his books

on the ancient world and some of his novels. Others – such as the propagandistic travel accounts – are best passed over or forgotten. However, to me the commitment remains as one of his lasting contributions.

My memories are of a stocky figure, about five feet eight inches in height, with wispy white hair. The dress is casual, usually an old sports coat over a skivvy, the face carelessly shaven. The mind is somewhat vague on day-to-day matters but sharp on people, events and places. There is also no trace or hint of vanity.

I like to think that he was flattered by someone putting so much time and energy into attempting to list all of his writings. However, my gains from our contact far outweighed his. I once asked him to sign the three volumes of his autobiography that I had bought so cheaply back in 1974. This he did with generous inscriptions. For these, the contents of the books themselves, and for our friendship, I can only say, Thanks Jack.

*John Arnold is a Senior Research Fellow at the National Centre for Australian Studies at Monash University. His bibliography of Jack Lindsay is yet to be finished but he is currently writing a history of the Fanfrolico Press.*



N A R C I S S U S  
N A R C I S S U S

Ruth Cowen

## Mateship Versus Matrimony

Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male: A History* (Penguin: Auckland 1987).

Facing each other across Broadway in Sydney, between the university and the railway station, a pub and a church have long engaged in a duel of posters. In 1988 the hoarding outside St Barnabas Church proclaimed:

“WHAT SHALL I GIVE TO THE LORD FOR ALL HIS GOODNESS TO ME?”

Australia's first Christian sermon 200 years ago.”

A poster in the window of the Broadway Hotel replied:

“HAVE A DRINK MATE!”

Australia's first 'shout'. Just before the first Christian service 200 years ago.”

This exchange could serve as a motto for Jock Phillips' book. Its relevance extends well beyond New Zealand. It opens a door to the values, experience and culture of all English-speaking societies of recent settlement, not only New Zealand but also Australia, Canada and South Africa. By way of contrast, it also illuminates aspects of life in the old metropolitan centres. The New Zealand story, as Jock Phillips tells it, is the story of transition from a frontier society to a suburban one, as it affects the mental world of the male.

As the Broadway duel suggests, the male mentality has been a battlefield for two different traditions. Both of them are firmly founded on the economic base of settler societies. In the nineteenth century New Zealand was primarily an exploitative frontier economy in which the work of clearing the ground and extracting its staple products was largely undertaken by itinerant unmarried men working as goldminers, gumdiggers, bushmen and whalers. It was hard work in a rough environment and the valued qualities were physical strength, endurance, bush- and field-craft, versatility and self-sufficiency. Some fulfilment was found in the contest with nature. Women were few in the bush and in the country as a whole they remained a

minority until the Second World War. The outback was a society of single males, and many of them never married.

Although Phillips does not sufficiently stress this, the nature of the staple product also underpinned the male preponderance of Antipodean frontier society. Shearing, gold digging, bushclearing (like logging in Canada) occupied males on a seasonal or itinerant basis. In contrast, where the staple was wheat or livestock farming (as on much of the American and Canadian frontiers) the unit of labor was the family, and women had an important role in defining the values and heritage of the new communities. In short, some staples promoted mateship, others promoted matrimony.

In New Zealand, however, the 'mateship' staples were more pervasive, and gave rise to an informal culture of men. It was a 'culture' only in the sense that it celebrated a coherent set of values. Foremost among these was physical prowess, sheer physical strength. For emotional satisfaction, for approbation and conviviality the frontiersman relied on mateship, on the intense but casual and informal closeness of other males. People lived very close to each other in the shearing shed or the whaling vessel. No one has written better about 'mateship' or placed it more securely in its material basis than Jock Phillips. In the absence of parents, siblings, sweethearts or wives, workmates had to provide substitutes and sublimations for everything that people (of both sexes) give to each other. It was a world of swearing, slang and singing, of nicknames and rough manners, of disdain for any authority that wasn't backed by bush virtues. Virtue resided in each individual and was there for everyone to see, a set of values that gave rise to a rough egalitarianism, based on a simple economy and society. Its other side was a disdain for urban softness, for pen-pushers of any kind, not only

writers and teachers, but also clerks, bankers, and city folk in general, for book-learning and gentlemanly graces.

Drink provided an escape from the loneliness of the bush, another test of manly prowess and an occasion for matey conviviality. One of the main frontier virtues was the capacity to carry liquor. The uncalculating generosity of bush community was expressed in rounds of 'shouting', of binges that 'melted' the money earned in months of labor into short bouts of oblivion.

Women did not have much of a place in this world. As prostitutes they were mere objects. As marriage prospects, they threatened the integrity of the male circle. Since many men could never hope to marry, it was easy to turn their backs on women. The matrimonial values of order, security, gentleness, feeling and property were alien to the roughness and impermanence of the frontier.

Just as women challenged the values of male frontier society, so did the rough virtues of the latter appear as a threat to the emerging middle-class order in New Zealand towns. In the urban society just beginning to form, with its lack of long traditions, the family was the basic cell of society, and bush virtues found little place. In its struggle to win over males from drink and to domesticate them to office and factory labor, to thrift and self-help, the family was supported by the churches. The wowser platform had as its main planks organized religion and church attendance, primarily a prim protestant religion of restraint. It rightly identified alcohol as the bulwark of male separatism, and endorsed a powerful campaign for prohibition, which regularly received the support of half the voters after 1900. In this campaign gambling was curtailed and barmaids banned. The other side was to promote domesticity: marriage, from this point of view, was a reform of the male character. Votes for women, in which New Zealand led the world, were designed to overwhelm the male vote and promote the wowser platform: not a statement of human equality, but a 'civilizing' influence in a rowdy society.

The 'respectable' middle-class order attempted to set up its own model of manliness. As in the rowdy tradition, this placed a premium on strength; not on physical strength, but on self-control, on resistance to temptation, on a controlled, far-sighted personality, suspicious of mere pleasure. But doubts remained whether such a person could achieve real manhood.

In taming the male, rugby football played a decisive role. Rugby had entered New Zealand education together with the cult of 'character' which

had come out of the English public schools. In 1905 the New Zealand All Blacks had a triumphant English tour and thereby provided their country with a male role model that combined both traditions. The rugby player's masculinity was beyond question and he was a paragon of physical strength. Fierce on the field, he also exemplified the virtues of self-control and cooperation. Rugby heroes had a superhuman tolerance of pain, and were presented as good family men at home, almost self-effacing in their modesty. So rugby was approved and cultivated in the schools and in the press. In addition to this official image of the game, which dominated the upbringing of New Zealand boys, there was also an unofficial one of violence on the field, and of high jinks, brawling, boozing and womanizing off it. Although rarely promoted by the press, this reputation for rowdiness did nothing to detract from the game's prestige.

Another formative experience was New Zealand's participation in the Boer War and the two world wars. "The Anzac spirit was an affirmation of the pioneer spirit," writes Phillips; not anarchic or subversive, but subordinated to national ends. Paradoxically in uniform, and subject to military discipline, the frontier virtues blossomed once again: strength, endurance, self-sufficiency, initiative, disrespect for authority, mateship, loyalty. Anzacs took pride in their physiques, which compared favorably with diminutive Englishmen, although the majority came from the towns. They affected to despise authority, though they loyally accepted it as necessary. Like rugby, Anzac took the frontier ethos and laundered it. But the boozing, exclusive male camaraderie remained a central element. Together the Anzac experience and rugby adapted and assimilated the frontier myth to the needs of suburban society. Rugby and war also assisted racial integration, since Maoris proved competent in both.

Between the wars the economy had shifted decisively away from the frontier. The countryside was settled and the centre of gravity shifted to the towns. The sexual imbalance was greatly narrowed, and marriage was now the norm, though about one-fifth of the males remained unmarried into their thirties. In the national iconography, the married environment now came to dominate: home ownership was as high as sixty per cent in the 1920s, and aspirations revolved around the bungalow on its quarter-acre. Advertising for mass-market consumer goods and films from Hollywood glorified married bliss as an ultimate good. Conscripted married men were spared the fighting line as much as possible while six o'clock closing was introduced

to make sure that those who were left behind came home for tea.

The heritage of the frontier had to be squeezed into the rapid, six o'clock swill twixt home and work. From the frontiersman's brandy flask, the New Zealander graduated to beer. In an inebriated haze, the ingestion and ejection of 'piss' became part of a single sordid celebration of male separateness. Much of this drinking was an adjunct to rugby, now more of a spectator than a participatory sport, itself a fight against the decadence and 'softness' of domestic existence.

When males came together, they shared jokes about marriage. In these jokes it appears as an unpleasant regime which emasculates the man by means of domestic chores, while wives were nags, prudes and spendthrifts. The onerous obligations of family life were a common theme in cartoons, short stories and novels which repeatedly portrayed men who preferred their mates to their wives. Family was incompatible with fulfilment. Inside the home there was a strict division of labor, and the same rigid segregation was also found within the labor force.

Despite the centrality of the family, the national culture was a male citadel, which left women out almost entirely. The most evocative national values were associated with camaraderie, with a male *Gemeinschaft* which excluded, indeed was the antithesis of, the family. The values and experiences of half the population, of women, found no expression in this culture.

This male edifice began to crumble in the 1960s and '70s. Rugby and beer drinking both declined. The Springbok tour of 1981 was a turning point, as men and women mobilized equally to resist its brazen promotion of racism. Urbanization proceeded apace and the large towns supported a greater variety of cultural expression. Women went out to work and marriage lost a great deal of its lustre. Feminists challenged the male culture from one side, homosexuals from another.

Male culture, whether in its 'frontier' or 'respectable'

forms entailed considerable losses. It involved the denial of inter-sexual intimacy, the repression of feelings, the rejection of other forms of fulfilment: intellectual, artistic, social, political. The book is itself a symptom of the breakup of the male culture. It is written explicitly from a feminist standpoint, with feminist categories and sensibilities, as an application of feminist method to the general history of society. It is a most impressive example of studies of 'masculinity'. But it is also a very personal book. Each section is preceded by a brief memoir which records the author's own socialization into one or another of the male mores. The section that follows these mores, by means of historical research, serves to put them to the test and to find them wanting.

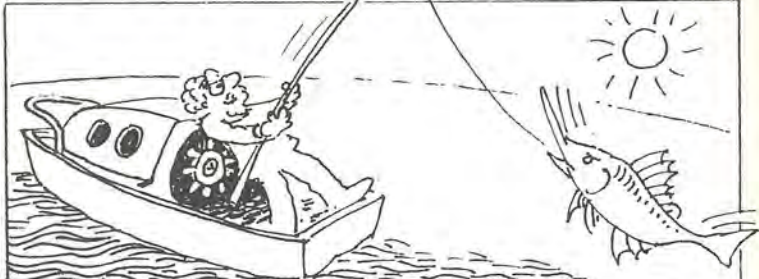
The personal sections are written by an insider who has become an outsider, socialized into his society's rituals and alienated by them. It shows a community which has suppressed variety in order to attain its notional virtues. But a few doubts remain. On the one hand, are things so much changed for the better? On the other, were they really so bad in the past? Perhaps the author is too close to his subject to be entirely objective about it. What was the real quality of suburban domesticity? Was it repressive or expressive? It's something many of us know a good deal about, and yet it remains unknown. Such evidence as there is points both ways. On the one hand, for all their exclusion and suppression, women live much longer than men; people still stake a great deal on marriage, sometimes repeatedly. On the other hand, the suburban nuclear household is in retreat, marriage is postponed, childbirth declining. Jock Phillips' book is a profound portrait of himself, of his community and of ours, a key to self-knowledge of societies moving away from their youth and encountering, together with economic middle-age, the more complicated issues of emotional and social maturity - it shows a left-wing moving from the redress of injustice and beginning to ask more directly about the meaning of happiness. It is a book for the present and future as well as the past.

