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MICHAEL WILDING

For Trees

The campus had its square brick buildings and its concrete tower blocks, not especially elegant, but solid and substantial and not cramped, there was that air of spaciousness, of a state where land stretched and buildings did not have to be piled close against each other. And some of the avenues had their trees, high imposing trees with ferns and spanish moss nestling in them, tucked in where a branch grew out of the trunk, delicate green fronds on winter-bare trees only now coming into leaf or blossom.

And then the teaching and administration buildings and the raw dormitory blocks surrendered to a human scale of low timber buildings, breakfast cafés, lunch bars, coffee shops, cluttered down in one corner of the campus, and I hung out here, eating eggs and hot cakes and maple syrup, drinking refills of coffee after coffee, lunching on baked burritos and draft beer, waiting till I gave my reading, watching the life of the students around, no obvious point of entry or connection available, an alien import flown in and soon to be flown out, listed in the campus paper, one of the endless stream of tokens and trophies and deals and exchanges and gambles and investments and loss leaders that passed this and every way, every day, every semester, every year: sitting watching, stretching out the coffee, stretching out the beer, so I didn't get too speedy, too drunk, too off the air for the audience that might or might not eventuate, living suspended in this capsule of otherness, flown in from somewhere no more rooted, no less alienated than this sense of suspension, wondering is this the life, advance purchase bargain discount stay over Saturday night required jet-setting, what grand design can this scratchy itinerary fulfil?

And at the other end of the campus the gaunt dormitory buildings surrender to tennis courts and other courts and pitches and then the wooden frame houses begin, modest, gentle, homely timber shelters with flowering trees around them and along the streets, I have caught it at this fine flowering moment of spring as all the trees break into bloom in the soft damp air. We detour to pick up some beer on the way, my host and I, and his wife pulls up behind us on a bicycle and walks along with us, gentle campus town of flowering trees and bicycles and little timber houses warm in the soft afternoon air.

We sat round the potbellied stove while dinner cooked, sipping the local beer, talking of books and writers, when the tree feller came. We went out with him to look at the tree to be felled, not a big tree at all but one that if not felled right would crash through the roof, or worse, the neighbour's roof, a vigorous young tree in bud.

'We're building on out here,' said Jim. It was a tiny little house and they were stretching it back into the block, and the tree was growing where the house was to be. Maybe they could have stopped just short of it, maybe with a lot of difficulty they could have built right up to it, but that would no doubt have made it more difficult, a clear block was easier to work on, the roots would have been in the way of the foundations and if they'd left it probably the roots would have broken the foundations up. It was not my tree, not my house, not my business, this was logging country, thousands of trees were felled every day and sawn into timber for housing and pulped into paper for newsprint, books, notepads, where would I be without wood pulp, back to plague rags again.

'Shouldn't be any problem,' said the tree feller. 'Tomorrow morning.'

He took out his card and gave it to Jim. His partner's name had been scored through.

'Partnership dissolved?' Jim remarked.

'Oh, he got sick,' said the tree feller.

'An accident?' Visions of crashing timber, broken limbs, impaled organs.

'No, not exactly,' said the tree feller. 'He got mentally sick.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Yeah, well, he's in hospital now.'

'How's he getting along?'

'Oh, I don't think they'll be letting him out in a hurry,' said the tree feller. 'You might've read about it. It was in the papers. He got this belief the people next door were sperm banks for aliens. So he went in there and kind of hacked them to pieces. So – .' He shrugged his shoulders. 'Anyway,' he said, 'tomorrow morning.'

At night I lay in the motel beside the river. The trees leaned over and whispered.

'He was right, you know,' they said. 'They were aliens. So are you, an alien. You are all aliens. But you can be open to us too. The spirits of the hamadryads can enter you and help us. Before the alien human came this was all forest. Everything you see was living timber. No Highway 99. No Best Western motel. No campus cleared for doubtful learning. This was the still soft land of the tree spirits and we lived here in peace. We hurt no one. Whoever heard of trees killing anyone till they started logging? Unless we were blown over in a gale and ourselves killed too, but that wasn't us, that was the windy elements.'

The newspaper lay on the wooden table. The wooden walls kept out the wind. The spirits spoke through the dead timbers as if through a sounding box, like music through a flute or violin.

'Taking possession was not a good way,' they said. 'Taking possession never is. That is what we are trying to tell you. We do not want to chop up aliens. We do not want aliens to come and chop us up. It might have been a dramatic way of making our case. Timber terrorism. But we regret it. As we regret the daily felling of our fellow trees. So you can speak for us now. You can take our message. The airwaves would be preferable to paper and print. Readings. Even just speaking, talking. We have a case. We entrust it to you.'

The tree had been felled when I went back in the afternoon.

'You should've come round,' said Jim. 'It was beautiful watching a professional at work.'

We watched a bit of university baseball on television and then we cleared up the yard, Kathy and I passing timbers to Jim who sawed them into lengths that would fit into the pot-bellied stove with a power saw. Then we stacked the sawn lengths into a woodstack. It took us most of the afternoon, keeping us warm in the air that carried the sharp tinge of possible frost, our breath white plumes, our cheeks pink from the air and the exertion.

'This is about as much fun as anyone gets to have around here on a weekend,' Kathy said, as we looked at the completed woodstack.

Then we went in and had a few beers.

JOHN HIRST

What Grandma Taught

A chapter from The World of Albert Facey *to be published by Allen & Unwin.*

If you have taken part in a fierce bayonet charge, says Albert Facey, you will find it hard to believe in God. At the end of his book he reports that he lost his faith in the Bible and the Christian religion. However, religion went on having an influence on him because he never ceased to believe in his Grandma. She brought him up and her values and teachings stayed with him all his life. She was a devout Methodist.

The Methodist Church no longer exists in Australia; it was one of the three churches which joined together to form the Uniting Church. Even before that it had ceased to be the sort of church which Grandma Carr knew. In her day the Methodists believed in heaven and hell and that God watched and recorded your every deed. You could not avoid hell simply by belonging to a church and going to services occasionally. You had to have been converted which was an intense inner experience when you knew you were sinful and worthless and that God's spirit had come into your soul to help and save you. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, described his conversion as his heart being 'strangely warmed'. He could set an exact time and place to this event: at quarter to nine in the evening on 24 May 1738 in Aldersgate Street, London. Once you were converted you had to devote your life to the Lord and to saving others. You could not live for your own pleasure. In Grandma's time the pleasures which Methodists were most opposed to were gambling, dancing and drink.

Wesley's was a hard religion to follow but many working people welcomed it. Wesley preached in the streets and fields and reached people who had no contact with the official Church of England. Miners in remote villages and workers in the growing towns became Methodists. This church offered them dignity and fellowship with their own kind. When poor people went to the Church of England, they saw the local landowner and other superior people and had to show them respect. In the Methodist Church everyone was called brother or sister.

Wherever mining became a regular industry in Australia, the work fell to experienced miners from Britain, especially from Cornwall where Methodists were strong. In Australian towns deep mining meant large Methodist churches. In the Victorian gold-field towns the Methodist churches packed in many more people than went to the Church of England. At Barkers Creek, where Grandma Carr belonged, the Methodist church was only a small weather-board building, but it was the first and for some time the only church. Though Methodists had plenty of members, they still worked hard to bring more people to Christ. Preachers who could put the fear of God in you were called in to conduct special missions. Meetings were held every night and the miners would be back at the church before dawn to pray that sinners might be converted.

Wesley told his people to work all you can, save all you can, give all you can. Work was not some-thing to be just got through or put up with; it was part of serving God. You took your job seriously and did it to the best of your ability. Working well would not in itself help you to get into heaven. Only faith in God would open the heavenly doors for sinful man, but someone who had been converted would want to work well. So if you were lazy at work it would look as if you had not been saved.

Facey had no fear of hell, but his attitude to work was just as Wesley taught. He took pleasure in doing it and gained great satisfaction from it. That he was working for someone else did not affect his enjoyment so long as he had a fair boss. No work seemed to trouble him - "I liked this work - it was very dirty". He could not stop working. After he retired he kept on doing up properties and selling them. Then he took to writing and wrote three versions of his book before he was happy with it.

In a nursing home at last, when his mind was wandering, he told an interviewer: "They've taken me in and given me a permanent job; I can stay here and work for this company".

People who live only for the moment are not interested in saving. If their earnings are good, they will spend them on something which will give immediate pleasure. Work and bust was a common attitude in the Australian outback. Men would take their shearing cheque to the nearest pub, hand it to the barman, and stay drinking until it was all gone. On the cattle drive where Facey was assistant to the cook the men were not paid or even allowed to go into town until all the cattle were sold. Arthur, the cook, explained why: "If them blokes get their money now they won't be able to do anything because they will be blind drunk, and it would be weeks before they would be any use to the Boss. He knows that. He's had trouble before over booze." When Facey was paid off he put £40 in the Savings Bank. He was puzzled that he no longer ran into Arthur - he was told he was drinking his earnings away in the Geraldton pubs.

This attitude was common among town workers in England when Wesley started to preach. What helped to change it was the increased opportunities for working people to improve their standard of living as the country grew richer. If there is no hope of changing how you live, there seems little point in saving. Spend today because tomorrow might be worse.

Methodists were the last people to spend money on pleasure for themselves. Saving came easily to them. Grandma Carr's advice to Albert, given after she had refused £10 from him to spend on herself, was "Just as hard to spend as it was to earn. If you remember this you will be alright".

Working people who had this attitude were able to feed themselves and their families, buy decent clothes and put enough by for hard times. Since there was no guarantee that you would keep your job, no severance pay when you lost it, and no unemployment benefit to tide you over, you needed to save if you were not to fall into poverty and become reliant on charity. When times were hard, you could do better if you could move to where there was work. When he learnt there was no work in the wheat belt because the harvest was bad, Facey went north to find work in the cattle industry. He could only do that because he had savings which paid for his boat fare and supported him in the Geraldton Coffee Palace until he found a job. He was proud of his savings and they account for what he felt as the Geraldton boat left Fremantle behind: "I felt free. It was a feeling of wonder - not lonely, not afraid - a feeling of independence. Here I was, only three months over fourteen years of age and free to go and do as I pleased."

His savings also allowed him to pay for a holiday to the east when he was 18. He had gone to Western Australia in the steerage, but he went back first class and dined at the Captain's table. John Wesley would not have liked this touch of luxury living. At the end of his life Wesley was disappointed in his followers. They had worked and saved, but they had forgotten his other instruction: to give all you can. Too many of them had become rich. Facey never became rich, but his dedication to work and saving meant that he owned the houses he lived in - "My Grandma used to say that people should

A cathedral amongst the miners' cottages: the Methodist Church at Golden Square, Bendigo.

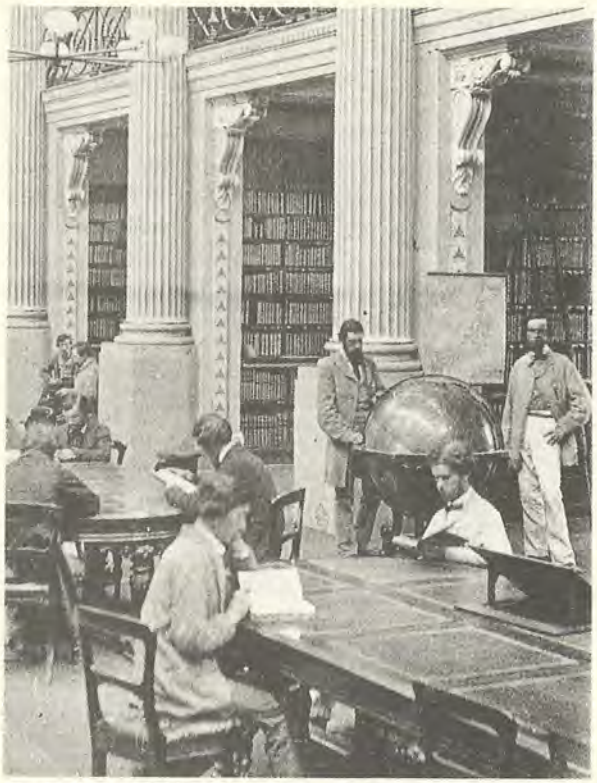
own their own home because paying rent was just throwing money down the drain" – and at the end of his life he was something of an expert in buying and selling property. Grandma Carr was never in danger of owning too much and when we learn that in 1886 she gave £3 to a special fund to further the work of Methodists we know that she was close to following Wesley's advice to give all you can. That amounted to more than a week's wage for a working man.

Savings banks which allowed ordinary people to save were a recent invention. Banks had existed for centuries, but they dealt only with people who deposited and borrowed large amounts for carrying on a business. Ordinary people had to save money by storing it in a safe place – under the hearth stone was a favourite location – or by giving it to someone else to look after. This was not very satisfactory. Money kept at home might be stolen (or burnt) and the temptation to spend it might be too strong. Trustworthy persons to whom you gave your money might cheat or rob you. To encourage ordinary people to save and to make it safe, savings banks were established in Britain by middle and upper-class people. In Australia they were run by the government.

The Savings bank was just one of many institutions to help working people in Britain improve their lives – there were also public baths (for washing, not swimming), public parks, public libraries, cheap or free schools for their children, building societies and friendly societies. All these institutions were copied in Australia.

The Friendly Society was the most important of these institutions in helping working-class families keep out of poverty. Friendly Societies were a combination of a men's club and a medical insurance scheme. They had quaint names like Oddfellows and Foresters and secret knocks, passwords and handshakes. Every fortnight members gathered behind closed doors, put on the Society's decorated aprons, and conducted their meeting according to the set ritual. Every fortnight you also paid your fees which gave you free visits to the Society's doctor, sick pay if you were off work and a free funeral. Sickness of the breadwinner then as now would create a crisis in the family. Since there was no government medical scheme and no sickness benefit, Friendly Society membership kept the family from falling into debt and relying on charity. About 60% of the men in Castlemaine belonged to a Friendly Society.

With all these new services and opportunities, working people had a better chance of improving themselves and becoming respectable people.



The Melbourne Public Library about 1860.

Previously working people were thought of as almost a separate, inferior race. They lived rough, crude lives and this seemed necessary so that other people could live comfortable and refined lives. They were ignorant and it seemed a waste of time or dangerous to try to educate them. They did not have political rights which seemed the only safe arrangement because if all these poor people could vote they would surely use their political power to rob the rich. The overturning of these ideas in the nineteenth century was the first and greatest step towards our more democratic society. As working people became responsible, clean, educated, saving people they could be admitted to full citizenship.

In Britain and Australia one of the most important divisions in society was between working people who were respectable and those who were not. Grandma taught Albert to be respectable. The clearest sign of this is not so much her advice on saving, but that she had taught him to be "respectful and honest". Careful spending and saving was the necessary first step to respectability; to be respectful and honest was part of the very important moral side of respectability. 'Respectful' meant well-mannered and polite, especially to people in authority: "The official-looking man said to me,

'Is your name Albert Barnett Facey?' and I said, 'Yes, Sir.' " 'Honest' meant more than just not taking what was not your own. It meant telling the truth and keeping your promises no matter what the consequences. When Facey, aged 16, was managing a sheep property over Christmas while the owner was away, he was invited by a neighbour, an old acquaintance, to Christmas dinner. He turned down the invitation because he had promised not to leave the property except to go into town to get stores. He ate alone on tinned ham and tinned Christmas pudding.

Parents and teachers laid great stress on honesty in training children. To be naughty was bad; to lie about your naughtiness was ten times worse. In *Seven Little Australians*, published in 1894 the year of Facey's birth, the boy Bunty, aged 6, is always in trouble. His father discovers that he was trying to cover up the damage he had done to his horse. He beats him with a whip and says "Telling lies to save your miserable skin. What sort of man do you think you'll make?" Bunty's father was a general, a part of upper class society in Sydney. It had always been important for gentlemen to tell the truth. Poor working boys like Facey were now being brought up to follow the same rule. Truthfulness became a part of manhood which rich and poor men could share and was a bond between them. It did not operate as strongly among women or between men and women.

When the poor used cunning and lies to protect themselves and overcome their disadvantages, other people could have no respect for them. Poor people who were straightforward and honest could be respected; they were, literally, respectable. Gaining this respect from the rest of society was one of the rewards for the hard work and self-discipline which respectability required.

Was it not very convenient for the rich and powerful to have working people who were hard working, respectful and honest? Some writers argue that in helping working people to improve themselves and become respectable, middle-class and upper-class people were not being generous and humane; they were really looking after their own interests. There is some truth in this. Some of the help came because middle and upper-class people wanted more reliable workers or were afraid that working people would revolt if their living conditions became too harsh. But the idea that working people could be full citizens did not come from people who were afraid of them or wanted to exploit them; it came from reformers and humanitarians who had great faith in the goodness and ability of all mankind, including the poor.

Respectable working people did not act exactly as their helpers had expected. As they became better off and respectable, they launched more effective attacks on wealth and privilege. People who are very poor may lash out in protest, but they usually cannot organise and maintain a trade union or a political party. For that you need some money to spare, a knowledge of the wider world and how it might be different, and above all trust in each other. To start a union workers had to trust part of their wages to another worker as union dues. To win a strike workers had to trust each other to stay loyal even when they and their families were suffering. Honesty and reliability are essential for joint action. Respectable working men made good

The solidarity of respectable men: procession of striking tramway workers, Perth 1910. Facey was a member of the union in the 1918-19 strike and was later its president.

trade unionists, among them was Albert Facey. Because he had been brought up to be respectful did not mean that he would not insist on his rights. It may have affected how he insisted on them. As a union leader he believed that argument and talk with employers was the best method and strikes a last resort.

Facey tells us of his Grandma's training in respectability when he is discussing the lack of toilets on a troop train in Egypt. Because Grandma had taught him to be 'modest', that is, to keep the body hidden and not talk about its functions, he was shocked at the sight of men relieving themselves in low-sided, open trucks with sand in the bottom. This concern for decency, particularly strong among religious people like the Methodists, could make for a very repressed person. The body and its pleasures were under suspicion. This of course had implications for sexual life. About his relations with the opposite sex, Facey says little except that he was very shy with women and that he had nothing to do with Cairo's prostitutes after the army doctors gave terrifying accounts of their diseases. Perhaps the most fortunate part of Facey's life was that with Evelyn Gibson, his first girl-friend, he made such a successful marriage.

One very important thing about a respectable working person has not yet been mentioned. They had to be sober. On this Facey had a faultless record. Alcohol never passed his lips. To be sober did not mean that you could never have a drink. It meant that you were never drunk at work and that you never had to take Monday off because you were still drunk or hung over. Of course it was not only working people who got drunk; a visitor from England said that Australia was different from England because here there were drunks in all classes. At Cave Rock Facey as a young boy had employers who became beastly drunk. But for working people it was much more important to be known as a sober person because it helped you to get a job. Since heavy drinking was so common the first thing that an employer wanted to know about a job applicant was how much he drank. References from these times seem to us very brief. They might say simply "John Smith is a sober, respectable man", but those few words were the passport to success. When Facey reapplied to join the Perth trams the question the superintendent asked was "are you still a non drinker?" "I replied yes, and that I always would be". He was one of three who got work out of 127 applicants.

A respectable working man could scarcely afford to be even a moderate drinker. At a time when nearly all the wage had to go on essentials of food and rent, money spent on drink threatened the comfort of a family. A heavy drinker immediately pushed his family into poverty and was likely to bash them as well. For women a good husband was a man who did not drink or who brought all his pay home to her and spent on drink only the small amount she allowed him.

The Temperance movement campaigned against drink. At first, true to its name, it wanted people to drink temperately, that is moderately. It promoted beer and wine as milder drinks than spirits, which had become the poison of English working people. They drank gin at places which advertised, "drunk for a penny, dead drunk for tuppence". In Australia they went on drinking spirits for a long time partly because they carried and kept much better than beer.

From around 1850 the Temperance Movement tried to persuade people to give up alcohol altogether. At their meetings they gave out certificates and by signing these you promised to give up drinking and to encourage other people to do the same. You had 'taken the pledge'. The back-bone of the Temperance movement in Australia were Christians from the Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist Churches - the three which later founded the Uniting Church. The most enthusiastic Temperance workers were the Methodists. On the goldfields where there were Methodists and drinkers in large numbers a great battle raged. The hell fire preachers at Methodist revival meetings set their sights on converting drunkards to Christ. At Barkers Creek and Specimen Gully in the 1860s the Temperance men thundered on the evils of drink in the midst of 16 pubs. Their greatest success was to get one of the publicans to sign the pledge. He threw bottles and kegs out of his pub and broke them open on the ground.

The Temperance people realised that they needed to match all the attractions of the pubs if they were to keep people from drink. Pubs were community and entertainment centres as well as places to drink, and they provided accommodation. The answer was to offer the same services with something different to drink. These hotels without alcohol were given a name which was meant to be irresistible - Coffee Palaces. In the capital cities they were like palaces. The Victorian Coffee Palace in Little Collins Street, Melbourne had 600 bedrooms and was the largest hotel in the country. The Coffee Palaces at Narrogin, Wickepin and Geraldton, where Facey stayed, were like boarding houses or small hotels without bars, whose owners had taken over the grand name. At the opening of one of the bigger

Coffee Palaces in Melbourne its promoter burnt the licence of the hotel that had stood on the site, but without alcohol the Coffee Palaces did not flourish. They either went broke or broke their pledge and returned to the drink.

The Rechabite Lodge was another alternative to the pubs. The Rechabites were a tribe mentioned in the Bible who refused to drink wine and lived in tents. The Bible was a great embarrassment to the Temperance Movement since it does not outlaw drink and it records as one of Jesus' miracles the turning of water into wine. The Temperance men argued that the wine in question was obviously grape juice. The churches opposed to drink stopped using wine in their communion service and used grape juice instead. But the Rechabites' attitude to alcohol was quite clear so the name was given to a Friendly Society set up especially for Temperance people. A branch of the lodge was called a tent. A Barkers Creek there was tent number 104 called 'Hope of Australia'. The Rechabite Hall was the only public meeting place in the settlement.

Like the other Friendly Societies the Rechabites ran an insurance scheme. They boasted that their rates were lower because their people did not drink and so were healthier. If you broke the pledge you were expelled, though you could be readmitted if you paid a fine. If you allowed drinks at the wake after a funeral of a member, the funeral benefit was cut by a third. For young people there was a junior Rechabite tent. This was to encourage them to sign the pledge before they got a taste for alcohol. To keep them together and away from the pubs there was a regular program of games, talks, sing-songs and excursions.

From the 1880s the Temperance Movement attempted to make people sober by law. They organised the longest protest movement in our history with the aim of reducing the number of hotels and if possible abolishing them altogether. They were very influential; politicians who thought they were fanatics had to listen to them. They could organise very easily because their followers met every week at church and in the Rechabite lodges. Women formed their own organisation to support the cause - The Woman's Christian Temperance Union. They demanded that women should be given the vote so that they could use their influence against the evils which threatened them and their families - and the worst evil was alcohol.

The opponents of the Temperance Movement called them kill joys and coined the word 'wowsers' for them. They replied, yes we are 'wowsers' - We Only Want Social Evils Remedied. They said that if drink could be abolished a great amount of human misery would be removed. All families could live in comfort and without the threat of violence. They were criticised for overlooking some other social evils like low wages or poor housing, but many men in the early Labor Party believed just as strongly as they did that until working men were persuaded to give up drink there would be no real improvement in their conditions.

The Temperance movement did succeed in closing many hotels and reducing the hours they were open. In South Australia and Victoria, where the movement was strongest, they got laws passed banning barmaids from hotels. They said that they were traps to attract men to drinking and often no better than prostitutes. That is why Facey's friend Bill Oliver went to great lengths to explain that his girl, the barmaid at Mullewa, was not like this: "She is as straight as can be and very respectable, and honest as they come. No funny business".

The grandest Coffee Palace in Australia: the Federal, Melbourne.

During World War I an exact measure of the public support for the Temperance Movement was taken. Governments in New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania held referendums on whether hotels should shut at 6 pm. All the referendums were carried. By this time women did have the vote and they were strong in support for 6 pm closing. After these referendums were carried Victoria shut its hotels without a referendum. Victoria had a referendum in 1956 when the government hoped to be able to change the law before the overseas visitors came to Melbourne for the Olympic Games. The people voted to keep the hotels shut at 6 pm.

Lots of people think of Facey as a typical Australian and yet he was something of a wowser and a prude. The image we have of ourselves as Australians and our actual behaviour are related to each other, but they are not the same. Australians have been a nation of home-owners, and we could not have become that if we were all happy-go-lucky types spending heavily on drink. Facey is a good representative of the careful, saving, home-making Australians. Men like this can also be happy among their mates at the pub. Facey was an odd man out in this situation. According to Henry Lawson, he denied himself the strongest bond there can be between men: "in spite of all the right-thinking person may think, say or write, there was between us that sympathy which . . . is the strongest and perhaps truest of all human qualities, the sympathy of drink. We were drinking mates together".

Facey was obviously well-liked and respected, but men always pestered him to have a drink. Be a man, they would say. His best answer was to say that he had promised not to. Now if he had simply signed the pledge that would not have been a good answer. People regularly broke that promise. Facey had promised a particular person and everyone thought keeping such promises was important. He had promised Grandma.

John Hirst, author of The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy *and other books, teaches history at La Trobe University.*

A Coffee Palace of the sort Facey patronised, the Victoria, Fremantle.

COLIN DUCKWORTH

Religion and World Conflict

'May all men remember they are brothers! May they abhor the tyranny which seeks to enslave the mind!'
Voltaire, Treatise on Tolerance, *1764*

"KILL A GOOK FOR GOD!" "THOU SHALT NOT KILL." The first of these apparently incompatible injunctions was seen printed across the helmet of an American soldier in the Australian mini-series, *Vietnam*. The second is better known than respected: the *sixth* commandment. God thought it had less priority than not uttering his name, making graven images, or putting your donkey to work on the sabbath, which might explain why major Christian sects have consistently ignored it. Or is it that Moses realised the limitations of his fellow creatures: "I hear you, God, but they're never going to stop chopping each other to bits, especially in thy name, so let's play that one down, hm?"

Whenever we wish to exhort people to be compassionate, we appeal to their humanity, which is (I'd like to think, but doubt) a deliberate irony, in view of the fact that humanity, as a species, is only marginally above the orang-utan, but not in all respects. While we applied our superior killing skills to simple concerns such as keeping mate(s), food sources or territory to ourselves, or even to slightly more complex ones like power, ambition and wealth, the situation was straightforward if less than perfect. It was one your average shark, gorilla, or lion, would have comprehended fully: survival of the best adapted and most aggressive.

But somewhere along the line mankind began joyfully to kill (and torture and maim) not to survive, but to propagate and impose *ideas*, thus providing overgrown school bullies and psychotic sadists with wholly legitimate and respectable outlets. Some ideologies, such as Christianity and Islam, enshrine the most sublime spiritual aspirations imaginable, and have at the same time occasioned the most cruel and bestial practices. When political ideologies became pseudo-religions, after the first French Revolution, they rapidly assumed the status of most favoured excuses for carving up fellow-humans. And in our own day, the demise of Communism and Fascism having left a vacuum, religion is again taking over as the major cause of international hatred and conflict.

If you have tried recently to initiate a discussion about man's aggressive nature on an appropriate occasion (say, at a soccer match between English and Dutch teams, or at an American bull-pit terrier contest, or at a street rally in Teheran), you will no doubt have noticed some stock reactions: Don't be so negative; Look on the bright side; It's a cause worth fighting for; Think of all the wonderful things religious people have done—Mother Theresa, St. Francis, Ghandi.

One who used to argue along such lines is A. N. Wilson, the novelist, biographer and essayist; but, unable to reconcile religion and acceptable conduct any longer, he has just issued a pamphlet entitled *Against Religion: Why We Should Try to Live Without It* (Counterblasts No. 19, Chatto & Windus, 49pp. £3.99, Australian RRP not yet known). It should be prescribed reading for detailed commentary in churches, temples and mosques, in all countries where freedom of religious debate is allowed. If the idea that cool, rational, unprejudiced discussion could occur in such places strikes you as improbable or ludicrous, you are well on the way to understanding why Wilson's warning about the dangers of religious belief is timely and deadly serious.

Eight days before the pamphlet appeared, the London *Observer* devoted the front page of its Review section to an extract. Predictably, readers counter-attacked massively from prepared positions, before anyone could have read the whole text. Canons, vicars, Franciscans, Abbesses, and the Bishop of Oxford, lined up with someone from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association (UK), against the humanists, atheists, and liberal secularists, making and missing several important points for and against. A highly intelligent response came from Conor Cruise O'Brien, who understood and shared

Wilson's post-Rushdie revulsion, but thought he had overstated his case. (I shall argue that if anything he understated and limited his arguments too narrowly). One non-believer complained he had had his Sunday breakfast spoiled because Wilson had given religion up for such bad reasons.

For many years A. N. Wilson was a staunch defender of Anglican and Roman faiths. All the more surprising, then, that he should now declare religion to be "the tragedy of mankind". It appeals to "something deep and irrational and strong within us, and this is what makes it so dangerous". The Bible stresses that money is the root of all evil. Not so, says Wilson: "It might be truer to say that the love of God is the root of all evil."

These uncompromising words, coming from a once devout Christian, reveal a deep disillusionment and despair that must be treated with respect, for no Christian could have written them without great distress. What motivated his change of heart? Not a falling out with the Church, but Khomeini's *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie. This scandalous affair (views will differ about where the scandal lies) was a revelation to Wilson of a critical situation much wider and deeper than controversial blasphemy laws. Namely, that "first-century AD Pharisees, sixteenth-century Catholics sending heretics to the stake, and twentieth-century Muslims, would all understand one another in this area." Since Wilson wrote his pamphlet there have been knife attacks on two translators of *The Satanic Verses*; the Italian translator, 65, survived, the Japanese translator, 44, died. All these people believed in the absolute universal rightness of their faith, "and for this cause they were, and are, prepared to enforce this doctrine by whatever means necessary, however cruel".

Looking at the increasing violence of religious conflict in the world, he recognises many signs that the spirit of the Grand Inquisitor is still with us, practising his fanatical terrorism openly in some countries, and working away insidiously in apparently liberal societies under the guise of the likes of Mrs Mary Whitehouse (the U.K. version of the Reverend Fred Nile), who "makes no bones about being directly inspired by God", Billy Graham, Pope John Paul II (who condemns intolerance in others but blocks the work of Hans Küng), the evangelical Reverend Tony Higton (who denounced the Queen for attending the annual multi-faith service in Westminster Abbey), and the Reverend Ian Paisley (who "once held a rally at which all loyal servants of the gospel were asked to wave revolvers over their heads").

The many examples Wilson gives of the civil abuse of spiritual power is indeed frightening and cannot be dismissed as unfortunate individual aberrations to which no decent Christian/Muslim/Hindu/Jew would subscribe. Wilson admits that he used to argue that the excesses of religious intolerance and cruelty are human and not religious failings; that persecution and war go on even where religion is abolished. But he can no longer do this. The Rushdie affair has shown us that "where religion is concerned, there is no such thing as a consensus." The peaceful, multi-faith, pluralist society is a secular dream, inevitably anathema to the truly religious, for all strongly held beliefs based on the certainty of direct inspiration by God are mutually incompatible. Even the amiable creator of the Hobbits, J.R.R. Tolkien, took C.S. Lewis to task over the non-imposition of principles regarding monogamy and divorce: "No item of compulsory Christian morals is valid only for Christians," he wrote. I shall re-read *The Lord of the Rings* in a different light now, with less certainty about who the baddies are.

Millions of nice, harmless, benevolent people, who sing humns and pray for world peace, preach the care of the sick and needy, try to love their neighbours, and teach their children to be honest, kind, grateful to God for their dinner and ignorant about sex and evolution, are going to be pretty upset by the accusation that they are endangering the future of civilised society. They will fail to perceive any connexion between their spiritual devotion and the bloodshed caused by religious conflicts in the Middle East, Ireland, India, and elsewhere. But if a charismatic leader started persuading a few, more, then most of your fellow-believers, can you be certain of withstanding the pressure? What makes you so superior to the yelling, arm-waving, hate-filled crowds who bayed for Rushdie's blood? Or to those who jostled and harrassed the peaceful citizens who went to see that nasty blasphemous film *The Life of Brian*? They were being as easily manipulated as the crowds of stolid Germans at the Nazi rallies in Nuremburg. Isn't it possible that our local church seems benign only because it has no power (any more)? The history of witchcraft tells us how recently and easily simple faith was perverted into cruel intolerance in little local churches like yours. Fairly recently the harsh, unforgiving spirit of the Grand Inquisitor showed itself in my local church, and I shall never return there.

Wilson writes out of sickened horror at the excesses to which humans will go in defence of a set of religious beliefs, or in order to convert others. He absolves the Jews from the latter practice (whilst

recognising that "Islam, Judaism and Christianity have all . . . advocated the death penalty for blasphemy"); but then, the Jews think they are born into the club, so naturally they don't seek members. Did Jesus realise how easily the idea that everybody *can* be saved would be distorted into everybody *must* be? Perhaps; as Wilson reminds us, He claimed to bring not peace but the sword.

The problem lies, surely, not with God, nor with religious belief, which Jung has shown to be a deep psychological need, but with us? Humans are simply fundamentally unfit to be trusted with potent ideas they immediately transform into fanatically-held dogma, for which it is not only permissible but glorious to kill and maim any who can be labelled as heretics, infidels, traitors, or subversives. True, the nastiest horrors of our century, perpetrated under Hitler, Stalin, and the Chinese cultural revolution, were not religious (indeed, were anti-religious), but this is proof that the Grand Inquisitor never has any difficulty in finding other systems of ideas (McCarthyism, for instance) to pervert into absolute truths demanding to be defended to the death - the death or social destruction of non-adherents.

Wilson has done himself an injustice by choosing the title he did, for he is not, in fact, "against religion", and admits to still having "strong religious impulses". What he is against is institutionalised bigotry, something akin to the massification Ionesco depicted so brilliantly in *Rhinoceros*. "Reason, justice and sanity," Wilson sadly comments, "are, it would seem from history, less attractive to people *en masse* than violence, chaos, muddle and folly." He concludes: "There is no such thing as collective virtue, only individual virtue."

That naturally brings us to Rousseau. Wilson blames the Englightenment philosophers for simply replacing old superstitions with new ones. In this he is less than convincing, for one cannot lump together the sceptical Voltaire (who would have opposed the Terror as strongly as he did the terrorism of the Roman Church), and Rousseau, whose adulation of the Sovereign Good led directly to the fanaticism of the Terror and the pseudo-religious cult of Reason.

It will be argued that Wilson gives no credit for the selfless works of charity that religious institutions and individuals perform. What about the Quakers, whom Voltaire greatly admired, and whom Wilson does not even mention? Or the Salvation Army, and the church hospices and refuges for drug addicts and others rejected by society? But these wholly admirable activities have no essential connexion with religion. Why should they cease in a secular society? If people are doing good as a *religious* exercise, to amass points in the next world, they score pretty highly on the scale of contemptible self-promotion. Saintly works by some do not validate the self-righteous boorishness of others.

What does Wilson hope to achieve with his counterblast? Not to outlaw religion, but to persuade people of good will that they should work towards a society in which organised religion, with hierarchical, authoritarian structures, is no longer considered worthy of *collective* support. Morris West may be right in saying people increasingly feel a need for religious faith; but as Graham Greene said just before he died, "Religion is a mystery which cannot be destroyed - even by the Church".

Is it too much to hope that people of sensitivity and reason who care about the future of the human race will see in this pamphlet a very necessary warning? Letting humans loose on such a potent force as organised religion is putting a time bomb in the hands of the most indisputably vicious and sadistic species of all living creatures. If we had just one excuse less for aggression, wouldn't the world be a slightly better, safer, and more livable place? Can we afford not to take the matter seriously, before the world's two most militant religions meet head-on with escalating terrorism and bloodshed, to the Glory of God? Or would it mean throwing the baby out with the holy water? Please, don't come to blows as you argue, will you?

In Colin Duckworth's forthcoming psychic thriller, Steps to the High Garden *(Calder Publications, November-December), his reluctant hero is caught up in ideological and religious conflict, cosmic terrorism, and the creation of a new race of beings incapable of violence.*

AMY WITTING

Home to Roost

At ten to nine on Monday morning 3X2 Mathematics, giving in grudgingly to Fate, lined up outside Room 21. Miss Ferris came along the corridor to meet them, tight with fear at the sight of them and shouting down her fear.

'Straighten that line! Stop talking! Stand up straight!'

They shuffled obligingly while she flung open the door, stepped in, hurried out roosterwattle red and pulled it shut.

'Halt! Stop there! Wait quietly!'

At the end of the line somebody muttered 'Stop! Go! Drop . . . dead', the thought of something first-class on the black-board drifted through the minds of one or two, most stood waiting without thinking at all while she opened the door again carefully, sidled through a thirty-centimetre gap and closed it behind her.

In a moment she came out again, opened the door widely and cried 'Forward!'