# A poet's life is never dull

by Lofa



... taking the 8.04 quatrain to Flinders Street...



... catching a haiku off the Queensland coast...



... spotting a dactyl on the enjambment...



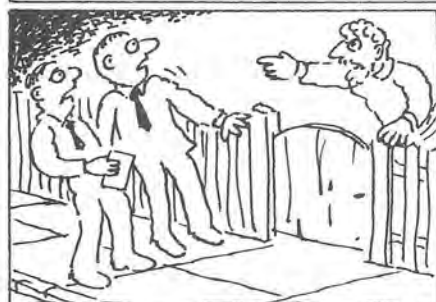
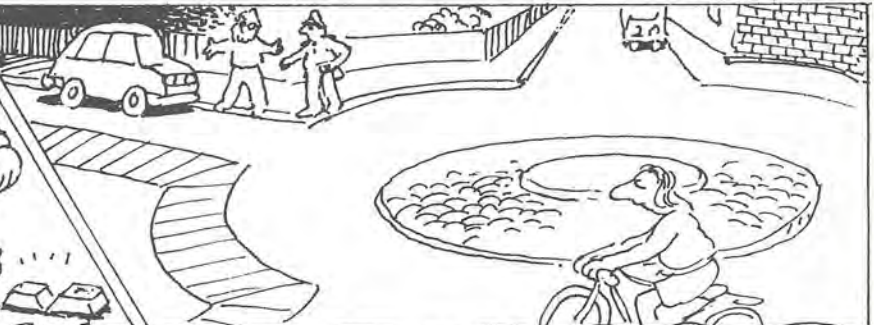
... and while crossing the Ictus of Panama...



... suffering a bout of bucolic diaresis...



... copping a fine for alliteration, then for parking his Stanza 2 hexameters from a roundel...



... telling a couplet of anapestic missionaries he's an acrostic...



lighting his lampoon and putting a monologue on the fire...

BUT IF HE SHOULD LOOSE HIS POETIC LICENCE, HE'D BETTER HAVE ANOTHER IRONY IN THE FIRE !!!

# books

## The Corruption of Power

Walter Crocker

Joh Bjelke-Petersen: *Don't You Worry About That; Memoirs* (Angus and Robertson, \$29.95).

Evan Whitton: *The Hillbilly Dictator; Australia's Police State* (ABC, \$16.99).

These two books on the Bjelke-Petersen regime in Queensland raise important questions for Australia; indeed the importance goes beyond Australia. It concerns parliamentary democracy everywhere, and all the more so as the institutions of capitalism become deregulated and the Welfare State gets distorted.

Whitton's 170-page book was published some months before Bjelke-Petersen's 259 pages. Neither author seems to have been aware of the other's writing though the two books complement each other to some extent.

Whitton produces a long series of charges against the Bjelke-Petersen regime: most of them could be, perhaps were, deduced from the report of the Fitzgerald Commission. His book has an ill-chosen catch-penny title: Bjelke-Petersen developed authoritarian traits but he was not a dictator, nor is 'hillbilly' the right word for him. He didn't have even the shadow of a private army or workable police state. Again and again Whitton loses credibility through exaggeration, as in passages about the 'private army'.

The exaggeration is a product of the author's personal and ideological objections to Bjelke-Petersen.

In another flawed passage Whitton writes about the gerrymander, which was not by Bjelke-Petersen or the Country Party (later National Party) but by a Labor government. Nor did the insolence of power he ascribes to him as a dictator originate with Bjelke-Petersen. Before the Country Party won in

1957 the ALP had been in power for an unbroken forty-two years. If one wants to know what insolence of power means the behavior of former ALP Premiers like Gair would show it. Here and there are small matters which do not quiet the reader's uneasiness about Whitton's reliability, such as his comments on "the deliciously beautiful" female TV presenter who reminds him of a cobra, delicious or otherwise. More substantially, he draws false parallels between Queensland and Hitler's Germany. If only Whitton had known Hitler's Germany!

That is to say, *The Hillbilly Dictator* does not achieve the balance of *Burke's Shambles*, Anthony McAdam and Patrick O'Brien's study of misgovernment in West Australia. Nor does it give enough credit to those in Bjelke-Petersen's Government who stood for good government, such as Police Minister Gunn and Attorney General Clausson. It is due to the latter's courage that the Fitzgerald Commission was set up, given teeth, and kept in existence. If there are any heroes to thank for recent reforms they are Fitzgerald backed by Gunn and Clausson and, preceding them, Police Commissioner Whitrod in the years between 1970 and 1976.

But Whitton's book is still useful and can be welcomed. It collects a long list of disturbing examples of irregularities, of bending the rules, political interference, high-handedness and, possibly among some Ministers and some members of the judicature - and certainly at high levels of the Police Force - sheer corruption. The Fitzgerald Report is of course the essential document for a view of Australian society since World War II, and it is even more disturbing than the Costigan Report.

Whitton could have strengthened his case by referring to comparable or relevant situations in other parts of Australia, notably N.S.W. (on which he is a well-esteemed authority) and with at least some glances at West Australia, Victoria and the

Northern Territory. My own home State, of South Australia, seems to be less bedevilled by corruption than Australia in general, at least up to the present and as far as we know.

The world conjured up by the procession of issues and names in Whitton's book is not soothing: prostitution, drugs, casinos, poker machines, illegal gambling, illegal liquor, bribes, licences, ministerial discretion or intervention, Police Commissioner Lewis, "Bagman" Herbert (Father of the Year, 1980, and a Knight in 1985) Minister Hinze, Harpeta, Bellino, Conte, Rooklyn, Meisner, Lowe, Herscu, Kornhausser, Saffron, Alter, Fayman, Top Level Ted (Sir Edward Lyons) and his associations with the TAB and Rothwells . . .

Bjelke-Petersen was born in 1911 in New Zealand, the son of a highly educated but pitifully paid Lutheran pastor of Danish birth. The mother, also of Scandinavian stock, was born in Queensland where her parents were pioneers in the Kingaroy area. Bjelke-Petersen's father withdrew to his books and left both farm work and household chores to his wife. The family, Joh says, was "so poor that there was barely enough money to buy food", and the responsibility for keeping the little farm and the family finances afloat fell equally upon Joh and his mother.

To add to the mother's heavy burden of care, Joh was struck with polio at the age of nine, and was largely immobilized for more than a year.

At school, he tells us, he aimed, usually with success, at being the top – in school work, in sports, in fighting; indicating qualities more respectable than likeable. His aim lost none of its acuity throughout his long and turbulent life. His family's poverty forced him to leave school at fourteen. Having some awareness of what he forfeited through lost education, he later took up correspondence courses and an assiduous participation in the local debating society.

He left home during his early teens in order to manage a second small farm acquired by his mother for several years living in the now-famous cow shed. He was alone and he worked long, exhausting hours.

Joh branched out from farming and into contract work such as clearing scrub and threshing peanuts. With his flair for mechanics, he improved on the design of threshing machines. Then, towards the end of the war and after it, he moved on to the profitable enterprise of clearing brigalow scrub in districts far from Kingaroy, again inventing new devices and now working on a larger scale.

Then he took up aerial spraying, one of his few unprofitable ventures. He lost sixteen planes in eleven years. But he could afford some losses. By

the age of twenty-five he was well off, by thirty rich by local standards.

In 1939 Joh volunteered for war service but was rejected because of his bad leg. After the war, Adermann, another Queensland puritan – and one with a growing reputation in Canberra as a Federal M.P. – persuaded Joh to stand for State parliament, the sole single-chamber parliament in Australia. Joh was elected in 1947 at the age of thirty-six. He spent the next forty-one years in parliament.

He was "miserable" during his first five years – "I felt like a caged lion and longed for the bush" – but in 1952, at the age of forty-one, he married Florence Gilmour, ten years his junior, and a secretary in the Main Roads Commission. It was a happy marriage: "Flo played the organ, Joh sang the hymns." A son and three daughters were born, between 1953 and 1960. It is evident Joh was a good husband and father.

After sixteen years as a back-bencher Joh was promoted to Cabinet as Minister for Works and Housing in 1963 at age fifty-two. The responsibility, the need to master detail and organise, and to travel the length and breadth of Queensland (by air and mainly in his own plane), revived his interest in politics. It also gave him the reputation of being a diligent and reliable Minister.

Five years later, in 1968, the dice suddenly fell: Premier Pizzey dropped dead of a heart attack. In the ballot for his successor, Joh was elected on the first vote. He can be believed when he says his election surprised him: "The thought had never occurred to me that I might become Premier". He can probably be believed, too, when he says he had done no lobbying for it, and never sought popularity – he didn't drink or go to the bar or play billiards – and was regarded and, by some, disliked, as a "loner". On the other hand, as he admits: "I certainly didn't have an inferiority complex."

At this point, Joh was already a businessman regarded by many as both venturesome and farseeing. How precisely he made his money, and how much, is not revealed. But up until his election as Premier there is no firm evidence that there was any illegality connected with his money making.

But what of Whitton's long catalogue of accusations and quasi-accusations? The evidence is too incomplete for final judgement; moreover some of the issues are still *sub judice*.

As far as the evidence now available goes, only one matter emerges which, though not involving the contravention of any law, might seem to smack of corruption – the \$400,000 demanded of and taken from Bond as settlement of Bjelke-Petersen's

libel suit against Channel Nine. Joh sets out his side of the case in his memoirs.

As regards Bjelke-Petersen and corruption, so far the following verdict must stand (to use the Scots Law term): *not proven*.

The charge, however, that in Queensland during his two decades as Premier there was significant corruption is *proven*.

Bjelke-Petersen, the masterful detail-loving Premier, either did not know what was going on in the network under his official control – which would seem high incompetence – or he did know and shut his eyes to it.

Explanation is still required of his attitude to the Fitzgerald Commission, and of his relations, direct and indirect, with shady adventurers, with money grubbers of dubious standing and with plain crooks. For all his religious beliefs, the values implicit in the self-declared fact that the men he admired most were businessmen such as Lang Hancock, Sir Les Thiess and particularly Sir Edward Lyons, made him vulnerable. How many people of principle in Queensland would have admired, or had no uneasiness about this trio? And why did Joh make a confidante of Police Commissioner Lewis, a man so oily, so sycophantic and now exposed as so corrupt; the man who, under Joh's aegis, displaced the upright and efficient Whitrod? Joh would also have had some responsibility for Lewis's knight-hood.

Bjelke-Petersen's latter years as Premier take on the hues of anti-climax, and something of tragedy. So much in his life had been worthy, yet has been quickly erased from public memory because of his actions in the last half dozen years before his downfall. These actions include decisions which are not easy to defend . . . such as his vetoing of a Public Accounts Committee and of a Register of Foreign Owners of Land and Buildings; a philistinism, or worse, regarding unrenovable natural resources, development and tourism; and an insensitivity to the realistic side of the conservation movement.

Joh's commitment to fundamentalist religion – a vigorous belief, but one as unengaging as the Calvinism of the Boers in South Africa – combined with his commitment to Sir Ed Lyons and the like is accounted for by some critics as hypocrisy. It might be irrational or self-deceiving, but to dismiss it as hypocrisy is to take an over-simple view of life and of human nature. Bjelke-Petersen, for his part, hints in his memoirs at no conflict whatever between the values of Christ and those of Ed Lyons or other such entrepreneurs.

There seems no escape from the view that, towards the end of his career, Joh was subject to

loss of balance. Hence, such examples as Joh's taking up Mylan Brych – who, from his Pacific island lair, claimed to have discovered a cancer cure – and bringing him to Brisbane and fostering him for a time. Or of Joh's allowing members of Fraser's Cabinet to play on his vanity – “leave it to Joh, he will look after it” – to the extent of carrying out a bootless intelligence operation in Europe, with expensive aides (among them Daniel O'Connell Professor of International Law at Oxford) to glean information about Whitlam's Loans Affair – an operation with hilarious examples of innocence abroad (138-45); or engaging Minuzzo to build a 107-storey building in Brisbane intended to be the highest not only in Australia but in the whole Southern Hemisphere; or, most damaging and symptomatic of all, the push to Canberra, the absurd *Joh for Prime Minister* campaign.

Joh says more than once that Sir Robert Sparks, who “all along had caused more trouble than all my Labor opponents put together,” was the author of his downfall in 1987. It is manifest that it was Joh himself, not Sparkes, who caused his own downfall.

And is Whitton correct in saying that between 1985 and 1987 the Premier of Queensland tried to gain a peerage and a seat on the House of Lords?!

Why then did deterioration overtake Bjelke-Petersen in his final decade of office?

For all his natural force of mind and character, Joh did lack the succour of education. Then there's his close familiarity with power: it does indeed tend to corrupt. Who has not seen a swelling of heads and of egos among the newly elevated? What happens when the elevation brings, as it does to all Ministers, a deferential personal staff, a P.R. apparatus, patronage, the euphoria of toadies, the big car, the big office, lots of eating and drinking; things which soon distance politicians from the citizenry they are supposed to serve? After a year or two of it, not to mention a decade or two, they come to feel they are different from “those out there” – that revealing phrase often on the lips of too many politicians. The aging process also takes its toll; and it doesn't have to reach the stage of Alzheimer's Disease to do so. Recognising this, the U.S.A. limits its Presidents to two terms.

Joh wasn't a hillbilly, but he was certainly a shrewd populist. But how does democracy cope with the increasing phenomenon of populism – that often cynical manipulating of current emotions, fads, fashions and buzz words?

In Bjelke-Petersen's day ‘communism’ was a case in point: “I always found”, he writes, “that you can



campaign on anything you like but nothing is more effective than Communism.”

Recently, populist jargon is being turned against this master populist – Joh is now being denounced as a *fascist*; he was raising a *private army*; he was turning Queensland into a *police state*; he was *élitist*; and a *dictator*.

*Sir Walter Crocker is a former Australian Ambassador to Italy and other countries. He served as Lieutenant Governor of South Australia 1973-1982 and is the author of Australian Ambassador and other books.*

## The Quest for Grace

Don Charlwood

Manning Clark: *The Quest for Grace* (Viking, \$29.99).

Although I was born in the same year as Manning Clark and was raised among “the life-deniers of Yarraside”, I find myself a stranger to much of the world he so vividly recalls in *Puzzles of Childhood* and now, *The Quest for Grace*. Not all is strange: I, too, watched Larwood’s panther run in the Bodyline series and heard Rethberg and Pinza and fed – still feed – on Mozart, but, seen from one of the state high schools which the Depression masses attended until they were fourteen or fifteen, universities were as far off from us as Baku; they were institutions for those who would some day be set in authority over us. Only one per cent of the population reached them.

The young Manning started at Trinity College in 1934, a scholarship student from Melbourne Grammar School, which he had also attended on a scholarship. Already he had known the pain of being a sensitive outsider in a school built in imitation of English traditions. The pain continued at Trinity, but fortunately the university also brought him to Max Crawford, then newly-appointed as professor of history, a man who was to have a profound effect on his life, then and later. More importantly he met there Dymphna Lodewyckx, daughter of Associate Professor Lodewyckx, head of the Department of German; the two fell in love. Dymphna was a language student, as brilliant in her field as the young Clark would prove in his.

Even after fifty years, he writes of Melbourne University with angry mocking, but also with vivid sketches of people who were to make their mark: Zelman Cowan, Margaret Kiddle, Rohen Rivett, Dick Hamer. Manning and Dymphna had extra-

ordinary fortune: in 1938 each was awarded a travelling scholarship, she to Bonn, he to Oxford, each to travel first class on the *Orama*.

The reader of the scarifyingly honest pages this far, senses what is likely to happen to so vulnerable an Australian in England; it happens, indeed, before he sets foot there. The English who board the *Orama* at Toulon and Gibraltar “made it plain by facial expressions of disdain and contempt that everything we Australians did . . . was all vulgar, crude, coarse . . .”

Oxford proves “an oasis in a desert”, but without Dymphna, a place of inevitable loneliness. The authorities come more than halfway with a solution.

Clark, you’d like to see your fiancée. Why don’t you take a foreigners’ course in German at Bonn University over Christmas and the New Year?

Their reunion took place in circumstances that chill even today. In Nazi Germany it is the day after “Kristallnacht”, the glass of Jewish premises littering pavements, uniformed thugs everywhere.

The men had outsized bums: they had faces which reminded me of the faces of the bullies who had made my life a hell during the first two years at Melbourne Grammar School. But there was a difference: the members of the Long Dorm at Melbourne Grammar School flayed the uninitiated with a wet towel: these men carried revolvers on the bulging right cheeks of their bums. . . . These men . . . looked as though they would never be complete unless they had a whip in their hands . . . How had they risen to power in one of the most civilized countries in the world?

On his return to Oxford Clark decided to urge his fiancée to give up her course and leave Germany. She did so and the two married in Oxford, he twenty-three, she twenty-two. In the last spring and summer of peace, they experienced a brief, idyllic period, Manning playing cricket for Oxford, even dancing down the pitch to no less a bowler than Hedley Verity. His cricket stories here are a delight after past storms and shadows. But then came Chamberlain’s announcement of war.

He spoke like a headmaster at an English public school. . . . He did not say what England would be fighting for.

My impression, even two years later, was that she was fighting for her life.

For medical reasons there could be no question of Manning Clark going into the services. He was appointed history master at Blundell's School in Devon; the headmaster, Neville Gorton, later Bishop of Coventry, was "a man of vision" changing Blundell's from a school preparing entrants for Sandhurst "into a school teaching boys the rudiments of Christian humanism."

The young men were ready for someone who did not put on side, someone who treated them as equals, someone who didn't know the answers, but was keen to join them in a hunt for such answers.

They proved "a never-ending delight to be with"; Clark had entered a "flowering time", realizing his vocation as a teacher. "I began to hope I had something to offer." Their first child was born that December, "part of those rapturous days . . ."

Just as the reader rejoices that this young visionary has found a happiness and fulfillment that had eluded him all his earlier years, he gives it up; he decides to make "a spiritual journey to discover Australia." His reasons are not clear, but it eventuates that he has taken his first unwitting steps toward his greatest achievements.

At Melbourne University in August 1940 no one was interested in him; there was no position for him; the best he could gain was appointment to Geelong Grammar School where he took over the History Sixth at the beginning of 1941.

Since he had formed friendships in England and had experienced a flowering there, I expected to read something of England's fortunes of war – of the Battle of Britain and the Blitz. There is nothing; it is as if England has ceased to exist; the scene is set wholly at Geelong Grammar.

The boys welcomed me warmly, the masters with suspicion, fear, and at times secret and at other times open hostility. I was a challenge to their cosy little world, to their devotion to the education of young men to serve faithfully the class to which they belonged – the Australian bourgeoisie. To me, then as now, the bourgeoisie were not worthy of such devotion and service. My jokes to the boys about knee-benders and grovellers at the throne of grace alarmed them.

Was so perceptive a teacher really surprised, or was he baiting them?

1941 was a year in which the thousands of Australians with whom my own lot had been cast, were being swept into Britain's war. Manning Clark

says nothing of their response at all; the European war is in abeyance.

Apart from his delight in the great promise of some of the senior Geelong Grammarians – Stephen Murray-Smith among them – his three-and-a-half years at the school proved barely tolerable. But gradually the realization was coming to him that he wanted to be a writer; also, the Curtin government imbued him with hope for a more independent Australia, a country that would wish to know itself. And, at a Carlton football match, he experienced a memorable meeting with "a young man, dressed in a sergeant's uniform. With his craggy cheeks, and a face so ravaged by I knew not what, he looked quite old, though his body was young": James McAuley. Later Clark invited him to speak to his History 6th.

Early in 1944 he was offered a lectureship at his old university. In Europe "heady times" had come; "the people were winning the war against Facism." Primarily "the people" were the people of the Russian armies. Though there is no doubt that they made the biggest contribution to victory, his statement begs questions: could they have won had Britain not held out in the beginning, in the days of Russia's non-aggression pact with Germany? or if America had not been drawn into the war? or if the bombing of Germany had not diverted so much weaponry to the defence of the German homeland?

In the next year the war ended; young men and women from the services swelled the university's history classes. For Manning Clark it was another flowering as he stimulated the minds of people who would ultimately follow his trail-blazing: Geoffrey Blainey, Sol Encel, Ken Inglis, Geoffrey Serle. In the same year Max Crawford, delighted with Clark the teacher, asked him if he would like to teach Australian history. "He did not seem to be bothered by my ignorance, or by my doubt whether I had anything to say." The genesis of his history was at hand.

Luck was with me. The war had turned the minds of many Australians towards the question of who we are. The myths which had sustained previous generations were being discarded. . . . The historical map of Australia was almost a blank: I must set out on a journey without maps.

His final chapter heading BECOMING A HISTORIAN OF AUSTRALIA signals the beginning of his life work; the scene is the fledgling

Canberra University College where, in 1949, he was appointed to the chair of history.

... there had to be another me, a me which had broken with Melbourne mockery and nihilism: there had to be a lot more suffering: there had to be discipline and single-mindedness ...

More suffering? By now I hoped not. There had already been so much that I felt wrung out by its intensity and by the mockery of things long passed. Would that it had been possible to produce so great a history with a less tortured spirit. But perhaps the creative forces that went into it brought their own measure of grace.

*Among Don Charlwood's best-known books are No Moon Tonight and All the Green Year both of which have been constantly in print. His new memoir Marching as to War is reviewed in this issue.*

## The Young Volunteer

Geoffrey Dutton

Don Charlwood: *Marching as to War* (Hudson, \$24.95).

Don Charlwood is the author of two books that have sold hundreds of thousands of copies, but his success has not undermined his modesty or the simplicity of his style. *All the Green Year* is a novel about boys growing up between the two World Wars; *No Moon Tonight* is his tribute to his fellow-aircrew of Bomber Command, in which 4000 out of 8000 young men were shot down over Europe.

Already an admirer of Charlwood's writing, I approached *Marching as to War* with a double interest, one personal, one literary. Although I am seven years younger than Charlwood, our generation's upbringing was much the same, and we both served as aircrew in the R.A.A.F., Charlwood as a navigator and myself as a pilot. On a literary level, I wondered how the purely autobiographical *Marching as to War* would compare with *All the Green Year*, which, although a novel, is obviously close to its author's adolescence in the 1930s. He has himself commented on *All the Green Year* that it is about the failure of parents to understand teenage children, and that he wrote it partly because of his own problems as a parent. "In fact, I knew little about growing up in the sixties ... indeed,

that was half my problem ... nor could I have written about my own family. But outlet I must have. I realized then that my feelings as a father were transferable; that I could create scenes against the background of my own growing up and enliven them with the pent-up emotions of a 1960s parent ... This is exactly what I did."