'Backward!' piped the joker at the end of the line, but the class moved slowly in the right direction, resigning itself to tedium.

'A winebottle and two glasses.' Miss Ferris looked accusingly at the headmaster. 'Used.' In agitation she gripped the edge of the table, which was a fine piece of polished teak.

He looked back at her with a concerned expression which she knew meant nothing – it was the effect of a couple of wrinkles and the set of his eyes – leaned back in his black leather chair and asked, 'Did any of the youngsters see them?'

'No. I shut the door straight away and hid them in the table drawer.'

'Not much harm done, then,' he said too lightly. "What was it, by the way?'

'Invalid port.'

'Good God! At that hour of the morning!'

Seeing the crumpled, desperate little face inflating with rage, he assumed a serious expression and said, 'I'll have a word with Mr Sutton about it.' He would have liked to say 'Sutton' or 'Jim', but the caretaker had a severe inward look which discouraged liberties.

'I hope you will get to the bottom of the matter,' she said in a tone which spoke less of hope than of disillusioning experience.

They looked at each other without enthusiasm, he reflecting on her remoteness from real life as she reflected on his remoteness from 3X2 Mathematics. The prize for innocence was his, since he had no idea what she was thinking, while she saw right into his mind, except for the corner where he was wishing she would take her damp little paws off his polished table. It was Miss Ferris's fate to know a lot about other people but never to know why she annoyed them.

The thought would have pleased her if she had read it. Whenever she came into the office, her face tightened with displeasure at the milk-chocolate carpet, the even milkier walls, the black leather, the shining teak, the biscuit-coloured curtains which hung almost to the floor in stiff folds as rich as an unsuitable dessert, the notes of soft positive blue in the vases and the sunny prints on the walls. When the new wing was built, the Ladies of the Auxiliary had undertaken to furnish the office. They had worked hard and spent freely to create a calming and civilising atmosphere, more conducive to reasoning than to corporal punishment. Miss Ferris thought the effect immoral for reasons which maddened her by their elusiveness.

As for the headmaster – the new décor had had a stronger effect on him than could have been expected from mere furniture. Elegance had become his watchword; he banished the sordid and the ridiculous from his carpet with a neat epigram or an inward-turning smile, so that the mothers, when they met on canteen duty, were soon complaining to each other of the flippancy of his judgements. Surely, they grumbled, it was his responsibility to discipline the children, after all.

'Such a funny thing happened this morning,' said Miss Lloyd a week later at the staff morning tea.

The headmaster looked at her glumly, fearing that the funny thing would be a trivial incident which would involve him in tedious exertion. Meanwhile he considered the problem of Miss Lloyd's legs, which were visible to mid-thigh below a long loose red sweater and a short narrow tartan skirt. They were clothed, indeed, in solid black tights, which might be considered sobering, but on the other hand . . . What attitude should a sophisticated male in authority take in this situation? A disapproving glance? Such was the authority of Miss Lloyd's legs that any glance in their direction would be misconstrued. Why couldn't Miss Ferris make a complaint about Miss Lloyd's display of leg? He would be able to take the matter up then in a worldly way - 'There have been complaints' - no names, of course, but a tone that deplored envious disapproval from the less fortunate of her sex.

'I came in early to draw a map on the board in Room 22 and I couldn't get in because the door was locked. So I went looking for Mr Sutton or a cleaner to open it for me. I couldn't find them anywhere so I went to the office for the key but it wasn't there. Back I went, feeling pretty frustrated, and I saw Mr Sutton just going round the corner into the Fourth Form corridor. I called out after him but he can't have heard me. Anyhow when I got back to Room 22 the door was open.'

'Mr Sutton having no doubt opened it as he passed.'

'But here's the odd thing. I went in and started on my map and then I heard somebody in the bookroom, so I looked in. It was one of the cleaners dusting the shelves. You know the tall bony one who never smiles? The one with black hair in a bun?'

'Mrs Grimsby. A cleaner cleaning. Very odd, as you say.'

'But how did she get there? If the door was locked? And I was only away a minute.'

With a small, yawning sigh he said, 'I feel sure there is some simple explanation.'

'Isn't there a regulation duster? That pink and yellow thing on a cane handle?'

'Yes, there is. I take it Mrs Grimsby wasn't using one. Great are the sins of Mrs Grimsby. What was she using, then?'

The school flag?

Miss Lloyd consulted her memory, which must suddenly have enlightened her, for she blushed translucent pink and muttered, 'I just thought it was funny.'

'Well, if it's not your job, Mrs Russell, don't you do it,' said Vera Johnson, the senior mistress.

Leaning on the handle of her polishing machine Mrs Russell spoke in a worn and plaintive tone. 'I'm sure it would never be done if I left it. There was chalk trampled into the floor on Tuesday and streaks of it still showing Friday. Never a drop of water nor a bit of polish, nothing but a quick onceover with the broom from one week to the next. And a really nasty thing written on the windowsill that stared you in the face for days. I made up my mind not to do it again but I could stand seeing that word no longer. I went in to clean it off and once I'd started, there I was, doing two people's work and getting no thanks for it. Far from it.'

'Why don't you speak to Mr Sutton about it?'

Since Mrs Russell was looking at her with a strange look that suggested distant laughter, Vera said sharply, 'You'll get nowhere making a martyr of yourself, you know. People just think you enjoy it.' This was a sidelong approach to a wellknown weakness in Mrs Russell.

'It goes against the grain with me to leave a room like a pigsty.'

'Leave it just the same.' Vera yielded to the unspoken request. 'If you don't, I won't be able to report it to Mr Blake.'

'Well, if you wouldn't mind, Mrs Johnson. I'm sure I don't see how things can go on as they are.'

Mission accomplished, Mrs Russell switched on her polisher and drifted away in its wake.

Mrs Russell was standing in the corridor with her friend Mrs Wiley when Vera paused beside them and said, in the neutral tone of the mere messenger 'I spoke to Mr Blake about that matter, Mrs Russell. He has mentioned it to Mr Sutton and Mr Sutton says that he is quite satisfied.'

Mrs Russell's eyes met Mrs Wiley's. Round that steady gaze their faces folded into grins.

'Thank you very much, Mrs Johnson,' said Mrs Russell in a struggling voice, catching and biting at her wavering lips. When she looked back to Mrs Wiley they gave way, leaning on their brooms, gasping, sobbing and heaving on a great tide of laughter.

'Satisfied. Oh my God,' sobbed Mrs Wiley. 'Satisfied. That's the word, all right.'

Vera walked on, affronted, leaving them shaking their heads and wiping their eyes. Of course she took their meaning - how could she help it? - but summoning up a mental picture of Mr Sutton and Mrs Grimsby, such a tall, dour, rawboned, uncommunicative pair, she thought, 'It isn't possible.' They must be laughing because the idea was so outrageous.

With profound gravity, the headmaster said, 'You wish me to understand that Mr Sutton has a tendre for Mrs Grimsby' – he pronounced the French word with offensive correctness – 'and that therefore he may be favouring her unduly.'

'It's not beyond the bounds of possibility.'

'That's one department where nothing is beyond the bounds of possibility.'

The headmaster became thoughtful as he took his own words to heart.

'I don't suppose it matters,' said Vera, 'so long as Mrs Russell doesn't have to do Mrs Grimsby's work.'

'I'll have a look at the rooms myself.'

Hadn't Mrs Grimsby become a little too interesting lately? What had someone been saying about her the other day?

Later, he said casually to his deputy, 'You know, I think we'll lock those bookrooms. Miss Ferris is complaining that they reek of cigarette smoke. In fact, it might be a good idea if I kept the keys myself.'

The day the headmaster drove his daughter to the airport he arrived at the school forty minutes early. His office door was locked. Frowning at the lateness of the cleaners, he opened it with his own key, pushed it wide, caught it, pulled it shut and leaned against it, trembling with shock. Then he opened it ten centimetres and spoke through the gap.

'Mr Sutton and Mrs Grimsby, you are to leave the school at once. Take all your personal belongings with you. I shall send whatever money is due to you. Do not come here again.'

Then he leaned against the wall until the lovers came out stiff-faced and walked past him without a glance.

At morning tea, Miss Ferris asked, 'Where's Mr Sutton today? He was going to fix the blind in Room 11, but he hasn't done it and I can't find him anywhere.'

The headmaster turned his answer into a public announcement.

'Mr Sutton has left.'

'You mean for good?'

'I mean for good.'

When someone behind him said in an idiot tone, 'Mrs Grimsby doesn't seem to be here either,' he gave no sign that he had heard it.

As he walked away with the deputy, he thought, 'Say no more. Dignity. Dignity.' What a mistake it would be to say the words that were struggling to be said. Goodbye sophistication, goodbye elegance and imperturbability. He would be a laughing-stock.

He said then.

'On my polished table. The pair of them. On my polished table!'

'Oh, the dirty wretches,' said the deputy with a mouthful of gloom.

The headmaster turned to look at him. The profound sorrow of his expression told the worst. Laughter through the staffrooms, demure faces at morning tea.

'There's been a very lax atmosphere lately,' said the headmaster sharply. 'I've been noticing it in the staff. Those skirts of Miss Lloyd's. Most unsuitable. I'm astonished that Mrs Johnson hasn't said something to her about them. See to it, will you, that she has a word with her?'

ELEGY FOR A BRIEF LIFE

To look on daylight and to close your eyes,
Maria Isobel, perhaps was wise.
We do not know what monsters might be lurking
to bring you a worse sleep or a worse waking.
To ease our grief, we say this death was meant
to be a safe house for the innocent.
But when the birthday candles are blown out,
(for every year an extra one unlit),
when complaining mothers disapprove
of idleness, new fashions or young love,
when they watch, with a complacent smile,
their hope of grandchildren walk down the aisle,
for one there will be silence and a sigh.
So lately born, what a long death you die.

THREE POEMS BY AMY WITTING

CLASS DISTINCTION

The oak is a squire among trees. The hidden
hold
of its muscular roots in the earth is safe from
threat
deep in its private domain. Its heraldic leaves
breathe the forest air. The mangrove has no
estate
but mud and tide. The glossy leaves of the
mangrove
exude the salt of its bitter habitat.

Its roots must suck for breath. The adaptation
has tortured it into the intricacies
of a vegetable Gothic, the high relief
of root upon branch, into flying buttresses
and colonnades. The monkey-puzzle nut
is its sculptured fruit. All these grotesqueries

are naked in air, but the live seeking wood
of its roots takes hold wherever it alights,
puts out a stubble of tough, resilient shoots.
The oak bears the most charming of parasites,
the kissing plant. The thin trunk of the mangrove
bends under the weight of lusty epiphytes.

How far from the oak in its immemorial stand
the mangrove holds and defends the edge of the
land.

LAST LIGHT

Ten minutes after sunset. Still a faint flush
behind the darkening trees. The tall parched
bush
which all day long has drunk the sun and stored
the gold of it stands shining with its hoard
like a stilled hive - all other light receding -
lovely, alone, in its slow fading.

Ten minutes after sunset. The pine has drunk
darkness out of the air and towers black
against a sky of steel. At its far height
a spread of wings - a parrot taking flight
meets a last hidden gleam which from its breast
strikes a long shaft of amethyst.

This last light
the eye holds
beyond the night.

TYPHOON

Heavy air, a tennis ball might stall mid-flight,
yet now at home, still in her whites,
she sees the dragonflies dart and freeze
outside the windows as if this proves

the forecast right. Familiar unfamiliar signs:
a ferry, unleashed and jaunty, from Kowloon
seems to mock the height from which she sees
the streets named for a colony

as if on a screen since, later, cloud
must wipe this view clean. It is like flight;
the airconditioning makes a cocoon of home
with its bedrooms, withdrawn and patient,

the length of postcard-perforated school terms.
Those windows need checking too, for what is coming
could unsettle the Batik bedspread,
the didgeridoo, yet it's no stranger threat

than the cobra she's glimpsed some afternoons
or the maid who, rattled, makes all the precious
glasses ping in mimickry of Cantonese.
She holds her calm like opened mail -

postmarked Hampstead or Rickmansworth
where 'I'm home!' in a husband's voice
might fail pale rooms and engender sameness
while here sampans cluster in the harbours.

Soon lightning teases. Collusion, it seems,
with days that flicker on the edge of China
seen through Peak windows clear as borders
this change must shake. Yet can this date her praise

of such a view while time like coffee percolates?
Kites circle, distantly, upon neutral air -
calm elevated into daring; a shift of light
foreboding wind to which closer trees will cling.

ANDREW SANT

THE COMPANY OF ANTS

He'd gone to earth in a cheap hotel
racked with brain-squalls and the fever's boom,
watching the walls bulge like sails
until the ants restored the right-angles -
a black cord drawn taut on the stone floor
from balcony to waste bin ('No food allowed in rooms').
Captured by their prim urgency he strained
to hear the ant-talk, the susurrus of ant feet,
noting sagely as they eddied round a finger
that northern ants drive on the right.

On day three he rose, shuffled down
the formic track, opened the louvred doors
upon the trombone blast of Rhodes -
the antique sky, the honeyed walls, the little bay
which held the nine ships bound for Troy - and crouched
staring as the living filament tipped down
the whitewashed wall towards ant-secrets
stored within a labyrinth. He turned back
into the room, content to rest a while
within the company of ants.

KEVIN MURRAY

THE FABRIC OF HISTORY

There arose another name
to clothe an old emotion:
revolution means a change
but also a circular motion.
So, whether left or rightist creed
the mightiest bastards win
who hold the hand of greed
in the suit of discipline.

THREE POEMS BY DENNIS NICHOLSON

NEXT TO GOD

For Paul Theroux

If you visited Heaven
And spoke to God
You would be richer
By a traveller's tale -
A slide night
(That's me: surfing The Horn,
Gliding The Alps,
Praising The Lord).
Your environment
Is portable and sealed
With a membrane
That can reduce
The light of stars
To a candela.
If you knew
Of your death
You'd join a church,
Pretending rebirth.

CANT OR WONT?

A necessity for some, laziness
Cannot be made a virtue of -
Unlike the needs of others.

Plough a paddock
With a plane
And you will see
Why I do not build
Pergolas.
I can hammer a nail
Or dig a hole
But who will write
My poem?
You tell me how early
You rise.
You tell me what you do
And would do,
If you only had the time.
Me, I stare into space -
It is my job -
Would you deny me it,
With unemployment
What it is?

TWO POEMS BY JENNIFER MAIDEN

POEM ON A BLACK LEATHER MINI

She smiles, taking notes.
Initially, the current trend
that young girls should wear black
bothered me as much as it did
their parents, still hungering
for colours, but I've grown
a tolerance bordering on
excitement for the practice now.
At first it seemed victorian,
and part
of these prudish, prurient nineties,
or Left Bank and coquettish, like
personified black coffee, or
too Ninja or Viet Cong, but
I can see the sense of the tight
black on the breasts, which hides
the nipples enough for tightness to glide
- and on the hips
as a pure and seamless shape
to straddle hard chairs in long
subtextual conversations. It is black
which indeed has saved the no-bra-look
and kept young armpits springy with dark
curls. It is black which still allows
the sweat from fears, desires and menstruations
to free the air of disinfecting flowers,
and leather to allure without
appearing animal.
What if black also seems sometimes
as indoor as mournings, savage futures?
What
matters is the way her elbows rock
in urgent, pleasant pain upon the table.
She smiles, taking notes,
her black skivvy as factual as a book,
hair kissed back wet above her studied face,
black shadows beneath wide eyes: eyes also
black-cored, black-deep . . .
and poised for other people -
for defence -
for all pooled liquid stealths and concentrations,
in which her black pen fishes like a knife.

THE STROLL

After caressing sculptures,
my daughter - who would never touch
any surface of my paintings - still
fingered some $2 million
item at the Art Gallery, and
an attendant barked out "Don't
touch the paintings," as if
he had waited for this all his life:
as no doubt he had, since few
people do in fact trail fingers
across the latest Van Gogh
preliminary sketch for
some masterpiece they can afford elsewhere.
She was more impressed
by Pointillists, whose myriad dots
changed as she stepped back into art.
She'd asked to see some Mary Cassatt
of whom she has a cut-out doll,
but when I found a volume, her attention
drifted from so many waterbound
portraits of mothers and children. Perhaps
they seemed too familiar, or too droll.
Her fingers began again to stroll
around bronze noses of celebrities,
as if each one were different, each
a refuge for her curiosity.

GOOD FRIDAY
AT THE EXPERIMENTAL ART FOUNDATION

weekends here
are the best: beautiful, quiet
I sit in Caron's & my chair

the one we share, at the
desk *between* our desks,
with the shutters letting in the light

All is white,
the shadows
very diffuse - multi sourced. Light

coming from many directions.

I am beginning to die myself I see

because mostly I sense I cannot see too well,
& have almost a headache.
Julie

types
way across the space
on the computer

the rustle of language that quiet
rattle

Michael came in,
adjusted
some of the new equipment, & left - dressed for

tennis. Julie is dressed differently too
tight pants. Only I am dressed the same
- but I am dying.

And it is Good Friday -
big deal. It will take a while.
I make tea, get paper, start this.

KEN BOLTON

LOVE IN A CORPORATE CLIMATE

Another breakfast done,
we wipe over the surfaces of living
to keep them clean of history.

Sitting in one corner
a child's faint ghost
is banging saucepan lids:
my toy-drum heart keeps time.
The sun is almost attaining
the uncluttered light of dream.

But minutes are passing like cars;
the city calls us to its service.
In ergonomic purgatory
we spend our different days,
commute between the ends of feeling
to arrive at the day's dark terminus
too worn to tend to little things.

The television saves us from despair
at life's diminishing returns:
we share its words and images like food.

Before a taunted sleep
we pray to the board of deities
to grant us more of everything,
report our lack of progress to the night.
On my *Things To Do Tomorrow* pad
I jot the things I meant to do today:
—pay the electricity bill
—tell you that I love you
—buy a soft bear for the ghost.

D. M. LUMSDEN

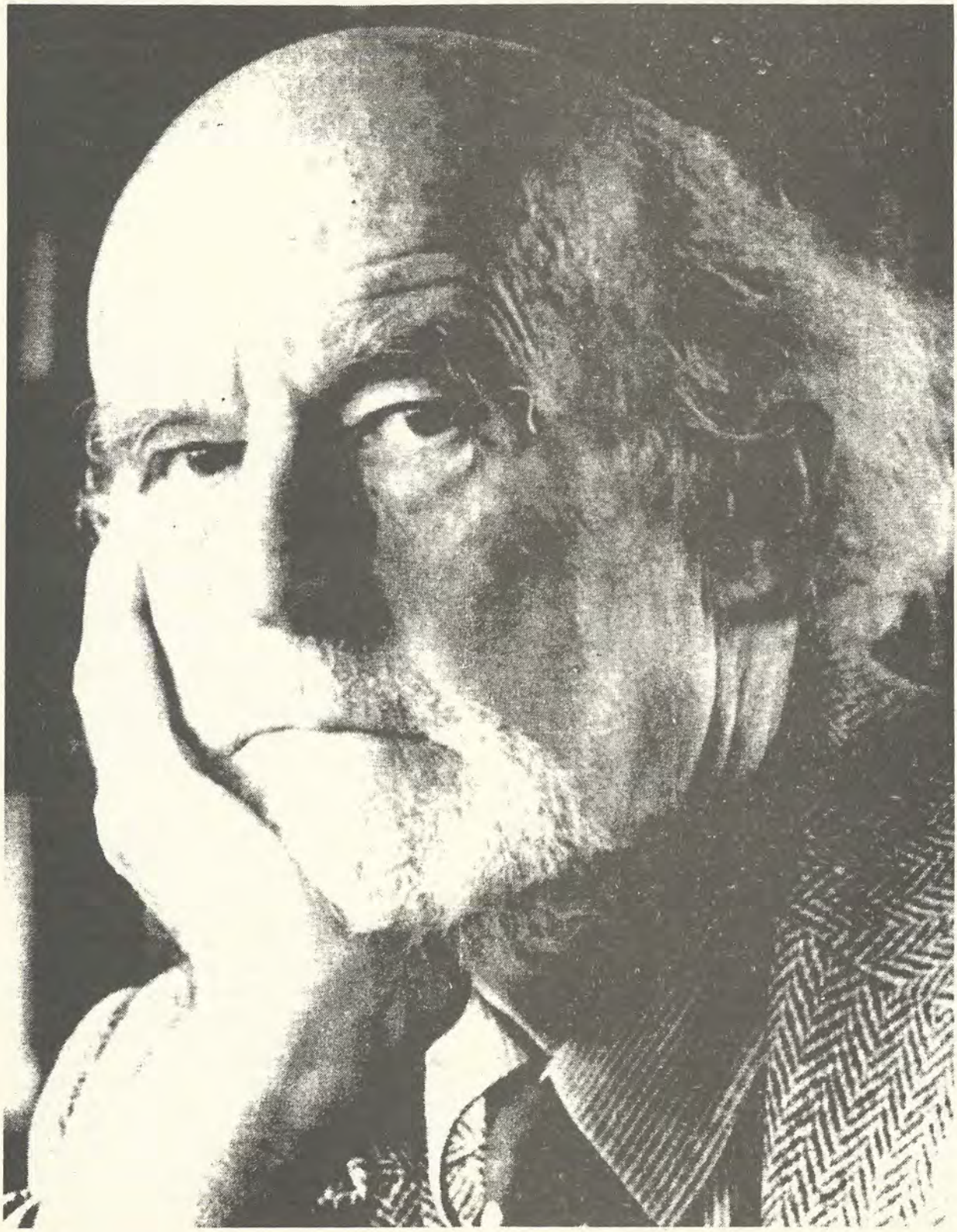
KEN INGLIS

Remembering Manning Clark

The *Canberra Times* obituary celebrates his ability to embrace different traditions of scholarship "by simply drawing scenes . . . of perception and compassion. Through his scenes come the pictures of Australian history and through those pictures come understanding of this nation and its people."

That takes me back. The topic for the first essay in 1949, pinned on a notice board in the old Arts building, was simply PICTURES OF AUSTRALIA. Daunted by such generality, I asked at the end of a tutorial (ten of us jammed into his tiny room) if I could stick to the Molesworth committee on transportation, finding out what pictures they had of colonial society. Yes, certainly; he looked forward to seeing what came of doing it that way. When I went to get the essay back his written comment (my first sight of his pen's spiky scrawl) was encouraging, and there was one point he wanted to ask about. I had quoted from Brian Fitzpatrick's *British Empire in Australia* an epigram from a French contemporary about the contradictory purposes of Botany Bay as gaol and sheepwalk. Had I looked for the original? No? Then let's see, he said, if it's in the university library. So we did, there and then, lecturer and undergraduate, and found the book, read the passage in context and had an animated talk about it. I had never experienced such a relationship, such a sense that teacher and pupil were partners in exploring the frontier of knowledge. It happened to me, and to others in the four years Manning taught history at Melbourne, both because he was a great teacher and because he truly was making his own discovery of Australia. The teacher had a rare hunger for the company of his pupils. He writes in *The Quest for Grace* of fencing the new family house at Croydon in weekend labour with help from obliging students. I remember more talking than labouring on my own weekend visit, and much eating, at the family table piled high by Dymphna. The master rejoiced at any discovery made by his apprentices. When John Poynter and Geoff Blainey wrote original undergraduate essays on wheat growing he urged them to publish their findings, and Poynter did, in the *Economic Record.* (Blainey has written eloquently about Manning Clark as his teacher in *Scripsi* v. 6, no. 2, 1990.)

His own first published work, significantly, done for *Meanjin* while he was still stirring the young and disconcerting the old at Geelong Grammar, was 'A Letter to Tom Collins', a message from the world of cloister and classroom addressed to a creator of literature, and to one of the few novelists who had dared to ask big questions about life in Australia. In lectures and tutorials, Tom Collins and Richard Mahony were presences no less real than John MacArthur and Samuel Marsden. About Samuel Marsden (his ancestor, though we or at any rate I didn't know that), he was sardonic, saying of the pastoral parson that he had taken literally the biblical injunction "Feed my sheep". Biblical and Shakespearean allusions, even when they baffled us, signalled that Australian history was about more than the surveying of land and the carpentry of constitutions. In *The Quest* Manning says that when R. G. Menzies fell in 1941, that was the first time he had ever thought of an Australian as a subject for a tragedy. To students a few years later Manning conveyed as nobody else had quite done an awareness that here too, as in older centres of civilization, history was, or could be, about every aspect of the human condition. Macarthur and Wentworth he rendered as tragic figures, heroes brought down (as in A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*, a book we had lately studied at school) by some fatal flaw. He invited us to consider Wentworth as if through the eyes of Alexis de Tocqueville, subject of the Oxford B. Litt. thesis which Hitler had prevented him from finishing, and which earned instead a Melbourne M.A. Was Wentworth's flaw rendered fatal by the



inescapable conflict between liberty and equality that Tocqueville had found to be characteristic of a democratic society? Marx came up, too, as he did everywhere. If you were a Marxist, that was fine, though the liberal Catholic or the insatiable empiricist was equally welcome. Whatever your stripe, you were expected to work hard at the newspapers and the public records, for Manning was as keen as his first professor, Ernest Scott, on the study of primary sources. It's easily forgotten, after all those volumes of highly personal history, that his first three books were collections of documents. We lucky ones had him lecture to us as he was finding and editing all those basic materials. Perhaps because his immersion in primary sources was so deep by 1949, perhaps for reasons closer to the heart, I recall his lectures, though laced with an irreverent sense of fun, as more sober than legend had led me to expect. The year before, so we heard, he had come one day straight from a session at the pub to give a ribald lecture on the squatters and their sheep. I never knew him the worse or the better for drink in lectures - or out of them, for that matter. When he led me late one afternoon from the Public Library to the Swanston Family Hotel, our companion Brian Fitzpatrick had evidently been there since lunch time, but Manning soon left for Flinders Street and the train to Croydon. Nor did I ever see him affected by the epilepsy which had kept him out of the war, and which he was to describe as the fatal flaw in his own clay, though a cricketing friend told me in 1948 that he had seen Manning fall down on the pitch during an attack. From then on I could see one more dimension in his passion for the epileptic Dostoyevsky.

One day a man with a large camera inserted himself into the room during a tutorial, and in next morning's paper I saw myself shaking hands with Manning across the desk. He had been appointed to the new chair at Canberra University College. The first time I saw him in Canberra, when Geoff Serle and Jamie Mackie and I, ex-pupils all, slept on the floor of the Clarks' prefab in O'Connor, he strode in from the bush carrying a gun in one bloodstained hand and a pair of rabbits in the other. I see that Geoffrey Dutton in the London *Independent* recalls most vividly Manning the fisherman.

When he arrived in Oxford in 1956 with Dymphna and the family after travelling through Asia, he was wearing his broad-brimmed bushman's hat and a long, loose jacket acquired in India. He was on sabbatical leave from Canberra, and he and Dymphna had been visiting sites and reading documents from Jakarta to Bombay in preparation for the early chapters of that history of Australia he had resolved to make his life work. You could see it coming in parts of the introduction to his *Select Documents in Australian History 1851-1900*, gnomic and quivering passages which burst the form, and in his 1956 essay 'Rewriting Australian History', a manifesto for an enterprise in the line of Gibbon, Thucydides, Carlyle and Macaulay but wholly - preposterously? - devoted to Australia.

He was back in a dark suit for a party in Balliol put on by Murray Groves, from Melbourne. (The Bohemians of the heart, he used to say, wear suits - though he chose, at least later, to let red socks flash between cuffs and shoes). I hear him talk with Murray's mentor Evans-Pritchard, Professor of Social Anthropology.
Evans-Pritchard: *Is* there a history of Australia?
Manning: Do you mean has there been any, or has any been written?
Evans-Pritchard: Both.
Manning: Yes.
The word came from what Manning somewhere describes as his granite face. That stony stare could make victims less resilient than an Oxford professor feel as chilled as Don Giovanni when visited by the statue of the Commendatore. Manning was still in Oxford when I qualified for my doctorate. He rejoiced, and gave me a copy of Jack Simmons' new life of Tolstoy, warmly inscribed.

I joined his department late in 1962, in personal circumstances which made me a beneficiary of his rare gift for helping lame dogs (the desperately drunk, the failed, the bereaved and otherwise afflicted), and just when volume 1 of *A History of Australia* was exciting, bemusing and outraging reviewers. HISTORY WITHOUT FACTS, declared the *Bulletin* over its review by M.H. Ellis, biographer of Macquarie and malign right-wing journalist. Other writers worried about the prose. On that score the author could have been well content with Trollope's words about Manning's hero and model Thomas Carlyle: "He cannot write, said the critics. No matter, said the public; we can read what he does write, and that without yawning." As for the facts, Bede Nairn's judicious study dismissed Ellis and other hostile critics as nit-pickers who had even exaggerated the number of nits they had picked and who had confirmed, rather than diminished, the stature of the work. Nairn wrote from Sydney, not from Manning's Yarraside, and published his essay not in an academic journal but in the Catholic review *Manna*. The initiative for a symposium held

after the book's first year of life came likewise from Sydney and from outside the academy, when Peter Coleman persuaded Manning and a variety of commentators to gather for a day at the Hotel Belvedere under the auspices of the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom. Nairn's piece and the transcript of proceedings at the Belvedere, well summarized by Stephen Holt in his book *Manning Clark and Australian History* (1981), will be precious sources for any historian wanting to trace the mysterious process by which a creative mind begins to transform the cultural landscape. My own most vivid memory is of Manning at the end of that day, gazing at the sea as he often did from Sydney Harbour's South Head, not savouring admiration or smarting from criticism but remorseful at having momentarily lost his temper at an old antiquarian. "I shouldn't have attacked a man with one leg", he said to the ocean. He had listened courteously, not granite-faced, to every speaker except this one, who had tried to pick a nit in a translation from the Dutch, innocent of the knowledge that it had been done by Dymphna.

The academy, in Melbourne and elsewhere, gave that first volume a rather awkward reception. Manning never forgot those university historians who supported him against knockers: Nairn, Allan Martin, Laurie Gardiner, and among his seniors Sir Keith Hancock and Max Crawford, to both of whom he dedicated the second volume. I came to Canberra soon after the Menzies government shot-gunned a marriage between the Canberra University College and the Australian National University. That made Manning's department and Keith Hancock's in the Research School of Social Sciences not just neighbours but in some sense family. Manning was at first uneasy about this relationship with the returned Anglo-Australian, and I don't know whether their rapport was helped or hindered by their both being sons of the Anglican vicarage. (As I learned only from *The Quest*, Keith Hancock's father had buried Manning's). I think Hancock set out to charm Manning into an amity that was sealed when Hancock wrote to the *Bulletin* eloquently rebutting Ellis.

Within his own department Manning gathered the most diverse of available world-views. Like Hugh Stretton in Adelaide, he believed that intelligent scholarly extremists were valuable not despite their bias but because of it. Before I arrived, Manning had been guided by a narrow majority in the department to appoint not the former communist and still vigorously Marxist Ian Turner, but the sternly Catholic Tim Suttor, the one university historian in Australia and perhaps the world who believed that the devil intervened in history. I suppose Manning accepted that the left was strongly enough represented in the group. As Bill Mandle observes in the *Canberra Times*, Manning coerced none of us. "Odd department", said a brisk British visitor, "people teaching subjects outside their competence." Manning and Max Crawford had both been schoolteachers, and that disposed them to think that undergraduates too could be well taught by generalists. In one respect I was teaching American history in 1963 as Manning had taught Australian history in 1946, keeping just ahead of the class. Certainly he helped to delay the coming of a specialism which Stuart Macintyre and others now lament.

For six months Manning was acting Principal of the School of General Studies in the ANU, a post which he filled with diligence, grace and amusement, doing a properly Apollonian job while allowing himself Dionysian fantasies. He told me he had a dream in which he ran around Canberra's Civic centre stark naked. The sturdy Australian Vice-Chancellor says: "Professor Clark! I *am* surprised!" The daintier English Deputy Vice-Chancellor says: "Well, I'm not *altogether* surprised." On committees which decided people's fate – life-and-death jobs, he called them – he always felt for the victim and shivered when he sensed around the table any pleasure in the task of executioner. As an administrator he did not excel at mere counting. When I was acting head in his absence overseas I found that by the formula for allocating academic staff we were entitled to three more than we had. But at academic diplomacy requiring higher skills than arithmetic he could be a master. If he believed that somebody should be appointed to a job, he was tireless, even relentless – *steely* is the word of one impressed patron – in the cause. And he was wholly successful as emissary to Harvard when he conducted tricky negotiations over the chair of Australian studies that was our government's bicentennial gift to the USA.

I was travelling on a pilgrimage to Gallipoli in 1965 when a telegram from Manning told me I had been appointed to a second chair in the department. I must be among hundreds who cherish his telegrams and postcards to and from all over the world, messages of congratulation and comfort, inspiration and fun. Amirah and I had a telegram of blessing a few weeks later when he was away from Canberra and unable to join Dymphna as witness at our wedding. Dymphna had us back to the house in Forrest after the ceremony, for cake and Swedish salad and champagne and a puppet show from Rowland and Benedict, the fifth and

sixth children. We had many a meal at their table, a place of plenty and gaiety and - no matter who sat there: student, artist, famous globe-trotting novelist - of unaffected domesticity. A telegram was delivered at our house the day before we left for the University of Papua New Guinea in 1967: GIVE THEM GLORY.

His stamina was astonishing. The second large volume of his *History* appeared in 1968, the third in 1973, the fourth in 1978. Day after day he climbed up to the study at 6 or was it 5 a.m., paused for breakfast and perhaps some serious or light-hearted phone calls, and mounted again to write for the rest of the morning. His writings and his increasing public activities made him a sage, and in the Whitlam years he was, as he said, a courtier. Meeting him at intervals, I found him less than happy as a teacher. The ANU had its share in the Vietnam years of students moved to a principled violence in which the university became the vulnerable organ of a society judged to be in need of destructive change. Their resort to physical aggression, even if that meant no more than sit-ins at the Chancelry, troubled him, however much he sympathised with their yearnings for a good society. They in their turn - or enough of them to be distressing - heard in him a voice from a gentle and irrelevant past: a darling Dodo, as he used to say of others in the 1950s. Going to that chair at Harvard in 1978 was providential, supplying again the thrill of knowing that students were having their minds stirred by his words and presence. Harvard and open-heart surgery each contributed, I think, to a rallying of body and spirit which makes volumes 5 and 6, published in 1981 and 1987, the most genial of his works. The critics also mellowed. By the end Barry Oakley could write without much dissent that Manning Clark, like Patrick White, had been "one of those writers who has changed the significance of what it means to be born in this country."

Each of the last three volumes has two frontispiece portraits: Henry Parkes and Henry Lawson; Alfred Deakin and (again) Henry Lawson; Robert Gordon Menzies and John Joseph Ambrose Curtin. The last two were antagonists in life; in each of the other pairs, one man is made to stand for an independent Australia, the other against. As the history approached closer and closer to drama, Manning's young admirers were right to think of turning it into a play. Like no other accounts of Australia, the scenes, the pictures, are there waiting to be animated on stage; and as a lifelong lover of popular songs, he was delighted that they set the play to music. It was an affecting moment, at the end of the first night, when art met life as Manning and Dymphna, after curtain calls, walked shyly on the stage where Ivar Kants and Michelle Fawdon had been impersonating them all evening - each actor, oddly, sounding more Australian than the original, he with less of Manning's father and Melbourne Grammar in his speech, she with none of the Europe still gently audible in Dymphna's. Later that night, in the lower Melbourne Town Hall, occurred a marvellous scene, a meeting of Manning's diverse worlds at which Bob Hawke thanked him passionately on behalf of the nation for communicating his love of Australia.

In the whole Bible the book Manning invokes most often is Ecclesiastes, the Preacher. Feeling bereft on the other side of the world, we mourn him at Evensong in King's College Chapel, under the soaring vaults that are a metaphor for heaven. The first reading is from the third chapter of that Book. *A time to . . . A time to . . . A time to . . .* I can hear Manning declaiming it, and I remember that posterity will be able to see as well as hear Manning as preacher, in the film from Peter Carey's *Bliss*.

A time to die. For those of us who do not share the Preacher's vision of eternity, that is the hardest of things to believe. But standing back from Manning's death, one does have a sense of things completed. The six volumes. The two books of autobiography, with the loving, confessional acknowledgement to Dymphna. The whole family, from three continents, home for his 76th birthday on 3 March 1991, and soon after that the wedding of his last unmarried child, a festival at which he gave and received much happiness. When Andrew and his companion told his parents very early on the morning of 4 March that they were to marry, the paterfamilias got out of bed, went to the record player and filled the house with Handel's Hallelujahs.