The autobiography turns out to be both more and less intimate than the novel. Charlwood's parents are less vivid than Auntie Trot who is the skilfully bitchy social editor of *Table Talk*; there are some unforgettable vignettes of his mother, but it is a restrained portrait. Britannia is the overpowering mother-figure in the book, her firm hand (the other one is held by God) is on every detail of young Don's life. Charlwood also describes places and houses in Melbourne and the Mornington Peninsula in loving detail, especially *Wensum*, his paternal grandfather's two-storey, semi-detached house in Victoria Parade, Fitzroy. Best of all is his evocation of the teatree (spelled correctly, not tarted up as 'ti-tree') around the bay:

On the beach side of the dunes, all was bright and lively; sun on water, people laughing and splashing, waves collapsing on the sand. Over the dunes another world existed, hushed and still. Sand tracks descended into speckled shade and sea sounds diminished to a murmuring. Trunks of ancient teatree leaned this way and that, sometimes growing back on themselves, sometimes reclining on the sand. Their shaggy grey bark could be stripped from twisted trunks. When the wind blew, their tops moved agitatedly together, creaking and scraping; down below where the air was still, the trunks hardly moved at all. In this dim world green vines spread over anything fallen; in some places orchids grew and native pelargoniums. Here and there large banksias thrust through the canopy to the light. This hidden world scrutinised and accused me; its bent trees sighed together. I had nothing of which to stand accused; not yet. But it was relief to burst into the sudden light, into the sound of the sea and its splashing crowds.

There is already a serpent in this Eden; although the innocent boy doesn't know what it is, he feels forebodings of guilt.

Don Charlwood grew up under a constant indocrination of Christianity, Empire and War. And a complete absence of information about sex, except for that minatory sense of sin that accused him under the teatree. I know of no Australian book

that gives a better picture of what it meant to grow up in the 1920s and 1930s, with those three looming presences and that one huge absence. All were united by duty, one's duty to serve, obey and if necessary die, and the impossible duty to remain pure in thought, word and deed.

Charlwood says he wrote *Marching as to War* because a boy in a group he had been addressing asked him why he had gone to England to fight Hitler over Europe. The boy's lack of comprehension was shared by the class; Charlwood describes it as "a gulf between concepts", and that his generation "had become something of an anachronism in its own lifetime".

So he starts with a title from 'Onward Christian Soldiers', a hymn which was sung to his uncle John and his fellow-soldiers of the Fourth Victorian Imperial Bushmen as they marched off to the Boer War.

One wonders now what has happened to that key concept of duty which in its various guises dominated most of Australian life up to the 1940s. Certainly the Empire (if not the irrelevant monarchy) has gone; God is almost dead, except in old believers and some weird revivals; War is no longer a noble cause; and there's no mystery in sex.

In young Charlwood's day condoms were called 'frenchies' and were only available from under the baleful eye of a chemist; only the boldest boys would dare to ask for them, or indeed know how to use them. Charlwood gives a poignant description of the agonies of ignorance when the giant in his groin began to raise its head.

The most embarrassing time came in the kitchen late one afternoon. It mounted aggressively, pressing against my trousers. There was nothing I could do except go outside. But as I turned to go, my mother glanced down and cried, "Get rid of that thing!" I went out stunned that she should know what it was. But how was I going to face her at tea time? The giant didn't much like the prospect; he shrivelled away. But at tea time my mother said nothing at all. I knew now, though, that between my legs I had something evil.

Not long after, sunbaking with a big kid behind the teatree, the big kid showed him how the giant liked to be handled. "This was more exciting than anything I had ever known . . . [but] I wished now this hadn't happened . . . The teatree tops moved and sighed accusingly." He now knew what the serpent was in the teatree Eden.

For Charlwood's and my generation, to believe in God, Empire and War was based on ignorance of what they really meant; it was another ignorance that we shared about sex. At least we asked each other questions about sex (and received some amazing answers), but it required a lot of sophistication to question the unholy trinity that united the God of Battles, Britannia and the .303 rifle.

I hope the boy who asked Charlwood why he went to fight Hitler reads *Marching as to War*. If he does, he will find a book which doesn't give a great deal away about young Don's mother and father, but gives a wonderfully intimate portrait of the boy and his background. And when he went, it was not marching as to war, but flying right into the terrible midst of death and destruction.

*Geoffrey Dutton's latest book is Kenneth Slessor - Biography, to be published by Viking in November 1990. His selection, with introductory essay, of the prose and verse of Henry Lawson will be published as The Picador Henry Lawson in March 1991, and will be the most comprehensive selection to have appeared.*

## Snug as a Bug

Hazel S. Hall

Gwenda Beed Davey (ed.) and Peter Viska (illus.):  
*Snug as a Bug in a Rug: Scenes from Family Life*  
(Oxford University Press, \$12.95).

*Snug as a Bug* adds to the popular series on Australian children's folklore which began with the Factor/Viska compendium of children's chants and rhymes, *Far Out Brussel Sprout*. This latest collection focuses upon the traditional use of folklore by adults as a means of both amusing and controlling their offspring. It's also a study of the art of oneupmanship by older children, who learn these witticisms and use them on their younger siblings.

Until recently, society has demanded that "children should be seen and not heard". There is perhaps some justification in this saying, since the young are naturally curious and ask perpetual questions. There probably isn't an adult who hasn't been exasperated by their persistence. A child's queries are often very personal, for example, "How old are you?" or the unremitting "Where are you going?" It is no wonder that a typical reply by an exasperated adult to the latter query is: "Up the wall if you don't stop asking questions."

On the other hand, there probably isn't a child

who hasn't at some stage been cut down to size by the verbal putdown of some adult. At times children must feel very unfairly treated, especially when reprimanded by some adult for acting like a "smartypants", while older people can apparently say or do as they like.

Then there's the irritating habit that parents have of trying to make an unpleasant task legitimate by reciting a ridiculous proverb or rhyme such as "Eat your crusts, they'll make your hair curly."

Davey and Viska explore all these issues, concatenating a number of amusing situations to form each witty scenario. The illustrations ably capture a wide variety of human reactions to these anecdotes.

The section 'Teatime' examines traditional stomach lore – after all, the way to a child's heart is through his or her stomach! Davey investigates the way adults control hungry children by verbal manipulation, for example: "What's for tea?" – "Feathers for a light meal."

The 'Curiosity' section looks at children's persistent Whys, Whats, Wheres and Hows. "What time is it?" – "Time you weren't here" is a good illustration of the kind of snappy retort which might come from a vexed adult.

'Silly sayings' is a witty concatenation of traditional sayings, some sharp, some more gently amusing such as "Rattle your dags".

'Ifs and Don'ts' explores negativity. Here the adult threatens a humorous but unpleasant outcome for the child who does not comply with the rules. There are also more sinister innuendos of social conditioning, for example, "Don't be a Whingeing Willie" and "If you say that again I'll wash your mouth out with soap." Many of us, young and old, will have experienced punishment by soap – particularly one particular carbohic brand which to this day conjures up most unpalatable reminiscences.

The final section, 'Bedtime' reminds the young that only adults stay up late. After all, what child does not want to be "healthy, wealthy and wise"! Some "goodnight lore" is also included.

There is a good cultural mix of folklore used in this collection. While some of the material is common to the British Isles, and hence reflects our colonial background, the reader will find plenty of material which is unique to Australia, such as "I'll drop you like a sparrer in the Yarra." There is also some material of Greek and Italian origin, which has been absorbed into the Australian tradition. Viska's illustrations cleverly reflect this diversity.

*Snug as a Bug* is not just a funny collection of family sayings; it's also a cleverly compiled verbal and visual comment on the past and present politics

of family life. And, in the end, it reflects the good humor and affection which adults, however harassed, retain for their offspring – as the saying "snug as a bug in a rug" sums up the child's ultimate feelings of warmth and security when tucked cosily into bed by a loving parent.

*Dr Hazel S. Hall is an ethnomusicologist living in Canberra.*

## Kind of Blue

Ken Bolton

Laurie Duggan: *Blue Notes* (Pan Picador, \$12.99).

Laurie Duggan is a singular and important Australian poet, possibly the most significant of the post-68 generation.<sup>1</sup> *Blue Notes* is his first collection since *The Great Divide* (1985). His intervening titles have been *The Ash Range*, an epic meditation on early Gippsland and, through it, early Australia, then a volume of versions of the Latin poet, Martial.

*Blue Notes* fits easily into the shape of the overall *oeuvre*. In fact, unlike the previous titles, it hardly alters that shape – which might regretably, determine its reception. But not unreasonably, because *Blue Notes* continues previous themes, and even ongoing series from the previous books: the examination of the Country as record and as symptom of the state of the nation in his (continuing) 'Blue Hills' series of poems, and a more mordantly witty examination of popular culture and the culture industry and the language of its tribes, in the small poems grouped together as 'Dogs'. Also, examination of the Past in 'The Front', though this poem is a special case. And there is something of the toying with selflessness and that kind of anomie that have been a feature of poems going as far back as his first volume, *East*. Of course these remarks schematically separate themes and characteristics that are, to different degrees, operative in most of Duggan's work.

A sample, from 'Dogs':

### Drive Time

The New Nationalism winks  
from its track suit  
and slips a few extra dollars  
into the hip pocket  
of The Quiet Achiever.

And a joke on the famed originality of the 'Martian' English poetry movement:

Martians

The elephant stamp of 1984  
goes to the poet, praised  
for his wit, who said  
jockeys humped over saddles  
were 'like cyclists'.

and:

Obit. Marvin Gaye

Miles from anywhere  
dogs play cards  
over the bar of a hotel  
where for twenty cents  
a man shot by his father sings  
'Ain't that peculiar baby'.

The 'Blue Hills' pieces work mostly by swift accretion of detail, so it is hard to effectively quote lines in isolation. The following excerpt, from 'Blue Hills 19', may give some idea of the accuracy of their observation, social and otherwise:

Above the Mitta, the hump  
of Mt Wills;  
a motorbike groaning  
across the dip behind tin huts.  
At Glen Valley  
a hippy couple corner onto  
the main road,  
reluctant to wave  
to a man in a hire car.

Missing from *Blue Notes* are larger poems of the outgoing, confidently generalizing sort – such as *The Great Divide's* 'New England Ode', 'Crawling From The Wreckage' and 'Pastoral Poems'. In fact, the 'Blue Hills' poems of this earlier volume, too, were more assertive and expansive. Here they are cooler and briefer. Such poems have addressed and acting as a source, at the thematic level, of Duggan's special value, have highlighted, shifted and corrected the mainstream culture industry's discourse (that of Murray, O'Connor and the like) as it treats Australian history and Australian 'identity'. It has also countered an associated hypostatized, domino-constructed repertoire of 'attitudes' – towards life, art, politics and changing values.

The 'Blue Hills' poems in this volume, the 'Dogs' series, and the poems that register and 'interrogate' a kind of selflessness and volitionlessness, all have different and more or less specified and filled-out

subject positions. The 'Dogs' poems imply a confident, acculturated, opinionated subject (which they do not describe or make 'present'); others have more detached, less sketched-in subjects or subject-positions.

In contrast, *The Great Divide's* 'The New England Ode' has still another originating subject, one that is more present. Its cultural coordinates gain increasing resolution through the course of the poem: opinions are rehearsed, arrived at, developed and argued for. The poems in *Blue Notes* have much less animus – whether positive or negative. They are more restrained, use less of the rhetoric of 'the voice' and of expressed opinion. The book's title, in fact, suggests to me the Miles Davis title *Kind Of Blue* – but if *Blue Notes* were a jazz LP it would be perceived, I think, as consciously in a minor, reflective, pensive mode: *Coltrane Plays The Blues*, rather than his *Giant Steps* or *Ascension* collections, for example. The point is, of course, that each of these Coltrane outings is a terrific record. And *Blue Notes*, too, is not a negligible book.

In some senses my remarks so far have been a little weighted towards considerations of theme. I should quote Peter Porter's remarks here: "Duggan is a stylist in an area of poetry where style is notoriously difficult to maintain . . . a form which demands absolute sureness of touch . . . His lyrics of circumstance catch the tone and peculiarity of urban Australia convincingly . . . He makes structures which are more than the facts and opinions they employ. That, I think, is poetry."

On this level – in form, movement and the consistent, high degree of specificity of the language – *Blue Notes* gives us poems that are to be returned to, are real, and do not generate effects that float before us in place of the poem.

'It might as well be spring and all' and 'The Front' are the two longer poems in *Blue Notes*. The first, which begins the book, bears out Porter's remarks, and also, I think, what I've already said. With 'It might as well . . .' we have the 'main shot' poem, one of equivocation, withdrawal, contemplation – and of beautifully slow-paced and clear perception.

Basil clings to windows through which  
there is no depth of focus

. . . .

everything defines itself, parodies of the normal;  
light movement of branches, the gale spent,  
the spread of grass on a corner of earth  
mown flat, paths swept, the garbage taken away.  
Things you left on the table are still there,  
the plants grown an inch taller; the cool

lemons have not escaped from the refrigerator.  
Out on the street a tram stops and an old man  
in a purple suit and cowboy hat  
climbs down and totes his airline bag  
across an intersection through the dull heat.

The above, I hope, gives some idea of the poem's stillness and quiet attention. The impression of accuracy and of gentle control are what the book as a whole leaves one with.

This is true, too, of one of the departures that *Blue Notes* does make. Forgetting for the moment Duggan's *Martial*, *Blue Notes* is his first book to include translations. They are of various poets, mostly Italian, and chiefly of works by the Futurist poet Soffici. Duggan, I think, slows the poems a little, makes them a shade more deeply knowing and less febrile or mercurial.

There are also some travel poems. These treat Italian and French towns, and they are interesting. Again, they are in the quiet key of much of the rest of *Blue Notes*. Duggan brings to these European subjects the method and the intelligence - which reads, effectively, as the 'eye' or 'sensitivity' - of the current 'Blue Hills' poems and their deftly apportioning, calmly just, verbal placement.

In 'Crossing Aragon' the area is described in terms of soil coloring, rock formation, etc.:

Around Morte La Nieva  
rocks and soil break through the scrub,  
terraces of loose stone with no apparent crop.

....

The place was always a frontier;  
'Caesar Augusta' corrupted to Zaragoza;  
its over-ornate church  
stylish as formal cruelty:  
the product of obeying distant orders.

Another of these picture-portraits ends:

and an old man in khaki,  
weighed down by enormous red epaulettes,  
steps out of a public lavatory.

Each poem seems both accurate portrait (of a town or view) and sharp assessment: knowing, generous, empathetic and yet detachedly, almost cruelly, true. There is the slightest inflection in the poem that subtly signals a return or retreat, or psychological 'move' - from the empathy and identification of close attention, to the personal integrity of the subject's identity, to knowledge and judgement. A slight detaching, rejection and moving

on that gives the poems their sadness and calm. It is 'Blue Hills' applied to Perigord, Aragon, Mont Ségur. For me these poems are distantly reminiscent of and analogous to Streeton's wartime watercolors of the Middle East: their bleached Australian light, slightly impassive yet acute look at the romantic settings of Delacroix and other French orientalist painters. They seem also to acknowledge and use, but not endorse, the conventions that preceded them, at the same time as they remind one, distantly, of Mediterranean travel posters.

The long poem, 'The Front', which closes the book, warrants its own discussion. It offers most of the rewards of closely reading Duggan's poems. It deals, I think, with the history of St Kilda, vis a vis Melbourne itself, and considers the values *evinced* in that history. It also considers the contesting claims of various poetic styles or rhetorics. At times it conflates their special pleading and self-interest, and the waxing and waning of their historical fortunes, with that of developers and politicians - and of the city itself. Poetically, the poem - its argument at least - seems drawn to the virtues of 'degree zero', but is aware of the subsequent inanition. While I like much of the poem I feel I did not always understand it. If the poem is at fault then I think this perhaps stems from an attempt to attain the invulnerability of the impersonal - in which case, it here makes for a few clumsy fictional shifts and a slight, overall oddness in the poem's manner ... of address? Utterance? Observation? Record? (*Is it addressed? Uttered? Is it record, or opinion?*) The poem seems unwilling to acknowledge itself - despite, say, the sound boom's showing up in the picture on occasion - as in phrases like "but I step ahead", or the citing or intrusion of "the smell of coffee" which, it is claimed, interrupts a line of thought/reportage. This last is a gambit more centrally part of the process and matter of *The Great Divide's* 'New England Ode' - the liquid metronomic device, as Duggan is able to joke in that poem. In 'The Front', where empiricism seeks to be impersonal, it intrudes.

Duggan's 'ear' in 'The Front' remains acutely sensitive, and the parts of the poem are accomplished and have a clarity of outline that the whole has sacrificed to its epistemological ambivalences. The one flaw, but a critically interesting one, in a very good book of poetry.

*Ken Bolton lives in Adelaide. His latest book is Two Poems - A Drawing Of The Sky, published by the Experimental Art Foundation.*

1. See Otis Rush No. 1, for the review of *The Ash Range* where the basis for that case is sketched.

## A Snark In Eight Fits

Nadine Amadio

Lewis Carroll: *The Hunting of the Snark*. Illustrated by Frank Hinder (The Carroll Foundation, P.O. Box 304, Flemington, 3081, \$19.95).

Not perhaps quite as well known or as extensively quoted as his famous 'Alice' books, Lewis Carroll's long surrealist poem *The Hunting of the Snark* is, on re-acquaintance, delightful, magical and, when it is not being antediluvian, positively contemporary.

With a fine sense of timing, and never on any occasion sailing backwards, The Carroll Foundation has published an elegant new edition illustrated by a grand old man of Australian painting, Frank Hinder.

It is the first time Frank Hinder has illustrated a book although he has (one must note 'in hasty parenthesis') illustrated a great many book covers. He is also the first Australian to illustrate 'The Snark'.

It would be difficult, if not inappropriate, to categorise Hinder's witty and innovative drawings. They are neither, strictly speaking, abstract, nor are they entirely figurative, although it might be said that they are a little of both. They are certainly neither cartoons nor caricatures although both these qualities permeate the drawings.

Created on a grid with a "mathematically elegant" system Hinder reveals in his own 'Snarkian' preface poem just how he arrived at his illustrations.

These 'snarklets' in strict geometrical form  
Are based on the square root of five  
And into these rectangular shapes  
The 'Golden Section' divides.

Hinder further goes on to explain:

The crew might be angles, triangles-dooangles  
But remember the Bellman's remark;  
When limming the crew  
No matter how crude  
The result is bound to be 'snarked'.

At eighty-four Hinder has a mercurial sense of fun and he creates, with his drawings and poems, his own exercise in style. He produces both an illustration and a word sketch on each of the crew members before he starts hunting, or even, for that matter, having fits. It is a visual introduction to

give an instant sympathy with Carroll's quite unique crew.

Remember the Baker who fainted dead away at the very mention of the Boojum and had to be roused with all sorts of things including muffins? You'd recognise him anywhere when you see that Hinder has provided him with a flattened rolling pin for a nose. Take the Barrister for example, whom Hinder portrays, with his usual angular wit, as having the scales of justice for his nose and eyes. Forgive me, I have to join the fun:

Hinder summed up a Barrister whose essential character

Is a rectangle with wig, scarf and brief,  
He can fix any court with the weightiest stare  
To unbalance a Snark or a Thief.

John Paull, President of the Carroll Foundation, in his illuminating introduction describes Hinder's drawings of the crew in Carrollian terms.

In creating the image of each crew member, Frank has taken the human physiognomy the accoutrements of the member's profession and 'portmanteaued' them into a unity of visage.

Carroll himself, in a preface bearing a facimile of the signature of Charles L. Dodgson, gives an example of the skills of 'portmanteauing'.

He explains that if you wish to use the words 'fuming' and 'furious' you would, if you had a "perfectly balanced mind", come up with the word 'frumious'. The word 'frumious', of course, describes the jaws of the terrifying Bandersnatch in *Fit the Seventh* as he went "savagely snapping around" frightening the poor Banker quite out of his wits as you can see:

Down he sank in a chair-ran his hands through  
his hair -  
And chanted in mimsiest tones  
Words whose utter inanity proved his insanity  
While he rattled a couple of bones.

Hinder creates his snarkish vision which clearly affords him great delight. The individual portraits of the crew members reveal character as well as profession. For example, although neatly capped, buttoned and bearded, the manic qualities of the schizoid Captain Bellman are swiftly captured by Hinder. The Captain who sails by a map that is quite blank and issues bewildering and conflicting orders is sometimes portrayed by a double image and often marked by the wildness of his eyes.

Straight off his grid slide, crawl or stalk, "strange creepy creatures" while the Baker's nightmare of



engaging with the snark "every night after dark - in a dreamy delirious fight", is conveyed in more recognisably Hinder abstract imagery.

Artist John Coburn has said Frank Hinder must be regarded as one of the pioneers of Abstract art in Australia. Born in 1906, Hinder studied both here and in America. He has exhibited throughout Australia and is represented in most major collections. He is widely recognised as an artist of innovation and integrity and has won many awards including the Blake Prize for Religious Art.

Frank Hinder has always been interested in the theory of Dynamic Symmetry which can be explained as "a geometric means of organising and relating the parts of a work" as, for example, in pottery, painting and architecture. This concept has influenced his work since the early thirties. The book is the first to be designed on the "Metagrid TM system". This is a design tool based on a matrix of the Golden Section developed by Australian John Fanning.

It was indeed a delight to read *The Hunting of the Snark* again. With an entrancing sense of mystery Carroll never really reveals the Snark. He did however give certain behavioural clues that might help:

Its habit of getting up late you'll agree  
That it carries too far, when I say  
That it frequently breakfasts at five-o'clock tea,  
And dines on the following day.

In that verse the Snark sounds quite human and somewhat reminds me of certain acquaintances. Frank Hinder sets the scene when he says: "Tis space/time related to Snark."

An artist friend of mine, Charles Blackman, who is also beamishly besotted with Lewis Carroll says the reason he loves Carroll is that in his surreal world "anything at all can happen and everything is permitted." Perhaps this is why artists respond so joyously to his imagery. All that is imposed is freedom. We must now welcome another artist, Frank Hinder, to those who have walked in the unpredictable wilderness of Carroll's world and emerged with their own art and imagination inspired. Don't miss the new Carroll Foundation *The Hunting of the Snark*. "Tis your glorious duty to seek it."

*Nadine Amadio has written books on the art of Charles Blackman, John Coburn, Albert Namatjira, Jimmy Pike and the Papunya painters. She wrote a fantasy novel, Orpheus, illustrated by Blackman and a new 'Alice' adventure set in Australia also illustrated by Blackman. She has completed an opera on the same subject. Her latest book and film is The Giants of Time.*

## "Fatal Attraction"

Barry Jones

Clyde Cameron: *The Cameron Diaries* (Allen & Unwin, \$49.95).

The Honourable Clyde Robert Cameron, AO, is a remarkable Australian by any criterion. Born in 1913, he left school at 15, became a shearer, then from 1938 a union organiser, clawing his way through the South Australian AWU and ALP organisations. He was Labor MHR for Hindmarsh from 1949 until 1980, 28 of those years in Opposition. In 1970 his support on the Federal Executive for intervention into the affairs of the deeply unpopular Victorian Branch of the ALP proved decisive: without it, Whitlam's election victory of 1972 would have been impossible. (Whitlam inscribed a photograph to him as "the architect of victory").