For the funeral service, his last creation, Manning chose words less triumphal. Some time last year we talked about Tolstoy's story 'The Death of Ivan Ilych'. He read it often, he said, and drew comfort from the moment at the end when the dying man catches sight of the light. "In place of death there was light. 'So that's what it is!' he suddenly exclaimed aloud. 'What joy!' " The mourners who filled St Christopher's co-cathedral in Manuka sang Manning's two favourite hymns, each an entreaty for light: 'Abide with me', with its exhortation "Shine through the gloom", and Newman's 'Lead kindly light', which spoke as directly to him as any

prayer in the liturgy. The Enlightenment forms one element of the triad he imposed on our history. In cosmic contest against Protestantism and Catholicism he found that worldview wanting; but in a larger sense enlightenment, illumination, is what he sought for himself and offered us to the end. The world is darker for his leaving it. As Dymphna and the children and grandchildren say in their death notice: We shall never see his like again.

K. S. Inglis, Professor of History, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University since 1977 edited Nation; the Life of an Independent Journal of Opinion *(Melbourne University Press, 1989). Among his many books is* This is the ABC, *a standard work.*

D. W. A. BAKER

Manning Clark

Charles Manning Hope Clark (3 March 1915–23 May 1991) asked his friend Don Baker to give the eulogy at his funeral service. This is the text of the speech delivered at St Christopher's Cathedral, Manuka, on Monday afternoon 27th May.

Manning Clark was a teacher and writer of history – especially of Australian history. Indeed one might almost say he invented Australian history, at least as an accepted and respectable academic subject.

He started teaching Australian history as a second year unit in the University of Melbourne in 1946. Earlier there had been, here and there, a little teaching of Australian history as an appendage to modern British history or as a part, a fairly minor part, of imperial history. But Manning was the first to establish Australian history as a year-long unit in its own right.

It is a tribute to his extraordinary success as a teacher that it is now difficult for us to understand what a revolutionary step he took in 1946. Very few at that time thought Australian history was worthy of serious study. Did Australia have a history that was distinct from English history? In schools, if we learned any Australian history at all, we traced the routes of explorers on a map marked with lines of different dots and dashes. How could this possibly be an academically respectable subject?

Where were the books which students would use? The published literature on Australian history was very thin despite flashes of illumination provided by writers like Timothy Coghlan, Eris O'Brien and Brian Fitzpatrick. So Manning perforce taught Australian history from the original documents.

Students were obliged to study these original sources for themselves, to examine their reliability and to evaluate their worth as evidence. This was a difficult task and by studying the sources Manning's students were trained to be scholars at the same time as they were being excited by their discovery of our past, prompted and led by Manning's brilliant teaching.

Many of his students went on to teach Australian history in schools and universities. They were assisted by Manning's publication in 1950 and 1955 of two volumes of *Select Documents in Australian History*. A glance at their bibliographies will indicate the extended range of his scholarship. They have proved to be marvellous teaching aids for generations of students.

Today, forty years or so since Manning began teaching Australian history, the subject has become firmly established. It is taught in every Australian university history department and it is inconceivable that any new history department would be established that did not teach Australian history.

This transformation of historical scholarship has, of course, not been due to Manning alone. Many tides and currents have mingled in the waters of an intellectual life, but it is surely significant that Manning's students are to be found in senior positions in universities in every capital city from Brisbane to Perth, including, at the extremes of north and south, Darwin and Hobart.

So Manning has been a great academic teacher. He has also been a great teacher in the wider community as well. So much so that many have thought of him, with his beard and his broad brimmed hat, as an Australian icon. One lady, a stall holder at the local market, saw his picture on the television and said how sad it was about that lovely old man.

He would never refuse an invitation to address an audience. He spoke frequently and eloquently

on the radio and television. Most importantly, perhaps, it was through his books that he reached the public at large - and not just the Australian public. Copies of his *Short History of Australia* are to be found in bookshops across the United States of America, often in places where no other Australian writers are stocked. It has been translated into several other languages including Japanese, Korean and Polish and Manning has told me how pleased he was, on a recent visit to Rome, to discover at the airport an Italian edition for sale alongside Italian paperbacks.

The six volume *A History of Australia*, published between 1962 and 1987, is, of course, his greatest literary achievement. Here, more fully than anywhere else, he has shown us his vision of our past, a very personal vision, as he has often pointed out, implied by the title: *A History* not *The History of Australia.*

When the first volume appeared some critics were savagely disparaging. Manning was deeply hurt by these attacks but he later learned to live with whatever reviewers might say and could laughingly claim to be the most mistaken historian of Australia.

Later volumes added to and amplified his view of our history and of what sort of people Australians are. For any comparable vision of Australia I think we have to look to works of fiction like Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life*, Henry Lawson's short stories or Henry Handel Richardson's *Fortunes of Richard Mahony*.

It is, I think, a little ironic that this should be so. Very few Australians (though Dymphna Clark is one of them) have so deeply and thoroughly immersed themselves, as did Manning, in the culture of the old world. Few have known as much as Manning did about the history, the languages, the literature, the music and the art of Europe. Yet no-one of his generation has done half as much to arouse in Australians an awareness of our past and a recognition of our national identity - not as Austral-Britons, to use the phrase of an earlier generation - but, quite simply, as Australians.

In some ways Manning was a very typical Australian. One way was in his love of sport. There will be some older people here today who will remember the delicacy combined with authority with which he would take a couple of steps down the wicket to loft a slow bowler over the fence. It was thus, or so he sometimes liked to claim, that he dealt with Hedley Verity when playing for Oxford against Yorkshire.

He was also passionately fond of football although, I regret to say, he persistently, even wilfully, continued to barrack for the wrong team.

Manning was also Australian in his distrust of established authorities, in his dislike of "spiritual bullies" and in his sympathy with the underdog. I think my favourite character in his *A History of Australia*, drawn with great understanding, is a convict called Williams (unfortunately omitted from the index to volume 1) who was observed drinking rum beside his wife's grave. For every glass he drank, he poured another over the grave. When asked why he did so, Williams replied that it was because she loved it so when alive.

Australians are capable of hard yacker. Manning was too. His literary output, combined with his teaching, demanded the sternest self discipline. He had a darg - so many words to write each morning before coming to the University to teach in the afternoon. If a faculty meeting demanded earlier attendance at the University, he would just get up several hours earlier than usual to accomplish his allotted task.

Manning loathed giving orders. I suspect he never did. John Ritchie has recently and correctly remarked that Manning led by setting an example. I once heard him give advice on how to run a University department. "Talk to everyone"; he said, "find out what they want to do and then encourage them to go away and do it."

I suppose Australians are a reasonably friendly people but Manning had an astonishing capacity for friendship and a great sense of fun. He made friends easily and loved them deeply. All sorts and conditions of people became his devoted friends. Friendship transcended differences of race, political beliefs and nationality. Sometimes such friendships got him into trouble when patriots during the war thought him disloyal for grieving over the terrible fate in Stalingrad of German friends he had made when studying in Bonn in 1938.

Unlike most Australians, Manning talked a lot about death. He often brought to mind Dostoevsky's words: "I want to be there when everyone suddenly understands what it has all been for."

Whether Manning finally understood this we will never know.

He once discussed the question with an academic in Mexico City. Manning asked him if he thought there was life after death. His friend modestly replied, "I entertain a shy hope."

Manning too always entertained such a hope. It is part of an Australian tradition older than European settlement here. Two hundred years ago, David Collins, one of the earliest chroniclers of New South Wales, talked with his Aboriginal friend, Bennilong, about the afterlife. Bennilong told Collins that when people died they returned to the

clouds from whence they had come. But, Bennilong said, they didn't do so all at once. They assumed the shape of little children and hovered for a while in the branches of trees, eating little fishes which were their favourite food.

Collins did not think this ridiculous. Before laughing at the notion, he suggested, we should ask whether it was any more extraordinary than the belief, held by many Europeans, that at the last day the various disjointed human bones should find out each its proper owner and be re-united?

He added, like the 18th century rationalist he was, that "the savage here treads close upon the footsteps of the Christian".

Farewell Manning Clark.

D. W. A. Baker, author of John Dunmore Lang *(1985), taught history at the Australian National University until his recent retirement and is now working on an historical biography.*

floating fund

BARRETT REID writes: To greet the spring a flowering of donations to a total of $893 between 30 May and 4 August. Just as well as Australia Post increased its bulk postage rates on 2 September. Your lively notes and comments after each issue are interesting and encouraging; sorry I cannot answer all of them. Specific thanks to:

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PATSY POPPENBEEK

Black Women in Australian Writing

The similarity of racial to sexual chauvinism is fairly well-known; however, a survey of Australian literature and drama indicates the presence of curious interactions between the two.

Early Australian writers, when they mention Black Australians at all, tend to treat them either as males or as an homogeneous mass without any characterization except that of 'aboriginality'. Thus, except for two minor domestically-oriented scenes, Kingsley's *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn*, refers to Aboriginals *en masse*: as, for example, "the brutes" whom one hero sheepishly confesses to not liking to shoot, and "the devils" who are euphemistically "given a lesson" (massacred) after his death. Rolf Boldrewood's *The Squatter's Dream* characterizes one Aboriginal woman. Similarly, Brian Penton's *Landtakers* never mentions children or the elderly, though a woman is mentioned once, and his massacre scene makes the Aboriginals one undifferentiated mass of "black" or "huddled bodies". The impression conveyed is not only that was it imperative for the heroic pioneers to eliminate the native people, but that such slaughter was that of young males - warriors - and not that of rather more helpless and inoffensive children, elderly, and women. The language used deflects ethical enquiry.

On the rare occasions when a Black Australian is treated as an individual and at some length, he (this character is almost invariably masculine) is the hero's faithful native companion. This role has ancient and respectable precedents, rooted as it is in the rustic buffoons and clever slaves of Greek and Roman comedies. In the Australian melodramas of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the part retained much of its antique respectability, for while the Aboriginal assistants were frequently comical (a characteristic of the role), they were nearly always secondary heroes. Thus the Warrigal of Dampier and Walch's stage adaptation of Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms* rescues Starlight from the last, apparently fatal shootout by pretending that Starlight is dead, nurses him back to health and restores him to Eileen. Nardoo, in Edward O'Sullivan's *Cooee: or The Wild Days in the Bush Forty Years Ago*, invariably scouts for danger, leads Bailey the hero to the rescue or does the rescuing himself when Bailey is incapacitated. As Margaret Williams pointed out in *Australia on the Popular Stage*, for approximately a century "a succession of nimble Aboriginal characters leap to the rescue of a series of very dim-witted Anglo-Saxon heroes and heroines in the role of the faithful servant-clown." In the *novels* of the era, however, the same character is present in degraded form: he is generally incompetent, animal-like, superstitious and the one who is rescued.

The colonial view of Black Australians, as conveyed by the writers, divided them into the categories of tame and wild dog. The faithful native companion falls into the first category, though the stage Aboriginal recalls a more noble character type; and one Black Australian character, Boldrewood's appropriately named Warrigal, is a mixture: tame dog to Starlight and wild dog to everyone else. The Aboriginal as tame dog continued the tradition of the clever, comical servant-slave, though only the theatre retained this type's more admirable characteristics. The idea of the Black Australian as wild/tame dog offers obvious benefits to an invading group, as it justifies their actions; however it also demonstrates a 'Pocohontas' effect.

Pocohontas was the daughter of an Indian chief who saved the life of John Smith by throwing herself between him and her father's axemen. Just as somehow Gilles de Rais was transmuted from an evil murderer and sexual mutilator of young boys into the semi-heroic Bluebeard, the killer of nosey wives, Pocohontas has evolved into characters like Uncas, Chingachgook and Tonto in America, and in Australia into the helpful Aboriginal. Male pride and propriety changed her sex, and racial pride switched her from the rescuer to the rescued, at

the same time providing the helpful native with gratitude as motivation for his devotion. Perhaps a conquering group needs the love and reverence of the conquered as additional justification for conquest.

The convention of the loyal native companion was so well-known that his presence and helpfulness needed minimal, if any, explanation. Thus while Jacky of *Never too Late to Mend* is saved from drowning by hero George, and Nardoo of *Coo-ee* is devoted to the *heroine* because of her "attention" to him when he is injured, the devotion of other faithful companions remains unexplained. The oddity of this was noticed by one of the heroes. Boldrewood's Starlight, who habitually thrashes Warrigal, comments: "Why he should be so confoundedly anxious about my welfare I can't make out - I can't, really. It's his peculiar form of mania, I suppose." The answer, of course, is that Warrigal conforms to a convention.

The similarity of the faithful Aboriginal to the female stereotype is striking. Both are dual: he is either a wild or tame dog, as she is either damned whore or God's policewoman. In either part he, like her, exists to reflect the delicious superiority of the white male. Like the passionately devoted wife or mistress, the faithful native companion finds true fulfilment through subjection to his master. Like her, his resources enable the master to conquer the world; and like her he is a secondary character, either mute or speaking an inferior language, and somewhat mysterious and despised. The sado-masochistic nature of Boldrewood's Warrigal is stereotypically 'feminine', and it is interesting to note that the stage Warrigal dresses in women's clothes, Starlight 'dies' in his arms, and he nurses Starlight back to health - all characteristically female roles. Aboriginals are typically called 'boys': they will never be *men*. Favenc's sniggering short story, 'The Parson's Blackboy', in which the 'boy' given a naive parson as his servant turns out to be a woman, thereby leading the manly priest to adopt one of the foremost "customs of the country", is true on a deeper level than intended. The conventional faithful Aboriginal is actually a stereotyped faithful woman in male guise.

It was left to two women to return the native companion to her true gender by introducing sexuality into black-white relations. Gypsy Kelly's short story, "Forbidden" (in *Australian Short Stories*, ed. Mackaness, 1928) and Katherine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo* first used this theme seriously. In the hands of these women, a by-product of their examination of the so-called "black velvet" problem was that the status of Aboriginal characters was raised, if not to full equality, at least to a higher level than had hitherto been granted them outside the stage.

Kelly's story is undeniably racist - as when Daley the hero puts "an arm about her *black* [my emphasis] shoulders. The urge of passion died instantly. No longer was she female - but forbidden!" However, while Dorcas' blackness causes detumescence in at least this virtuous white male (thereby confusing the issue Kelly was attempting to tackle), the author raises her heroine's status somewhat by endowing Dorcas with the characteristics and the fate of a romantic heroine. After the girl finds the lost hero and they are discovered in their compromising situation, Daley is killed by her villainous fiancé. Dorcas casts herself upon the fatal spear, expiring soundlessly except for murmuring her lover's name because, "In the female of all humans one instinct will survive supreme even in the face of death". Not great literature, but Kelly should be given the credit for substituting the romantic stereotype of the love-lorn human female for that of the animal or proto-human typical of writers like Reade, Favenc and Penton. While it may be objected that the stereotype of the doomed romantic heroine is a limited and powerless one, and romantic Aboriginal heroines such as Prichard's Coonardoo and Durack's Dalgerie are certainly both submissive and ill-fated, it is an improvement on the dog image.

This ambivalent improvement is evident in *Coonardoo*, which was regarded as an advance on the stereotype of the Aboriginal woman - and accordingly disliked. For example, Cecil Mann sneered:

"With any other native, from fragrant Zulu girl to fly-kissed Arab maid, she could have done it. But the Aboriginal, in Australia anyway, cannot excite any higher feeling than nauseated pity or comical contempt."

Certainly, in contrast to the popular vision of the Aboriginal as grotesquely and comically ugly (and hence sub-human), Coonardoo is beautiful and desirable: "As handsome and spirited as an unbroken filly, she tempted every man who saw her to the breaking and handling . . .". The Aboriginal as a beautiful horse, an image which is repeated in regard to Coonardoo's husband Warieda, is more appealing than the Aboriginal as dog; however, it is still the Aboriginal as animal and as resource for the conquistador.

This is also a criticism which can be levelled at the use of Coonardoo as a mediatrix to the land and to the generative principle without which everything dies. That Prichard does so use Coonardoo is generally accepted, and the references to their

love-making cited. Thus when Hugh made love to Coonardoo, he "gave himself to the spirit which drew him . . . to the common source which was his life and Coonardoo's". She is:

> Something primitive, fundamental, nearer than he to the source of things . . . You had to keep in the life flow of the country to survive . . . what was the impulse of man to woman, woman to man, but the law of growth moving within them?

The novel does indeed come close to making Coonardoo a kind of fertility priestess: when Mrs Bessie sees the men singing to her breasts, they "looked as if they were worshipping her . . . they were in their own way, she imagined, venerating the principle of creation, fertility, growth in her". But Coonardoo has none of the power or autonomy implicit in such a figure. She submits to the men's ceremonies, having (unlike Alinta in Maris and Borg's television play, *Women of the Sun*) no women's rituals of her own. While her names ("Coonardoo", we are told, means "Well in the Shadow", and she is variously called "Esmeralda" and "Pearl") indicate that she is valuable, like all treasures she is essentially passive. She is *sent* by her husband to Hugh, who takes her and destroys her - she does not, after all, have to acquiesce in Hugh's brutal treatment. This passivity is part of her role both as an Aboriginal and as a woman.

Prichard offers a similar vision of Aboriginal woman in *Brumby Innes*. Brumby collects a herd of happy women, all but one of them Aboriginal, by the simple means of raping them and violently driving off their male relatives. The exception is his wife May, "a pretty, shallow, city-bred girl", who puts up a token struggle against his stallion methods because she is reluctant to forego the fallals that Western civilization's belief in romantic love earns for women. As Brumby says, love is "the smoke you blasted women put up to do men out of being plain, ordinary, decent male animals". Although May stays with the rest of Brumby's harem because "he gets you . . . like the rest of 'em", she is obviously incapable of being the appropriate match for him that the tribal women are. Black Australian women, used to the honest expression of the sexual drive and to being controlled by men (who, for example, do not allow them to breed when food is scarce), are the Real Women for Real Men like Brumby.

Dorcas and Coonardoo raise the *possibility* that the inferior flesh to which the conqueror stoops is not inferior: after all, if they are animals what does this make the men who love them? The loved woman perforce raises the status of her race. However, several masculine writers have raised male Aboriginals by depressing the stature of female Aboriginals: the Black Australian man is endowed with the allegedly masculine qualities of autonomy, maturity and aggressiveness; the Black Australian woman, by contrast, is immature, dependent, and must be controlled by men. Prichard certainly saw Aboriginal women as fulfilling their nature and hence being happy under that control; however, writers like Max Brown, Xavier Herbert and Richard Beilby portray Aboriginal women not simply as acquiescing in control, but as dangerous to themselves and to others if males fail to control them. Thus Brown in *Wild Turkey* lauds male Black Australians for possessing a spiritual power which one day may transform the world. This power is evident even when they knock a woman down, "as may happen in a crisis, [because] you may be pretty sure she is stupid." The blow is so nicely calculated that she is merely rebuked, never harmed. The women:

> develop their own power too, but . . . it brings out the opposite qualities in them, so the men and women exert a powerful attraction for one another. The women are intuitive, passionate and often very wilful. The men are passionate too, and salty, but they hold they are wiser in certain matters, and they generally are.

The assumption is that, since the women's qualities are the opposite of the great spiritual powers of the men, these feminine powers are not worth much. Moreover, the women are specifically allocated the non-rational quality of intuition. Combined with their wilfulness and their lack of wisdom in certain areas, these women obviously need strict guidance.

The same idea is developed in considerable detail in Herbert's *Poor Fellow, My Country*. Jeremy Delaney, Herbert's mouthpiece, says complacently that:

> In Aboriginal life, the sexual taboos are introduced with cultural education . . . Initiation. I'm speaking of males, of course. Women must be left out of it, because their part in cultural activity is only background . . . which I suppose you could say of most women in all societies, anyway. Women are the true keepers of sex . . . With a male Aboriginal . . . that is a mature one and one living in the true Aboriginal way . . . continence in sexual matters is paramount . . . Sexual desire is considered due to woman's magic. To withstand it shows strength.

Women are therefore both culturally and personally immature, possessing a dangerous power which they cannot or will not control, and hence men must control it for them. A woman who attempts to interfere in the cultural matters which are exclusively men's business is a menace. Women interfere three times in Prindy's stages of initiation, each time without any discernible motive other than the desire to possess him utterly, and a series of hideous deaths result: deaths which signify the end of any hope for the creation of a new Australia.

Herbert's misogynism extends, as might be expected, to white women, who are blamed for the whole mess caused by racism, for if they had not interfered in their husbands' pleasures: "The boss's bed could have been the foundation of harmony . . . and a new society". The only women who do not cause trouble are those, such as Nanago and Rivkah, who love and obey Jeremy, and who do not try to interfere with or carry out Men's Business.

More recent writers have also indicated a bias against Aboriginal women, and particularly against the stereotype of the strong Black Australian woman. In *The Brown Land Crying*, Beilby twice has the audacity to say that the sexual use of Aboriginal women by white men has made the invasion harder, not for the women, but for the men. Thus one reason given for Milton Odel's need to affirm his Aboriginality is that he is male, "harbouring a coloured man's instinctive bitterness and innate sense of defeat. For wasn't he a product of defeat? Miscegenation had always operated through the women of the defeated race, degrading its men". Grace Odel, a strong Black Australian woman who has hauled herself and her family out of the miseries of a camp, is condemned for her lack of feeling for the rest of her people and for believing the White Australian promise of upward social mobility in exchange for conformity to White Australian mores. Moreover, once her son refuses to obey her edicts and to live like a white middle-class Australian, Grace disowns him. Weak Aboriginal women are just as bad: Milton's girl-friend, a dependent female, is a prime cause of his downfall.

The idea that Black Australian women are guilty of collaborating with the enemy to humiliate their menfolk in fact appears to be fairly current. In an interview quoted in Shoemaker's *Black Words, White Page*, John Newfong said:

> When one society is dominated by another society and the dominating matrix of society is male-dominated, the men of the *dominated* society will be emasculated. And it's almost a subconscious thing, you see. You notice that in *The Cake Man* the mission superintendent and Inspector . . . defer to Ruby - this is to further undermine William's standing, simply by not addressing themselves to him. And this is what is always done.

Newfong also maintains that "Ruby, because of her Christian beliefs, undermines his [i.e., her husband's] beliefs in himself because she doesn't dare believe in herself".

Clearly, Merritt's *The Cake Man* can be interpreted as a criticism of the strong Aboriginal woman, although this is probably not what he intended. However, the idea of the Black Australian woman as collaborator is definitely present in another work, Colin Johnson's (Mudrooroo Narogin's) *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World.* Women are associated with the sea, a manifestation of *Ria Warrawah*, which is evil and chaos, and from which the whites came. The sea is taboo and dangerous to men, but the hunting-ground of women, and when Wooreddy smells the sea he is reminded of women. At one point, Wooreddy realises that "*Ria Warrawah* and Great Ancestor [a male sky power who restrains *Ria Warrawah*] came from a single source . . . His mind flashed and a pattern came which he could not explain". This revelation remains irritatingly unexplained, but what is clear is that women "had guarded their underwater world and denied it to the men". Women also engage in a kind of collaboration with the Europeans by going to them for food in exchange for sex, and Trugernanna saves Robinson, the oppressive 'protector' of the Tasmanians. Women do not have the sterling characters of men: when Ummarrah regards the women who are crying because he is about to be hanged, he is reminded of Walyer, the female guerilla leader "and of how she had given up so easily and died so easily. He had not given up until there was little left to give up". With the death of Wooreddy, the last *male* Bruny Islander, "the world vanished". The strong woman is to be feared: Trugernanna is recognised as "a female with a strong will . . . a great future as a provider had been predicted for her - and much sorrow for her mate!".

In contrast to this has been the creation of the stereotype of the strong Aboriginal woman, who is strong not only for herself but for her family and people. Her forerunner is probably Coonardoo, who is described as "a remarkable woman", but whose unique abilities we can only infer from what happens when she leaves the station. Probably

Catherine Martin's female characters in *The Incredible Journey* are the first strong Aboriginal women in fiction. They rebel against male ideas about whom they should marry, and conspire with each other to marry young men of their own choice, rather than old men chosen for them by their fathers. This defiance of male authority, alongside courage and sisterhood, is also prominent in the heroines' daring journey across the desert.

Donald Stuart's *Yandy* contains a woman whom he describes as being someone who will be great for her people, but he never really develops this aspect of her character, so Nene Gare's Mrs Green of *The Fringe Dwellers*, who supports so many of her people both materially and spiritually, is probably the next strong fictional Aboriginal woman. Stuart's Yaralie from the book of the same name is perhaps another, for although she is not the source for her people that Mrs Green is, her determination to live her own life with the man she has chosen shows that she has at least the potential to be such: she certainly leads her husband!

After this, it is not until we get to the dramatists of the Eighties that the strong Aboriginal woman occurs, frequently in such a way as to answer the criticisms made by those such as Newfong and Herbert. For example, several aspects of Hyllus Maris and Sonia Borg's television drama, *Women of the Sun*, challenge Herbert's contention that women have no culture or religion. In the first episode, "Alinta", the women have their own ceremonies, their own sacred land, upon which men are forbidden upon pain of death, and Towradgi the female elder is seen passing on sacred lore to the young girls. She tells them that the eagle soaring above is "the messenger of the Great Spirit. He was here when the world was made, he'll be here when everything is gone". In the Eighties of Episode 4, wise woman Alice also tells the children she instructs that the wedge-tailed eagle is the messenger of the Great Spirit and is watching them, for the earth has not changed and "The culture hasn't walked away from the people, it's the people who have walked away from the culture . . . Our culture is like a great bird. It came to us right from the start of creation." In this series, women are the guardians of their culture and the ones with spiritual powers.

In effect Kelly, the Aboriginal woman in Sarah Cathcart and Andrea Lemon's play, *The Serpent's Fall*, replies to Beilby's idea that Aboriginal men have been injured worse than the women by the women's sexual abuse. Remarking on the reason for the prominence of Black Australian women in present day life, she says that:

> For our men it's been two hundred years of having their self esteem kicked and it's gonna take them a long time to get back. It's the women who now have to lead the Aboriginal struggle, and they are. Because the women are strong . . . perhaps because Aboriginal women have been through so much . . . having their kids taken . . . Being abused physically and sexually and emotionally and spiritually . . . until literally you're down in the gutter and you couldn't get any lower . . . so therefore, we had to rise.

In other words, Aboriginal women are important in the Aboriginal struggle not because they are engaged in some kind of covert collaboration with white men but because they are naturally strong and because they have been hurt so badly: and hurt, by implication, even worse than the men. Interestingly, whilst Bob Maza concurs with the theory of the use of women as a means of racial control, he specifically clears them of blame. Thus in his play *Mereki (The Peacemaker)* he has Kila tell a White Australian:

> We was the hunters . . . the head of the family. Then you fullas put us in chains . . . then our women and kids were *allowed* into your kitchens, and us men . . . we was left out on the woodpile. And who fed the family? Not the men, not the hunters . . . No, it was the women. So we started drinking . . . to get away from the fact . . . we weren't men any more.

Moreover, whilst Mereki, the play's *deus ex machina*, is a man, he is the creation of, and firmly directed by, a humorous female spirit whom he impertinently but accurately calls "Big Mama". Whilst Mereki is inclined to lose his temper at what these whitefullas are doing to Black Australians and to the land, Kiaruke tells him that we are all, black and white, her children: "all born of me, so you will bring peace to them all". On the mundane level, it is Eve, a strong Black Australian woman who tries to help White Australian Will keep his house, and who eventually is given the power to bring about a reconciliation.

Writers who include members of an out-group in their work do so for reasons concerning both their work and their society. Indeed, the very *absence* of Black Australian characters in so much Australian writing says much about how White Australians see Black Australians, or rather do not see them. Thus for the authors of the first generations of the conquest, Aboriginals could not be individuals: once individuated, they would become

human. Human, they became accusers. The only alternative in fiction was the lone, loyal native companion whose faithfulness validated the conquest and who was stereotypically female in nature, role and perhaps origin. On the early Australian stage, this character came dangerously close to unseating the hero and heroine as the centre of attention, but the novelists kept him well under control until the Thirties, when the faithful Aboriginal reverted to her real sex so that the writer could deal with the miscegenation problem. In the hands of women like Kelly and Prichard, this involved some raising of the status of all Black Australians, but for others the Aboriginal could be included in the author's in-group only by keeping others out of it. That is, a common sex is selected as a more important indicator of true humanity than a common race, and characteristics regarded as masculine were attributed to the newly-elected members of the in-group. The hostility formerly directed towards all Black Australians becomes reserved for Black Australian women, and particularly for women who challenge male privileges or who possess the masculine prerogatives of strength and autonomy. Hearteningly, however, there is a contrary stream of writing which consistently uses the powerful Black Australian woman stereotype of the woman who is strong not only for herself but for her people.

Patsy Poppenbeek wrote a thesis called Black and White on Black: Black Australian Stereotypes in Prose Fiction and Plays *for her M.A. She teaches Communication Studies in the Business Studies Dept. at Newport College of TAFE.*

on the line

It was in the morning paper some time ago that a small paragraph caught my eye and kept my attention long after the newspaper, unfortunately, was thrown away. A survey of senior public servants, those who make major contributions to the formation of public policy at federal government level, showed that most of those working in key areas are "economic rationalists". At the most senior levels there seem to be very few indeed presenting alternatives to free-market economics of the neo-Friedmanite kind, no Galbraithian opposition to speak of among the federal mandarins. Who shall value these valuers? Not many, apparently, in the corridors of power during the 8½ years of Labor federal governments. Outside the corridors there are, of course, informed voices questioning the prevailing orthodoxy, Hugh Stretton being perhaps the most formidable. And there are others, Ted Wheelwright and Kenneth Davidson of *The Age* to name two of the better-known, to whom we can be grateful for keenly questioning policies producing an imbalance of public squalour and private affluence.

What has this to do with a literary magazine? Everything. The health of the public culture is intimately connected with federal government policy. The starvation of the A.B.C. and the S.B.S., the sorry state of our film industry, the reduction of diversity in newspaper ownership, the closure of quality newspapers, the bankruptcy of television networks, the shocking decline in our public library systems, the devaluation of scholarship, are often noted and are only a few of the strands in the complex web of cultural relationships affected by the ruling economic view, a view deeply affecting not only Australia but many other democracies. One of our readers commenting on Thatcherite attacks on the pursuit of learning notes that "scholarship for the love of it" is distressingly devalued both here and in the U.K., "Though Britain at least has a stronger tradition which will take time to erode." He allows himself a small point of hope "I don't think any Australian university has yet lost its Classics Department, the way both Sheffield and Aberdeen have. Now there's a subject of no use at all to economic indicators but a solid and enduring nourishment all the same."

He also wrote that *Overland* seemed to him "to be part of a whole web of things - like A.B.C. radio and public libraries which form a sort of 'poor man's university'. Now *Overland* and all the other magazines have to pay prohibitive postage, the A.B.C. is more under-financed than ever and public libraries are the forgotten, poor cousins in government budgets."

We will soon know more about our economist mandarins. Michael Pusey, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of New South Wales, has written *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: a Nation Building State Changes Its Mind* (Cambridge University Press, pb. $25).

So much of what now affects the simplest aspects of our daily living, making a phone call, posting a letter, reading a book, buying some groceries, is profoundly altered by abstractions and to understand the origins of what affects us becomes increasingly difficult; a degree of alienation is part of the price we pay. Some recent poetry and some painting, and I daresay there are manifestations in other arts, can be read and seen in this light: observation of immediate surfaces, their repetition almost like a litany, divorced from any emotion, affectless almost, with a sophisticated sense that to understand either the observation or the observer is either impossible or not their art's concern. Such artists may be telling us something about the abstract nature of much contemporary experience. Simple-minded rejection of these poems and paintings may be a present-day version of shooting the messenger. And that leads me to serendipity. What's happened to it? A correspondent talks of apprehensions about the effect of on-line data-base cataloguing now practised in many libraries. Access to a library's collection will be given by the data-base and by precisely what you ask of it. Browsing amongst the whole collection may not ordinarily be possible and the wonderful experience, which many of us have enjoyed from time to time, of coming across books which then proved important to us may become a privilege which few will enjoy. Of course, in large libraries, books on open access were always only the tip of the collection's iceberg. But the tip may becoming much smaller. As the range of new titles in bookshops also is becoming smaller. Abstraction and complexity again. But we are resilient animals and, in time, we may learn to browse upon print-outs and bibliographies where once we browsed on 'real' books.

Some readers, myself among them, gave two cheers when Mary Lord in

Australian Book Review (June, 1991, p. 20), reviewing *Elizabeth Jolley; New Critical Essays*, drew attention to the "obfuscation, jargon, gobbledegook and meaningless nonsense" she found in *some* of the essays. She wrote that "this kind of writing smacks of serious intellectual insecurity; the more complex the idea the more important it is to express it precisely and clearly" - and said that "critics . . ., by using language to establish an élitist mystique, work against the proper object of criticism, which is to elucidate". At last someone has come out of the conformist closet. We have, too often, remained silent for fear of being seen as part of the great Australian anti-intellectual push. To ask that the discussion of books be carried out in language generally accessible to the readers of those books is not to deny complexity; it does affirm the value of the continual construction of a common culture. Some of the literary and art criticism which I find opaque turns out, when deciphered, to be truisms not worth the effort. Some resist analysis and are probably meaningless. This may come about because the authors are more concerned with displaying their credentials to each other, their familiarity with a specialist language, than with talking to us. They draw on a range of those French thinkers so influential in the last fifteen years such as Saussure, Barthes, Lacan and, most of all, from the books of the deconstructionist Jacques Derrida.

It is nothing new for Derrida's theories to evoke adamant loyalty and vehement opposition. Debates have been enlivening the American and English literary reviews for years. Tom Shone, an English reviewer, said: "The French writer Jacques Derrida is the nearest thing to a computer virus. He inserted himself into the academic circuit with a triumvirate of texts in 1967, and since then he and his many disciples have attempted to 'deconstruct' - that is, erode from the inside - just about every sacred cow there is."

I do not know whether the debate about the use of deconstruction on literary criticism has moved out of the academies to the wider world elsewhere in Australia but readers might like to know that *The Age* in Melbourne gave a full page to the topic recently (13 August, p. 11). Some debate in the letters columns followed. The initial articles were by Luke Slattery on the current effect of deconstruction theory on some university departments and their courses and by Peter Ellingsen on the origins of deconstruction and the fierce debates it has engendered abroad. Both articles could be justly criticised for muddying the water while attempting to clarify it - Slattery's article could be read as an attack on all literary theory, Ellingsen brings up the well-worn accusation that Paul de Man "the godfather of deconstruction" wrote for a pro-Nazi newspaper in the 1930s. De Man was 21 at the time, and Ellingsen, given the space he had, could have found less complex issues to illustrate the moral questions raised by deconstruction. Still, the articles with their comments by Les Murray, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Stephen Knight and others were welcome. Dr. Philip Mead had harsh words to say about both articles, choosing to see their effect as anti-intellectual and chauvinistic. He read Slattery's article as an attack on theory generally and, if that was so, was justified in his scorn. All literary criticism, all book reviewing rests on theoretical assumptions and these assumptions must be examined. I chose to read Slattery as expressing concern about some aspects of deconstruction theory and its "new jargon"; that the general public might be even further distanced from literary debate and the public engagement between intellectuals, already tenuous, further weakened. Of course *some* deconstructionists insist that debate can only be carried out in their specialist language, to do otherwise is to misrepresent important ideas. But there are well-known literary critics, some of them academics, and among them some who write for this journal, who do indeed have considerable knowledge of Derrida and other theorists and who manage to write lucidly for a general public.

Two recent books bearing on all this may be helpful to the interested general reader: *A Derrida Reader* edited by Peggy Kamuf (Harvester Wheatsheaf) and *Against Deconstruction* by John M. Ellis (Princeton University Press). Ellis is Professor of German at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His book is closely argued but splendidly lucid.

Colin Duckworth (see page 12) would I am sure be the first to agree that in a period when the once well-used term "social conscience" is rarely heard the organizations who do use it and, more importantly, practice it are, more often than not, religious. The turning to membership of an organized religion by many of our major writers in recent years has not occasioned much comment so far as I can see. Such facts are uncomfortable perhaps. And to close on a suitable note I would like to welcome, agnostically, the publication (and very nicely too) of *Quaker Poets; Number Two* ($8 from Margaret Fell Bookshop, P.O. Box 99, Alderly, Queensland, 4051). This fine booklet follows the success of *Quaker Poets: Number One* which sold out quickly and was reprinted.

Barrett Reid

MICHAEL SHARKEY

At Varuna

I'm currently working as the Blue Mountains City Library's writer-in-the-community, based at Springwood and Katoomba branches of the Library. Cheap accommodation which suits my needs is *not* easy to find in the Mountains: garden flats, private homes and hostels have their drawbacks (dogs, kids, too-lonely people and backpackers). So I jumped at the chance to move into Varuna, the restored home of Eleanor and Eric Dark at Katoomba.

The house was built to Eleanor's specifications in 1939. Eric and Eleanor designed two acres of gardens, including an orchard and tennis court, to complete their retreat. The gardens are in a state of being slowly repaired.