In the Whitlam Government he was Minister for Labour from December 1972, adding Immigration after the 1974 election, then moved downwards in June 1975.

One of the finest Parliamentarians in my experience, he was a brilliant debater and strategist, deadly in attack, resourceful in defence, with a mastery of detail and extraordinary precision of language. He was also an implacable enemy.

He was an outstanding example of a now endangered species - the self-educated worker who mastered the system. (Paul Keating, 30 years younger, is another one. So was Mick Young.)

Cameron was always a voracious collector of information, a diarist, a skilled telephone interrogator (more effective than Billy McMahon). Since 1980 he has been working as a writer and oral historian whose 600 hours of taped interviews with Barwick, Gorton, Hasluck and Fraser will be of permanent value.

Clyde Cameron kept political diaries for 31 years, but most were stolen, by person or persons unknown. This volume comprises the 1976 and 1977 diaries, uncut, unexpurgated and without a critical apparatus to put the daily record in context, or to correct occasional repetitions and inconsistencies. The diaries of Peter Howson, former Liberal MHR and junior Minister, edited by Don Aitken, published as *The Life of Politics* (1984) are fascinating too because Howson's observations and his faithful recording of what people told him are

subject to a rigorous editorial analysis. Historically, Cameron is a far more important figure than Howson, shrewder, tougher, better read and more experienced – but objective analysis also could have been applied with benefit to these diaries, together with some modest pruning.

The central theme of *The Cameron Diaries* is the broken love affair between the diarist and Gough Whitlam. In the excellent index, one of the shortest entries, ironically, is: "Whitlam, Hon. E. Gough *passim*", a distinction shared by Hawke, Hayden and Kerr. Whitlam appears on virtually every page, mostly as a hate object. Cameron's dismissal from his beloved Labour and Immigration portfolio on 6 June, 1975, at Whitlam's hands, using Governor-General Kerr's reserve powers as his instrument, and relegation to "the humiliating portfolio of Science" (and Consumer Affairs) was unforgivable. Cameron could recognise political Death Valley when he saw it.

Thereafter, Cameron's great mission was to set the record straight and to force Whitlam from the leadership. He relives the humiliation of his removal from Labour and Immigration on many a page. Despite his bitterness, Cameron could still recognise Whitlam as a great historic figure, with enormous energy, vision and charisma.

Whitlam and I have been mates for 25 years . . . I liked Gough from the very moment he entered Parliament in 1952 . . . It is true that Gough is seen as an egotist, but he is entitled to be egotistical. He is an extraordinary individual! He is tall, handsome, highly intelligent, witty and has a presence that makes him stand out from the mob . . . He never spared himself . . . He has stamina, great courage and determination . . . [In] Gough's case his debits are more than offset by his huge array of credits . . . I find it impossible *not* to like Gough Whitlam . . . In spite of our many difference, I am still very fond of Gough Whitlam. He is a great Australian . . .

The centrepiece of *The Cameron Diaries*, taking up the best part of 300 pages (in a total of 868) is his account of events leading up to a mid-term Caucus election for Party leadership and the Shadow Cabinet held on 31 May 1977. This innovation, which has not been maintained, was intended to put new Shadow Ministers on their mettle and to give new MPs a chance for promotion or, at least, to cast a more considered judgement than would have been possible on their first day

as a Caucus member. Since many Parliaments do not run the full term, predicting an appropriate mid-term date is a hazardous exercise. Bill Hayden challenged Gough Whitlam on this occasion, losing by only two votes. There were many hidden agendas in the contest.

Clyde Cameron had urged Lionel Bowen to run, feeling that he would have been a stronger candidate than Hayden. Some MPs who voted reluctantly for Whitlam were hostile to Hayden, seeing him as a bone-dry economic rationalist. Bob Hawke's supporters in the Caucus wanted Whitlam to hang on until their champion was able to enter the House of Representatives: they felt that Hayden would retain the leadership for some years, as he did. The Victorian Left, having been Whitlam's most vociferous critics, were now his strongest supporters – as were ex-Ministers Gordon Bryant, Frank Crean and Rex Connor.

When Talleyrand was told that a rival statesman had died, he is said to have observed: "I wonder what he meant by that?" Clyde Cameron thinks the same way. He finds it difficult to accept that people act out of a diversity of motives, often finding it hard to explain their actions to themselves, let alone others. Jim McClelland and Barry Cohen have both written about their equivocation. Each had a strong emotional attachment to Whitlam, felt that Hayden would have a better chance of winning the next Federal election, but in the end opted to vote for sentiment rather than to establish the next era of leadership. But Clyde is incapable of seeing their equivocation as sentiment, or loyalty to the immediate past. He saw McClelland and Cohen as devious plotters who sought to play off the rival camps in order to seek preferment. Sometimes he seems incapable of ascribing actions to anything other than naked self-interest.

Fraser called an early election in December 1977. Clyde became so carried away by the campaign that he began to convince himself that Whitlam would win, notwithstanding his deep reservations.

Clyde Cameron describes a political world that no longer exists, a period piece about a time when the outcome of Caucus elections, or filling vacancies, was uncertain, the votes of individual MPs could make a difference and their views were worth taking into account. Hence, his endless speculation about how Ralph Jacobi, Gordon Scholes or Dick Klugman would vote. In those days, it was possible for MPs to be elected to the front

bench without patronage or endorsement by a faction. (I was a beneficiary of this system in 1980 and 1983.) This is no longer the case. Now the outcome of a vote for a Ministerial vacancy, the Chairmanship of a paid Committee, or even an overseas trip is absolutely predictable.

The convenors of the Left, Right and Centre Left factions, after consulting their own members, hold a negotiating session or two (sometimes rather protracted) and, after identifying trade-offs for the next round, select the winner. His/her name will be floated past the Leader for his endorsement (it could be embarrassing if he objected) and then leaked in the customary way to Laurie Oakes and Michelle Grattan. The name is then presented to the Caucus as a *fait accompli* to be unanimously endorsed. The possibility of such deals coming unstuck is too remote for concern.

Some of Cameron's most engrossing pages take us back to 11 November, 1975. Amazingly, Whitlam's contempt for the Senate was so profound that he failed to tell Labor's Senate leaders that his Government had been dismissed. He returned to The Lodge for a steak lunch instead of working out tactics at Parliament House about the passage (or withholding) of Supply in the Senate.

As a humble State MP, I was told by 1.30 p.m. at a meeting in Melbourne that Gough had been sacked. Ken Wriedt in his Senate office did not know it at 2.15 p.m.

Clyde Cameron's heroes were Eddie Ward, a model for his parliamentary style, Rex Connor, for his vision, and Lionel Murphy, for his range of interests and warmth of personality. Murphy's translation to the High Court was apparently no impediment to continued close consultation. Lionel Bowen and Jim Cairns were also admired, but at a lower level.

Cameron writes extremely well: witness descriptions of his term as a U.N. delegate in New York (1976) and Rex Connor's funeral in Wollongong (1977).

Cameron lived for politics, working with extraordinary intensity, going for 18 years as a Shadow Minister without a holiday, on an average of four hours sleep. He loved to gossip and, as he explains (p. 498), after picking up a new tit-bit he would repair to a telephone cubicle or lavatory to write it down. This could make him a dangerous dinner

companion. For those who see politics as psychodrama *The Cameron Diaries* are essential reading. They are among the first of their kind. They won't be the last.

*Barry Jones, author and politician, is, like Clyde Cameron, a former federal Minister for Science (1983-1990). He is now Chair of the House of Representatives Committee for Long-Term Strategies. His books include The Macmillan Dictionary of Biography (1981), now in its third edition and Sleepers, Wake!: Technology and the Future of Work now in its 16th impression.*

## Left Book Club

### John Sendy

Abe David and Ted Wheelwright: *The Third Wave, Australia and Asian Capitalism* (Left Book Club, \$14.95).

Anne Gollan (Ed.): *Questions for the Nineties* (Left Book Club, \$13.95).

Audrey Johnson: *Bread and Roses, A personal history of three militant women and their friends 1902-1988* (Left Book Club, \$14.95).

Paul James (Ed.): *Technocratic Dreaming of Very Fast Trains and Japanese Designer Cities* (Left Book Club, \$15.50).

The newly-formed Left Book Club, initially at least, must rank among the most successful and unusual publishing ventures in Australian history. A few initiators untrained in publishing, starting from scratch, sparked by the communist veteran Laurie Aarons, raised \$150,000 through donations and share-holdings to establish a non-profit cooperative aiming "to publish and distribute books, pamphlets and other publications on economic, social and political issues, challenging New Right philosophy and suggesting solutions based on socialist ideas, principles and values." With chiefly voluntary labor they produced four impressive books within the seven months from November 1989 to June this year.

Their first book, *The Third Wave: Australia and Asian Capitalism*, by Abe David and Ted Wheelwright, appeared in 5000 copies and sold out quickly as did a second run of 3000; another 3000 are due out at the time of writing. The other titles published are also selling well. Many sales go to trade unionists and others who normally do not buy books, commensurate with the Club's aim: "encouraging people who rarely or never buy books to do so."

This small but notable left-wing success comes

at a time when ravenous giants gulp down small independent publishers. It occurs when those to the political left of the Hawke Government suffer policy poverty, organisational disarray, the acute embarrassment over the unexpected and sudden disintegration of the Soviet bloc, an all-time low of socialist ideas and achievements and the opposing spectacle of the worldwide greed machines and capitalist markets achieving optimum mass popularity.

The Left Book Club idea arose from the old Left Book Club established in Britain over 50 years ago by the publisher Victor Gollancz, which produced over 200 red and orange covered books, selling in millions in English-speaking countries. This Left Book Club was dedicated to the struggle against fascism. An Australian offshoot developed. Over 50 Australian groups existed, mainly in Sydney and Melbourne, with Victoria claiming a membership of 1,375 early in 1939. The monthly publications included such meritorious works as Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China* (1938), G. E. R. Gedy's *Fallen Bastions* (1939), and R. Palme Dutt's *India Today* (1940).

The old Left Book Club members were expected to purchase a book every month, but were not asked to become shareholders or to make donations to an organisation which had considerable financial solidity and publishing expertise as well as a ready market among the rapidly-growing anti-fascist and socialist movements of the time.

Therefore, the new Left Book Club, despite its initial success, has vastly more difficult conditions in which to operate. So far, it has only 750 member-shareholders, including 40 organisations (mainly trade unions) and urgently needs more members. A minimum shareholding for individuals costs \$50 (\$20 concession) and for organisations \$100. Members have voting rights and a say in policy-making, receive regular newsletters and are entitled to a special member's discount on books.

The first book, *The Third Wave: Australia and Asian Capitalism*, appeared at the height of public interest about the extension of Japanese capital investment in Australia. More than 1000 copies were sold before publication. Uncharacteristically for book launchings, *The Third Wave's* first official launch was held on the World Square building site in Sydney last November, with an audience of building workers. Several dozen other 'launches' have been held on jobs and at trade unions clubs, with good book sales.

In *The Third Wave*, David and Wheelwright argue that Australia is being "swept along into a new historical era as capital reshapes and reorganises

the world." They worry that Australian resources and wealth will be nearly all owned by someone else: American, Japanese, British. They point out that Japan has become the most powerful financial nation and by the mid 1980s had \$21 billion invested in Australia, not far behind the US and UK, but growing much more rapidly. Commenting on the proposed Multi-Function Polis they quote ANU Professor Gavan McCormack:

The fundamental weakness in the project thus far is that the aspiration for equality, diversity and creativity in a new 21st century community is locked within a private, profit-oriented nexus. If it remains locked within the value system of automatic supermarkets and a range of personal leisure facilities - which is by and large what the new cities in Japan have brought *their* citizens - the society of the 21st century may bear a close and ironic relationship to its 20th century counterpart . . . there would be no new Jerusalem.