Eleanor Dark died in 1985; Eric in 1987. Their son Mick donated the entire property to the Eleanor Dark Foundation for use as a writers' centre and retreat shortly afterwards. In 1990 Rhonda Flottman, former Blue Mountains Community Arts officer, was appointed administrator of the Foundation by a Board which included Richard Neville and Mick Dark. She supervised the transformation of the neglected estate into a comfortable home for up to five writers: during 1990 Rhonda worked in the house without electric power or heating through the height of winter.

There are five bedrooms in the house and works spaces for writers include Eleanor Dark's writing studio, a free standing cottage in the grounds: she wrote her last six books in the studio.

Writers can apply for Fellowships to stay at Varuna [write to "Varuna - A Writers' Centre", 141 Cascade Street, Katoomba 2780 for application forms]. They can also apply to the Foundation for information about paying their way. Fellowships (funded through the NSW Arts Ministry) may be awarded for periods of 3 weeks to 3 months, and writers receive accommodation and food (no payment). Guests are expected to work on a particular project and some rules apply. Life is kept as simple as possible (no television, for example) and guests don't disturb each other in working hours (9 a.m. to 4 p.m. is sacrosanct: no phone calls or other bother). There are no provisions for families, companions or pets. Writers who apply to Varuna are expected to have reached a professional level of achievement: applications will be considered by a panel of literary peers, and residencies are considered without regard to age, sex or race.

To date, Fellowship holders have included Gabrielle Lord, Yasmine Gooneratne, Carolyn van Langenburg, Alan Close, Judith Lukin and the biographers of Eleanor Dark, Barbara Brooks and Judith Clark.

Writers who stay at Varuna are expected to contribute to a literary program: Yasmine Gooneratne came back after her stay to run a workshop on writing family history; Judith Lukin, Carolyn van Langenburg and others have given readings of their work done at Varuna. Others will fulfil their obligation at later dates. My contribution as a paying guest has also included 3 workshops on editing and preparing manuscripts for publication.

Varuna was formally opened on Saturday 16 March 1991 by Peter Coleman, NSW Minister for the Arts. Dorothy Hewett, Judith Clark, Richard Neville and Rhonda Flottman were among speakers, and the 240 well-wishers to the project included Donald Horne, Tom Flood, Sandra Forbes, and a host of private-enterprise sponsors of the project, who have donated time, equipment and furnishings for the centre.

Varuna is the only residential establishment which offers peace and quiet for several writers at once. It's two hours from Sydney, but I can't see any reason for making the journey. I've been able to get on with revision of a biography here, and it's hard to imagine the pace of work being so sustained elsewhere. This is a brilliant house to work in. Rhonda Flottman is a superb administrator: bravo to Mick Dark and the Foundation.

History and Hartley Grattan

Laurie Hergenhan writes: Norman Harper suggested to me in an interview that one way of looking at Hartley Grattan's role as critic of Australian culture was to see him as a "gadfly", stimulating or even irritating people into positive action. Grattan would have appreciated John Barrett's spirited defence (*Overland*, 122) of the Australian history books available in 1927 - enough to support "a decent undergraduate course". But Grattan would have been surprised at the occasion for this defence, a retrospective remark that only "Ernest Scott's schoolbook" was "available" when he first arrived and wanted "to get into" Australian history, (*Overland*, 121).

It is not a case of asking "what was Grattan up to?" – nothing nefarious I should think - but what a knowledgeable person like him could possibly mean. He certainly wasn't thinking of University courses. These, as Dr Barrett points out, did not begin until some twenty years later. And Grattan was one of those who worked extra-murally, finding it impossible for a visiting American author-journalist to get more than a toe in the academic door even later in the 1930s (he was rebuffed in 1937 by Sydney University but gave some guest lectures for Macmahon Ball at Melbourne on American political history in 1937 and 1938).

What Grattan probably meant, allowing for some exaggeration, was that in 1927 there was no up-to-date (in the best sense) synthesis or generalist history available and that, as he put it at the time in a letter to a friend back home, Australian "historiography" was at an embryonic stage. This seems fair enough given such turning points just around the corner of Hancock's *History* (1930), and also, say, the revisionary work of Brian Fitzpatrick, who received support and advice from Grattan. In an obituary of Grattan Manning Clark commented (in a similar way to Grattan's 1920's remark) on the lack of texts (presumably surveys) for students when he began teaching Australian history in the 1940s and found Grattan's *Introducing Australia* (1942) and *Australia* (1947) useful.

Of course Grattan was no angel. He could be prickly, opinionated and difficult to get on with. But he was no go-getter. He gained neither fame nor fortune in his dedication over some 40 years to the study of Australian culture and history.

Nettie Palmer's private "reservations" about Grattan must be held in balance against this record and against a long friendship with genuine admiration on both sides. Grattan's own "conscientious" reservations in print about Vance's limitations as a fiction writer must have tried this friendship. Also, Nettie felt he might have acknowledged that he came to read the "talismanic" *Such Is Life* through her. He remembered it, however, as being through Frank Wilmot ("Furnley Maurice").

Both Nettie and Grattan were generous critics. In paying tribute to many Australian friends to whom he owed so much over the years Grattan wrote: "If any Australian is to be credited with keeping me interested in Australia 1928-36 [when he made his second and most important visit], it is Nettie Palmer, may she rest in eternal peace".

P.S. Author Norman Bartlett has written to me apropos of my article (*Overland* 121) to say that in the late 1930s when visiting Perth Grattan opened up for him and others an interest in American and Australian culture.

Mr Colebatch and the ACTU

Hal Colebatch writes: I am not in the habit of complaining about reviewers' opinions, however I feel I should correct two errors of fact in Graham Rowlands' enjoyable review of my poetry collection *The Earthquake Lands* (*Overland* 122).

While Mr Rowlands is correct that I do not look upon Communism with favour, my implied strictures, in the poem 'Drums', upon the ACTU's call for Australian government, business and unions to embrace a "central national economic and social objective" was not that it was Communist but that it was Fascist.

This is surely obvious from the imagery of gleaming leather holster and leggings, "The man on horseback", blank eyes "under the visor of his high-peaked cap" etc. These words are all deliberate, and I would think not overly subtle, touchstones to images of Fascism or National Socialism. Mr Rowlands may not know that it is possible for the one person to be opposed to both Communism and Fascism simultaneously, but I can assure him that such is the case.

My poem 'The *Nymphe*', dealing with a surrendered German warship that ran aground on the Norwegian coast at the end of World War II when the Norwegians and Germans aboard got drunk together was not inspired as Mr Rowlands states by the fact that it had escaped entering the Soviet Navy but by the fact that it seemed possible for the Norwegians, who had been victims of Nazi aggression, to extend some gesture of comradeship or compassion to the "vanquished aggressors".

Again, I submit that is quite plain from lines like: "hard to read of this without/thinking more kindly of the human race." (As the headnote indicates, the poem was triggered by the marvellous statement in a naval textbook that: "Unfortunately after a bout of heavy drinking on board the navigation became impaired".)

Apart from the above I appreciate his invocation of The Force.

Once upon a Time... A hairy-tail fairy-tale by Lofo

THE POET, THOUGH SADDENED, FELT STRANGELY INSPIRED, AS IF THE WAYS OF THE WORLD HAD SUDDENLY BEEN REVEALED TO HIM. HE ONLY REGRETTED NOT MEETING THE PUBLISHING FAIRY. BUT HE GUESSED THAT SHE TOO WAS INTO HAIRY CHESTS & RIPPLIN....

NANCY KEESING

Australian Language

Asked recently to address a branch of the Rostrum Club (which is devoted to public speaking) on the topic of Australian language and slang I decided to refresh my memory of certain aspects of the topic.

One of the things I had intended to say was that language, both formal and informal, and some of its usages, changes over the years. In preparing the speech this was forcibly brought home to me. For instance *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary* 1972 edition says that slang is a word of cant origin, ultimate source unknown or "the special vocabulary used by any set of persons of a low or disreputable character; language of a low and vulgar type now merged in cant; the cant language of a certain class or period." Another definition was "language of a higher colloquial type considered below the standard of educated speech and consisting either of new words or of current words employed in some special sense." Among many definitions of cant was "the secret or peculiar jargon of a sect, class or subject . . . a stock phrase temporarily in fashion."

Collins Enligh Dictionary (edited G. A. Wilkes 1979) among several definitions describes cant as pious platitudes; stock phrases that have become meaningless through repetition and I noted that it was regarded as the special vocabulary or jargon of a particular group such as thieves, journalists or lawyers.

Wilkes defined a colloquialism as a word or phrase appropriate to conversation and other formal situations. Slang he said is a vocabulary, idiom etc. that is not appropriate to the standard of language or to formal context; may be restricted to social status or distribution or as another word for jargon. A slanging match was insults and accusations made by each party against another.

It occurred to me that one never nowadays hears the word cant and that slang, especially in Australian English, has often become almost standard. I turned to Stephen Murray-Smith's *A Guide to English Usage in Australia* (Viking, 1987). He says:

> slang is unconventional English, and the origin of the word itself is unknown. *Slang* differs from *jargon* in that it does not have a particular occupational base, though there will of course be social and "class" differences in the slang people use.
>
> Slang is the incoming tide of a restless sea of language. Words are cast up on the shore. Some are drawn back by the next wave into the sea, and disappear for ever. Some remain, driven even higher by the water, to sprout like coconuts on a Pacific island, and to become a fixed part of the linguistic environment. The word *mob*, for instance, was once merely slang.
>
> What is slang depends on the viewpoint of the listener or reader. In Australian schools the word *chook*, used for *chicken*, would be regarded as slang. To many Australians, especially in rural areas, *chook* is standard Australian English. George Eliot once said that "Correct English is the slang of prigs who write history and essays."
>
> The slang 'problem', if it is a problem, is self-correcting. Words of no more than passing fashion soon fade away. Words that a language community needs, either because they don't exist in the language at all, or because that language community has special characteristics which lead to the invention of new words, or the new use of old words, will survive. The Australian word *earbasher* was needed because the English word *bore* had gentlemen's club connotations that did not "fit" in Australia. It will probably pass into standard Australian English, and perhaps in a century people will be astonished that it was ever regarded as slang. It may even pass into international English, as the words *whinge* and *whinger* are now doing. (Like much Australian

slang, *whinge* will be found in English dictionaries, but it is Australians who adopted, adapted and popularised it.) The word *bludger*, another splendid Australian coinage, which has developed from its original meaning of a prostitute's pimp to fill a language gap, is probably a permanent part of the Australian language, and may, like *whinge*, be exportable.

A language without slang would be a dead language. In written and formal Australian English slang should be used circumspectly and with respect to the audience and the effect intended. It should be discouraged, like other language, when it becomes tired, repetitive and an excuse for not thinking about what we are saying. But, at its best, it is the yeast in the dough of words.

Another matter that occurred to me was present day discussion about multi-culturism, 'ethnic' usage and so on. I looked at *The Australian Slanguage* by Bill Hornadge (Cassell Australia, 1980). Under the chapter headed 'Wogs, Dogs, Bogs and Logs' he discusses offensive linguistic use and says:

> In 1977 the advertising agency for Thai International, the Thai airline, took advantage of some less desirable Australian traits to promote the airline. An advertisement which they ran in the Singapore edition of the *Straits Times* featured a photo of a singlet-clad Australian with a large (and typical) beer gut, cigarette in mouth, flinging food into a frypan and surrounded by tomato sauce, and other distinctly Australian condiments. The text under the photo read:
>
> "Get into it. They came from Europe to begin a new life. The Dagos, the Balts, the Wops.
>
> And they brought with them a love of fine food that would do little to change the Australian's love of the meat pie. If you go to Sydney you'll see they're still wallowing in the tide of tomato sauce. If you love fine food - give yourself a fair go. Give Australia a miss and get into it on Thai International. And if your flight can't avoid a stop in Australia - stop on board. Thai International. Twice a week into Sydney: And out of it - fast."

The racist attitudes of many Australians are one of our less desirable exports. In an article in *National Review* in 1978 Merv Rutherford and Tom Kelly related some of their experiences on a recently concluded trip to northern Sumatra. Arriving at a place called Samasir, they were met by a local youth aged about seventeen who enquired whether they were Australians. When they said yes, he responded with: "Beauty bottler mate, no bloody worries cobber, good munga here, mate."

Alexander Buzo published a small book called *Meet the New Class* (Angus & Robertson, 1981). The publishers' description of the book explains it and is also of interest here:

> From all walks of life, from all levels of society, from both ends (and the middle) of the political spectrum, comes a new breed of new breed, a New Class with a language all its own . . . and they're taking over.
>
> Their weapon is jargon. These are the inventors of the deadly phrases "meaningful dialogue" and "sexual awareness", and of the masterly "at this moment in time". In their hands, well-worn English words acquire totally new meanings, and so the New Class achieves its supposed aim - the befuddlement of all non-members.
>
> To fight or join, the New Class, you must first understand them. Alex Buzo, well-known author and "concerned person", here presents his complete (and completely hilarious) guide to the New Class - its habits, manners, speech and other peculiarities. Your combat manual for the new class war.

The continuing interest in slang and colloquialisms is evident from a new edition (1990) of G. A. Wilkes's *Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms* and a greatly enlarged edition of the immensely popular *The Dinkum Dictionary/A ripper guide to Aussie English* (Viking O'Neil) by Lenie (Midge) Johansen, first published in 1988. The 1991 edition adds some 500 new words and phrases to its original nearly 17,000 items. This book is less scholarly than some in its field - it does not give sources and does not include a bibliography. However at the Australian recommended price of $19.95 it is a splendid buy and would be an ideal gift.

Newspapers nowadays often publish columns of colloquialisms and paragraphs etc. giving examples of changing language. The *Sydney Morning Herald* (6 August 1990) discussed "Lingoes our Children Speak", many of which are more or less local to certain schools or suburbs and would not be widely understood or, very likely, permanent.

Some people, Johansen among them, assert that Australia is peculiarly rich in slang with the implication that this is by contrast with other countries. I do not know whether this is true but

we own a *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* of 625 pages (University of Toronto Press 1982); an Australian work *Sea Jargon* by Lew Lind (Kangaroo Press 1982); Francis Grose's *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* third edition 1796, edited and introduced by Eric Partridge (1894-1979) and *A Dictionary of Austral English* (Edward Morris) 1898 edition (Sydney University Press 1972) which is a local classic; and more, many more. Morris especially identified and described Australian native plants and wild-life by their names as usually used at that time (and often now), and does emphasise one point about "Aussie English", past and present: that it often responded and responds to local needs for definitions and descriptions.

One point I think insufficiently noticed by many experts and writers is that large numbers of early Australians: convicts, many free settlers, and many marines and soldiers used language that reflected their 'low-life' contacts and origins. For instance, early Jewish convicts and settlers (often called Petticoat Laners) were themselves, or their parents, Jews of western European origin, who, for historic reasons sought British freedom - really only comparative freedom until the Parliamentary reforms of Disraeli (D'Israeli) and others - during and after the Napoleonic upheavals.

When the Anglo-Jewish author Israel Zangwill (1864-1926) published *Children of the Ghetto* (1892) and other plays and novels he was describing an indisputable ghetto situation in England. The people of these ghettoes spoke a babble of tongues depending on their countries of origin, but were very often drawn together by their use of the more or less universal European Jewish language, Yiddish, which although it uses Hebrew lettering is *not* Hebrew. Leo Rosten, an American linguist in his amusing, but not un-serious book *The Joys of Yiddish* (Penguin) first published 1968 in USA, explains that the word Yiddish comes from the German *Jüdisch* meaning Jewish and discusses present day examples of Yiddish in England and America. But in England much 18th and 19th century thieves and criminal cant derived from Yiddish and transferred early to Australia. Rosten gives a list of present-day phrases which, "whatever their origin probably owe their presence in English to Jewish influence." Some, not all, of these phrases are heard in Australia now and in the past. They include: Get lost; My son the physicist; I need it like a hole in the head; Who *needs* it?; It shouldn't happen to a dog; OK by me; This I need yet; He's a regular genius; Go hit your head against the wall; Excuse the expression . . . and so on.

It is often overlooked or forgotten, that in Australia's early years many convicts and settlers, marines and soldiers used 'low life' speech. Moreover such early arrivals, even from the British Isles, let alone a few French, Americans and others, could not understand each other, or their gaolers, employers and supervisors. Irish and many Scottish people (and there were great numbers of such convicts, spoke only Erse (Gaelic).

Couples who did not dispense with marriage (there were many); were frequently joined by Church of England clergy in words they did not understand. Officially there were no Roman Catholic clergy until the 1820s.

Today's frequent discussions using such 'buzz words' as 'multiculturism'; 'multicultural speech' and 'racist' beliefs, religious prejudices and attitudes were long pre-dated by historical attempts to find common discourse with 'white Australians', let alone with Aboriginal people (from many areas and of many tribes and languages,) or to come to terms with my most abhorred word, 'ethnic - 'ethnics' are people often jeered at in Sydney school playgrounds as 'ethnos'. Present discussion, too, makes me wonder for how long people remain 'ethnics'. I, for instance, am a fifth generation Australian/New Zealander but my surname remains Dutch (still existing in Holland and there pronounced 'Kaysing'). Despite generations of New Zealand and Australian education am I an 'ethnic'? or my deceased cousin, the very well known New Zealand poet Charles Brasch one of whose great grand-fathers was a Jewish refugee from Germany to England in the 18th century who tried to make a few pence by selling trifles to the sailors on a ship who promptly press-ganged him - he settled in America where he learned his English. Members of his family married Australians and some became notable in both Jewish and ordinary public, commercial and political life. 'Ethnos'?

To sum up - slang, cant and colloquialisms are a part of large mixed societies world wide, and a part too of what will, I prophesy, become lengthy, yet-to-be-written sociological treatises.

Among Nancy Keesing's books is Lily on the Dustbin; Slang of Australian Women and Families. *Her memoir* Riding the Elephant *(Allen & Unwin) is now in paperback.*

DI BILLS

Grave Side

"I will show you the house," she offered.

"How far?" he asked.

"A half hour's walk if we go across country."

"We will have to go slowly. It is a long time since I have walked a long way and I have learned never to trust an Australian's sense of distance." He laughed.

The walk was not difficult. They set out through the campground, climbed a fence and walked through tall gums along the creek. The paddocks around them were lush with ankle deep green grass, unusual at any time in the northern Flinders and rare indeed at the beginning of autumn. The weather was still warm and it had tricked the wild flowers into an unseasonal display of colour. As they walked, he told her about his country, and how at first he had missed the green in summer and the snow in winter. He spoke of growing up in a large house, on an estate where his mother worked as a paid servant. His voice was heavy and warm and she was reminded of winter sun through a glass window. She felt something like comfort in the pit of her stomach.

His words dropped like frayed whispers through the strident speech of the noisy miner birds. She pointed them out in the tree tops; grey birds with a slash of brilliant yellow under each eye, a last brush stroke to match their beaks. She gestured in the air as she said this and watched his gaze hover on her hand as it hung against the sky. She could almost run her fingers along the line of his stare, it was so solid.

She took him to the edge of the scrub, near the old shearing shed, and they stood with their backs to the homestead and looked through the trees to the point where the hill reared out of the creekbed and raced to meet the sky. The sun had left its mid-day summit and was sending oblique rays from the top of the hill through the scrub below. There is a time of day in the bush, when the light through the trees cuts the air into bands of mist, each band marked on its upper and lower edges by shafts of light. Like beams, they intersect each other and build shimmering, slanting bridges between the trunks.

"Like a painting," he remarked. She was so pleased, almost breathless, to have chosen just the right moment.

She leaned on the twisted trunk of a river gum and reached for a leaf from the tree. Crushing it in her hand, she held it out for him to smell. He looked at her and she felt again the hard edges of his gaze. His eyes were steady and she saw now that they were leaf green in colour. Her own eyes watered as she inhaled the eucalyptus.

She wished she could brush the stray pollen from where it had fallen on his hair. Instead, she told him of the time she had lived nearby, as a child, and of the large home with the kitchen big enough to seat twelve people at the table and how they would always wash and dress for dinner.

"Customs," she said, "from your country." He smiled.

"Have you ever seen a station homestead? They are an interesting blend of English cottage and colonial commonsense."

"Show me," he said and although with any other man she might have taken his arm, she saw his angular shoulders and could not bring herself to touch him.

They walked into the garden, neglected now and left like so many she had seen. The home was built of stone and had in some fairly recent past been re-pointed around the bottom, so that the cement in the first few feet of the walls was grey but higher up it changed to an ochre colour. They strolled around the verandah, and at each of the french doors they cupped their hands at the sides of their eyes and peered into the rooms beyond. They were empty of furniture and floor coverings but some of the fire places still had mounds of ash. She expected at any moment for someone to sweep in

and kneel at the hearth, except that over the doors the architraves were eaten by white ants and were hanging like shreds of bark from a tree. The house had been empty for some time. Opposite the french doors, each room had another door leading into the passage that ran the length of the house. On the other side of the passage there were more rooms. They walked to the back of the house and found the kitchen with its coal scuttle.

"We didn't have coal", she said. "Our combustion stove burned wood and it was the station hands' job to keep the wood cupboard full. They hated it and the manager's wife was always at them to cart wood. One day she had had enough. It was during shearing and the boys had been working all day in the shed. They came in late, and exhausted, for their evening meal. She waited until they were all seated and then served them an axe in the middle of the table. From that day the wood box was never empty."

She laughed, and was surprised that her memories were so vivid. She could see the sheepish faces of the boys, could almost reach out and touch them and she wished she could take his hand and lead him into that very room; take him back over the years to the shy, yearning creature she had been.

He smiled and the lines on his face creased like water through a landscape. They looked at the drooping verandah roof with its sad gutters and its downpipes hanging like question marks in mid-air.

"Look at the garden," she pointed as they came around the side of the house. "You will not find native trees here. There will be rose bushes and lilacs and fruit trees" and she was right, they saw, as they followed the rough paved path that struck off across the grass to the fence.

"I cannot imagine why they would persevere with such unsuitable species in this climate," he said.

"They must have been so lonely at the beginning, so desperate to transplant something from their past," she said. He glanced quickly at her and she felt that he was waiting for her to continue and she wondered what else there was to say.

"Look," and to cover her embarrassment she turned her attention to the old swinging garden seat, off its hinges now and hanging by one arm like a child in a tree. It should have suggested decay but instead she thought it looked smug and comfortable in its haven of weeds. She knew how it would feel to rock gently in its arms as dusk dragged across the night sky its blanket of cool relief.

She thought if he would just sit with her and look with his green eyes into hers, she would be happy. She thought of how it would feel to stroke his cheek and almost leaned towards him but instead she ran her hands over the broken, jagged edges of the splintered wooden slats of the swing.

He disappeared behind the lilac bush and she could hear him laughing. His laughter made her ache. She followed and found him bending over a row of square cement slabs in the ground.

"It's a pet cemetery. I can't believe it. Look at the inscriptions."

She bent beside him and read.

"Spiegal, a Domino Cat. I wonder if he was spotted."

"Or perhaps he knocked things down; like the domino effect."

"And here's Tim, a good sheep dog. Gosh, look at the dates. He was twenty-five years old!"

She watched him kneel beside the tiny graves and run his finger over the letters. In the past, other fingers had drawn sticks through the wet mortar, creating these quiet epitaphs. She understood their sense of loss and felt, or thought she did, their sadness. His hands were as grey as the cement beneath them. She wondered whether, if she held his hand, it would be hard and cold, as if chiselled from stone.

"This one is Max, a musterer's dream. I bet he was ugly. Good dogs always are," she said, and accompanying the lump in her throat was a sudden vision of a thin, wiry dog, in desperate pursuit of frantic sheep that blundered stupidly and pathetically across the hill.

He flicked a leaf from a word and in the action his hand touched hers. If she hadn't wanted badly to touch him, she could have easily grasped his fingers and held them, but the strength of her wish made it impossible. It need only be a gesture of friendship, but she knew it was much more than this and the knowledge kept her from reaching out. Instead she wound a piece of onion weed around her finger, so tightly that it cut pale rings on her skin.

She was suddenly very angry and very disappointed. They would soon walk back and she would have shared this precious time for nothing. She had tried to give him something of herself and he was not even aware that it had cost her to do so. She was like a sapling, forever bending towards him and forever restrained.

BRUCE BENNETT

The Bright Locked World

This is part of the opening chapter of Spirit in Exile: Peter Porter and his Poetry *to be published by Oxford University Press in September.*

How, and where, does a sense of exile begin? For Peter Porter, who was to become Australia's leading author-in-exile in London, it began in earnest in a suburb of Brisbane in 1938, when he was a nine-year-old boy - his mother died, without warning, of a burst gall bladder. Later, in his early fifties, the development of a philosophic cast of mind enabled Porter to write that "Pain is the one immortal gift".[1] But as a child no such props were available to resist the raw onslaught of emotion. From the enclosed and protected environment of a home with a quiet and somewhat timorous father and an ebullient, life-loving mother, the only child found himself suddenly thrust into what seemed a loveless world. On the verandah of his Brisbane home he had a premonition of death. Masochistic fantasies and apprehensions of mortality haunted him. Subsequently, a paradise would be constructed from fragments of his early childhood. For the young child, however, time was arrested at the moment of his mother's death, and the world seemed a bleak and bitter place for many years afterwards.[2]

In the construction of a mythology of self in his published poems, reviews, interviews and articles, Porter's mother's death is of paramount significance. It is the central image in a mosaic of loss. From the age of nine he recalls that he felt "locked out of Paradise".[3] This sense of expulsion provides the emotional impetus for a mythology which mirrors in some respects the Christian narrative of a fall from grace, with its many literary analogues. In most of Porter's work, hell is more vividly realized than Eden or Paradise, though it should also be said that the temporary imaginings, the fleeting images of a state of grace, are consequently more expressive and poignant.

The historical Marion Main married William Porter in 1922, when she was thirty-two and he was thirty-seven. She had worked as a nurse before her marriage. After some five miscarriages she gave birth to her only surviving child, Peter Neville Frederick Porter, on 16 February 1929. She is unlikely to have imagined that this son would become one of the major English-speaking poets of the twentieth century, or that he would owe so much to her. The reinvention of the mother-figure in memory and imagination assumes special iconic force for the young writer in his twenties, and at different phases later in his writing career. In finely-etched images rendered in prose and in verse, Porter describes this primal source of emotional sustenance:

> She was the oldest of eight children, and the most loved, as well as the most ebullient in personality. All her life she masked a restless

> melancholy under a party-going extravagance. Her vision of existence was a florid excess of light and laughter followed by darkness and dreams. She was openly, even determinedly, vulgar - but this was a reaction to the increasing gentility of Australian suburban life. She was no intellectual and did not care for reading, but she loved company and holidays. She was the firstborn's mixture of rapture and grace, but she was overweight and radiated doubt.[4]

One of the few photographs of Peter Porter smiling shows him as an eight-year-old holding the hand of a large, soft-faced woman who is also smiling.[5] Their smiles are not assertive, but confident, sure. The "restless melancholy" masked beneath a "party-going extravagance" is perhaps the most obvious inheritance of the son from his mother. The poise and play of the phrase "light and laughter" against "darkness and dreams" seems also self-interested. But it is where these images of the lost mother are most at odds with the public 'man of letters' persona that they become most revealing. The mother is projected as anti-intellectual and "determinedly vulgar". While Porter's poetry is often loaded with cultural referents, it also demonstrates a relish in attacking social and intellectual pretensions with rude energy. These are the son's equivalents of the mother's behaviour, who could refer to chamber music as "people pissing into pots".[6] So are the often rapid transitions between formal and colloquial speech which British critics have sometimes put down to Porter's 'Australian' origins.

Marion Main also transmitted to her son an incipient sense of exile. Although born in Adelaide in 1890, she moved with her parents, brothers and sisters to Sydney, where she was brought up, first in Randwick and then at Woolwich. By the time she moved to Brisbane and married, Marion Main was a convinced Sydneysider. Brisbane seemed a form of exile to her, and her son subsequently accepted that Sydney was "the real Australia - the authentic Babylon".[7] The laughter, parties and drinking at his Sydney grandparents' home soothed him to sleep during his holidays far more easily than the bareness and silence of the Brisbane house in Annerley where he spent most of his childhood years.

Although Porter has not to date written a book on the houses of his childhood, as fellow Brisbane writer David Malouf did in *12 Edmonstone Street* (1985), these have figured significantly in his autobiographical commentaries, interviews and poems. The wooden house on stumps at 51 Junction Terrace, Annerley, in East Brisbane (called 'The Nook') is a place without magic, the lost place in which the boy is remembered, through the mythologizing filter of later years, as living chiefly 'Under the House':

> . . . where lawnmower, wash tubs, copper, rain tank and the thousands of pieces of *disjecta membra* of suburban living collected. I always associated under the house with illicit activities: in early childhood, lighting fires and sharpening pencils with my father's cut-throat razors. Later on, when I came back to live in the house after nine years at a boarding school, I used the darker recesses for those desperate, solitary sexual manoeuvres there seemed to be no way of avoiding.[8]

The boy's bedroom in this house is inhabited by shadows and night terrors. Nearby is a quarry, to which the boy sometimes retreats, and the Chinese market gardens. Reflecting on his childhood terrors, the older Porter cannot account for them in terms of any lack of parental love, but sees them instead as 'spirits of the house':

> When I imagine the psychopomp, arriving to collect my soul for the underworld, I see myself back in a room of this childhood house, when at last the door really will open and usher in the remorseless assessor.[9]

The sense of judgement expressed here, and the terror of inchoate death find different correlatives at different stages in Porter's writing career, but are constantly in his personality.

Following Porter's recurrent visits to Australia after 1974, it is Sydney rather than Brisbane which provides him with the central images of his childhood;[10] these derive from Christmas and other holidays with his mother at his maternal grandfather's house at Woolwich. Such early plantings of imagery assume primal significance and are closely linked with the mother. Porter has evoked the house and seascape in prose as well as in verse:

> My grandfather's land went down to the water, and there he built a single storey brick house, complete with a deep cellar (something a boy from burning Brisbane and its wooden houses on stilts found eerily fascinating) and spacious, pleasantly laid-out garden. The path down to the harbour was terraced and cut deeply into the soft blue rock. Ivy and other creepers and perennials grew at each turn as you made your way from the lawn above to the swimming pool with its coarse buffalo grass

and adjacent boatshed. All you had to do in those days before pollution if you wanted a swimming pool was run wooden stakes into the harbour and drape narrow-mesh net around them. At high tide you had a feasible body of water to swim in. You could manage a fair number of strokes before you bumped up against the shark-defying net. At low tide the baths were a beautiful if ragged rock pool made up of muddy flats and luminously green seaweed with bladder wrack and stranded jellyfish. I loved to sit on the grass sward beside the boat ramp on a summer's morning as the Lady Chelmsford, the diesel ferry with the larger funnel, went by, heading up the river. Her sister ships, also named after former Governors' Ladies had shorter stacks. There was a haunted house at Onions Point, which I would never venture beyond. The river was often crowded with sailing and rowing boats, prawn fishermen at night with lanterns in their boats, and on special days the Showboat with music blaring from her saloons.[11]

Significantly, these memories have entered Porter's dreams and he has associated them with music. He has identified this music as Schubert's song 'Die Götter Griechenlands,' in which a lost fair world is summoned up in Schiller's words, 'Schöne Welt, wo bist du?' as the music modulates to A major.[12] The landscape and waterscape of Porter's grandfather's house and the road along the Lane Cove river become entwined in a key stanza in the autobiographical poem 'A Christmas Recalled', written in London in 1959 and published in *Once Bitten, Twice Bitten* (1961):

> Summer was December and the water sounds
> Of the presiding Harbour. Ferries named
> For Governors' Ladies wallowed round
> The river bends, past one haunted house, by
> A thousand boatsheds, past the water games
> Of Spartan Girls Schools, regatta crowded bays,
> Resting heavily at barnacled, bituminous quays.

The poem as a whole is less carnivalesque than this. It evokes images of the child, apart from the mother and her family at the house by the harbour, overhearing the adults talking and drinking, their noise "a secure lullaby," their drinking and talk anaesthetizing his fears. What intervenes is an uncle's mention of the forthcoming war ("We've got about two or three/Years before the Japs come"), and premonitions of death and destruction are aroused. The boy escapes the house and sits crying under the pepperina tree which, like the house, the boat-shed, the ferries and the harbour, subsequently assumes iconic significance among the voyages and returns of Porter's work.

Later poems in Porter's *oeuvre* take up memories of the Woolwich house and its associations, including 'Landscape with Orpheus' (*ES*, *CP* 309-10), 'Essay on Dreams' (*TAO* 38) and a stanza in 'The Story of U' (*TAO* 62-3), a poem which derives from Mallarmé's sonnet, 'Une dentelle s'abolit':

> This is the house they made for you
> With water-steps and angled palms,
> A cellar where your tears came true
> And terrors took you in their arms:
> Down by the water a boatshed
> Collected the dynastic dead
> Who heard cicadas keeping on
> Their etching of a single song.

The mood is higher pitched than in 'A Christmas Recalled', and mythic associations have thickened the texture, so that the Lane Cove river dissolves into an image of the Styx. The cellar in the house at Woolwich is an ante-chamber to death, recalling the 'Under the House' area in Brisbane, where the boy cries as he has beside the pepperina tree. Instead of the mother's loving embrace, "terrors took you in their arms". The "single song" of the cicadas is one of grief and incipient loss. Here, among images of the holiday house by the harbour, the boy-man commences a career of exile in a fallen world, a pattern of dislocation and apartness. Such a sense of self might have culminated in the production of a Romantic, but Porter resisted neo-Romanticism in favour of more ironic, and sceptical, modes of address, thus accepting the mixed blessings of the person suspended outside all places of final belonging.

One of Porter's contributions to the study of childhood is his recognition of its denial of simple innocence to the mind looking back from adulthood. 'Ghosts' (*1962/3*, *CP* 42-3), a series of directly autobiographical vignettes, are influenced in their ideas by Ibsen's play *Ghosts*, which Porter saw in London in 1960, and in tone by Strindberg and Hardy. The poem evokes not the grand holiday home at Woolwich but the interior of the weatherboard house in Brisbane. While the poem contains no direct reference to Ibsen's play, apart from the title, it implicitly polarizes Brisbane and Sydney as places of provincial enclosure and metropolitan freedom respectively, as Ibsen does with his Norway versus Paris opposition in *Ghosts*. In Porter's poem the central figure is the autobiographical speaker's mother, who comes from a more energetic, mercurial family in lively arriviste Sydney, but has

married into what the speaker recalls as the deadened, colonial-Victorian city of Brisbane. The figure of the mother is rendered with a dramatic naturalist's specificity:

> A large woman in a kimono, her flesh
> Already sweating in the poulticing heat
> Of afternoon – just from her bath, she stands,
> Propping her foot on a chair of faded pink,
> Preparing to cut her corns. The sun
> Simmers through the pimply glass – as if
> Inside a light bulb, the room is lit with heat.

The watcher of this scene is a "little feminine boy/In striped shirt, Tootal tie, thick woollen socks,/His garters down". The only child's inheritance from this mother, his twenty years older self muses, in a rapid transition, is "her party melancholy and a body/Thickening like hers".

The mother's imputed viewpoint controls the tone of 'Ghosts'. By moving to Brisbane and marrying into the remnants of an 'Old Colonial Family', her perspectives are narrowed like Ibsen's returnees to the darkened interiors of Norwegian houses, after the cafés and restaurants of cities further south. The boats on Brisbane's Moreton Bay provide compensating images of release and pleasure, as do the ferries at Lane Cove, but the poet seems cut off, financially and temperamentally, from the pleasurable physical adventure which these craft might offer:

> Who goes for weekends down the Bay
> In thirty footers to St Helena, Peel and Jumpin' Pin?
> No yachts stand off the Old People's Home,
> Out past the crab-pot buoys and floating mangrove fruit.

What then is the cause of such disillusion and joylessness? Naturalism in drama of the Ibsen kind customarily seeks causes. Porter's poem ends with an attempt at explanation:

> I was born late in a late marriage. Psychiatrists
> Say it makes no difference – but now I think
> Of what was never said in a tropical house
> Of five miscarriages. If the words were said
> They'd start the deaths up that I left for dead.

Like Ibsen's play this ending implicitly accepts the power of heredity as an explanation of human behaviour, while also doubting such determinism. The deep disquiet in the poem can have no simple physical or psychological explanation, but an influence is established, a set of questions raised. The poet's task here, it seems, is to raise questions rather than answer them, to doubt psychiatrists and theorists of human behaviour. It is a customary refusal of this author to be browbeaten by authorities or to accept facile conclusions and generalities. At the same time, the slangy facetiousness in the speaker's last line opens the way for an interpretation of his present state of exile as an over-hasty retreat from the buried fears of his Brisbane home. The poem raises questions of psychoanalytical accountability and personal responsibility which are explored from a variety of angles in later work.