*The Third Wave* discusses the issues arising from this new wave of foreign ownership and possible consequences for the future. No wonder it is selling quickly.

Edited by Anne Gollan, *Questions for the Nineties* contains fifteen authoritative, plain-speaking articles by such well-known figures as Ric Throssell, Robin Gollan, Marian Sawyer, Phillip Adams, Ken Inglis, John Molony, who examine problems like uranium, woodchipping, land rights, Asian migration, censorship, privatisation and whether it matters who owns our press and television stations.

John Molony puts a strong case against higher education becoming the attainment of "national priorities" and worries that more and more governmental control and direction will lead towards more privatization.

Bill Caldicott, in discussing uranium and the energy crisis, argues compellingly:

Enormous sums have been spent on nuclear research, and indeed on less pressing problems such as exploring space, developing nuclear arsenals and delivery systems, and research into 'star wars' technology, but equivalent amounts haven't been devoted to research into safe energy sources.

Likewise, Ted Wheelwright, who asks why we have to be more competitive in the international marketplace, suggests that we may have to get off the economic treadmill. He proposes the establishment

of a centre for research on alternative forms of economic development in recognition that the quality and quantity of modern economic progress so far is a major cause of the rape of the Earth.

Though more questions for the nineties could be posed, such as the land-transport/traffic-chaos/road-carnage problems, Anne Gollan has chosen well and her authors have delivered sensibly and soberly.

Audrey Johnson's *Bread and Roses: a personal history of three militant women and their friends 1902-1988* gets its title from a spirited waitress who wrote eloquently in 1931 that her kind wanted "the bread of life" as well as "the roses and silk stockings of life." It is a warm story of women who battled for equality, wages and conditions, peace and dignity in the trade union, women's and communist movements. It tells of the emergence of the NSW Hotel, Club and Restaurant Employees Union as a force and of the lives of Flo Davis (Cluff), union secretary from 1946 to 1960, and union organisers Topsy Small and Vic Workman.

*Bread and Roses* gives sketches of significant women of the Australian Communist Party during the twenties and thirties: Mary Lamm (Wright) Hettie Weitzel (Ross), Joy Barrington (Higgins), Irene Orr, Edna Nelson (Ryan). It is an entertaining and useful aid to Australian labor and feminist history.

The publication, late in June, of *Technocratic Dreaming of Very Fast Trains and Japanese Designer Cities* shows the verve of the Left Book Club. Edited by Paul James and with articles by Gavan McCormack, Yoshio Sugimoto – and a number of other scientific and activist opponents and doubters – it appeared when debate raged about such projects. The contributors maintain "a critical distance from the prevailing corporate and government view that all that glitters is gold, or even that high speed and high technology will necessarily bring new riches."

The contributors tackle the accusation that opposition to the VFT and MFP is based on racism: Japanese Professor Sugimoto maintains that issues of "environment protection, property ownership, quality of life and technocratic control are fundamentally race-free ones." *Technocratic Dreaming* could become another bestseller.

The Left Book Club can be contacted at Box 22, 4 Goulburn Street, Sydney, 2000.

*John Sedy's most recent book* is Ralph Gibson, An Extraordinary Communist.

## A Matter of Seeing

R. F. Brissenden

Billy Marshall-Stoneking: *Singing the Snake: Poems from the Western Desert 1979-1988*, Drawings by Tutama Tjapangarti (Angus & Robertson, \$14.95).

Judged simply as a collection of poems Billy Marshall-Stoneking's *Singing the Snake* is an impressive achievement. There is nothing tentative, clumsy or make-weight here: every piece is confident, accomplished and authentic. It may seem a rather slim volume to represent eleven years' living, working and writing among the people of Papunya and Kintore in the Western Desert. But with poetry it is always quality that counts, not quantity – and there is nothing in this collection that does not ring true.

Inevitably, and quite properly, since these are for the most part poems written by a white man about black people, *Singing the Snake* will not be judged simply as poetry. No matter that the poet should have tried above all to see things honestly – his poems will be tagged as committed, engagé, political. And indeed a primary commitment to honesty in these matters and at this point in our history is necessarily a political act.

For non-Aboriginal Australians the first and most difficult task has been simply to see our Aboriginal fellow-citizens, to concede their existence. We actually needed a referendum – and not so long ago – to persuade ourselves that they were still here.

In this context Billy Marshall-Stoneking's poems speak to me in a peculiarly direct and personal fashion. I spent my adolescent years in the mid-western New South Wales town of Cowra on the Lachlan River. Although I didn't consciously recognize it at the time, Cowra offered me what would now be called a richly multicultural experience. Chinese families worked the market gardens on the river flats; Greeks ran the fruit and vegetable shops and the cafes; protestant Anglo-Celts like me went to the public primary and high schools while the tykes went to the convent and kept within their pale, except when we thumped each other on the football field; the Prisoner of War Camp held first Italian and then Japanese POWs; and there was a large army camp which after the war became one of the main immigrant holding centres.

Whether we liked it or not we couldn't help being aware of the distinctively different characteristics

of the groups that made up this heterogeneous society. Chinese and Greek children attended the schools (one of my best friends was a Greek); folklore had it that the Italians in their burgundy-colored trousers not only made good farm laborers but also posed a romantic threat to farmers' daughters; the Japanese broke out of their camp and committed *hara-kiri* all over the countryside; and the 'Balts', by a sort of cultural osmosis, imperceptibly permeated our community.

But the Aborigines? They were there too, but we didn't see them – or if we did it was as shadowy, indistinct figures on the periphery of our vision. By some extraordinary and unspoken group decision we agreed to conduct our lives as if they did not exist. You could not enter the town from the south or west without driving past the Aboriginal mission, yet somehow it wasn't there. You could not go to the flicks on a Saturday arvo without being aware that you didn't sit in the front rows downstairs: that was where the Abos sat. I went every Saturday – yet I have no memory of ever seeing an Aborigine buy a ticket, although on countless occasions I must have stood at the box office window beside black kids of my own age.

This communal blindness was surely a reflection of guilt and embarrassment: to acknowledge the existence of the black people would have been to acknowledge that we had stolen their land. It was also an expression of magical hope: if we kept on acting as if they weren't there eventually they would disappear, taking with them the awkward reminder of our act of theft.

This is a long preamble to a discussion of Billy Marshall-Stoneking's poetry. But it points, perhaps, to what is still the most difficult problem in black-white relations – the problem for the non-aboriginal Australian of *seeing* the Aborigine clearly, fairly and honestly. To see the black people at all, to acknowledge their existence, was a major step forward. But invisibility has been replaced by all sorts of stereotypes – romantic, sentimental, idealized. Awareness of white guilt has been a necessary precondition for dealing fairly and effectively with the problem, but by now it is more of a hindrance than a help. The concept of Aboriginality itself is a distortion, although in political terms no doubt still useful. What we need most of all is the capacity to see each other simply as individual human beings.

It is the great virtue of Billy Marshall-Stoneking that he succeeds in doing this. His poems are not about 'Aborigines', they are not about Papunya people or Kintore people – they are about the men, women and children with whom he has lived and

worked for the last ten years in the Western Desert. They are by turns, sad, funny, light without being trivial, angry, frightening – all these things and more. But they are never sentimental or condescending.

To illustrate my argument effectively I would need to quote the whole book. One poem will have to suffice. It is called *Drinkin Alajapuring* with a note that it is 'after Nosepeg Tjupurralla'. Drinking in Alice Springs is a major and tragic social problem for its white as well as its black citizens: one would have thought it to be an almost taboo subject – at the least an inordinately difficult one. But Billy Marshall-Stoneking succeeds in writing a poem that without denying the darker aspects of the situation suggests some of the pleasure that can be found in sharing a flagon with friends:

Why, they come in good friend,  
really good friend;  
that plonk makem mad.

They gotta take a little bitty mouseypull –  
one by one – you push it me,  
I'll take a mouseypull n  
push em next man:  
ebbrybody gotta take a little bit

(Hey! You don't wanna take em so much!)

little bit  
little bit  
alla way.

One man no good,  
oh! angry!

Lotta people drink  
n pass away.

This is a book to keep and treasure. It is made even more attractive by Tutama Tjapangarti's contribution. His delightful drawings provide a most sympathetic and distinctive accompaniment to the text.

*Poet and scholar R. F. Brissenden is also well-known for his crime novel Poor Boy (Allen & Unwin). His latest crime fiction Wild Cat will be published early next year.*

## Climbing Misty Everest

David Wood

Ross Fitzgerald: *Busy in the Fog* (Macmillan, \$24.95)

We begin this review with a FAX message from Horton:

Most people don't really believe in freedom of speech. They only believe in freedom of speech for themselves. Yet we both know that unless freedom of speech allows you to say things which others find horrifying it is not worth having at all.

Sub-titled *Further Adventures of Grafton Everest*, *Busy in the Fog* has been published some twelve months after *Pushed from the Wings*, a novel, and *All About Anthrax*, a collection of short stories – the two books in which the inimitable, kinky professor of the 'Me Generation' first made his shambling, disgusting appearance. In this his third outing, Grafton has learnt nothing from his previous experiences. He has put on weight and has become the official Billy Bunter of our time: hypochondriac, ponderous sexual gymnast, voracious consumer of debilitating goodies.

Surrounded by comic book double agents, thugs, corrupt politicians (don't you worry about that: Queensland can spawn them like leeches!), Grafton's latest preoccupation is with New Age Consciousness, which he contorts to his own tunnel vision but which cops some pretty hefty satirical thumps on the way as the professor blunders in with all the dexterity of an elephant in a china shop:

"Do you really believe this shit?" said Grafton. "You're frightened of the dark stairway that leads to want," replied Annie (his T.M. instructor). "But that too is a good thing. You need a very innocent attitude to do the mantra." "You mean I think too much?"

Annie shook her head. "Thinking while saying the mantra is good. All experiences of meditation are good," said Annie. "Now what do you feel?"

"I feel a huge prick growing deep within me," said Grafton. "What do you make of that?"

"Show me," said Annie.

Grafton could hardly believe his luck.

Grafton's subsequent affair with Annie provides a psychologist's field day. There is nothing discreet

about the descriptive passages, and when we find the massive monomaniac with his huge hams jammed over the toilet bowl, his mistress sucking him off through a condom, ("a first for them both"), we may well feel like leaving *Busy in the Fog* there, the book appropriately housed. More disturbing, perhaps, is the violence of the minor characters who plot and plan to blow the joint up.

At the end of the novel, these devious plotters mistakenly destroy themselves, but fate cock-snoots all semblance of sanity by producing an earthquake which tumbles the wall of the Wivenhoe dam and drowns Brisbane. Southern cynics may remember the words of General MacArthur about Gladstone, spoken during the Second World War, applying them to the northern capital's imagined demise: "If the whole of Gladstone slid into the sea, it would be a disaster. But if somebody were to pull it out again, it would be a catastrophe!"

Grafton Everest, by now comfortably ensconced in Toowoomba and watching the disaster on TV, would agree. Even though Bowen (Griffith?) University has been destroyed, Professor Everest's salary continues; he yawns and makes himself a corned-beef sandwich, though not sharing academic confederate Abe Dreighton's belief that "our testimony is that Dr Jesus had led us to move to this garden city to promote and project his vision . . . Hallelujah, hallelujah. Toowoomba is the place to be!"