The figure of the mother in the years of childhood is presented as one of fullness and generosity; the years of adolescence that follow are by contrast an emotional wasteland. In 'Two Merits of Sunshine' (*PAAM, CP* 56-7) Porter creates counterpointed voices which explore the mother-fixation from different angles, somewhat in the manner of Harold Pinter. The first voice is that of the younger self, and recalls the child's perceptions at his Brisbane home in precise and vivid detail:

> When you were about seven you were playing
> Among the fallen fleshy palmnuts
> On the pink cement path running through buffalo grass.

The mother returns from shopping "powdered in a talc of sweat" and smiles "a brown and gold mouthful/Of smile, a donation of her stones/ Of sunburned fat". The mother is large, generous, outgoing, though she is also one who doubts and worries. She gives her son a wind-up toy, but he breaks the spring by over-winding it. The voices of suburban order, friends and neighbours, seem to mock him: "you had broken your mother's heart". However the mother's image remains full and generous, "under a spinnaker of laughter"; though in retrospect the speaker now knows "she was bellying out to death". The concluding lines given to the first voice offer an apparent finality:

> Having defined love you never needed it again,
> Or its fat victim in a flowered dress,
> Or a garden to tease perfection in.

If the first voice recalls principally the "teasing perfection" of the garden of love which his parents, and in particular his mother provided, and which the son blames himself for bringing to an end, the second voice seems to further fracture any simple notion of identity. It represents the forces of repression. Although the speaker moves to distance

himself with irony or disdain from the loss of the mother, he remains totally implicated:

> I now read fashion magazines and
> Deplore Mother's Day. There are no
> Lovable fat women in Heaven, nothing crooked
> Is made straight and no rough places plain.

The inversion of the biblical psalmist's prophecy in the last lines,[13] following the pathos of the speaker's transparent attempt to distance himself from the pain of his loss, is both ironic and poignant. The outlines of Porter's personal allegory are already evident: it will be one in which distant and barely attainable hints of perfection occasionally appear - in gardens, seascapes, music, paintings or people - setting themselves against the ordinary course of life, which is characterized by crooked paths, rough places, and the persistence of pain. But elements of Eden will continue to taunt his human consciousness.

While the mother is the main figure in the personal allegory of Porter's writings, the father has an important complementary role. Their place together in the son's early childhood is recalled in images of the garden and house in Annerley. Here, if anywhere in Porter's writings, is a coherent vision of an Australian Eden:

> Our family seemed to communicate best in the garden. I would follow my father around as he weeded, mowed the lawn, planted out his seedlings and wove webs of cotton above the beds to daunt the sparrows. They were not put off, of course. I would watch while he made fires and clipped the hedges. My mother would make forays into the garden, to bring tea to my father, to help him smoke out wasps and to talk over the side fence to the neighbours. She would also stand on the back landing and shout the names of horses she wanted to back to the woman next door, who would then ring them through to our SP bookmaker. We had no phone. It is not much to remember of a close-knit family life, yet it suffices. In Eden, Adam and Eve, after naming the animals, may have had little more to say to each other. Loquacity, even chat came with the fall. We required few furnishings and few points of reference beyond nature to keep ourselves well in our islanded stockade.[14]

These images of harmony in casual Australian backyard activity are remarkable in the writings of a man for whom dislocation and creative discontent are the more usual states of mind, though the passage also contains hints of a dangerous isolation. In the mid to late 1970s, however, after a period of twenty years absence from Australia between 1954 and 1974, Porter's writings became imbued with a new spirit of reconciliation, and also a recognition that his early view of Australia had been skewed towards a projection onto this country of "the monsters of my daily life".[15] While hints of the early perfection are contained in a number of poems set in gardens, the archetypal return occurs in 'An Australian Garden' (*LIACC, CP* 208-10), in which the speaker and his lover enact a union among the hybrid blooms of a Sydney garden.

The reconciliation between Porter and Australia is most evident also, however, in the changed imagery of his father. The most genial of this imagery links the father with the mother and garden. In 1977 the father is projected, semi-comically, as an artist *manqué*, perhaps a poet himself, part-British, part-Australian:

> My father loved [the garden] with the concern of a Capability Brown correcting God's poor sense of design. His way of gardening would hardly recommend itself to the 'natives only' gardens of modern Australia. He saw our suburban terrain as wild land requiring to be tamed. So he kept only three or four trees . . . There were garden beds of all shapes - rectangles, circles, parabolas, parallelograms and chains of mere holes, in which my father sowed a rotation of flower crops. He favoured iceland poppies, cinnerarias, stocks, asters and dahlias - all imported flowers bought from nurserymen, nothing native to Australia . . . My father's greatest love was reserved for roses - he was always arriving home with new cuttings wrapped in hessian and slightly dampened sawdust. When he reaches Heaven, he will undoubtedly approach the throne down an avenue of rose bushes.[16]

This is a paean to the father who, after the death of his wife, when himself cast down and out of work, cast forth his young son (on the advice, the son avers, of rich friends and relations[17]) onto the waters of the Anglican private schools of Queensland, where he was miserably unhappy. School was "hell"; or, in later formulations, "Auschwitz".[18] The father who drove him out, and for whom a repressed anger must have been felt, nevertheless is understood in later years as:

> . . . a man not fully at home in the fallen world, [though he was] most at ease in his garden. From it he drove, angel-like, most of the native plants and shrubs . . .[19]

From this garden too, the only son was expelled to a series of exiles at various schools, followed by short-lived "apprenticeships" as a reporter and then warehouseman in Brisbane, before departing by ship, in 1951, for London and the life of an Australian expatriate.

Abbreviations: CP Collected Poems, ES English Subtitles, TAO The Automatic Oracle, LIACC Living in a Calm Country, PAAM Poems Ancient and Modern.

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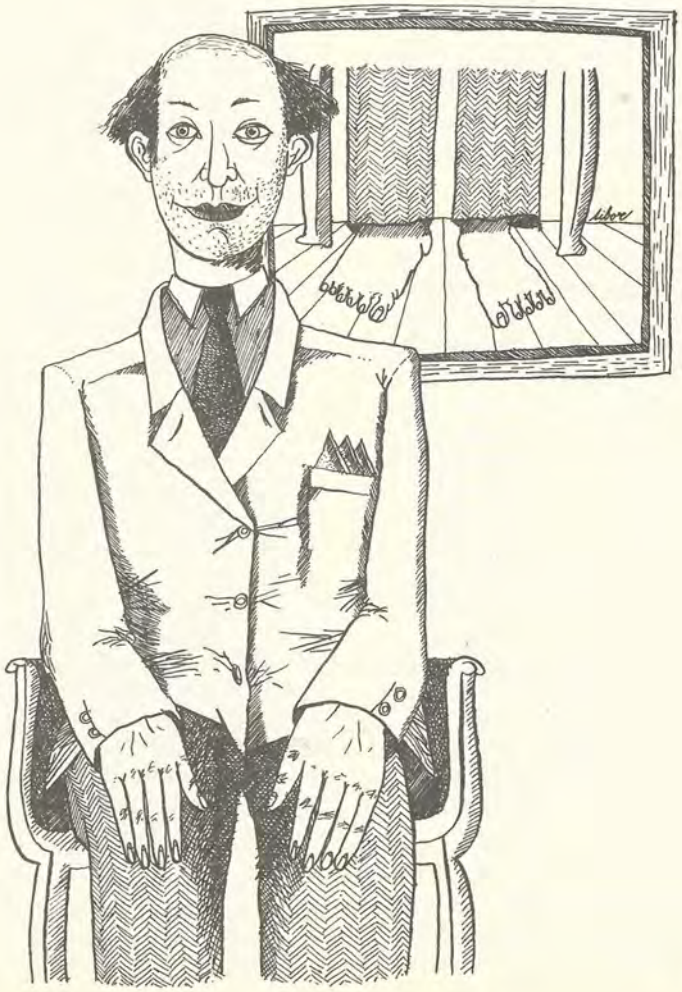
1. 'A Philosopher of Captions' in *English Subtitles, Collected Poems*, 279.
2. See Bruce Bennett, 'Peter Porter in Profile', *Westerly*, 27, 1 (March 1982) 49.
3. Peter Porter, 'Locked Out of Paradise', *The New Review*, 3, 36 (March 1977), 15-20.
4. Peter Porter, 'In Exile: An Autobiographical Anti-Biography', Part One of a three-part script for ABC Radio Helicon, unpublished typescript (Sydney, 1987).
5. See Peter Porter, 'Locked Out of Paradise', 15.
6. 'Peter Porter in Profile', 46.
7. 'In Exile', 4.
8. Peter Porter, 'Brisbane Comes Back', *Quadrant*, 98, XIX, 6 (September 1975), 53-8.
9. Ibid.
10. See Peter Porter, *Sydney*, Time-Life, Amsterdam, 1980.
11. 'In Exile', 5.
12. Ibid., 6.
13. Porter has commented that the biblical quotation reached him characteristically through its musical setting and not through reading the Bible - via Handel's *Messiah* and Gibbons's anthem 'This is the record of John'.
14. 'Locked Out of Paradise', 19.
15. Ibid., 18.
16. Ibid.
17. 'Peter Porter in Profile', 46.
18. Ibid., 46-7.
19. 'In Exile', Part One: Inventing the Past, 12.



Jiri Tibor

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

After Poetry 10, A Quarterly Account of Recent Poetry

TOUGH LUCK, T. S. ELIOT

If an objective correlative moves in this country, the order of the day seems to be "Shoot it". As for Australian poetry being an escape from personality, forget it. Perhaps it would have been different if T. S. Eliot had landed a job in the Reserve Bank and a directorship with the old Angus and Robertson. But then he wouldn't have been T. S. Eliot.

In this quarter's poetry, only Michael Sharkey's poems deliberately avoid his personality. If his views and feelings still come across clearly, it's not because he talks about himself. Terry Gillmore's poetry is either a personal quest for religion or a religious quest for personality - perhaps both. Paul Hetherington eventually works through introspective poetic and biographical insights to portray others for their own sake. For all the late R. F. Brissenden's interest in places and people, he remains a strong presence in his last collection. A strong presence even as he, in effect, renounces any claim to living places and people. Despite Gillmore and to some extent Hetherington and Brissenden, the real contrast with Sharkey is Bruce Beaver. There are some escapes from personality in his dramatic monologues. Overwhelmingly, however, he has made an art form out of his personality. He finds everything about himself fascinating - the world *he* sees, the people *he* meets, *his* inadequacies, *his* mood swings and *his* willingness to confess to the reader.

If all criticism is a mode of autobiography, as Oscar Wilde said, then so is all art. It's likely that Sharkey conveys his personality even in the act of escaping from it. Even so, that's a mental leap; not the immediate reading experience. 'The Waste Land' is a nervous breakdown but it's also and always 'The Waste Land'.

The reader of Beaver's *New and Selected Poems 1960-1990* has a chance to assess not only Beaver but the later Beaver's own assessment of the earlier Beaver. His earlier poems may have been about death. Twenty years later he says so often enough - in death poems. However, he concedes that he didn't call the early poems death poems. He had:

> . . . thought they were all about life
> in extremis, life as an agony.

The 'life in extremis' view needs to be accompanied by the following multiplicity:

> The real poems
> were everywhere else
> than within me
> and I would have to
> get there somehow,
> get into
> the world of selves
> and singular poems
> of the multiple
> self of selves,
> the pluralistic
> being of the
> very place,
> the whole poem
> and its verses
> of the place
> and its personae:
> things and persons
> in that other-
> wise of world and
> microcosmic
> levels of the
> poems grounded
> in the being
> of myself and
> everything.

Beaver has written some superb short poems - the 'Days' from *Odes and Days* (1975). He connects

the "green gossip of the maidenhair fern" with Henry James' Isabel Archer's Roman journey, ending with the deliberately flat "ever-so civilized hell of the human condition". He's obsessed with, but distances himself from, carnations and poppies. He says melodramatically (but also lightly) that he's been writing in his own blood for 27 years. He still hasn't run out of letters and corpuscles. These lines from 'Day 46' reveal a stunning poem:

I imagine the people running
through the effervescent shallows
or lazing on the wide, glowing
sands, or trailing fingers in
cool wavelets, the hair blown
back, the eyes filled with blue
vistas and the golden light
of the sun coins spun through
the deep air, or sitting on shaded
balconies that face the fading
east or aspiring west, both satisfying
the dreamed of well-being only the
habitually exploited can imagine.

No matter how much the anthologist might value these poems, there remain the other 29½ years of the poet's output. He talks about his poetry, manic depression, reliance on women and being born middle-aged. Although scarcely cheerful and sometimes defensive, he's always honest, self-aware and capable of half-mocking himself. He realizes that a flock of pigeons isn't a flying saucer and yet he'd rather like to claim "They've come!" While he's a powerful presence in his poems, he also describes beaches, pine trees, parks, waterfront cranes and household objects. He writes about strangers, friends and relatives - from his viewpoint. He wants to find meaning. Perhaps he wants to *make* meaning even more than he wants to find it.

None of this is an attempt to avoid aesthetics. His early work is dense and difficult - rapt, prolix, obscure, convoluted, sweeping and in long lines. Even so, he often achieves the effect of both comic and serious long-winded accumulation, ending with the jolt of the right word or reference:

Up on the moon pallid levels, the small
concrete caves of our fellow
Trogs, they pause at their silver sinks or before
The shallow pools of their reflected selves
In window, mirror, other's eye and - wonderful -
listen
Into the night and over the ubiquitous
Eructations of the flatulent city's
Cantankerous citizenry of wheeled spring-heeling cretins
And their auto-nubile vestals - marvellous -
hearing
The first and last birds of Respighi and Mahler

Letters to Live Poets (1969) was a new kind of poetry for him, accessible, political and directly autobiographical. It was also prosaic, as he later admitted. He was to write more such poetry. Clarity had been achieved; but something demented (and attractive) had been lost. Fortunately, it wasn't completely lost because he returned to dense writing in the 'Odes' part of *Odes and Days* and elsewhere.

Gillmore's *Surviving the Shadow* is a *book* of poetry; not a collection. There's little point in assessing it according to the number and quality of well-made poems in the last three sections. That would turn the earlier sequences into rough drafts when they're really a different kind of poetry.

Much of the book stems from the tragic death of the poet's young daughter, his turbulent relationship with her mother and the depth and dimensions of his grief. The latter involves drugs, alcohol, travel,

poetry, derangement, religious strivings and new relationships with women - all seen exclusively through the poet's eyes. No matter how sincere the religious strivings, they tend to take second place when sex and love are fulfilling:

Because of my desire
I let go of my rope to God.

I must learn to lie lips sealed on yours,
a prayer in the silence.

The fine quality of the well-made poems in the last sections will be clear to most readers. The superb quality of 'Desire' and 'Opening and healing the hole to the universe' will be even clearer:

we could extract with the finest honed needle
the last vestiges of the distant explosion
that remain as unspoken festering slivers;

something as huge as the smallest blade
could remove the unrecognised remnants
of grief's shame, guilt's rage, blame's anger;

a maul, as you dreamed, could smash and split
and expose to air and light the rotting silence,
like the innocent snake in the child's journey.

Far better it be healed by love, the oneness
that called it out of the imploding vortex
to the vast hole in the sky where the moon is.

The earlier performance poems used repetition, lists, accumulation, verbless sentences and colloquialism within narratives. It would be possible to exemplify both banality and over-writing at some length. Over-emphasizing the performance poetry's flaws, however, might *under-emphasise* the flow and readability of the earlier poems.

The reader's experience, then, is of moving along with the psychic narrative only to be startled by short bursts of fine performance poetry - indeed, fine *poetry*. Here are lines from 'Emma', Gillmore's dead daughter:

Now I hear nothing except
my echoes bouncing off echoes. . . .

Turning to earth,
turning.

and from 'Aberrations':

I was trying to make a hub
for that wheel of nothingness, poetry.

Hetherington's *acts themselves trivial* is a paradox. Strict editing could have turned it into a slim volume of considerable quality. Less strict editing, however, has reduced the poetic impact while increasing the biographical interest.

Because the poems are arranged roughly in chronological order, the reader has two experiences. The first is aesthetic; the second is biographical. These experiences are complicated by the existence of not just the early Hetherington and the later Hetherington but also by the middle Hetherington who influences the early as well as the later Hetheringtons. Moreover, the later poet is no better than the early poet - just different. Although the middle poet is acutely aware of his mental and emotional states, this doesn't necessarily mean that he expresses insights in poetry of quality.

The early poems balance on the tension between lost love and the futility of hope, assertiveness and potential embarrassment and living in the present when the present repeatedly lapses into the past:

And I couldn't say
why I was awake
when birds were calling
just before light
in the warming morning
with a fear that what I remembered
was stronger than me.

Whereas those lines are closely linked to the relationship in the early poems, the following lines from the middle poems aren't closely linked to anything:

It was a freedom
to find it out, that the heady imaginings
of early ambition were only good for a laugh.
to be ordinary, caught up in a life you couldn't control
was simply a relief, a letting go of burdens
you'd carried from way, way back when you thought
the world ignored you and you wanted its notice.

That's fine as biography. What the reader wants, however, are the poems that will emerge *after* those lines.

What the reader wants, the reader gets - although the ghost of the middle Hetherington still haunts a few of the later poems. By the time the poet is able to write about other people as separate

entities, he's writing *new* kinds of poems. 'Icarus', 'A Secret Collection' and the eight 'Poems From The Circus' exist for the reader without the poet's hindsight and introspection. Poems about his children work because he tries not to interpret them. In his excellent poem about his wife's childbirth, he plays an appropriately minor role:

> At the edge of a hospital bed a miracle
> begins to take hold of a body, plainly
> dressed in white, a jagging insistent push
> like a coiled spring loosening.
>
> I take hold of my wife, who starts to cry
> as if inside her space is doubling up,
> and prop and hold until my arm is numb,
> trepidation mixing fear and joy.
>
> Though hours have passed, this depth of time
> will not be gauged, and still the termless moment
> uncoils, like a stubborn, strenuous dream,
>
> till the final heaves let forth the head and arms
> and the astonishing is simply there,
> yelling, to be placed in cradling hands.

Sadly, assessment of Brissenden's *Sacred Sites* is overshadowed by his death after a long illness. Editor, academic, Chairman of the Literature Board, he published seven poetry collections, two crime novels and one critical work.

The political crime novels *Poor Boy* and *Wildcat*, written in his last years, might seem an odd departure from most of his life's work. In fact, they're representative of his capacity to change, respond and explore. Both his forms and his subjects display great variety. While often using the European, white Australian and more recently black Australian pasts, he also wrote topical work. Poems about Joplin, Yevtushenko and the superb and apparently effortless ballad on Tasmania's Sydney Orr case reveal topical writing with lasting qualities.

The sacred sites of the new collection consist of Australian-European historical sacred sites, his personal sacred sites and Aboriginal sacred sites.

The poet's interest in immigrants and southern Europe is tolerant curiosity rather than ethnicity for ethnicity's sake. The landscapes of his childhood and first meetings are lovingly revisited. Although interpreted with intimations of mortality, they're most effectively evoked for their own sake:

> Nothing so green
> In the red world of summer
> As the stiff fern-shaped leaves
> Of the pepperina.
>
> Nothing so sharp and bitter
> As the ripe pepper corns:
> Miniature bunches of grapes hard as shot
> Bright pink against blue sky.

It wouldn't have done the poet any disservice if these revisitings ended his book. They don't. The last section is about the 'Top End' which is larger and even more diverse than the poet. Brissenden is present in his last poem, but only just. A fine poem. Perhaps an even finer gesture:

> Rock turns to water. An infinity
> Of fish, of food and life and movement, drifts
> Above us as like Michelangelo
>
> Beneath the Sistine roof or like these nameless
> Artists we lie and watch the barramundi
> Swarm and swim. These images enshrine
>
> Thanks for a full belly, the hunter's love
> For what he kills - and more: a simple joy
> In being part of all that lives and dies.
>
> Unnumbered birds are flying over the green
> Wet plains. The brush moves, the glowing fish
> Are caught forever. Water turns to rock.

Sharkey's collection *Alive in Difficult Times* is clear, public, funny and deeply Australian verse. Despite references to Latin literature and international Modernism, most references range through Australian literature, art and indeed art galleries

- the 'minor' as well as the 'major'. Some poems would be unintelligible overseas.

Sharkey's public verse can sound like a total escape from personality:

> fear of foreigners, racist jokes,
> having the missus meet the blokes,
> cattle with staggers, sheep's rheumatics,
> Apex, Rotary, Chamber of Commerce,
> large mouth bowel worm, lice, hydatids,
> these are the region's native products.

That may not be Classicism; but no-one could mistake it for Romanticism.

Although not lists, his early poems refer to Australian life generally or to suburbs and country towns. The tone is laconic and sardonic. Where the poet implies sadness or disappointment, he's resigned to not being able to change anything. He's 'Doing the Block' but not *his* block. His subjects are the centre of his attention.

'Pictures at an Exhibition' are successful satiric reinterpretations of thirteen Australian paintings. Although they're all dramatic monologues, the speakers' identities are sometimes deliberately left for the reader's interpretation. At other times the speaker is an inspired choice, as with the model for Bertram Mackennal's 'Circe':

> Stuck in a room full of guards and alarms
> and dull landscapes I've time to reflect
> that all art history's bunk,
> all mythology's junk,
> and the rest's gynaecology, yes.

Hardly laconic.

Perhaps it's not surprising that a public poet works best within frames - literally in the thirteen pictures. Outside them, his satire and sarcasm vary in quality. In the one poem he writes the effective couplet:

> the sun went down like a vaselined oyster,
> clocks, of course, went Dali;

and the *ineffective* couplet:

> Bandicoots crossed the block of Arcady Heights
> with a cut lunch
> just as the in-laws arrived;

One of his 'Epigrams' is witty:

> How shall I put it to you?
> Put it anyway, I said.
> She put it to me anyway:
> we woke next day in bed.
>
> Her husband called and said How could you?
> Could I what? she said;
> Do what you're doing with him there.
> She said, I use my head.

while another to a Prime Minister is *corny*:

> Since you've banished poverty
> from inside our society,
> how is it when I'm home I see
> the outlaw's moved in here with me?

A carefully edited collection of dramatic monologues including 'Pictures' and extending to people other than writers and critics could make Sharkey as much a fixture as Bruce Dawe on Australian school curriculums.

Graham Rowlands teaches Australian Politics and Crime Prevention Planning in Adelaide. His most recent poetry collection is On the Menu.

Bruce Beaver: *New and Selected Poems 1960-1990* (University of Queensland Press, $19.95).
R. F. Brissenden: *Sacred Sites* (C/- The Phoenix Review).
Terry Gillmore: *Surviving the Shadow* (Paper Bark Press, $19.95).
Paul Hetherington: *acts themselves trivial* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $14.95).
Michael Sharkey: *Alive in Difficult Times* (Kardoorair Press, $8).

THREE POEMS BY BRUCE DAWE

THE BEACH

Life's a beach. And then you die.
Popular saying

At daybreak, a jogger, indenting the wet shingle
with the cuneiform marks of his passage.
Clambering over the sullen rocks of the
headland,
a boy and a long-haired dog which splashes
through
the shallows, dutifully fetching
thrown driftwood.
Then a spartan swimmer, leathery from salt and
sun,
braving the chill waves.
Low tide, and fisher-folk are already
burleying for worms.
Then the early lovers, honeymoon-driven, hand-
in-hand,
savouring the boom of ocean, compulsive as a
dance-band,
then the families: parents strolling like Egyptian
priests, toddlers
staggering with seismic joy, small children
racing ahead to gather suddenly around
funny things
to be touched with a tentative toe
or mumbled over, wide-eyed ('Mmnnh . . .
Errhh . . .'), the parents
glancing sideways at each other ('Worth it?
Every bit of it . . .').

Far out, the indistinct, appearing and
disappearing
dots of surfers.
After breakfast
the crowds arrive, seeking the best spots on the
sand,
loaded with Eskies, blankets, rugs, towels,
umbrellas, trannies,
sun-screen creams, sun-glasses, books,
the impedimenta of culture.
Life-savers man the towers now, below
the parade of fashion begins, the skin game;
from the beach-house
young bloods study form . . .
Under the boisterous surface of the day, the
sparkle and laughter,
larger darknesses, like kelp, move in.

AUSSIE-MANDIAS

"I'm a Mitsubishi Magna currency laddie!
I'm as dinky-di as any guy can be!
You'll see me toying with my new Toyota!
Or leaping up like John Laws on TV!

I get higher than a kite with my Hitachi!
I get all the latest *big* news NEC!
When Mr Ockamura's paged at Surfers
I've even thought that they were paging me!

I've got this little problem, though, that haunts
me:
Some days I'm quite sure just *who* I am . . .
I dream I'm in control and the world's my
freeway
- Then wake to find I've fallen from my pram!

ADVICE TO A TEEN-AGER ABOUT TO JOIN THE WORK-FORCE IN STRAITENED ECONOMIC TIMES

Fret not that you were born too late
to savour Hitler's hymns of hate;
you still may share what Slav and Jew
in Sachsenhausen camp went through.

There is no need to travel back
along that Mesozoic track;
Tyrannosaurus Rex will make
a meal of you, first job you take . . .

You'll meet them all, this week or next
- the monsters who, on some pretext,
will speed you to the exit door,
and you will never know what for . . .

They're all there, waiting for the kill,
in factory, office, shop, and mill
- they hate your guts, my little friend,
in your beginning fear their end . . .

Beware the chilly greeting smile!
Behind it lurks the crocodile!
Be not too bright, too good, too clever,
or life may close on you forever.

INNER CITY ANIMALS

The one-eyed cat on the old stone step
is a battler and a wary guard,
but cannot stop the rising damp,
pedigree Burmese next-door is nouveau,
a bit overbred and haughty,
round the corner the sheepdog cross
sits in the passageway glum,
perhaps he's hanging out
like a lonesome stage door Johnnie,
as violin practice leaks out the window,
you could swear he winces,
while the bitsers, black and white,
are permanently speedy and hang about
outside the coffee shops of their mistresses.

In the new park with its struggling trees,
a children's party where mothers and kelpies
round up kids, give orders, demands on all sides,
yuppies and puppies, the fluffiest dog
takes the tiniest child for a walk,
and the fishing families, intent and rugged up,
pull on lines, there's a sudden silver flash
and a fish dies intricately and slowly
on the concrete beside the rusted pilings.

There are migrants like the mynahs,
mimicking the locals to survive,
and tawdry lorikeets returning to the cities,
long gone all these years, still screeching,
and tiny skinks sunning on the back step,
flickering among the fallen leaves,
or darting around cracks of crumbling houses,
these tiny ones, the lords of all -
mosquitoes, ants, cockroaches, living on top,
underneath, gardens, houses, rubbish, any way
they can, like all communities, living
any way we can.

JILL JONES

POOCHERA DAWN

There is one light -
it will not get better
only stronger:
coming off silos
like showers of hard grain.
Along a makeshift fence
of the pub
wild barley feathers gold
everyone here knows
you cannot mine.
Always up early
a farmer's wife
fingers her ring.
Buckled down to promises -
she understands what things
are permanent:
knows growing older
she has only grown
less afraid.
English flowers;
stocks and marigolds
still hold
their old parched ground
but not for long.
And nameless birds squabble
in a profusion
of red bottlebrush:
each one a kind of bright
effusive candle -
burning;
leaving even now
scorch marks on the sky.

JEFF GUESS

TRAILING ARMS

Everyone knew
and ignored him
the old two-pot mutterer
who drank the dark
two beers a time
in the crowded pub
people would glance
but never sit
in the always empty seat
to which his eyes and lips
in endless monologue
addressed themselves
until another ceremonial
salute to the barmaid
a debonair touch of the hat
accompanied further purchases
as he downed
a desperate pension.

Then there was this
overheard one friday night
queuing for the urinal
upon whose walls
some cynic, long ago had scrawled
'fighting for peáce
is like fucking for virginity'
willing lads pissing their pay
against the wall
'Old Joe's a nutter'
I hear one say,
'Yeah', says his mate,
'On the Burma Railway he was
that's who he drinks with
every night, his mate
who didn't come back
funny Joe never left either.
Ready for another?'

ADRIAN CAESAR

ON SAFARI

Such dirty work
turning dreaming tracks

into nature strips
that drunks fall over

on Larapinta Drive
and Heavitree Gap

a tribe oversees
the wrecker's yard

enthusiasts bagging
wing mirrors, sometimes

a door. The traffic lights glow
with spiteful newness

in the pure desert air of June
between Peking Palace

and Mario's
these arid zones we adapt to

menus feed their sectors of
talk, the lights turn green

Mormons bike home
in charisma dayglo

hamburgers jammed in their saddles
in an abattoir town

the bush philosophers gather round
in the Bull Bar of The Stuart Arms

welcomes you its branding irons
on display unique

surgical instruments
polished with Silvo

the quaint heraldry
of cows are you or have you

ever been a herbalist?
Have you cased this joint?

The white didgeridoo player
rips the tops off beercans

with a surgical hand
still wired for sound.

Next gig: Hotel Bondi.

ADAM AITKEN

FIVE POEMS BY TERRY HARRINGTON

MATINS

blue tit
& brown wife
bath each other
before sparrow fart
in a puddle

sprinkled
with hold dew
two tits
tittle there
fearlessly

LEMONS

proper lemons are
oriental yellow
firm
wax-skinned
sour
& nipplesome
fed
on chicken-shit
licked
by rain

WINTER BEES

we go to them under a cold sun
bared back to the skin
to smell their strength
to weigh their ripening

they want their own honey now
their pollen their propolis
their love-warm brood-comb
their wintering queen

WATTLE

your yellow is blinding
shrieking out
the fading winter

you know when it is time
a million orbs at dawn
a litter of pollen

the bees dance in your plenty
a million brood-eggs wriggle
with your yellow fat pulsing

the sun snap-dries your confetti
a million years
joining soil to sun

TIN

black pelts of rain
on a tin roof

there is nothing
so loud
when you are
this empty

BRUCE GRANT

The Other Country

The room was as intriguing as a painting, each aspect of it requiring attention, each detail thoughtfully placed, the whole giving off a feeling of privacy and self-absorption, yet also of generosity. The colours were light and soft, or, if bright, brilliant rather than strong. The shape of the room was conventional and so were the shapes of its objects, bookshelves, posters, a big, low double-bed, a four-legged table, stools, commodiously square armchairs, a desk, rectangular rugs on a scarred and polished wooden floor, but the effect was not conventional at all. The arrangements were made so cleverly, or perhaps artlessly (it was not immediately apparent when you walked in) that you felt the room had been created for an important purpose, that it pulsed with vigor and tenderness, that nothing was excluded from it and significant secrets had been confided in it, so that the visitor even imagined ridiculously it might accommodate war and violence.

At night, when the curtains were drawn, it glowed rather sombrely, having no overhead lighting, and soft sprays of light near the bed and the chairs and in one corner gave it almost the weight of a Rembrandt, although none of the brown darkness. On sunny days, especially in winter when the sun actually shone through one window, it revealed itself in the light, encompassing colours of, say, Monet. Indeed, a print of The Lillies hung prominently on the wall facing the illuminated window. It was not an Australian room.

It was a woman's room. That was apparent from its tidiness, its edge of delicacy and although perhaps this was only experienced by those who actually entered and remained within it, its tranquillity, for this last quality depended a great deal on the person whose room it was.

Yet she was not seemingly a tranquil person. She was energetic, fast-moving, efficient. She would rise quickly from her desk and greet you with an outstretched hand to shake or a cheek to kiss, depending on who you were. Then she would hold her head slightly on one side, as if making a friendly judgement of you before motioning you to one of the commodious chairs. She had an air about her of being delighted and amused by you, as if you were some kind of entertainment provided, if not for her alone, at least for her kind of world which you had indisputably entered when you came into the room. She seemed to be deciding how far to go with you, how confidential or even intimate your conversation was likely to be, how responsive or persuasive she might be.

She would laugh lightly as she directed you to a chair, glancing out the window.

"I don't think the snipers can get us here."

Her language was almost always constructed at two levels, one literary, one functional. Her literary language was laced with images of war, quaintly divided between World War I and the national liberation wars of the 1960s. She would often evoke as a first line of conversation, when she had settled a visitor down, what she took to be the pathos of World War I.

"Been pouring out the sweet red wine of youth lately?"

Most of her callers found this difficult to answer. They smiled winningly and shuffled their feet.

"Ah, yes," she might add helpfully, "live deep and let the lesser things live long?"

She would tilt her head to one side, summing them up, giving them some kind of mark for prospective wit in the absence of evidence. Or she might offer a visitor something from which she took to be the camaraderie of guerilla warfare and urban terrorism.

"Fish swimming happily among people?" she might inquire, or "Knocked off any fascist pigs lately?" These inquiries were made with cheerful precision, as if their murky depths were unknown to her or, if known, casually dismissed. Her visitors would murmur incoherently while maintaining

confident smiles. Those who knew her well might say "Yes, Auntie".

Her functional language was related to her work which was, however, not easily defined. She was confidante and go-between to so many people in such disparate and even opposing roles that not even she was entirely sure at times what she was doing. For example, she wrote or assisted in writing the speeches of several government ministers in the other country. As she lived in Sydney, this task required a liaison with the local consul and many of the people who came to see her were official couriers, sometimes from the embassy in Canberra. They would be asked to wait cheek by jowl with young Australians who were passionately opposed to the government - and in some cases even particularly to the ministers she assisted - but who came to see her because of the influence she supposedly had, and did indeed have, in getting visas for them to visit the country they so disliked and providing contacts for them when they arrived there. She would brief them in fine detail on all matters. At the same time, she conducted a lively dialogue with the foreign and Australian media, which came to her to seek or to check information about an event or perhaps a visitor from the other country. She was also in demand by Australian officialdom. Ministers and their staffs kept in touch with her and the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Defence, Immigration, and also the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, had her on their lists of people who might be invited to functions in which the other country had an interest.

It was not at all clear to any one of these groups how she managed to serve so many other masters, as well as themselves. They wondered how the seemingly irreconcilable interests of all the people she serviced did not make unmanageable demands upon her, yet she was so useful to them, and their experience of her so lacking in any evidence of double-dealing, or indeed multiple-dealing, that they shrugged off the question while it was still half-formed in their minds.

Her secret lay only partly in her agility, which was nevertheless impressive. Her sharp and active mind had the ability to direct her attention quickly sideways long before it became fashionable to regard lateral thinking as a creative way out of problems and impasses. Her mind jumped from one thing to another, not erratically but as a natural progression towards a conclusion which would nevertheless be rarely announced when reached. Her body worked closely with her mind, moving around the room like a bird in a freshly dug garden, spinning about, cocking an ear in suspended thought, peering under books and papers, holding aloft one object while searching with one hand for another. She often talked to herself, in the form of directions and admonitions. "What *are* you doing?" and "*There* it is, dingdong." And so on. Yet this frantic presence was effortlessly managed, which is what gave the room its tranquillity in spite of the perpetual flurry.

Somewhere, at the core of her, known by some and sensed by those who knew only the rumours, was a profound experience that gave her assurance and satisfaction, even authority. She knew, and assumed others did too, that she had touched, perhaps held briefly, one of life's great moments and nothing, not even the disappointment of her own life, could take this from her. It was captured in history and could never be lost.

She was a daughter of the revolution and inside her, as she grew older and the events of which she had been part receded, a young woman struggled to shout that all was not lost, that the spirit of renewal and affection was still alive, that the martyrs had not died in vain and that the bemused men and women who now sat around in their diffident houses, re-reading old press clippings, could be revived. If only . . . Lately she had not been able to say with certainty what this conditional occurrence was, but she never doubted that something would happen, that wrongs would be righted and faith and hope restored. At night she slept peacefully, breathing as lightly as a child.

One day a man with a military bearing rang the front door bell. Her room was the first on the right as you entered the house which was owned but inconstantly occupied by a childless, non-tenured academic couple who were persistently elsewhere on research. She was meticulous about encroaching upon the rest of the house, except the kitchen and the bathroom, which she legitimately shared, but her visitor intimidated her and she placed him in an adjoining room, what would have been the front room when the house was built in the 1930s in this sea-side, working-class Irish Catholic suburb that had now become expensive and urgently middle class. In that room, incongruously among the bric-a-brac of a transient, unaesthetic life, including a television set, video, high-fidelity sound system and by chance a bundle of washing she had left on a chair as well as the surviving lace curtains (not the original of course but its stylistic legacy) was a Balinese mask which the visitor noticed immediately.

"I'm from Kamaria" he announced, pulling from his pocket a notebook which he playfully fanned

spraying imaginary bullets around the room.

He had a big laughing face that caused her concern and she decided not to respond, although she was aware that in war games played to test Australia's defences, Kamaria had been a mythical adversary from the north.

"How can I help you?" She realised, without embarrassment, that she sounded like a doctor or a priest responding to unfortunate symptoms.

"We're seeking your assistance in an important matter." He had straightened his back and tightened his facial muscles, giving now an impression that he was a conveyor of weighty concerns. He took from his pocket an envelope, passing it to her with a flick of his wrist. She noticed with surprise that it was addressed to her, so she opened it. Inside was another envelope, blank.

"Open it", he said eagerly.

It was a small brown envelope which she tore with difficulty. A single piece of paper on Department of Defence letterhead emerged and she read as follows:

Dear Madam,

We believe you may be in receipt of information which could be of value to us. We would be grateful if a meeting could be arranged to discuss this. You may wish to make the arrangement with the officer who brought this letter.

It was signed by someone who was a brigadier.

She looked at her young visitor whose face was shining with excitement and pride.

"Do I have to go to Canberra for this?" she asked mildly.

"Not at all. We could do it here in Sydney." He was so pleased with his ability to be accommodating that he heaved his bulk out of the chair and walked to the window, looking through the curtains at that part of Sydney opposite, which was an amphitheatre of houses in stages of renovation, huddled over a rocky enclave and a broiling sea.

"Fantastic", he said. He explained that he had been brought up on a sandbelt in Perth.

"The air must be invigorating. Especially in summer?"

Her mind was wandering, not in the sharp jabs of thought that stimulated her or the delicious curves of memory that sent her to sleep, but drifting in a haze of recollection. Little, prickly, significant things that might now need to be shown in a different light, political intimacies that sprang from friendship, personal intimacies that sprang from frustration and loneliness, and now, her age and the meaning of her life.

"Let's have it here", she said, pointing to the floor.

His face fell in a great slab of disappointment.

"You mean the meeting?"

"You can bring your tape-recorders", she said. "I'll have mine."

"I don't know how they'll take it", he grumbled, looking disconsolately around the room.

"Well, try them." She was chirpily pleasant.

"I can't guarantee anything." He wore his fallen crest like a suit of armour, weighing him down, prolonging his arms. She bundled him out, her hand lightly reaching to the small of his big back.

Then she sat down to collect her thoughts, an unusual procedure which nevertheless bore instant fruit. She would have the meeting in her own room. It would be crowded, but the furniture could be rearranged. She set about rearranging it immediately, pushing the bed into a corner with the table, assembling the commodious chairs in a kind of circle, restaging the lights. She looked long and lovingly at the Monet which remained invulnerable on the central wall.

What did they want to know?

She switched on the answering machine, checked that her fax was working, put the dog on a leash and left the house for a walk. She sought to remember the detail of her first meeting with Bluyker. He had become so important to her politically, the centre of her life, that it took a

moment to recall that his attraction had been at the beginning so entirely sexual that it would probably not have mattered what his politics were – within reason, of course, by which she meant she could not have loved a fascist, or even a repentant ex-fascist. All politics then, in that post-war burst of relief and hope, had been optimistic, practical or lyrical and sometimes, as with them, both. She had been drawn to him like a moth. He had first kissed her on the Charles Bridge in Prague, after a peace meeting at the university. She had followed him to Paris in a bus to see him for one hour, spent in a tiny room at the top of the Hotel du Levant in the rue de l'Harpe. She had seen the snowflakes pelting and had said, blurted out really:

"I'll always undress for you. I'll always be wet for you."

"Always?" He had laughed delightedly.

"If I'm not, just force your way in."

Heavens, had she really said that? The dog threatened to pull her over the cliff face and she steeled her memory as she pulled back on the leash. Yes, indeed, not only said but written, in a note sent to him in . . .? London. He had tried to climb a lamp pole on the Embankment. They had driven a hired Jaguar to Scotland on icy roads, slept in a farmhouse, had porridge for breakfast and climbed a bald, windy hill.

The years with Bluyker, six, nearly seven, were so busy she had never detected the particular political perspective that later caused him so much trouble, so busy and brimming over with a love for him that was a kind of personal Declaration of the Rights of Man. And Woman. And Jews and Blacks, everyone in the Third World, artists everywhere, helpers and doers and lovers of their fellow human beings all over the world. Loving Bluyker was like saying mixed marriages were a good idea, regulated economies would work, science and technology had the answers, population control, social cooperation and food production would save the world. The old order was crumbling before her very eyes and she and Bluyker were, somewhere, in the vanguard of all that was new.

She had never loved a man like that since. She had never loved a man since. She had . . . She stood on the cliff-face, looking out to sea, and her eyes filled with tears. She cried, doubling up with deep sobs, holding the leash away from her as if to exclude the dog from her misery. But he crept near her nuzzling her small brown shoes and wrinkled woollen stockings.

She straightened up firmly, brushed her skirt and pushed the dog away. She had not been herself, distraught, trapped in menial work and harrowing judgements. It was an unfortunate mistake. Yet even as she packaged the episode again, to be stored out of the way, she saw her naked body lying flat and cold on a hotel bed, like a scene from a morgue; then a dark man's hands hovered over her pale skin, thick lips crushed hers, thrusting loins created turmoil within her and, reluctantly, she reached up to him, exploding inside, again and again.

Was Bluyker in prison then? Probably. It had been three years since she had seen him, two years since she had heard from him, a year or more since she had heard of him. "I will never forgive myself", she said under her breath, then aloud, loudly: "I will never forgive myself!" By the time he had gone to prison, their political dreams were over and they only had each other. "I'll never forgive myself."

The dog, which usually pleased her with its energy and enthusiasm, irritated her today. She could not escape the feeling that Bluyker somehow knew, that breaking the bond of fidelity to him may have broken his spirit. They were so close, so sensitive to each other's moods, so immersed in each other that he would have detected a change in her. Her letters were never answered. But even if he did not receive them someone would have read them. Someone might have analysed them carefully. Someone may have talked to him about them, noticing that her enthusiasm flagged, or seemed forced, or how vague she was about the details of her visit to Jakarta.

And, of course, eventually she stopped writing. He would have known that. She just stopped, tired out, sick of sending messages into the unknown, unable to sit down every Sunday afternoon at her typewriter to send him the week's news, unable to keep saying: "I love you. The bottom line, my love, is that I love you. I love you!" It just became impossible, unreal, play-acting. She just stopped, worn out. And then, to explain it to herself, she said: "He must be dead." For years she thought he was. She did not learn he was alive until the big changes came, until the prisons were emptied. Then his name was everywhere for a while, but she still could not write. And he never did.

She could see, looking towards the Sydney skyline, the headland cemetery where her father was buried.

She had taken up Bluyker's work in Australia. It was like being engaged on a huge painting, the work of a lifetime, filling the canvas with deft strokes, touches of colour, keeping the scene alive, vibrant, confident, hopeful, bringing in the later generations, regenerating the connective tissues, making sure all options were open. She had put her whole life into it, her father, who had taught

her to be fair, her radical friends, ageing but holding on, her love of the honest Australian landscape, even the dog, which now dragged her homewards.

She waited for them in her room, quietly gathering strength. She had been true to Bluyker, in the bigger sense of their place in history. She pursed her lips as the phrase entered her head, glancing around the room to reassure herself that this modest enclave was all she possessed, reminding herself of her anonymity and discretion as go-between. Her name was never in the newspapers, she was meticulous about confidences, she had never breathed a word to others about Bluyker's work. Also, she had retained a disdain for ideology and political factions that she knew he would like. He used to say: "Factions are like football followers, one-eyed and prone to violence." He hated ideologues so intensely that he had once refused to share a room with one at a week end conference. The man was mild and personable enough but Bluyker was quite irrational, claiming he would not be able to sleep in the same room as a person who thought that "even the air we breathe is the property of some authority or other". He had spent half the night walking around with her, pretending to be discussing conference issues, then had collapsed in a couple of chairs when the last stragglers had gone to bed.

It took Bluyker years to understand what she knew instinctively, which was that ordinary people respected tradition because their parents or grandparents were likely part of it. Bluyker thought conventions could be brushed aside, institutions upturned and traditions reversed without offending ordinary people. Bluyker believed that the "onrush of events" (one of his favourite phrases) would take care of everything. The art of politics was to be in tune with what was going to happen anyway (what was inevitable?). He thought that people would irresistably follow. He did not understand that the forces of resistance were always there, waiting, in every society, at every stage of history.

In the plane before landing he had handed her a small parcel.

"Hang on to that for me, sweetheart. Do you mind?"

"What is it?"

"Oh, nothing much. A few odds and ends."

"It was not a heavy parcel but it had weight. It was not odds and ends.

"Why give it to me?"

"You're pretty and cheerful, my love, and I'm not."

He had whistled the tune of Gershwin's 'Someone to Watch Over Me', slanting his eyes at her knowingly, bantering, refusing to tell her what was in it.

She did it. No one at customs questioned her and she handed it back to him in the taxi.

"Good girl", he said, squeezing her hand.

That was the difference between them. He was central in whatever they did together because it was his country. His country was so much more exciting than hers that it never occurred to her to question why her rights and duties depended on him. It never occurred to her that she might be untrue to her country in being true to his or him. It was simply that his country was important and hers was not.

She sat rather glumly awaiting their arrival. it was all nonsense, wasn't it, this business about being loyal to one's country. Bluyker used to be a traitor: now he was a hero. She had taken so little interest in Australian politics that she now did not care which party was in power in Canberra.

She looked at the Monet, so still and complete, and remembered the surf outside her door pounding on the ancient rock of Australia.

They came right on time, two men with her earlier visitor, now subdued. She seated them carefully in the arranged chairs and placed herself opposite them.

"Well now, how can I help?" Her voice was nicely neutral.

They each took notebooks from their pockets and opened up at the first page, as if preparing for a substantial discussion. One man appeared to be reading something in his notebook and the others waited for him.

"What do you know about a man called Bluyker?" he asked.

THOMAS SHAPCOTT

Birthdays

Why this blackmail? We go a long way back to find
the thing significant: moment of birth. Time
of the mother, not the child. The debt
is built into birthdays, and each instalment pays.
Year after year the counting tugs you away
from origins but debt does not work like that:
it grows.
This morning was my birthday, and I know
even the hour of birth. I do not know the woman
(youngish, apprehensive?) whose body took her over
like a machine distending sinew and muscles
until my twin and I were pushed out, him first
and me reluctant, red, 'wrinkled like a prune'.
The mother of my associations is the one I know
out of a much later gradation of experiences,
even the photos say nothing. The pregnant woman
whose body folded me into the greatest intimacy
moved backward from the moment of birth. The wise
post-parturition contractions massaged her
to some sense of return from all I was
and all my brother was. All the years of all
the ensuing birthdays were hers, her supervising,
leading, urging and bewildering. Even my brother
moved in his separate space from the birth moment on.
The blackmail began.

It began again this morning, the returned day.
I have learned to be prepared for pain, and for
some hurt sense of - what? of disappointment?
Call it that for now. No gift from family
quenches the hunger. My children do not even remember
the day, it is nothing to them. And my own
celebrations of parents' birthdays were perfunctory:
a pair of socks, a floral cup-and-saucer, flowers
in the end. Were my parents, either of them, cut
to the bone at the gap in the year? Did they drink
that cup of neglectful poison? It's as if I,
in my hunger demanded Surprise Parties, feasts,
gargantuan revels
although I know that nothing appeases some primal thirst.
What vanity! What debt!

I find myself trying to dig to the splinter in the flesh
of this fester. The fact of twinship, perhaps?
My brother was born an hour before, but also
a prior day, so that we spent our childhood
sharing not only gifts but parties and events:
this year the cake is on the 20th, next year
the 21st - and in my memory only the first day
persists. I was greedy enough to want my presents
early, or the cake, or the party tricks.
Even our twenty-first was shared, many of the presents
were identical: the photograph album, the electric razor,
the pewter mug. Symbolic keys. When I broke free
it was to begin my own family and I recall
the ceremonies of Christmas and birthdays
as central events. It was I, myself, who made the fuss.
Anyone's birthday was the excuse, but was I acting
out a more private ceremony, willing to life
something even the natural headline of a twinship
could not express? What could my children
ever afford, to match the giver-man? Hand drawn cards
and weed-flowers satisfied me in those years. A bottle of wine

from a friend humbled me. And there *was* the year
of the Surprise Party, a crowd, orchestrated by
wife and brothers. That should have sufficed.
No need at all for future birthdays.
That strange chafe,
can it never be quenched? What is its source?
Its expression has persisted so long: my first year at work,
when I was sixteen, and my request to have the day
(I mooned at home, listening to radio).
Or my 23rd, alone in Sydney and an 'Intermediate Clerk':
of course I remember the meal I shouted myself
at Cahills, even to telling the waitress just why.
And in these later years the taste of poison
increases rather than fades. What vanity is this?
What locked-in passion?

Tonight we see HAMLET. I have bought the seats
and my wife's son will never know the drama
of the extra booking that added him in: yes,
he will go why not? He fights with his mother
and, in the foyer because I say a word to support him,
she strides off. Last night we went as a couple
to another play and drank coffee in sleek Mietta's
sharing our cheerful derision at the artwork.
Tonight my own son arrives at the theatre and asks,
straight off, "Where's Judith?" When she returns,
seeing him, she speaks energetically,
as to an audience, of last night's play
but at the final curtain she flings herself
(almost literally) from my side and is off,
seeking her own son no doubt whose seat is separate.
I wait in the crowd and make pained conversation
with my son and his friend. Rain outside. There are gulfs
we cannot bridge. As an afterthought, pushing off,
my son says, "Oh yeah: happy birthday Dad".
Very loud laughs. I do not suggest coffees
and nobody else does.
Now what sort of fool would brood on all that?

There is a tyranny, a blackmail in the naming of things
and time itself adds to the charges. Each year
the payment is not made, and the debt is my own.
It turns inward and the personal sting grows more
impersonal. I seek that out. I must. Somehow
there is more explanation than mere petulance or pang.
Where did the ache begin? Is this a game of origins?

Those games to get attention: being the good boy
folding the linen or cutting the hibiscus hedge
or being the bad boy with scissors and a cruel tongue -
I don't remember my brother trying to gain affection,
it was his right. I wanted to be Mowgli in the Jungle Book,
I was the capable castaway on Coral Island, I outflew
Biggles in the stories I was planning to write;
cheeky as William, I was ripe for the Secret Club
and the passwords, and was on my brother's side.
I was astounded when he recalled to me, forty years on,
the time we were bailed up by the bigger boys
and I rounded on them with a rage of invective
while he got away. It was not a victory
merely the heat of the moment and the only tactic
if you were smaller. Even his tribute
after those years I deflected aside, though I knew
he had not hoarded the childhood things like me.
I have to approach myself now.

I have to be honest. The first moment of true rage
I come back to also concerns my twin. I see myself
as hero, though I was restrained by four Prefects
when I rushed to his aid in the schoolground
under the Jacarandas (the site is still vivid!),
hearing of the tussle, with him underneath
and the enemy: was it Alan Kilpatrick?
"Let him fight his own fights" one of them muttered
but I knew there was nobody else in that school
who had a twin would rush to his aid, blind
with passion. It did not even occur to me
then or for decades that my brother had no need of me,
he was indeed fighting his own squabble.

The gift was not given, and it was not received.

We were marked, we were eccentrics, I had to fight
in all those playgrounds of kids from mining families
or the Railway Workshops. At Primary School
in the class there were always two groups, theirs
and ours. Within our group, my brother and I
had our separate allegiences. I never questioned
the allegience of the others, I think I hardly noticed it.
I recall with a grunt, now, Roy Naylor coming up
to be on our side and offering to bash up anyone
I nominated, as his entry fee. I knew none of that mattered.
What mattered was a balance somewhere, but a balance
between me and my brother, or between our claims
on our mother? And what was Jack's claim with our Dad?

If in the end I have to account a truce with my father
it was because for so many years we were in Joint Practice.
There was time to distance and to negotiate
though of course he was always the one at the top.
I did not, like my older brother, have to raise fists
to prove anything, nor like my younger brother
have to return year after year, the fond Roaring Boy,
seeking a blessing and a benign hug.
I had come out and had got there on my own. I had
mastered distance, I felt.
Taking two paces aside, I see myself, that young man,
as clever, moody, sharp with my tongue. Classic
defences. Dad, for his part, had few friends.
I could not believe he had given me gifts,
including the cruel gift of boyish looks
and a polished accent.
These things
are not bargains, but neither are they assets
unless you learn to negotiate. We shared a final innocence.

Blackmailed by innocence? That is too pat.
Just as "the infant starved of affection" would affront
my mother, fair in all measures, though she must confess
the claimant pang of her first-born and, I suspect,
the sweet gentleness of my twin, whose world
grew among motorbikes and car engines and tools
of trade in the printery her brother ran.
My birthday debt remains, shall we say,
more as a compensation. I invented the ritual.
I probed the nerve, year after year, until now
it is pain that I yearn for, seek out, track,
and devour. Birth day. Day probing back.
To make a gift is to create an obligation.
Thank you, mother. Thank you, Dad. My own children
wince and, I hope, recover, though I hear
in my own wild Irish grandmother (long dead)
the unrelenting ache of a loss deep in the blood
and an inbred refusal to forget, no matter how hurtful
the cause or the eventual consequence.
We do go a long way back, and we come to a shared
commemoration of birth, each one separate
and the same. The Chorus Of The Unborn
holds us to ransom and nothing we tell
prevents their urgency, it thrashes our very loins
and precedes decision, or act, or consequence.
Out of the consequence we take our moment, and are born.
We discard the shell, the shelter, we take voice
as our own, and with the very gulp of air
we swallow the first complaint, making it ours
with true greed. To find in the ceremony
some later pique ("I knew you'd forget!")
is simply to say, we remember. What we remember
is a hoard that grows and pushes our shoulders
forward; we cannot afford to stop.
One day: from midnight until midnight, that's the cost.
And you realize, in the end, only one person
holds the key and the candle. No matter how boorish,
soft or trivial, you have become the giver
and your life is the burden of the gift.

LYNDON WALKER

Twistin' by the Pool

The Lorne Memorial Swimming Centre has a large sign in black and red on a white background with the largest letters saying POOL REGULATIONS, followed by the following archaic subtitle: 'Patrons will please refrain from the following' and then a list of prohibited activities in more red lettering with a line drawing in black to the left for the benefit of the illiterate. Running, Ballgames, Acrobatics (with the pacifist capitalised clarification: NO BOMBS), Dunking, Pushing-In, Petting. As he thought about this the last arrangement disturbed his sense of order somewhat. He considered lazily that really pushing in should have come after petting.

It was too far away for him to clearly see the illustration which accompanied the word 'PETTING' but as far as he could tell it only showed a couple kissing. Rough Play, Wrestling, Swimming In The Diving Area, Continuous Bouncing On Diving Board, the restrictions went on. Underneath there is a list of lesser though explicit admonitions presented without the visual aid of illustration. Flicking Towels, Throwing Stones Or Other Articles In Pool. Under this the last line of the sign begins with the single red word: 'PUNNING' and is followed by what most closely resembles a Chinese or Indian proverb: 'Your last step could kill or maim' it says cheerfully.

The woman he was with on this cool, early morning in early summer was about to transgress one of these forbidden actions but it was not the one which most held his attention. There had been some tension between them now for some time, two years really. For two years she had been trying to become pregnant and he had been trying to make her so, all to no avail. She had been on the pill since she was a teenager and now in her thirties she had gone off it but did not seem to have returned to fertility. Now two years later it was as if this thing which was originally supposed to have grown naturally and beautifully out of their love for each other had succeeded in driving a wedge between them. At any rate their love-making was no longer the relaxed and easy thing he thought it ought to be. This holiday had been one of the avenues he had pursued to try and take them out of the rut they were in, but now it was beginning to look as if this was failing as well. Niggling little arguments had sprung up between them like bushy weeds in a neglected garden.

These are the thoughts that occupied his mind as they entered the pool enclosure having walked down from the grassy bank up above towards the foreshore with the huge green cold Pacific rolling in from Bass Strait where it meets with the Antarctic. He thought the coolness in the air and the ocean reflected what was happening between them lately. Even this trip to the pool had been disputed territory. He had said it was too cold without saying he wanted to stay warmly in bed with her in the motel if that was possible. She had let him know that wasn't possible. He had woken early, as usual, and as more usual when they were in this place in his favourite motel and he could wake up and watch the sun rising over the ocean. Inroads of gold cutting paths through the cold air across the grey of ocean, then the changing, second by second, to a warmer, more alive world mostly absent of the junk of men. Some seagulls whirling in to the shoreside gums, a fishing trawler setting off from the stormproofed jetty down and to the right, no sound reaching, nothing breaching the serenity it seemed to impart, this world. She had put out her own tense vibes:

"Do you have to wake this early?"

He had tried to explain to her what it meant to him, this moment, to communicate his enthusiasm, to pass on some of the gift. It made no discernible impression on her. When the breakfast arrived he'd placed her orange juice by the bed and then each course as he'd finished his own. He used to worry that she didn't eat but now he just tried to arrange things passively so that they

were easy for her if she ever wanted them. She rarely did. Her complaints about everything, her friends, work, life, him, seemed now like uncharted reefs on which his every effort was wrecked.

Now as they entered the deserted pool with its moralistic fifties sign he wondered if this was a novel how would they plot their way out of it. Originally very in love, committing themselves to children and life together. Strange how just one slight wind change in their course had brought them into this sea of constant storms. This minor warfare with its major casualty their life together. Just thinking of it made him tired. It was like so many bad American stories on the television. The only major cultural difference he could pick up was that they never fought about money.

Just then she did something which reminded him of why he admired her so much. Without so much as a second thought she dropped her towel and dove straight into the water, coming up cleanly and swimming one entire length of the pool. He knelt down and tentatively trailed one hand through the water. It was just as cold as he had imagined it would be. This was no trick of secret knowledge on her part, knowing it was warm, this was bravery, courage. It was times like this he felt inadequate in comparison to her.

He walked to the other end of the deserted pool enclosure, laid out their towels side by side under the shade of some huge old trees and picked up his book as if to read. He didn't read though. He watched her beautiful tall body cutting through the water in her determined graceful style powered by what he regarded as the most beautiful legs in the world. He watched her swim one length of the pool after another, counting as she went, and remembered their fight about 'laps'. He had spent most of his earlier life in Queensland and New South Wales, where people regarded the water as something of a playground. He remembered how angry she had got when he exaggerated his side of the argument by suggesting the more regimented Victorians, ploughing up and down in their well defined lanes, were the Nazis of the swimming world. He knew she had got that angry because his comment had jarred her own memory of her cold competitive father, who regarded sport as yet another arena in which he could beat his children, and that in saying this he had cut very close to the bone.

She finally finished lapping and came to rest at the end of the pool near where he rested on the towels:

"Come in. It's beautiful once you get used to it."

"It's freezing!"

"Come on. Don't be such a coward."

She had got to him and he really did want to please her.

"All right. I'll give it a try."

He got up from the towels and walked towards the shallow end of the pool. Painfully slowly he stepped down into the water and onto the first rung of the chrome ladder that itself was cold to the touch from its contact with the water. Satisfied at provoking at least some movement from him she had gone back to her own methodical swimming. Now she stopped and noticed his pathetic progress in entering the pool. He could feel the freezing water inching further up his chest with the little waves she made as she came closer.

"Come on. You'll feel better when you're all the way in. This way you're only prolonging the agony."

"Maybe so, but as it's my agony that's the way I'd like it."

She winced and came right up to him keeping her own body totally submerged.

"How about I just wrap myself around you?"

Before he could protest she had done it. Her body, her arms, her bathers were all freezing cold to the touch. "Shit" he said, and a tiny deep shiver went through him and kept on going like it had a life of its own.

"You have to get your whole body under the water, head and all, before you begin to feel warm."

With that she took him under and held him there. The shock of the cold frightened him. He opened his mouth and water poured in. He closed it again and opened his eyes on a blue world. He tried to stand but she had her own head out of the water and was holding him around the shoulders. His feet kept sliding on the bottom. This was like a joke that was going on too long. He began to struggle and then like a dream the mind played one of its tricks of memory and place, dragging back into his consciousness his childhood time spent in boarding school and the pool and the macho taunts, the fear traditions of the nasty little snobs who were his classmates. He couldn't believe this strong feminist was behaving exactly as they had. He couldn't believe he had time to think about that. He looked straight onto the skin-tight bright swimsuit that clung to her body and saw her nipples standing out in relief. The water was going down now, past his nose. It was at that moment he thought he heard music. As if this parochial resort in a small coastal town had installed stereo underwater speakers that were playing Peter Gabriel or Phil Collins or other submerged English rock. The water was going down his throat, down into his lungs.

He began to choke. Then, just as quickly, the moment passed. He broke free to the surface, gasping and spluttering, letting in and out air and water all at once like some whale or submarine at the end of a sound. He glimpsed her face, a face he knew well. He couldn't read it. He'd never seen that expression before. He didn't know what it meant. She was swimming away from him now.

He lay for a long time on the edge of the pool. By the time he felt normal enough to take in his surroundings she was out of the pool, her dark glasses on, reading a book on her towel. He walked towards where she was lying but she said nothing to him. He put on his own sunglasses and methodically buttoned his shirt. He walked over to the wire mesh of the pool and clutching it like a cage from the inside watched the wind and sand eroding the treed hills of Lorne. He stood there for a long time, letting time and his feelings pass. The wind blowing through him, not bringing with it any answers.

books

Suffering from Biography: the Case of Ada Cambridge

Susan McKernan

Audrey Tate: *Ada Cambridge: Her Life and Work 1844-1926* (Melbourne University Press, $24.95)
Margaret Bradstock and Louise Wakeling: *Rattling the Orthodoxies: A life of Ada Cambridge* (Penguin, $18.95)

Ada Cambridge made a few mistakes if she wanted her literary reputation to survive. The first, of course, was to publish too much - five books of poetry, more than a dozen books of fiction, more than forty short stories and serials. Another was to write for a popular audience. And this folly was compounded by publishing two autobiographies depicting herself as a domesticated clergyman's wife with conservative social and political views.

If she had been more interested in posterity and less in finding an audience during her own lifetime, Cambridge might have restricted herself to publishing only *Unspoken Thoughts, A Woman's Friendship, A Marked Man* and *Materfamilias*. She would have remained silent on her private life and opinions, or better still, she would have (like Rosa Praed, Jessie Couvreur and Barbara Baynton) abandoned marriage and Australia for life in the literary circles of London or Europe. Yet, even if Cambridge had made these concessions to twentieth century critical prejudice, she could not compensate for one fundamental error: she wrote comedies and satires, shrewd and witty delineations of social behaviour. Baynton's *Bush Studies*, and Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* might be taken seriously despite the sex of their authors, but what can you do with a writer who remained consistently optimistic about human possibilities?

Cambridge wrote for money. Though she had published hymns and moral tales as a young woman, after a few years in Australia she began to publish short fiction in the newspapers, moving rapidly to produce at least one serial a year (sometimes several short ones) from 1872 to 1892, and a book a year from 1897 to 1907. From this simple fact - that Cambridge was commercially quite a successful writer - there has developed a series of disputes about whether Cambridge needed the money (and, therefore, had crass motives) or whether she used the money for luxuries (and, therefore, was not serious) with only occasional suggestions that she may have written because she was a writer, and that, because she was a writer, she consciously sought out readers and wrote for an audience. If only she had been like Henry Lawson, struggling to support a family from her earnings and gaining success only at the expense of literary compromise. But Cambridge wrote during the great age of the Victorian serial novel; she accepted the limitations of the genre in which she wrote and, for her, literary and popular success could come together.

Ironically, the recent enthusiasm of feminists for her work has thrown more doubt on Cambridge's achievements. At present, it is possible to own and read Cambridge's book of poetry, *Unspoken Thoughts*, one of her autobiographies, and the novels, *The Three Miss Kings, A Marked Man, A Woman's Friendship, A Girl's Ideal* and *Sisters*. Yet the enthusiasts may have done their author a disservice by rushing into print with her slighter works, and one can only wonder why *Materfamilias* missed out. If your first Cambridge encounter is with *Sisters, A Girl's Ideal* or *The Three Miss Kings*, I think you could be forgiven for putting the novelist back into the 'lady novelist' pigeonhole with Rosa Praed and Jessie Couvreur - enjoyable though all three of these writers may be. If you're curious about Cambridge's achievements, then go straight to *A Marked Man*.

This rush to retrieve a neglected woman novelist has been inspired by a desire to find a feminist

writing tradition in Australia, and some of the introductions to these reprints find it necessary to point out Cambridge's failings as a feminist. So Cambridge is now being read, but read through a set of ideological spectacles which magnify her every departure from the received feminist wisdom of a hundred years later. Rather than a new way to enjoy her work, the current enthusiasm for Cambridge offers a new way to trivialise or dismiss it.

While Cambridge's fiction still struggles for recognition, her life has come under the scrutiny of two biographies - Audrey Tate's *Ada Cambridge* and Margaret Bradstock and Louise Wakeling's unfortunately titled *Rattling the Orthodoxies*. Both rely heavily on Cambridge's autobiographies, and both take the opportunity to delineate Cambridge's failings as a feminist and radical.

Audrey Tate's biography takes trivialisation as its guiding star, with the biographer claiming at the outset the right to refer familiarly to her subject as 'Ada'. She also refuses to countenance the possibility that a writer whose sophisticated irony is evident in all her later fiction might have played with her self-image in her autobiographies, might have disguised her real motivations to her readers and might have enjoyed deceiving them. Thus, Tate tells us in an early chapter that Cambridge preferred "the needle to the pen", though we later learn this doubtful declaration was made by the seventy-eight year old author to a journalist.

As Bradstock and Wakeling suggest from time to time, all the evidence points to Cambridge playing a double game for self-protection. For her readers she was Mrs Cross the womanly, unchallenging clergyman's wife and mother who happened to write novels for their entertainment. It was a good, and probably necessary, cover for the intelligent, well-read writer who nevertheless found herself forced into a conventional role in a conventional society. One might compare Cambridge's self-created persona - the domesticated feminine little wife who just happened to write a novel a year - with Elizabeth Jolley's public persona as the daffy 'silly me' who can't quite understand how people came to be reading her novels. Attitudes to women writers have changed so little that a stereotyped cover can still come in handy when dealing with the public.

But Audrey Tate takes most of what Cambridge offers in the autobiographies as gospel truth. Bradstock and Wakeling, on the other hand, have done more checking of the Cross's movements against newspapers and local histories. So, for example, while Tate recounts Cambridge's version of the carriage accident in which she hurt her back, including her remark that it would not have happened if the carriage owner, Charles Lyon, was driving, Bradstock and Wakeling show that this is a covert swipe at George Cross who *was* driving. Similarly, they follow up Cambridge's unnamed friendships more diligently, and are able to speculate about her social connections, and some of the models for characters in the novels. On the other hand, Tate finds George Cross's article on 'The Modern Pulpit' and is able to show that, at least for a time, Cross and Cambridge shared opinions on the state of the Church. Tate simply recounts that Cambridge thought her husband had too many horses at Coleraine, while Bradstock and Wakeling reveal that he was trying to breed racehorses. Tate's photographs show that, about the time of the Great Exhibition of 1888, Cambridge dressed rather more like Margaret Clive of *A Woman's Friendship* in homemade dresses and modest bonnets, than Patty Kinnaird, the bustled fashionplate, but the biographer does not note this. Bradstock and Wakeling's cover illustration, on the other hand, is copied badly from one of the photographs in Tate, and it renders Cambridge as a tight-lipped, mean-faced old woman with a dirty face, where even the most solemn photographs in Tate suggest intelligence and the possibility of humour. Surely Tate's prior claim to the obvious title did not force Bradstock and Wakeling to the extreme of taking their title from Adrian Mitchell's acid dismissal of Cambridge - a view which they explicitly reject in the text.

In general, we only read biographies of writers when we are interested in their books, and it really matters little whether George Cross drove recklessly, bred racehorses and agreed with his wife on the inefficacy of sermons, or whether he fulfilled everyone's favourite stereotype of a narrow-minded clergyman. Only those naive enough to believe the propaganda about the Victorians experience a ripple of excitement at the thought of a clergyman's wife attacking the Church and marriage. Nor does it matter whether Ada Cambridge was tempted into an affair during her travels to Sydney in 1887 or whether she was a model of wifely faithfulness. Readers of her novels know that, whatever her experience, she knew how it felt to be tempted to adultery, and she understood that women, even corseted in Victorian finery, had sexual natures.

Where the biography of a pioneer clergyman's wife may depend on such trivia, a literary biography must come to terms with the writing as well as the writer. Both biographies give some account of Cambridge's novels and poems, generally in

descriptive outlines of their subjects and plots. Nevertheless, the reader of Tate's biography could be forgiven for believing that Cambridge wrote silly women's romances saved only by "freshness" or "frankness" or "richness". Tate makes the elementary critical mistake of assuming the narrative voice in the novels to be identical with her close friend 'Ada', and offers such absurdities as "Here [In the *Three Miss Kings*], as in all her novels, Ada is never far behind the scenes . . ." (p. 115) On the contrary, as far as we know she *wrote* the novel. When it comes to the poetry, Tate compares Cambridge's work unfavourably with Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' in order to find Cambridge wanting; but the biographer is condescending enough to suggest that she shows "real poetic ability" (p. 132). Tate reduces Cambridge's writing to the barest (and most old-fashioned) ideas: "It is not until she recognizes that her life and philosophies are somehow empty and shallow, and comes to learn the true value of love, marriage and motherhood, that she finds contentment. This remained Ada's thesis throughout all her novels." (p. 150) If that is all the novels amount to one wonders why anyone would read them, reprint them, or bother to write biographies of their author.

Bradstock and Wakeling are considerably more perceptive readers, and their initial claim that Cambridge's writing was at odds with her chosen genre promises much for their later readings of the novels. To my mind, *A Marked Man* breaks down because the author has been more ambitious than the romance/social satire genre allows and the unresolvable complexities of the novel's conclusion are a sign of its ambition and its author's willingness to experiment. Bradstock and Wakeling mount a similar case for the novel, but I think their focus on the characters of Richard and Sue Delavel, and dismissal of Noel Rutledge, skew their reading. At one point, they take Noel's assistance of Sue from a boat as the starting point for a discussion of the Victorian cultural heritage of "pretty passivity" for women. This little incident leads the biographers to comment on another of Cambridge's failings – her internalisation of "Victorian social norms" – but in terms of the novel, it is an opportunity for Noel and Sue, who have just become lovers, to touch. At this point in the discussion, footnotes lead to Annis Pratt and Susan Brownmiller, where a bit of attention to the text might have helped the biographers retain their sense of proportion.

Where Tate's perspective puts Cambridge in a minor place as a charming Victorian woman who wrote entertainments, Bradstock and Wakeling tend to use Cambridge's writing as evidence for some current feminist literary theory about the Victorians. Either way, the individual qualities of the writing are smoothed over to suit pre-existing attitudes. In this way, the really interesting aspects of Cambridge's fiction – her willingness to mix genres, her shrewd satire, her departure from convention – are passed over in favour of demonstrating how conventional she was by the standards of the biographers. The novels are reduced from works of art to evidence for social attitudes and ideologies.

A further possibility for literary biography is an exploration of the literary culture surrounding the work, particularly an examination of the author's reading, her reading public, publication and reception. Neither of the biographies go far in this direction, though Cambridge's autobiography *Thirty Years in Australia* begins with a reference to Kingsley's *Geoffry Hamlyn* and Kendall's poetry. To produce so many novels and serials to deadline, Cambridge must have spent considerable time alone, but her contacts and her reading suggest anything but isolation. It seems she knew Rolf Boldrewood, Ethel Turner, Rudyard Kipling, Julian Ashton, the editors of major newspapers in both Melbourne and Sydney, and she was president of a writers' club during her Melbourne years. And she read Stuart Mill, Clough, Meredith, Tennyson, Dickens, Thoreau, Gissing, Morley, indeed all the authors under discussion in her time – the novels provide plenty of allusions. So it is disappointing that neither biographers were able to find letters or diaries to confirm or challenge Cambridge's view of herself. Nor do they explore the models for her serial fiction and her creation of literary paradises in Western District sheep stations (was Kingsley her literary inspiration?). They do, however, tell us that Cambridge wrote a script for a photo-play in the last years of her life. A popularist to the last, one can imagine how she would have taken to television.

Axel Clark's recent biography of Henry Handel Richardson tells us that Richardson spent the year after she left school, 1888, indulging her taste for popular romance, including Rhoda Broughton and Scott. It is difficult to imagine that such a reader would have ignored the Cambridge serials appearing weekly in the *Age* and the *Australasian* – *A Marked Man* began serialisation in July 1888, a month before the Richardsons left for Europe. While such lines of influence can only be matters for speculation, Cambridge's novel has many points of comparison with Richardson's study of money, marriage and restlessness in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. At the same time, of course, Joseph Furphy

labouring over *Such is Life* at Shepparton may have noted the skilful irony of his female contemporary (Kate Baker, at least, had personal knowledge of them both). If one of them had made a note of their interest in Cambridge's work - as Lawson did for Boldrewood - then the rescue party may not have needed to set out. But we prefer to think of Richardson as influenced by the great European novelists, not the popular writers she encountered in adolescence; and Furphy's anti-romanticism may not look so innovative alongside Cambridge's wry subversions.