Throughout the book, religion gets short shrift. While this is fair play when satirising creationist bigotry or New Age excesses, one baulks at the relevance of quotations from Meister Eckhart, Thomas Vaughan and Isaiah which head up some of the chapters.

Other parts of the novel, too, are off the rails. The underpinning storyline is a wet dream nightmare, the plotting improbable and the overall structure like the leaning tower of Pisa doing the tango.

But the novel is not irredeemable. The strength of *Busy in the Fog* is episodic, with short-story-length passages that are a barrelful of fun, with tongue-in-jowl humor that punctures pretension and parsimonious codswallop. The pity is that these highly successful passages are not interwoven into a viable whole, especially considering what a marvellously unique character Fitzgerald has created in Grafton who, despite his sexual and other excesses, somehow retains (don't ask me how!) his innocence. As a character, Grafton Everest fits to a tee the Russian proverb prefacing the book: "all that trembles, doesn't fall".

The weaknesses of *Busy in the Fog* probably result

from too hasty an execution, too little deliberation on the foil necessary to make plausible Grafton's kinky individuality.

In Ross Fitzgerald's two previous works, Grafton's wife, Janet, serves this requirement, as well as being a strong character in her own right. In the current novel she has become a feminist. But as well, she loses some of the wise equanimity needed as contrast to the madcap professor. Now just about everybody is running around in a crazy spin, and we are left with a madhatter's tea party that would have given the white rabbit a nervous breakdown.

In Ross Fitzgerald's book of short stories, *All About Anthrax*, his Crafton Everest is pushed to a literary peak, while holidaying in Bali. This story is particularly successful because it combines Grafton's repugnant habits with sharp barbs of defining wit, his kinky excesses against the counterpoint of normality, all within an engaging setting and a credible unfolding of events.

This happy combination was not evidenced in *Pushed from the Wings*, nor is it in *Busy in the Fog*, more is the pity.

That Crafton Everest lives again, despite the book's shortcomings, is a remarkable tribute to the uniqueness of Ross Fitzgerald's character creation and of the author's quixotic imagination.

*David Wood is a poet and novelist who was previously a flautist with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra. He lives in the Springbrook Mountains behind the Gold Coast.*

## Surviving the Storm

John D. Waiko

Sean Dorney: *Papua New Guinea: People, Politics and History Since 1975* (Random Century, \$16.95).

Reading this book will help the observer to understand some of the extraordinary events of Papua New Guinea politics and people since 1975. Dorney sets the scene with what he calls "fleeting glimpses" – biographical pieces and incidents in chapter 1 emphasising that the "diversity of the people and cultures is the nation's most distinctive trait."

Dorney also recognises that as the nation's young democracy has survived the political storms of the past fifteen years it is likely to have the willingness to resolve the considerable external and internal

problems that will emerge in the future. For instance Papua New Guinea has been able to cope with the extremely complex and delicate issues associated with the Melanesian Irianese on the Indonesia/Papua New Guinea border.

Sean Dorney draws attention to both strengths and weaknesses in Papua New Guinean society. He emphasises the role that Papua New Guinea's free press, radio and television broadcasts and independent judiciary have played in promoting a democratic society. He notes that rapid population growth is a matter of social concern but points out that the subsistence sector of the economy in which people are largely self sufficient is expanding and not contracting. Dorney shows that he is aware that the strength of the subsistence sector, which still accounts for 80% of the population, means that Papua New Guinea has neither beggars nor people starving to death in the urban streets. This subsistence sector in which people have direct access to traditionally owned land and food sources provides the basis for a substantial measure of economic and social security.

He also notes the success of some nationally owned cash-crop production, in particular coffee, where 95% of production is owned by Papua New Guineans. Dorney recognises the fundamental importance of some form of devolution of power to the regions such as has been attempted in the provincial government system since 1976.

Among the weaknesses in the society Dorney notes are vulnerability of the cash economy to the fluctuations of world prices of natural resources particularly copper and oil and cash crops such as coffee and the dependance on overseas aid. He is also concerned about the politically destabilising effects of the votes of no confidence at both national and provincial government levels, and the first past the post voting system under which the successful candidate can be elected with as little as 10% of the electorate's vote. He is concerned about corruption which he believes has its roots in the traditional bigman system where leaders acquired and distributed wealth in order to establish and maintain status and power. In the modern era politicians attempt to emulate the bigman by developing commercial business interests in order to accumulate wealth. Involvement in business often leads to corrupt practices and a conflict of personal and political interests. A further concern is the lack of ideologically based political parties. In a system in which individual and regional allegiances take the place of party loyalties there is a high turnover of politicians with up to half the sitting members losing their seats at each election.



However Dorney sees hope in the fact that Papua New Guinea has successfully compressed into a 'modern state' what he calls thousands of "tiny independent society states" in less than one hundred years. He believes that this rather remarkable feat has been made possible by the adaptability of the people many of whom currently operate effectively in both traditional and modern society, and in the newly emerging society which hopefully will have the best aspects of both. Dorney shows an important sense of perspective on some of the social problems which this transition has caused. He comments, for instance, that "Perhaps the surprising thing about Papua New Guinea is not that law and order is a perplexing problem but that things are not a great deal worse."

While applauding the wealth of relevant material assembled by Dorney, and recognising his perceptiveness and insight into a number of important problems I do not, of course, agree with all his interpretations. In my view he places too much emphasis on the discussion of the possibility of a military coup in the country and takes too seriously those relatively few people who see this as being likely. However, he does quote Pias Wingti's point that a coup will not occur as long as the people have faith in their elected leaders and implies that he believes that the Papua New Guinea people will continue to have this faith.

I am also concerned that he believes that many Papua New Guineans are offended as being referred to as Stone Age people. In my view, and in the view of many of my peers, the term is not regarded as derogatory. In my own 'Stone Age' village society, that is a society in which much of the tradition pre-dates the introduction of metal, there is a great deal of which I am very proud. I, like many of my generation maintain strong links with my traditional society while operating at a professional level in the western 'Space Age' society. I believe that we are fortunate in being in a position to choose the best of both societies as our cultural anchor and enter the 21st century.

In my role as a 'western' commentator I question the need for the amount of detail provided by Dorney in the section on parliamentary democracy and suggest that this might well prove too complex for all except those very closely involved with the events with which he deals. I believe that the point that changing party allegiances are disruptive could have been made without the wealth of evidence which seems more appropriate to a political science article than a publication designed for general readership.

Sean Dorney quite rightly devotes a chapter to

Bougainville and the problems which accompanied the establishment of the copper mine. Conzinc Rio Tinto, and its subsidiary, Bougainville Copper Ltd., was the first transnational corporation to take advantage of Papua New Guinea's rich mineral deposits and in 1967 signed an agreement with the Australian government under which substantial revenue went to the national government but arrangements concerning returns to the North Solomons region had not been made and there was no consultation with the landowners.

It is now generally accepted that, even when acting in good faith, tremendous mistakes in handling this now tragic situation have been made by all concerned, the Australian colonial government, the post-Independence governments, the company and the landowners. But much has happened since gold and copper first came out of the mine in the early 1970s and hopefully much has been learned.

Fortunately Papua New Guinea is a remarkably resource rich country in which all provinces have something to share - gold, copper, oil, timber, fish or fertile land. In this situation we can learn from the experience of our traditional societies in which those who had material wealth shared with others. In a system of delayed reciprocity if someone was short of food or bride price others would provide it and he would return the food or bride price when he was able to do so. In the meantime he was under an obligation to whoever had helped him. This principle of reciprocity sometimes extended beyond the clan to adjacent friendly or allied clans which built up a network of reciprocal obligations.

Papua New Guinea is a nation made up of a number of provinces. We need to apply to the nation this principle of reciprocity. If each province will share its wealth through contributing to the national purse as Bougainville has done the nation as a whole will prosper. However, it is important that we work out ways in which this can be achieved so that the landowners and the province in which the resources are being exploited are the first but not the only ones to benefit from the wealth of the region. If we can devise a national profit sharing natural resources policy which also protects the environment we will have learnt from the tragedy of Bougainville. It is vitally important that the North Solomons remains within the nation at this time. If it secedes it would miss out on the riches that will come from other provinces in the very near future. Dorney recognises that it is of utmost importance that we learn from the mistakes of Bougainville and work out a viable sharing formula before it is too late.

There is, understandably, a sense of urgency in this book concerning the need to find solutions and Dorney has gone to great lengths to make the information as recent as possible. So perhaps it is inevitable in a book that is so up-to-date that there should be signs of material being gathered in a hurry and in some places a feeling that a section has been put together by a computer 'cut-and-paste' of earlier reports. There are, in addition, minor errors of which the naming of Kuk as Kup is the most important, for it is at Kuk that there is evidence that highlands people were amongst the first gardeners in the world. It is also unfortunate that the former Police Commissioner's name is spelt as Tohien instead of Tohian.

In spite of some reservations I wholeheartedly commend the book to you and congratulate Sean Dorney on achieving the remarkable feat of providing information which will help the observer expect the unexpected. Dorney is a good friend of Papua New Guinea for having produced such a timely account of our nation's recent history and politics. I believe that the book should be read by all national and provincial policymakers and hopefully by some landowners who might be made aware of the complexities and the potential danger of parting with customary land.

Papua New Guinea has just celebrated its fifteenth year of Independence. At the Independence ceremonies all national leaders whether in government, in opposition or non-aligned, strongly emphasised the theme of national unity. In so doing, they were consciously or unconsciously, following the footsteps of Michael Somare. Dorney quotes the father of Papua New Guinea's Independence as saying in 1976 when he solved the first major Bougainville crisis:

While the rest of the twentieth century is impatient, violent and insensitive, we are building a nation prepared to be patient and determined to peacefully resolve our differences . . . In Papua New Guinea our ability to seek compromise, and our patience to seek peaceful solutions is something we can show the rest of the world with pride . . . I believe we have shown this twentieth century world what nationhood really means within the first year of our Independence.

*John D. Waiko is Professor of History, University of Papua New Guinea.*

## floating fund

BARRETT REID writes: Well! Thank you very much indeed. Times are tough and getting tougher but, nonetheless, from 12 July to 15 November, our readers donated no less than \$1,269. Specific thanks to: \$100, J.N.; \$75, J.J.W.; \$52, A.S.; \$50, H.N., J.S.; \$32, G.B.; \$27, D.K.; \$26, M.K., E.R., J.D., R.C., D.P., N.B.; \$24, D.B.; \$20, H.F., W.H.A.; \$16, J.S., M.L., D.R., J.L., L.B., R.J.H., D.R.L., D.C., A.S., W.B., L.R.; \$15, V.T.; \$12, E.I.; \$11, J.S., F.S.L.; \$10, M.McK., B.J.R., G.B., D.A., R.D., V.S., D.M., J.McK., A.A.; \$8, M.McL.; \$6, J.G., L.S., R.W., R.B., L.D., F.J., M.D., C. & C.C., F.P.B., R.L., G.L., D.McN., C.MacK., L.C., R.G., J.G.B., H.G.U., T.H., N.D., A.J.McG., B.R., A.L., J.K., J.A.S., J.E., S.C., B.H., G.R.S., L.C., B.H., K.P., G.R.S., G.M., M.S., K.C.P., W.K., T.S., J.B., J.R., H.N., J.R., H.S., J.A., B.S., B.G.M., D.B., R.M., D.W., R.B., A.B., C.S., M.M., J.H., C.K., E.D., B.B., J.H., I.S.S., M.M., B.B.; \$5, R.A., P.W.; \$2, S.P.; \$1, W.F.W., R.R., M.C., K.E., J.C.

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