With or without proven lines of influence, Cambridge's writing stands in a line stretching from Jane Austen to William Thackeray to George Meredith on one side, and to Martin Boyd and Elizabeth Jolley on another. This is not a tradition of working class fiction or radical nationalism, and by and large it is a comic tradition sensitive to the nuances of social class and manners. It is time that we developed ways to read it, without resorting to nationalist, radical or feminist frames to lean on. Or, at least, it is time we developed a feminist approach which did not read women's fiction as a simple document of women's experience or patriarchal conditions.

Nevertheless, even the most simple-minded biography can provide information to tease the enthusiast. These biographies make it clear that Annie Morrison of *A Marked Man*, the conventional snob who longs for life in a pretty English parsonage, is a self-critical version of Ada Cambridge herself, just as Annie's suffering husband is a version of Ada Cambridge. Those two figures of fun in *A Woman's Friendship* - Margaret Clive and Patty Kinnaird - are based on Ada Cambridge the ardent reformer and Ada Cambridge the fun-loving flirt. And that dreadful, dominating mother, satirised so sharply in *Materfamilias*, has quite a lot in common with Mrs Cross, the proud mother of Hugh and Kenneth. Now, there's a place to start reading.

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Fictional Biography

Teresa Pagliaro

Nancy Phelan: The Romantic Lives of Louise Mack (University of Queensland Press, $19.95).

Louise Mack (1874-1935) may have been known to older generations for her children's stories, *Teens* (11897), *Girls Together* (1898) and *Teens Triumphant* (1933). After associating with Sydney's literary and artistic circles in the Nineties, she made the almost obligatory trip to England to further her literary career.

Nancy Phelan in *The Romantic Lives of Louise Mack* has provided a readable account of the life of her aunt in the University of Queensland Press's "Fictional Biography" series, unravelling the tale of Mack's life as a child and adolescent in Redfern and Neutral Bay, her years in England (1901-1904) and Europe where she was a correspondent in the First World War in German-occupied Antwerp. For reasons which are discussed below, Phelan is particularly interested in Louise Mack's sojourn in Florence (1904-1910) where, amongst other things, she edited *The Italian Gazette.*

The focus of Phelan's work is Louise Mack's personality rather than her books. As she is writing part-fiction, Phelan is freed from the obligation to research her subject meticulously. A fortunately consequence of this approach is its fluency. Where archival material is not available or appropriate - an abundance of documentation and argument would slow the movement of the plot and blur the portrait's lines - the author allows her imagination to run freely. It is a technique which works well, for the protagonist ultimately inhabits a twilight zone between the worlds of fact and fiction. Since the work does not purport to be a critical biography, the reader has no reason to expect complexity. But while Phelan's style is compelling one could occasionally wish for more substance. The point is best illustrated by the account of Mack's years in London. Even as fiction, this does not work very well. The conventional image of the impoverished writer, starving in an attic and struggling for recognition, requires original treatment to avoid the destiny of a stereotype. Research into the actual facts behind the situation may have yielded information to reveal what was unique about Mack's experience and given depth to the account. The absence of further reference to the large group of expatriate Australian writers and artists in London from 1900 to 1904, other than Lawson and Becke, is an omission after earlier reference to Mack's close bonds with them: George Lambert (by then married to Amy Absell), Will Ogilvie, Arthur Adams, Banjo Paterson, Barbara Baynton were amongst those who had frequented the Mack household in Neutral Bay during the Nineties and who were in London. As Phelan herself noted in reference to A. G. Stephen's visit to London, "It is hard to believe that he did not see Louise".

It may well have been that they were not as tight a group as they have been portrayed or indeed as Mack liked to think of them. If Phelan had presented either the dissolution of Mack's romanticised view of Sydney's Bohemia or perhaps contrasted her expectation of its re-creation in London against the reality of her loneliness in her early years there, the portrait at this point would have been richer. The question of whether Mack approached any other publishers before submitting her manuscript to Unwin's is one which might seem trifling, yet, if she met with the rejection which most Australian writers did, this could have given added point to the story of her perseverance. It would also provide another and more feasible explanation of why she agreed to what she saw as the "lower calling" of serial writing.

Phelan fills in the picture of Sydney's cultural life, from the point of view of the individual. Her account of Mack's dealings with George Robertson is fascinating. In her assessment of the publisher, she allows for the fact that Mack, as she grew older, became increasingly cantankerous, if not impossible, and places Mack's later fights with Robertson over copyright matters in the context of her tendency to fight with everyone. Phelan also notes, however, "Robertson was a hard business man . . . To [Louise], Robertson was always the Shylock who cheated her, who told her that she was a failure, that her books would not sell . . .". A. W. Barker, in his *Dear Robertson* (1982), saw nothing contradictory in portraying Robertson as both shrewd and generous. But to add another dimension to Mack's and Robertson's explosive relationship, one could also note that Robertson himself, as he grew older, was becoming increasingly difficult. A. W. Jose, the firm's reader and reviser, who until the 1920s had been on excellent terms with Robertson and, who during this period was editing the *Australian Encyclopaedia*, now frequently found he was forced to leave the office until the volatile atmosphere cleared. Robertson felt that the encylopaedia project and Caley's *Birds of Australia* had got out of control "[they] are simply mopping up thousands of pounds" he wrote. The latter was scrapped. Robertson felt that he was losing his grip on these major undertakings. The apparition of a writer, enraged about a contract she had agreed to twenty-five years earlier, would have added to the general sense of pandemonium, in an office where the publisher was from time to time assailed by authors suffering from varying degrees of alcoholism, impecuniosity and depression.

Yet what the book may lack in depth or complexity from a scholarly viewpoint, is more than compensated for by the wealth of family anecdote illustrating different aspects of Louise's character. Louise was one of thirteen children and this family source enlivens the narrative and provides at the same time the multiple perspectives which give Phelan's biography breadth as well as balance. Her picture expands and encompasses the lives of the whole Mack family as well as their Sydney environment. The account of the gradual decline or disintegration of Louise's personality is handled in a tactful and humorous manner. Her comic sense derives from an ability to see the emotionally charged scenes of family fights with the eyes of both insider and outsider. In particular it is the blend of comedy, compassion and frankness which lifts the account above the ordinary.

After Mack's return to Australia, she embarked on a series of lecture tours recounting progressively more fantastic tales of her European experiences:

> She has now become a close friend of Edith Cavell, of Duse and D'Annunzio . . . she had met and talked to Lenin ("What do you think of Lenin, Miss Mack? - "A very silent yet forceful man") . . . My father called her "Baroness Munchausen" but my mother, who always defended her, would say, "It's like writing. She makes it up but speaks it instead of putting it into a book. Then she begins to believe it."

It seems to me that the account of her attempts to escape an unpalatable present by retreating into an almost non-existent past and the story of her gradual slide into alcoholism which the family initially deny, in its pathos, makes a more satisfactory and convincing ending than the subplot brought to the fore.

Phelan closes her book with the puzzle found on Louise Mack's certificate of her second marriage, which states that she had a child, a fact never heard of in the family. This insoluble problem could be the result of something as mundane as bureaucratic error. Phelan, finding that the truth is not easily retrievable, acknowledges she is giving the book a soap-opera conclusion, and suggests a closely autobiographical interpretation of one of Mack's novels where the protagonist has an affair and child in Florence. It seems to me that here it would be more plausible to suggest a representation of character along Phelan's mother's lines given above, namely that Mack came to believe in her own fictions. Phelan, however, is unable to resist the exotic atmosphere of Florence and exploits it to the full.

Details of Lawson

Teresa Pagliaro

Colin Roderick: *Henry Lawson A Life* (Collins/ Angus & Robertson, $39.95).

When publishers and commentators make extravagant claims about new books what the writer in fact has achieved becomes overshadowed. Collins/ Angus & Robertson did Roderick a disservice in their publicity material when they described *Henry Lawson a Life* as "the definitive biography". Roderick's real achievement lies in the compilation of what might better be described as a compendium or a chronological encyclopaedia which details the course of Lawson's life. His extensive knowledge of letters, business files, legal contracts etc, makes the biography a fascinating handbook or guide, containing a myriad of details about Lawson's life, although Roderick's documentation is incomplete. Roderick's life of Lawson represents the labour of forty years' research, during which he has published texts and collections of correspondence and criticism. His *Henry Lawson Letters 1890-1922* is an invaluable resource familiarising scholars with many aspects of Lawson's life. But while, in his latest work, he presents a chronology of the events in Lawson's life, his work could not be described as a "definitive biography". Lawson's interior life is as remote as ever. We never really come to understand what Lawson was like as a person. There is a lack of proportion and of perspective in his presentation of events.

Roderick (Preface, p.xi) wrote that he wanted to present "the man in the artist". The appropriate starting point, however, to understand Lawson the man is an understanding of Lawson *as an artist.* The biography suffers from the lack of an overview of what Lawson achieved in his prose, and of the particular nature of Lawson's creativity; Roderick appears to have no understanding of the development of Lawson's artistic vision, of its crisis points, its peak and decline. There is no sustained discussion of those themes recently described by Geoffrey Dutton: "If there is any unity in these stories it is in Lawson's idealistic attempt to incorporate in one vision loneliness and compassion, the wanderer and a place to come home to, eccentricity, even madness, and a healing faith." Even though Dutton might protest at the biographical application, these tell us more about Lawson and his relationship to the world, than the diagnosis of manic depression which dominates Roderick's portrait.

Except in overtly dramatic moments, Lawson does not come to life. There were three obvious sources which Roderick could have used to reveal to us more about Lawson, rather than concentrating on the diagnosis of manic depression to the degree he does. It is disappointing that he did not use his commanding knowledge of primary sources to greater effect. Lawson's prose, if used judiciously, would have yielded much; his correspondence contains many self-revealing passages, and finally Roderick could have used his extensive knowledge of the history of the texts to extraordinary advantage. The proofs provide an invaluable resource: the textual alterations Lawson made, as well as the ideas he mulled over and rejected, indicate much about his inner landscape, and how his creative vision changed. The impact of different editors on the development of his ideas, and both the thwarting and inspiring effects they and the Australian cultural milieu sometimes had, are important in any consideration of his decline.

Roderick could have cast more light on Lawson by an exploration of the personae in his stories. Several critics have noted the strong biographical element in his prose. A prudent biographical reading of the texts was in a sense endorsed by Lawson himself when, in 'A Fragment of Autobiography', he referred his readers to his prose to fill in details. Furthermore, since Roderick himself links the author and characters (*Commentaries*, p.x), his own understanding of Lawson depends upon various assumptions about the personae Lawson assumed, but this is not fully explored. A closer study of Lawson's narrators and characters, and an interpretation steering a steady line between the overliteral and the too-fantastic could have revealed much about Lawson and his uneasy relationship with the world. Here one thinks of the recurring figures like Joe Wilson and Mitchell and of stories like 'Mitchell on Matrimony' and 'Some Day' or the words of the narrator, Mr Careless, at the end of 'Board and Residence': "This is the sort of life that gives a man a God-Almighty longing to break away and take to the bush." The image of the wanderer who is ill at ease in the world is of central importance not only to his stories but as a representation of Lawson himself. It is surprising then that Roderick failed to explore the relationships between Lawson and many of the key figures in his life. Of prime importance here are his relationships with various friends in Sydney and, above all, Robertson.

The cultural milieu of Sydney did not offer Lawson horizons he could find appealing. Arthur W. Jose (one of his editors) recognized this and

commented in *The Romantic Nineties*, "It seems to be the curse of Australia that she somehow misuses - or at least wastes - the best brains put at her disposal. Lawson was one of the most regretted victims of the pseudo-Bohemianism . . ." While Roderick mentions the "pseudo-Bohemianism" there is no full consideration of the other factors Jose mentions which may have been restrictive, and may have had negative effects on Lawson's development as a writer. Here one thinks of the *Bulletin*: Dutton noted that "visions and ideals were not its territory". Other writers and artists, amongst them, Sid. Long, George Lambert, Fred Leist, Christopher Brennan, R.F. Irvine and A.W. Jose felt the *Bulletin* was not accepting their best material, and for this reason they founded the *Australian Magazine*. Lawson had difficulties with the *Bulletin* short story guidelines, in particular, such characteristics as surprise endings, and the strictures against authorial intrusions. The revisions for *While the Billy Boils* reveal interesting and important developments in his writing, notably in his refinements of the role of the narrators in the stories. There is no doubt that Jose had a stimulating effect in assisting Lawson to evolve a new narrator. However, Jose and Robertson were also influenced by the *Bulletin*, and there is a way in which Lawson 'outgrew' the Angus & Robertson editors too. There is evidence that some of the metaphysical and spiritual ideas Lawson was striving to articulate in his stories were not realised. For example, in 'In A Wet Season', Lawson described the scene of a swagman tramping through a sodden, dismal landscape, " . . . we saw a ghastly, beardless face which turned neither to the right nor the left as the train passed him." Lawson thought of adding, "His eyes were fix[ed] straight ahead - looking for God perhaps - ". Jose recommended that this be omitted, Lawson agreed. While this is a topic for an article in itself, it is sufficient to note that Lawson was attempting to introduce a metaphysical dimension to the wanderings of the swagman.

The lack of perspective is seen in the equal emphasis given to events and episodes, both major or minor, or the failure to explore important aspects of Lawson's life and the pursuit of the inconsequential or trivial. For example, the conditions of Lawson's birth are investigated in minute detail, the question of whether there were doctors or a midwife present, whether the birth took place in a hospital or a tent, and whether there was a storm on at the time. The significance of this material is questionable in a biography which does not explore more important issues. Equally, some major events required more than the superficially-detailed treatment they received. For example, Lawson's stay in London was a pivotal event in his life; in his own words, he went to London, "to win fame and fortune". While in fact he won neither, some of the prose he worked on during this period was his finest. Further research into the roles of Lawson's "literary friends" in England may have been particularly worthwhile. Here one thinks of his literary agent, Pinker, his literary adviser, Edward Garnett, and Macquarie, who remains as shadowy a figure as ever. Furthermore Roderick does not discuss John Barnes' illuminating research into this critical period, his work on Edward Garnett and his discussion of the beginning of Lawson's decline in London as a person and as a writer. One might note generally speaking, that had Roderick drawn on secondary criticism more extensively, the work could have been considerably enriched.

Roderick's biography has much to offer the interested scholar for its chronological ordering of a wealth of primary sources. However, can the publisher's claimed "definitive biography" exist for Lawson or for anyone else? Probably not, but for something resembling it, the mass must be made into something which is greater than the sum of its parts. This task has not yet been completed.

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The Straits We're In? Japan and Australia

Max Teichmann

Humphrey McQueen: *Japan to the Rescue; Australian Security around the Indonesian Archipelago during the American century* (Heinemann, $19.95).

As part of the contemporary strategy of turning everything into show business, and portraying political processes as melodramatic happenings, this book has been mistitled. McQueen is *not* talking about Japan coming to anyone's rescue, any more than a recent book by Friedman and Le Bard was prophesying 'The Coming War with Japan' - the title of *their* book. Everything just *has* to be expressed in hyperbole . . . apparently. Especially as Anglo-Saxon publishing, or sections thereof, is on its uppers.

There are rich precedents for continuing to represent political, economic and cultural processes, of great complexity and some unpredictability, in

simplistic ways. The Cold War thought system was a story about threats and very little else. Individual countries were only examined in this conflictual setting, and if not amenable to such treatment, then considered boring, dispensable. Not newsworthy. So if Japan (or Germany) can't be portrayed as threats, or as conflictual, then they're not worth a bumper. In rather the same way, the quite dramatic changes in Western consciousness and social mores from the 60's on have been parodied and trivialised by the Philistines. Islamic countries are only interesting if they "go Fundamentalist", or harbour terrorists. The Gulf mucked up this plot line, but when the next Arab country "goes Fundamentalist", the anti-Arab brigade waiting in the wings with their rattles, kerosene tins and wooden spoons will soon let us know what a mortal threat we now face.

McQueen has avoided most of these pre-loved clichés; but not entirely. He had a problem of supplying a central theme around which the book could evolve, so he landed on the possibility of Indonesia interdicting the vital flow of shipping through the Strait of Malacca, the Sunda Strait and the Lombok Strait. Were that to occur, all those countries dependent upon Middle East Oil (and Japan takes 70% of her supplies from there), would be stymied. So here we have a *cause célèbre*: failing that, a talking point. Why Indonesia would act thus is not clear, and why the rest of the world is likely to tolerate for long such a blockade is barely discussed. But Japan and Australia have a common interest in keeping these straits clear. So we might then expect to witness a scenario whereby Japan and Australia become military buddies and Japan more interventionist in world politics.

Having raised this possibility of Tokyo, Canberra martial togetherness, McQueen rebuts it. On page 250 he rules:

(1) There will be no return to 1930s style militarism;
(2) Japan will stay non-nuclear;
(3) Japan will avoid force to protect its interests overseas, such as around the Indonesian archipelago;
(4) Self defence spending will grow only if necessary to retain or replace the shield by the U.S.A.;
(5) Japan's non-military international behaviour will become more assertive.

So Japan will *not* be coming to our rescue, or anyone's. As to being dependent upon Middle East oil, Japan and many others have the remedy in their own hands. The redevelopment of Siberian oil, and an opening of new fields, would, over time, greatly reduce this Middle Eastern dependence, as it promised to do for Europe, before the existing Soviet oil fields began to run down through sheer inefficiency. America is not in the business of letting Japan and Europe off the hook of dependence upon Anglo-American oil companies, nor concomitant processes for the three great non-American economic blocs to start pooling many of their interests. There will be no American or Japanese aid to Russia, while Gorbachev stays, and Europe, especially Germany, is rather strapped for cash. When Washington's man Yeltsin takes over, Russian economic and foreign policies will be captive to Washington, as are Poland's under Waleska. Then we shall see.

The ground given for Japanese non-involvement in Siberian development is the territorial dispute over the Kuriles. This is essentially a beat-up - what is more tangible is the deep antipathy of Japanese, when polled, to the Russians, and not simply the Communists. The Chinese and other Asians fare much better, while Americans are not exactly top of the charts. The reasons seems obvious. Gorbachev could embarrass Japan by returning the Kuriles, but he still could get no aid. Yeltsin would, but as part of a larger American-imposed hegemony.

This suggests that Japanese foreign policy is still subservient to American directions, and as McQueen indicates, so, in a way it is. Japanese P.M.s and Party leaders are content to let Washington grapple with the global village's political problems, and McQueen spells out the very modest role of the Japanese military. It is in world trade that Tokyo asserts its potency, and aspirations towards autonomy.

McQueen's survey covers a great deal of ground, so much so that there is periodically a coherence problem, and an indigestion problem. At times the effect is of a mass of research notes, raw data, set out in some sort of order, and crying for a stern editor. But this Cook's tour - be he James or Peter - is worth persisting with. His early historical account of Japan's seemingly inevitable drive to Pearl Harbour, a counter-defensive expansionism rather more reasonable than Germany's, is interesting. It would be very useful, for example, in secondary school source materials. This is not derogatory, for McQueen describes Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* as a "best selling high school text".

McQueen tackles the barbarous conduct of the Japanese military towards prisoners and inhabitants of occupied territory, so is not lacking in courage. One argument, that we *sometimes* did the same sort

of thing has to be put, but can detract from the *policies* and values which made Japanese atrocities a natural flow on, as against aberrant Western, certainly Australian, military bastardies. But the main intention here, I think, is to counter racial theories of the sadistic Japanese character, and its unquenchable penchant for war.

The deep rooted pacifism of the Japanese constituency - apparently proof against all U.S. pressures and blandishments - is one striking refutation of the image of a warmongering Japanese psyche. In fact, the Japanese public refused to fall for the Gulf trap, into which the U.S. pushed Europe, in particular Germany. The motives of the United States for this kind of mischief making, seeking, as it were, to squander the fruits of our W.W.II victory and erase the moral insights and aversions to the kinds of open-ended slaughter which came from that war, deserves a condemnatory book of their own. Living in peace is Japan's way of coming to the rescue.

McQueen is philosophical about the Indonesian regime, despite critiques of their conduct in East Timor and Papua Barat. It is here to stay; it is the creation of the U.S. and in a sense the C.I.A. - it is held in place by U.S. and Japanese capital and trade. Therefore, Australia is perhaps wasting its time opposing Indonesian activities. Indeed, we should be supporting its claims to being an archipelic state. I find *this* brand of quiet nautical imperialism potentially very destabilising despite arguments that the Law of the Sea is a Western colonialist invention. Is not Indonesia a new Colonial Power?

McQueen is unhappy about U.S. imperialism, and scornful of the permanent deference of Australians to the White Big Brothers. Which is perhaps why he seems about to play the Japan card, or even the Indonesian, as counters. But in the end he doesn't, quite sensibly - but plumps for a species of independent behaviour which he styles "lightly armed opportunism". Whatever that means. This final section on the defence of Australia, and the options, is the weakest part. The author doesn't give himself the space or the reflective time to do the job; indeed much of the attention directed to recycling Des Ball's work on the bases, and intelligence matters, could have been diverted to here, possibly with profit.

To return to an early theme: why should Indonesia at some future time block the straits to commerce and oil supplies? If one takes the developing U.S.-Japanese competition seriously, and Washington's determination to force Japan into war games, and a rearmament which would then create an anti-Japanese alliance - sponsored by America - one might have a possible answer. Were Jakarta suitably misled by the U.S. into thinking she could do this, as a lever, for example, against Japan, or Australia, as Saddam was encouraged by Washington regarding Kuwait, *then* Washington could procure an interesting result.

In any case this is a worthwhile book, and the author should perhaps try his hand again with a kindred subject.

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Examining a Liberal Tradition

John Hirst

Stuart Macintyre: *A Colonial Liberalism; The Lost World of Three Victorian Visionaries* (Oxford University Press, $24.95).

Why's a good Labor man like Stuart Macintyre bothering himself about three Victorian liberals? Didn't the previous generation of historians tell us all we need to know about George Higinbotham, David Syme and Charles Pearson?

Last year Macintyre was the speaker at a small gathering at Higinbotham's statue in Melbourne. The occasion was the hundredth anniversary of Chief Justice Higinbotham's very generous and very public donation to the unions' strike fund during the great maritime strike. Macintyre spoke very warmly then, as he does in the book, of Higinbotham's attachment to principle and regretted that there was no modern politician of whom the same could be said: "a man of honour, fastidious in rectitude, unswerving in attachment to duty, impervious to insult".

Of course Higinbotham was quite atypical. A gentleman entering the Victorian Assembly in the days of the liberal ascendancy was not entering a gentleman's club; he was rubbing shoulders with auctioneers, publicans, shopkeepers and traders, all clamouring for roads and railways in their electorates and government jobs for their relations and supporters. Higinbotham's rectitude and high mindedness was in part a response to the company he had to keep. At first he refused to align himself with any group or cause and entered the parliament as an independent. He cast in his lot with the liberals only after the Legislature Council, elected on a narrow property franchise, resolutely refused to allow the liberal program of land reform and

protection to be implemented. That Higinbotham could find an honourable part in the rough house of colonial politics was an encouragement to other high-minded and cultivated men: to Pearson, Deakin, and Higgins. The exploration of this liberal lineage is one of the major themes of the book.

Macintyre insists first of all that it is a *liberal* tradition. By English standards the Victorian liberals were heretics because they had embraced protection for local industries which the merest tyro in political economy knew to be counter productive. Colonial liberals also differed from metropolitan in not having to contest an established church and an entrenched aristocracy. But none of this should deprive them of full entitlement to the name. Liberalism everywhere was adapted to local circumstances and in its seemingly most debased form of "progress and development" had not lost its animating core.

The chief publicist for protection in Victoria was David Syme, editor of *The Age*. Here Macintyre grapples with the less attractive side of Victorian liberalism. Syme, to speak plainly, was a tyrant, with his family, his employees and liberal politicians who he thought owed their first allegiance to him. Was this personal idiosyncrasy or what liberalism invited with its conferring of unfettered freedom on the individual? Macintyre refuses to accept the liberals as they presented themselves, as public men whose private life was properly hidden. The saintly Higinbotham does not escape this scrutiny, with Macintyre suggesting that "his legendary humility and courtesy could work as devices to impose his will on others in ways that were no less overbearing than a voice raised in anger" (p. 197). One certainly wonders about Higinbotham's willingness to accept the legitimacy of other people's power when as Attorney General in dispute with a supreme court judge he referred publicly to the judge as "an officer in my department" (p. 46).

Though the book is subtitled 'The lost world of three Victorian visionaries', Macintyre acknowledges that liberalism has not lost its force: "So many of the programs for change that have been mobilised in twentieth-century Australia - labourism, welfarism, the market-based neo-liberalism of the new right, consensual nationalism and perhaps even multiculturalism as well - employ arguments that are conducted within the terms of liberal discourse" (p. 214). Indeed, with the disappearance of socialism, liberalism has re-emerged with new vigour, still amazingly inventive in the rights and freedoms it seeks to confer. This gives special point to Macintyre's sympathetic examination of how his three liberals faced the central dilemma of their philosophy: when people are set free from traditional bonds, what then will hold society together? As intelligent cultivated men these liberals were not strangers to the fears which they denounced in conservatives as exaggerated and misplaced.

Higinbotham welcomed the destruction of religious dogma by the advancement of science, thinking that as the accretions of creeds fell away, the life and teachings of Jesus would shine more powerfully. But after failing to get the churches to agree to the teaching of a common Christianity in the state schools, he reluctantly supported a completely secular education - and worried whether civilisation could survive without some firm ground for its moral teaching.

David Syme, having escaped from the constrictions of Scottish Calvinism, turned a fierce rationalist critique on the attempts to found new faiths like spiritualism and theosophy and yet at the last embraced man's "intense longing for a higher life" which gave "meaning and purpose to human endeavour" (p. 127).

Pearson, as royal commissioner into education and then as minister of the department, had the opportunity to influence what liberals saw as the key element in bonding the new society. Once ignorance was banished an enlightened people would impose on themselves the restraints necessary for the maintenance of order. Pearson wanted a curriculum much wider than the 3Rs and state high schools and a free university to ensure equality of opportunity. His achievements fell far short of this and in his *National Life and Character*, published just before his death, he could not raise much enthusiasm for the whole liberal enterprise: the struggle against oppression had been ennobling but now men had to endure "the eternal calm". Would that this were the result of all the liberals' efforts! The liberals now certainly seem visionary in the faith they placed in education and enlightenment, but perhaps they can be excused since their experience was of a softening of manners, a decline in crime and an improvement in public behaviour.

Macintyre's book is always breaking its bounds. Its three biographical studies widen into an examination of liberal politics as a masculinist activity, the position of religion, the role of the press, the form of the state; and they are preceded and followed by chapters discussing the liberal lineage and liberal achievements and limitations. I would have preferred to have had a book which broke free of its biographical moorings and became in form what this is in essence, a full reassessment of liberal thought and activity, which defines

political history much more broadly than we have been used to.

Macintyre declares his response to the liberal tradition at the outset: "an unresolved attachment to and rejection of the values it embodies". This engagement gives the book its great strength. The penetrating intelligence of the highly-accomplished social scientist never operates apart from a concern for the public life of the country. These are the ruminations of a good Melbourne man, which it is one part of the book's purpose to define.

When Higinbotham's statue was unveiled in 1937 a larger crowd was gathered up the hill for the funeral of a popular fireman. Nettie Palmer, neice of Higgins, was unsure of the statue's location and was directed to the wrong crowd. She arrived late at the unveiling and was disappointed at the whole affair, which led her to wonder "if there isn't some essential lack in us, something missing that keeps life from having meaning and depth - interest in our past, reverence for those who have shown outstanding qualities of mind or spirit". With this episode Macintyre opens his book which is his answer to Nettie's doubt. It is a very good book, but the means of getting a large crowd in this country to take an interest in even the noblest practitioners of past politics have yet to be discovered.

John Hirst, author of The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy *and other books, teaches history at La Trobe University. His new book on Albert Facey will be published by Allen & Unwin.*

Fullness and Frugality

Barbara Giles

Amy Witting: *Beauty is the Straw* (Collins Angus and Robertson, $12.95).
Gary Catalano: *The Empire of Grass* (University of Queensland Press, $12.95).

Two very different books are these, one fullbodied, using all means that come to hand for its purpose, the other spare and unadorned.

I'd heard great things of Amy Witting, but no one had told me she wrote almost entirely in rhymed verse. She carries this off with verve and so much ease that one hardly is aware of the rhyming, except that the verse flows sweetly. And when she eschews rhyme, as in 'Housewife', it is a reasoned decision. The verse moves a little less than smoothly, lines are ragged in length, dactyls rush, anapaests drag, her woman is impatient, unsatisfied with a life she tries to fill, but making of it only a net:

> It's very fine work indeed,
> as fine as a spider's web,
> considering the void below it
> and the weight of the heart it must hold.

She ranges widely, hardly any two poems coming from the same ground although the book is presented in four sections. The first is philosophical and personal; the second 'Travel Guide' is my least favourite; the third 'Beauty is the Straw' has definite echoes of Hopkins, "dream dance of under-sea", "Bare beauty of a tree when the birds flare/sudden as a trumpet" but also contains hard judgements such as 'A Curse on Herod':

> May you live forever . . .
> . . .
> May short fierce arms be locked about your knees
> wherever you turn, and small fists drag at your hem
> while voices whine of weewee and icecream.
> . . .
> May the bogeyman be thirty inches high
> and immortal. These are your children. Guard them well.

And, for all the beauty of the world, beauty is not the straw at which to grasp security:

> but beauty says to me, "You are the straw."
> I am the straw. There is solace in that thought.

The fourth section is comprised of five letters. The one addressed to W.H. Auden was sparked by a TV program showing a cryonic burial, which leads her to comment on the failure of the gods to punish hubris. "The devil we are born with", she says, "is arming for the kill," and explains she writes to Auden because she is baffled by his "We must love one another or die."

> You didn't explain precisely
> how to love one another and live

The longest of the letters is addressed to two girls who chose to die, by burning, for their beliefs: Afra, a Christian martyr in 310 AD, and Lynette Phillips who immolated herself at Geneva in 1978. Speaking out of the bitterness of loss she says to Lynette, "Arguments . . . you are beyond their reach, as you always were . . ./I could not summon

you out of your despair." And Afra?: "but you two got no comfort until you heard/ the voice of the man-god, offering peace and love/ . . . For you two girls . . . a poem and a candle are not much."

Such variety of subject, scene and discourse enliven this book one wishes it were twice its length of 91 pages. I like especially the way in which she uses whatever means fit her purposes. She uses the vocative 'O', borrows from Shakespeare, using in one poem a line of his to clinch a wicked poem about an (imagined?) aunt, who has been trasmogrified into a cockatoo: "For you the fate

is fit/Why, this is hell, nor are you out of it." In 'Double, Double, Toil and Trouble' she uses a whole clutch of poets and also nursery rhymes to castigate Lust. She can be very tender, as in 'Unborn':

> We had a dialogue that man and wife
> can never hope to have:
> when your dumb energy said "I am life"
> I answered "I am love"

Sensible, inventive, witty, playful, thoughtful, informed and elegant *Beauty is the Straw* is the fruit of many years, wisely selected. We are left wishing for another book.

Gary Catalano's is a cool, if not to say cold, book. Very seldom does overt emotion manifest itself. But not uncaring. Its minimalist technique and its focus on objects serve to distance it from the reader, but concern is there, in oblique, overheard discontents.

The use on the cover of Rick Amor's woodcut, 'Runner' posits a wilder desperation than is evident in the poems. The headlong runner seems frantic for escape and likely at any moment to sprawl headlong. Not so Catalano, not in these poems anyway, his angst is on a rein, his sights set far ahead.

Or are they? Each re-reading seems to upset the last one. I questioned the order of this book on first reading, for I had a sense of shock at what seemed a downturn in impact after the first few pages. A careful examination showed that the ending was in arrangement very like the beginning, a poem offering hope, a prose poem and a tiny fragment to close. I don't know that this device, if device it be, is effective. The opening section with the splendid 'The Empire of Grass' sets up an expectation not met by the poems that follow. Should this book have opened with a crescendo, only to end diminuendo?

The vast landscape of 'The Empire of Grass', elegant, evocative, makes an abstract but clear statement of a dream of peace. Then with a shock like stepping from smooth sward to marble, and most disturbing to the senses, we are plunged into the first of two prose poems.

The intention of the poems, both political and moral, is the same, but we have come from cherished dream to harsh reality, to enter the world of power, a Museum, firmly closed against a cacophony of faces, the inhabitants of that other Museum, "squalid, ratty and detestible, which some know as life. They steel themselves against the pitiful cries . . . the silver in the mirrors slowly ages into a dense and unforgiving black."

That this juxtaposition is planned I have no doubt, and very effective it is. It pours ice-cold water on his dream, quenching hope. The trouble is that nowhere else in the book is there so effective a poem as 'The Empire of Grass'. The squalid remains squalid, and the 'True Discoveries' of the penultimate poem promise little or nothing, the stars a joke, the found shell a trifle.

My first reading, then, was hostile. But persistence brought realisation of how far Catalano's poetry is from being the "single street" which he derides as being the usual expectation/capacity of the Oz audience (and that audience minuscule). His own deceptively simple verse presents a many-braided path, at which an exasperated reader may well mutter "obscurantist".

There are problems with satire, innuendo and irony. Such forms require the reader to be aware of their ground. From the writer is required a

sharpened pen, and perhaps some sign-posting, otherwise it may appear to be what it lampoons. 'Postcards to Peter' may well fall into that category here, and 'Roman Imitations', while the intention is unmistakable, lacks wit.

Jeff Guess, in *A Sense of Audience* has spoken of felicities that come "outside accident and intent". Is it this vein of unconscious power that Catalano has rather mislaid of late? Many poems seem to betoken an irritated consciousness, and the metaphysical values, which he applauds by implication in *Australian Poetry*, are not apparent here.

What we do get is a feeling of dislocation, of unease, sometimes a kind of *Alice in Wonderland* misbehaviour of the real world. "There's a hole at the centre of things", he says in 'Idiom', and this notion of a hole appears again in the prose poem 'Hole', the penultimate poem of the collection. It appears at first reading rather horrible, but on further consideration, is a compassionate allegory.

Things are important. "We need to love things more than we do" he says in 'Album'. The things he collects for mention are old, tatty, worn and stained, common objects little thought of. But "there are times/when the whole world/comes down to this/ the trembling of light/ in a clear glass/of water."

An uneasy, and a concerned book. Should it have ended, as it began, on a high? In its own way it does, not with the lyricism of 'The Empire of Grass', but with a workaday insistence on the quiddity of things, their infinite variety, and beautiful things he does not burn to possess. "As your exile here/ weighs heavily on you/I'll give you the sea/ But let me caress/your curves once more/Let me probe/ at your clenched fist/then/I'll let you go."

He begins in dream, and ends in reality.

Barbara Giles is to follow The Hag in the Mirror *with a fourth book of poems. She is also a prolific writer of books for children.*

A Liberation: Herself When Young

Michael Sharkey

Joy Hooton: *Stories of Herself When Young: Autobiographies of Childhood by Australian Women* (Oxford University Press, $24.95).

I don't know when I've been so stimulated by a critical book about Australian writing. Joy Hooton's study of women's autobiographies constantly raises tantalising questions about habits of reading and interpretation of culture. Not just Australian culture, mind you: she is spot-on in rejecting a focus on 'Australianness' as a criterion of writing, and therein lies one of the strengths of her study.

Hooton points out the tendentiousness of many standard 'semiotic' studies of Australian culture. The authors of *National Fictions, Women in the Bush* and *Inventing Australia* have drawn on already familiar material in drawing up generalizations about problematic and complicated issues. Hooton adduces a vast amount of new material to show that conclusions about culture can only acknowledge their complexity and be of a provisional nature. More interestingly, to my mind, Hooton reveals the androcentric assumptions of much previous criticism of autobiographical writing which has provided a base for studies of Australian culture. These androcentric assumptions relate to authorship, subject material and implied readership. Her own study is a breath of fresh air; only I wish she had spent more time in teasing out her thesis and less in exercises of close-reading of representative texts. I suppose that it is necessary to re-create familiar texts in accordance with the tenets she spells out but I am simply questioning the *number* of instances she adduces to demonstrate the contentions.

I don't want to push my reasons for annoyance with the book too far forward. I am as delighted with the revelations concerning the sheer volume of women's autobiographies which are accessible in libraries about the country as I am with the uncommonsense readings of several familiar texts. It is mere cavilling to point out that several other works - several dozens or even hundreds - remain to be explored, in the form of manuscripts, published monographs or serials in magazines and newspapers. This book opens the door to a new interpretation of women's writing for students and teachers of Australian (or any) literature, and for readers in general. Now to be a little particular.

Hooton grabs attention from the start with her shrewd observations on the reasons for the failure of male critics to engage with female texts. She notes that no genre-label adequately describes women's writings about themselves as children: 'autobiography' and 'memoir' embrace fictional and non-fictional narratives (more troublesome matters of distinction here). Problems of definition aside, the prevalence of such writings by women has not been accounted by critics who have drawn conclusions from selective readings of published and manuscript accounts and who have sought to make such material cohere to familiar patterns. One might see in such behaviour a refusal to heed Wittgenstein's warning about bias in thinking: the

tendency to describe a thing and set up norms in such a way as to replace complex facts and variables with simplified and invariable models. Hooton identifies the bias and keeps it directly in view while she probes and posits ways of accounting for the complexities she discerns. Like many of the accounts she explores, her own narrative is resistent to a clear story-line and to tidy enclosure. It's a work to ponder over and one which will, I hope, liberate much thinking about Australian writing in general.

Hooton does not assail male critics: she challenges a deep androcentric reading of cultural texts. She brushes aside the focus on pioneering memoirs and set-texts beloved of all critics to insist on a widespread failure among critics to perceive the extent to which they are influenced by the very theories with which they engage. She sees deconstruction as the latest development in the history of individualism in Western culture and reveals the androcentric assumptions in definitions of individualism. Timely, as one might say. Her focus is on what women have written rather than on what they might have or should have written. She presents, I believe, a convincing case for exploration of the difference within the texts she examines, without advancing a poetics of women's writing about the self.

Hooton is concerned to clear the way for such further study. She won't be drawn into claiming a female literary tradition of solidarity, but constantly reminds us that autobiography is bound by its historical and cultural moment. Gender differences in male and female texts are not explored, and I think this is wise: it may be that linguistic analysis offers a clearer signpost to the existence of innate differences. Hooton does suggest that a covert culture is transmitted by women's autobiographies - from mother to daughter as much as from author to reader: in fact the ideal reader and even 'hero' of such writing is the daughter.

Where Hooton proposes 'characteristics' of women's biographical writings, she stays within genre-boundaries, to suggest that self-enacting discourses, non-chronological and reflexive texts, discontinuous narratives and other features of style beloved by post-modernist critics seem to be distinctive features of the writing. These very aspects have been overlooked('ignore' is an active verb) by androcentric critics. The relational nature of much of this writing is also indicated: where men have seen the past as the Other, women writing about themselves have sought attachment and inclusion. This is not a matter of seeking escape from an unhappy present into a happier past, but an attempt to celebrate placement within a group, family or place. Men's autobiographies by contrast deplore the past or reflect on aspects which have shaped a career; women's sensibilities are less fragmentary, more unified.

This is not to say that women are and have been better culturally integrated. In fact herein lies another reason for their exclusion from the 'canons' of Aust. Lit. Few women autobiographers seem driven to inscribe themselves in national or even regional myths. In women's texts the process of living is foregrounded: the myths of occupation and progress are characteristically put on view in male writer's reflections. Thus the notion of life-as-a-journey is usually missing in women's autobiographies, or is ironised as in *My Brilliant Career*. A sense of absurdity, subversion of expectations, revelation of pretensions, and a sense of play is characteristic of women's memoirs, even if not always reined in to accord with the author's purpose.

The aim of women's autobiographical writings, Hooton suggests, is the transmission of experience; in assuming the ideal reader and hero to be the author's daughter, Hooton is wonderfully provocative. The 'author' of such works is compelled to grapple with the question of her own identity between mother-figure and daughter-figure. One is provoked to reflect more acutely on the readership assumed by writers of male autobiographies, and that assumed by their critics. Male writers, suggests Hooton, are preoccupied with the should-be story, and select details of their past in line with a predetermined teleology. Her readings of Jack and Norman Lindsay are superb, and her comparative readings of Joan and Rose Lindsay represent a *tour de force*. I wonder though if she is not demonstrating a 'corrective' or should-be reading of experience implicit in the female Lindsays' autobiographies.

Hooton sees the narrators of women's autobiographies as fluid in their movement, shifting between "narrator" and "narrating self", and tension develops in some memoirs when the latter is overridden by the former. In Eliza Davies' *The Story of an Earnest Life* and in Mary Gilmore's autobiographical writings, tension springs from adherence to an overriding teleological aim - the revelation of God's purpose in a pious life, or the "unquestioned good" of patriotism and the attempt to dodge complications in Gilmore's 'construction' of a public life.

There are more good things to note than space allows. Hooton's comments on the "liberating" possibilities of memoirs of place and "childrens' texts" will trigger further debate and research. I am particularly impressed by her remarks on readership. May I quibble about one point? Hooton suggests there has been no single male auto-

biography which deals centrally with passion: I had thought Dowell O'Reilly, Hugh Frewen and John Le Gay Brereton precisely wrote about this. Are they to be thrown on the scrapheap of 'mateship'? Perish the thought.

You will not find this book plain sailing. Joy Hooton is impressive when she theorizes and tackles the critics. I wish she would do it more. She makes good use of Totil Moi against Elaine Showalter; her scholarship is hardly at issue, and I am excited to see, at last, an Australian academic giving acknowledgment to research assistants by name: this is, I hope, a sign to others that decency doesn't hurt one bit.

It would be a shame if this book were reduced by other academics to a set-text for the purpose of 'using' Hooton's essays on individual authors like Christina Stead, Henry Handel Richardson or Barbara Hanrahan. The book should be read steadily for the whole picture. At the outset I regretted a tendency to offer 'prac-crits' of so many selected authors. As a well-known editor once said to me when rejecting a poem "the genre is not fresh": precisely. The tendency in all such studies is to re-tell the plot, and Hooton falls for this too much. I stand in admiration of her speculative chapters. It is a pleasure to reread Chapter 4 on "Relational Selves" and Chapters 11 and 12 (on "National and Personal Myths" and "Black Narratives"). The bibliography points to further riches and the book deserves a permanent place in any library, personal or public, concerned with our literature and our history.

Dr Michael Sharkey teaches English at Bond University. His poems Alive In Difficult Times *(Kardoorair Press, $8) was published recently. He is writing a biography of David McKee Wright.*

Sodom to Sydney

John Rickard

Garry Wotherspoon: *City of the Plain: History of a Gay Sub-Culture* (Hale & Iremonger, $24.95).

Garry Wotherspoon launches his history of gay Sydney with an account of its proudest and most characteristic ritual, the Mardi Gras. By 1983 this summer celebration was already "one of the biggest and most colourful peacetime parades that Sydney had ever seen" - a theatrical extravaganza which included, as Leo Schofield observed that year, "bikies, Darth Vaders, cycle sluts, gladiators, Red Indians, Supremes, Carmen Mirandas, wizards, fairies, ballroom dancers, nuns and altar boys". Even for Tinsel Town this was an exotic and outrageous gathering: and perhaps for this reason the Sydney media studiously ignored it.

Times have changed, and the Mardi Gras has now been incorporated, along with the Harbour Bridge, the Opera House and Bondi Beach, into Sydney's public image. In spite of the homophobia which AIDS has helped revive, the 'gay sub-culture' has achieved a measure of stability and legitimacy. It is an appropriate time to write its history.

As one who grew up in the Sydney of the 1940s and '50s, and who has had more than a nodding acquaintance with the city in the decades since, I approached Wotherspoon's book with considerable curiosity. Would I find here some of my own history? Would I be able to recognise his 'city of the plain' as mine? For this is, as the author admits, a history with an autobiographical dimension, and many of its readers will similarly bring to it their own filter of experience.

Wotherspoon is an economic historian, and he stresses not only the economic changes which made the 'coming out' of the sub-culture possible, but also the urban geography of gay life. The first and last chapters begin with maps of Sydney. Sites, whether bars, beats or, for that matter, churches, have always been crucial to the sub-culture, and Wotherspoon meticulously traces their history, always in the context of the changing nature of the city itself. So, most of the evocative names are there, from Black Ada's, Christ Church St Lawrence and the Long Bar of the Hotel Australia to Les Girls, the Purple Onion and Ken's Karate Club. Wotherspoon makes no attempt to disguise the sleaze and glitter of this social world - why should he, indeed? - but he seeks to make us aware of the many 'homosexually-inclined' who lived, and still live, beyond its bounds, and whose experience, for the most part, can only be guessed at. For the gay sub-culture, particularly as it emerged into public view in the years of affluent protest, was a predominantly middle-class one.

The history of the pre-gay generation, even in its middle-class manifestation, is harder to write, and here Wotherspoon is largely dependent on either the evidence of the courtroom where 'offenders' were dealt with, or the resource of oral history, with its familiar problems. Wotherspoon has already edited a collection of interviews, *Being Different*, a forerunner of *City of the Plain*. Many of those reminiscing present a perhaps romanticised view of 'what it was like', stressing the excitement of secrecy and subterfuge, and what, under the very eyes of one's respectable neighbors, it was possible 'to get away with'. There are also a few important literary sources, most notably Kenneth Mackenzie's *The Young Desire It*, Jack Lindsay's *The Roaring*

Twenties and Jon Rose's *At The Cross*. Rose's autobiographical novel presents some splendid Isherwood-style snapshots of what now seems the almost innocent decadence of inner-city 'camp' life.

When it comes to charting the internal politics of the gay movement, Wotherspoon is carefully tolerant. He depicts the emergence of reformist and radical wings in the early 1970s as a " 'maturing' of a political process", which, in the light of Sydney's reputation for cultural pluralism, is an appropriate endorsement. Wotherspoon, however, does not give enough attention to Sydney's ideological climate: libertarianism is referred to as a context for Frank Moorhouse, but there is no mention of the source, John Anderson.

It is a moot point how tolerant of homosexuality the libertarian tradition was. Wotherspoon relates how the painter Elioth Gruner confessed to his friend Norman Lindsay his fear, given his attraction to his own sex, of enlisting in World War I. He does not record Lindsay's pained and unhelpful response: "Look, I think it's best to dismiss such a thing from your mind." According to Lindsay's biographer, both Lindsay and Gruner were so embarrassed by this exchange that they never referred to the subject again. So much for friendship!

And Sydney's apparent hedonism, which was part of the city's attraction for writers and artists, was matched by the repressive intolerance of many of its established institutions. In a city where sectarianism was rife, it was remarkable that the Anglican and Catholic hierarchies should be so united in their religious and moral conservatism. Add to these an entrenched, Catholic-dominated Labor government through the 1940s and '50s (which was no lover of human rights), a corrupt police force and that high-minded old granny, the *Sydney Morning Herald* - which, according to Lex Watson, preferred for many years to avoid any mention of the gay movement at all - and you have an impressive coalition of power and prejudice.

City of the Plain is, of course, about Sydney, and it assumes that the history of its gay sub-culture is central to the history of gay Australia. This may be so, but Wotherspoon is by and large unable to establish what might be unique to the Sydney experience. Thus his chapter on the repressive Cold War period does not take into account the particular nature of the forces arrayed against 'deviants' and cultural minorities in New South Wales: nor, of course, is he called upon to explain why law reform was achieved so much earlier and more easily in South Australia and Victoria.

It is unfair to criticise Wotherspoon for not writing a history of gay Australia, and his achievement in this book challenges others elsewhere to match his research. But it remains that his Sydney view is often a very self-absorbed one. Early on he casually mentions that "by the late 1980s gay sub-cultures were emerging in all of Australia's cities". Could "1980s" possibly be a typo? In the sense that he has used the term, there were gay sub-cultures in most capital cities decades before this, and in the case of Melbourne at least I suspect there is a very similar chronology to Sydney's.

City of the Plain ends with a brief epilogue on AIDS. Wotherspoon is chiefly concerned here with the impact of the epidemic on the gay community and its public profile. It is perhaps too soon to examine historically the effect of AIDS on a gay sexuality which owed so much to the carefree hedonism of the now discredited permissive society. Liberation has come face to face with suffering: sexuality is permeated with grief.

Life, however, goes on; and so does homophobia. In *The Sixpenny Soldier*, published last year, Roland Griffiths-Marsh has given us one of the great war - or, rather, anti-war - books. It is honest, horrifying, compelling. But in his honesty, Griffiths-Marsh also reveals an almost obsessive disgust with homosexuality, which I suspect is not confined to his generation. He describes, in some detail, a wartime encounter in the downstairs bar of Melbourne's now-vanished Hotel Australia (a well known site for the 'homosexually-inclined') when he is accosted by a mincing, pirouetting queen (my word, not his) with a falsetto voice:

> I was flabbergasted. I had never been pawed by a man before and felt unclean. I remembered the warm hugs of my childhood, in the arms of my father. This, to me, was disgusting; red-hot anger started to surge within me. Fortunately Ray, much more street-wise than me, laughed, and said to the queer, "Piss off, you silly old bastard, or I'll knock your head off." Thankfully, a brawl did not eventuate, as some homosexuals can fight very well, and we were outnumbered . . .

It is gays, of course, who are used to being outnumbered. It is possible to hope, as Dennis Altman did all those years ago in *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, for an end to the need for these sexual categories. But in the meantime it is some comfort to know that "some homosexuals can fight very well". And, in a way, that is the ultimate message of Wotherspoon's book.

John Rickard teaches history at Monash University. He is the author of Australia: A Cultural History.

The Grit of Life

Michael Dugan

Tim Thorne: *Red Dirt* (Paper Bark Press, $19.95).

Tim Thorne's poetry seems not to have gained the wider recognition it deserves, in part, I suspect, because his books have come from a series of different small publishers, some of whom are no longer in existence. There has been no single publisher watching over his interests and consistently promoting his poetry.

Red Dirt is his sixth collection and contains four groups of poems under different headings. This form of presentation probably has more significance for the poet than it does for the reader. Ten poems printed here under the heading 'The Strutting Fire' have been taken from an earlier collection, *A Nickel in my Mouth* where they were scattered through four groupings under different headings.

Thorne's poetry has consistently reflected an interest in history as a means of understanding, commitment to social reform and people at risk, concern for the young and a strong sense of place. All these are present in this volume but his perspective seems even bleaker than in earlier collections.

> A century of scientific love
> built Chernobyl. The cancer spreads. What
> next?
>
> Surely some random active particle
> will lodge where it can work a rational,
> materialist miracle. After winter, spring.
> Artists were always mutants. Working class
> kids will baulk at Kulchur, will create
> their own responses. Love and hope lie deep.
> A sixteen-year-old I'd almost given up on
> writes a superb poem – on suicide.

One wonders whether there should be a question mark after spring.

The poems grouped under the heading 'White Diamond Gloom' are about hospitalisation, surgery and the suffering of pain. These poems are bleak to the point of despair. Their author/subject is powerless against the forces of the surgical profession and the Kafkaesque existence that is hospital life.

> This is the age of the cherishing gadgets.
> Isolated with accoutrements
> our single rooms are safe as plastic bags.

But even this dehumanised and painful existence has its moments of human humour, albeit of the gallows kind, and the healed patient can emerge as

> The winner! You come out
> crowning at the gates . . .
>
> the future comes lightly tied
> with its rope's first twisting thread.
>
> But for now seize the light
> in a cry, suck in enough
> tomorrows to flesh limbs
> for a long kicking fight.

In other poems Thorne writes of his homeland, Tasmania, out of mixed love and despair, in poems that are well crafted, tough and gritty.

> Up on Barrow
> the bald and glittering rocks like skulls and
> knees
> in the Ukraine, sliced by spades of frost
> (Well, genocide . . . there's something we
> know about.)
> clarify our beginnings. Sharp and white
> the crystal cuts itself to whorls, breaks, grows,
> comes down past abattoirs and English
> willows.

Thorne's mood in these poems is dark. A sharp wit is ever present but even here the humour is

generally black, as in his comment on a record album he has seen advertised under the title 'Songs of the Protest Era':

> That would have been somewhere
> between the Twist and the Frug . . .
>
> The napalm was popular then, too.
> Nixon sold better than Chubby Checker . . .

Thorne opens his book with a wry, nostalgic glance at the Age of Aquarius (and Richard Brautigan):

> Yeah, it was simple then. You 'got your shit together', split from bad scenes and saved the world
> by growing your own (dope, hair or vegies);
> teaching, trout fishing. The future was a river.

That the golden age is long gone; that there are bad scenes you can't split from; that mortality is reality and the laughs that are to be had are at the face of the executioner, are inherent in the poems in this impressive, tough and often witty collection. These are poems that force you to think as well as feel.

Michael Dugan's books include social histories, children's books and several collections of poetry. A new collection, Twenty-five Poems *is to be published this year.*

A Fresh View of Distinctively Australian Writing

Elizabeth Perkins

Mary Lord (ed.): *The Penguin Best Australian Short Stories* (Penguin, $14.95).

Many things claiming to be distinctively Australian are simply imported from elsewhere and pasted over with Australian labels. But the literature that evolved here in the nineteenth century, although rooted in an imported language and culture, soon outgrew its European origins, and even when old genres were used, the writing was recognisably Australian. It is not surprising that the short fiction or story was one of the first genres to take local shape and colour, because its origins lie in the narratives people tell each other as part of every-day conversational intercourse. No matter how sophisticated the short story or fiction form becomes, it never quite loses this primal identity.

Mary Lord's edition of *The Penguin Best Australian Short Stories* traces the path of short fiction in Australia. The collection starts with J.G. Lang's 'The Ghost upon the Rail', set in the middle of the nineteenth century, not far from the metropolis of the first settlement, and ends with Halligan's 'Belladonnna Gardens', set in contemporary Canberra, the capital of the nation which grew out of that settlement. It is an instructive journey, both for the pleasurable literary experience and the perhaps less pleasurable experience of social critique. "Sunt lacrimae rerum", reminding that human stories are almost inevitably sorrowful, may be a tag from a longer narrative of an earlier culture, but it is true of the best stories, even the humorous ones. Unless a story is a celebration of unmitigated joy, which few are, and certainly none of these, the sadness that touches at some level almost every good story is not tragic, pathetic or sentimental. It is a reflective sadness, accompanying thought rather than feeling. Perhaps it derives from the creative charity or love with which the writer shapes a successful short story. The concentration necessary in short fiction makes palpable the attitude of the accomplished writer, even when the writer tries to become invisible in the text.

This charity towards living things is as obvious in the apparently disinterested portrait of the part-Chinese woman in Barbara Baynton's harsh bush story, 'Billy Skywonkie', as in the evocation of elderly married lovers in Christina Stead's delicate 'Street Idyll'. Michael Wilding's 'The Words She Types', a meta-story about the construction of fiction, comes from *The West Midland Underground*, one of the finest of Wilding's collections, although not one that attracted the most attention. 'The Words She Types' reveals, as the best meta-writing does, in story, novel, drama or criticism, a warm engagement with the process of writing itself, which cannot be interpreted as a cold intention to deconstruct. Patrick White's 'Miss Slattery and her Demon Lover' comes from *The Burnt Ones*, a collection whose title indicated the intense sympathy that underlay even (or especially) the most satiric stories it contained. Possibly editorial intervention has brought together in *Best Australian Short Stories* texts that share this charity, but there are few short stories known across generations, languages and cultures that do not exhibit the creative charity that helped to produce them.

The claim that the stories in this collection are among the best Australian writers have produced is justified, and it implies that they may well be among the classics of our literature, since the word "classic" simply means "of the first rank". Mary

Lord's selection, as she indicates in her informative Introduction, sought to present stories that are not what she calls without disparagement the "anthologised evergreens". Many readers will meet for the first time such remarkable pieces as 'Monsieur Caloche' by Jessie Couvreur ('Tasma'), a tale of 'cross-dressing' which precedes by some years Furphy's story of Nosey Alf in *Such is Life*, but whose interest is as much in the portrait of the bullying, wealthy, self-made Sir Matthew Bogg. An early detective story, 'The Dead Witness; or, The Bush Waterhole', by Mary Fortune, is reprinted for the first time since its publication in *The Australian Journal* in January 1866.

Readers can trace, as it surfaces in a number of stories, the xenophobia or racial prejudice that dogs our generations, although the object of its ignorant fear may change. Tim Winton's 'Neighbours' brings the prejudices of earlier stories to a satisfying resolution when a young academic discovers that learning the skills of a midwife and knowing his new Australian neighbours are more challenging pursuits than tracing the development of the twentieth-century novel.

Narrative interest is foremost in all the pieces, even when more elaborate concerns are also apparent, as in Katharine Susannah Prichard's little-known but shapely and poetic 'The Curse', or Peter Carey's 'The Last Days of a Famous Mime'. The element of surprise is seldom absent, and the skill of the writers ensures that the unexpected is not factitious or contrived. Place and character are strongly evoked, contributing to the conviction that the stories do offer a fresh view of distinctively Australian lives. Morris Lurie's 'Pride and Joy' is one of his best pieces, in which the crassness of Matthews, a wealthy and probably criminal Australian who apes the behaviour of American screen crooks, is balanced by the growing sensitivity and discernment of both Matthew's son and the narrator. At another extreme are the vulnerable ingenuousness of the hero-worshipping teenagers in Helen Garner's 'The Dark, the Light', and Beverley Farmer's psychological study of a self-deceiving father and a daughter who recognises her own ambivalent behaviour. One of the most provocative stories is Olga Masters' open-ended 'On the Train', introducing a mother and two daughters and an inquisitive passenger whose curiosity, like that of the reader, is fated to remain unsatisfied.

Women and female concerns are represented even in the earliest stories, mitigating, without removing, the general impression that men and a masculinist ethos dominated nineteenth-century short fiction, and suggesting that to some extent this impression may be due to the kind of stories reprinted and anthologised. To find that a masculinist ethos was often criticised is also interesting, and the critique is a function of the charity which marks the approach of these writers. Except for a black tracker, Aborigines are absent from the anthology as inhabitants of the Australian landscape and as writers, although readers now expect to find Aboriginal writing in representative Australian collections. Perhaps stories by black writers, such as those published in the journal *Identity* (1972-1982), were not available for reprinting.

Apart from this omission, *Best Australian Short Stories* illustrates the editor's belief that diversity, lack of constraint by fashions, and a willingness to experiment with form and theme are vital characteristics of the Australian short story.

Elizabeth Perkins teaches in the English Department of James Cook University and is presently writing on playwright Alma de Groen and novelist Thea Astley.

The Poetry of Gwen Harwood

Michael Sharkey

Alison Hoddinott: *Gwen Harwood; The Real and the Imagined World, a Critical Analysis* (Collins Angus & Robertson, $14.95).

Elizabeth Lawson: *The Poetry of Gwen Harwood.* Horizon Studies in Literature Series (Sydney University Press, $7.95).

Gwen Harwood's poetry seems to me distinctly accessible on account of its frequent address to a reader. I admire her cool narrative and dramatic experiments, her clever allusions to other artists' productions in a continuum of recording what it is to be alive – and thinking of art and death.

I know there are pitfalls in writing a review of a woman's work from the male perspective. Trebly so when I know the authors of these critical studies: there's not much escape from this phenomenon in Australia. It's difficult to be in the literary racket, as reader, writer, teacher and critic for nearly three decades without becoming part of a system which looks, to outsiders, like a closed shop. But I shall, I trust, discriminate and point up the usefulness of each book.

Alison Hoddinott's study opens up aspects which

might be intuited from Harwood's love of word-games and their limits: the German influence and the Byronic, as well as the musical and philosophical. Harwood's verse reveals a strong shaping imagination that resolves each line into the just-so pattern of a formal song or elegy.

Hoddinott's work is especially interesting in view of her long friendship with the poet. I regret that Angus and Robertson have produced such a beastly-looking book, though: the layout and handling qualities are less than appealing. Even if authors must submit their text on disk, it cannot be beyond the wit of publishers to adjust the format and make the final product attractive to the eye. Alison Hoddinott and Gwen Harwood deserve better. To my bibliophiliac mind, the study by Elizabeth Lawson is more attractively produced; the Sydney University Horizon studies by comparison with Angus and Robertson are superbly got-up. It seems a pity to have to say such things in a book review, but I cannot help thinking that standards are not just declining in some areas of book-production: they're almost non-existent.

The merit of Hoddinott's work resides first of all in the lucid ordering of themes. Letters, poems and commentary are woven together in a sprightly way that comes as a refreshment after the chaotic ordering of some previous, rival critical studies of Australian poets - studies which often seem no more than random articles flung together between covers. There's attractiveness in variety, but it's something new to see the development of an argument in a lengthy critical work. Hoddinott traces Harwood's preoccupations from her earlier works through to her most recent in a pattern whose model is musical composition, a fugal or canonical text. At times she repeats material from one section to another, as she recounts 'Childhood, Memory and Preservation of the Past', through to 'The Professors', 'The Philosophers' and so on, but the effect for the reader is not one of tedious déjà vu. The whole is tied together with reference to Harwood's abiding concern with language. The book gathers momentum as it proceeds; the core of its critique lies in examination of the Eisenbart and Kröte poems, and Harwood's interest in Wittgenstein and Ryle. The chapters on the philosophers and language offer absorbing analysis. Hoddinott, a student of Harwood's husband in Hobart, shares the poet's Romanticism, while appreciating Bill Harwood's rival positivist necessitarianism; her discussion of the appeal for Harwood of the ambiguities inherent in expression and form in the *Tractatus* provide tension in her own writing. It's a welcome and cant-free discussion of some of the most ironic and accomplished poetry in Australia by the person best-equipped, to speak on the subject apart from the poet.

Hoddinott's study is more than a handy companion to the poetry: with her edition of Harwood's letters to Thomas Riddell, it genuinely elucidates the text. Hoddinott's book expands a 1981 essay on 'Gwen Harwood and the Philosophers', and traces the gradual build-up of a position behind the 'masks' which, once exposed, led Harwood from notoriety to outright fame on publication (at age 43) of her first collection of poems. Hoddinott is particularly good on Harwood's 'masks', the pseudonymous poems which, thirty years ago, upset editors and provided a frisson for sensationalist reporters. Harwood's works may have helped to make editors briefly more self-critical than they had been, although Hoddinott's discussion reveals the impassioned and controversial nature of poetic debate in a period sometimes alleged by later waves of young poets (chiefly male) to have been characterised by complacency or spiritless theorizing. Hoddinott's study is also commendable for its revelation of Harwood's affinities with German Romantic song and poetry. Hoddinott plainly shares Harwood's affection for Schubert, Heine and the art-song tradition. What matter if chaps have some good tunes, if one can write such splendid music of one's own?

Elizabeth Lawson's book is a thoughtful shorter guide to Harwood's work. She notes Harwood's style does not easily corroborate "some feminist thinking about cultural inheritance". Quite so: unless Wittgenstein, Schubert and Bach are primarily considered as exemplars of the patriarchy and only latterly as universalising thinkers and artists, then Harwood is guilty of *lèse-majesté* in gender terms. Faced with the self-imposed task of "inscribing" Harwood in female literary history, Lawson sees the poet as an "undercover agent" in male culture: the tension in both Harwood's and Lawson's writing signals undoubted consciousness of the political ramifications of language.

In the long run, Harwood eludes all the nets - like her admired Byron, who will not be tied down to Tory versus Whig categories but reveals what Flaubert called the "*idées reçues*" and the "*idée chic*" in all bourgeois codes. Lawson's book is bound to find popularity with teachers and students because of its conciseness, detail and price. Hoddinott's work will provide more material for extended reflection on the characteristics of Harwood's themes, and will direct readers to further researches in the areas of language theory, formalism, Romanticism and

epistemology. A tall order? It will be fascinating, in view of Lawson's researches and of Hoddinott's glimpses of the woman in the artist, to read the first biography which appears on Gwen Harwood. She is a marvellous asset to both writers, and to all who read her.

Michael Sharkey teaches English at Bond University. His book of poems Alive in Difficult Times *(Kardoorair Press, $8) is reviewed by Graham Rowlands in this issue.*

Mythic World of Youthful Foolery

Frank Kellaway

Gwen Harwood: *Blessed City; the Letters of Gwen Harwood to Thomas Riddell, January to September 1943.* Edited by Alison Hoddinott (Angus & Robertson, $14.95).

Blessed City has been a phenomenal success with the public. Among other things it won *The Age* Book of the Year for 1990. It is now nearly a year since it first appeared. In spite of this I am eager to record a personal response to this correspondence between two of my closest friends.

I don't suppose these letters would have been published (publishers being what they are) had Gwen not become a poet of great stature and it is true that they are interesting for insights they give into the poems but in spite of their erudition and literary 'importance' their value seems to me to be in their inspired fooling, their delight in absurd incongruities, the sheer verve and courage of her escapades, the great beauty of her response to the natural world, the passionate concerns of a young woman who, two years previously, in spite of violent emotional family opposition, had to enter a convent in order to discover whether she had a religious vocation.

The letters (all from Brisbane) have a sort of unity in that they cover the period shortly after Gwen and Tony's first meeting when Tony was drafted to Darwin in January 1943 until his return on a second leave to Brisbane in September of the same year. They read like a novel with plenty of serious-comic action and a gallery of characters ranging from Gwen's highly eccentric, gifted and original family to the dull, usually predictable civil servants at the War Damages Commission where Gwen worked.

The action at home concerns mother Agnes (rechristened Agens following a typing error) and her tree-lopping activities vociferously opposed by Gwen, brother Joe's (Hippo's) fanatical body-building and crazy involvement with first world war aviation, and father Foster's brilliant excursions into comic musical invention as well as his maudlin affection for a gluttonous dachshund. All this is seen with its absurdities sharply heightened, quite without sentimentality, but even Agens, the least sympathetic, emerges as a vigorous, extraordinarily generous person who is always offering strangers in need the run of the house.

The action at work concerns Gwen's running battle with the public service in the War Damages Commission. Her campaigns were conducted with ruthlessness, wit, courage and complete irresponsibility if you even believe in the validity of the existence of such an organisation; Gwen did not. She deliberately misfiled information so that it couldn't be found, burnt some files, baited her superiors in a variety of ways, mixed up calls on the switchboard, answered calls pretending to be someone else; she encouraged Naval friends to call on her at work and scandalize the office girls by their irregular behaviour, sitting on the counter and laughing loudly in the holy of holies. Among the worst of her crimes was a habit of sitting on the floor.

The most outrageous escapade was to get her mate, Diana, to call her from the switch. She took the call on a phone well within hearing of her boss and pretended to be involved in a spy ring. The caller was an imaginary character called Karl to whom she spoke in prepared German. Next she rang another imaginary character called Henry " . . . Karl rang up . . . No, I'm *not* joking . . . it was Karl himself . . . someone will have to see him . . . Listen you must go to Bill's at about eight o'clock and ask him for the key . . . Goodbye and be careful." Then she rang someone called Ernest and gave mysterious directions for "tailing" Henry (pp. 130-1). She watched her boss listening intently to all this. The fact that there were no serious repercussions suggests that he was both less of a fool and kinder than Gwen supposed. The incident also shows Gwen's foolhardy self-confidence that if Mafeking Reed (the boss) should report the matter she would be able to make an ass of him in public.

Gwen says now, rather ruefully, "Ah what a 'spike' I was in those days." Yes, but that is the essence of the book, its youthful high spirits and fearlessness about consequences. Of course there's an element of showing off to Tony who was older, and of silliness. I can see her astride a piano-stool in the Foster drawing-room mowing down her

guests with an imaginary machine-gun, surrounded by stolen public notices on the piano and against the walls.

But however she shows off Gwen never takes herself too seriously. When Tony asks her about being a writer she says "If I decided to be a writer I should certainly long to be something else in about three months, so it seems better to do nothing about it." (p. 257.) Then she launches into a crazy account of what she will do after the war. "Every two days I shall take a day off . . . I shall visit Public Servants in disguise . . . mutter inaudibly at public meetings, musical afternoons, get myself engaged as accompanist to 'leading' singers and play Pop Goes the Weasel when they have a few bars rest . . ." and so it goes on in a glorious rabelaisian spate of fantasy (p. 258).

There is a third field of action in the church where Gwen is organist and plays for weddings. The fun is of the same order with grim-faced brides giving savage orders to bridesmaids and leading singers wanting but not daring to tear one another's larynx out. Still in spite of the sharp vision of absurdity there is a genuine love for the music, the organ and the liturgies.

Like some of the best novels this book of letters creates its own mythic world, a comic mythology which includes red-bearded dwarf spies, Tiny Tim who becomes Tinny Tim, the poems of Eliza Cook, Hubert from Shakespeare's *King John*, Fred Hackelskinner and Theophilus Panbury, Gwen's alter egos, and Dr Jemindar's archaeology of Creek Street including To-ni and the God Bat-Ters-Bee. In reading these letters we must surrender to and live temporarily in this mythic world of youthful foolery. It is heartening that there are so many people, as sales of the book show, who are not too stuffy to enjoy doing it.

Frank Kellaway is a poet who now spends his time painting pictures. He has had one successful exhibition.

Raised to the Tenth Power

Kevin Hart

Francis Webb: *Cap and Bells.* Selected, edited and annotated by Michael Griffith and James A. McGlade (Angus and Robertson, $16.95).

"The spectacle of a mathematician who, without seeming to think about it, produces the square of some ten-digit number, fills us with a certain astonishment. But too often we fail to see that the poet raises a phenomenon to its tenth power, and the modest exterior of a work of art often deceives us with regard to the monstrously condensed reality contained within." So wrote Osip Mandelstam in 1913, in the full flush of vatic self-confidence, about that extraordinary Russian literary movement known as Acmeism. Mandelstam was thinking principally of Anna Akhmatova and himself, two of the most gifted poets of this century, but everything he says here could also be said of Francis Webb.

Technique and craft, precision and concreteness - these were high values for Mandelstam and Webb. Both believed that poetry should respect the world around us, and draw strength from it; and both believed, still more deeply, in the sovereignty of the word. All art aspires to the condition of poetry, not music, they say, since words have music and colour, passion and thought; they can enchant us while lucidly pointing us toward the Real. For all their commitment to clarity, both poets often composed lyrics which, because of their density and range of personal reference, make high demands of their readers. "I pin my faith on slipping images/Twisting like smoke or a fish caught in the hand" Webb wrote in an early poem. It gives a fair idea of his style: metaphors appear only to be quickly replaced by new metaphors, just as arresting and just as perplexing. Thus the final lines of 'For My Grandfather', one of his most powerful lyrics:

> And to those years dusk comes but as a rift
> In the flesh of sunlight, closed by memory;
> Shells stir in the pull of water, lift
> Fragile and holy faces to the sky.
> My years and yours are scrawled upon this air
> Rapped by the gavel of my living breath:
> Rather than time upon my wrist I wear
> The dial, the four quarters, of your death.

The force and richness of Webb's metaphors illuminate one aspect of his ambition; they testify to "the monstrously condensed reality contained within". No other Australian poet, not even Slessor or Hope, has worked with a greater sense of the high seriousness of his art. If poetry for some writers is a matter of sensuous description, self-expression, or even the production of verbal icons, for Webb it was a way of thinking and of knowing. What is given to thought in poetry is an apprehension of the self's dealings with itself and the world. That is quite a different thing from confessing details about one's personality: Herbert Read's influential

linking of Webb and Lowell, quoted by the editors of this volume in their introduction, sets the reading of Webb in precisely the wrong direction. Although Webb knew about mental suffering, he never starred himself in his verse as an individual. Lowell's directness about his condition, plangent though it can be, in the end obscures the self with personal clutter. Webb's indirectness, by contrast, reveals a self, a man who bears "messages of the hidden heart".

Revelation and indirection: the two go together for Webb as for any modern poet of stature. Webb is the most overtly visionary of Australian poets, something that makes his Australian readers (who are nothing if not empirically minded) more than a little uncomfortable. "Southward the new, the visionary!" cries the hero of 'Leichhardt in Theatre', but the theme of exploration is a means of mapping an inner journey. Leichhardt and Eyre are important figures in his work not for what they tell us about the colonial mentality, or about the historical quest for Australia's 'dead centre', but for their analyses of human anguish and isolation. The accent falls on what follows their proper names, 'Leichhardt *in Theatre*', 'Eyre *All Alone*'. And if their journeys are ever inward, towards a hidden self, they can hardly be direct. One approaches the self only through others. "I do value in poetry that heightening or ameliorating sense of companionship in human experience", Webb wrote in 1971. It is a wise and generous view. Yet in order to write poetry that deserves to be valued, one must look to one's own experience, one's own idiom; neither can truly be found in other poets, however companionable they may be. Browning and Yeats were plainly important for Webb; without them he could not have developed his idiom; but he learned how and when to turn away from them.

Webb's vision is, as Herbert Read rightly said, a tragic one. He is concerned with "the treacherous lord/Of time", with "the seige-works of a huge nightfall", and with "The bones ambiguous with life and death". These lines hint at strong pressures at work on Webb, but they do not distinguish him from a hundred other talented poets. We only begin to glimpse his tragic vision in lines like "Man must clasp to his soul/The sacred illness". Exactly what that "sacred illness" is cannot be said in a few sentences. Part of it is given in the early lines "I have taken/A fool's power in his cap and bells", although, unlike his editors, I doubt whether the jester image, even with its Franciscan overtones, has a good claim to regulate all of Webb's verse. And part of it is revealed in the intimate suffering of 'A Death at Winson Green', 'Hospital Night' (the second version), 'In Memorium: Anthony Sandys, 1806-1883', 'Ward Two', 'On Going Free' and 'Incident'.

These poems, along with 'Five Days Old', 'Ballerina: Coppelia', 'The Sea' and those mentioned earlier, form the durable core of Webb's writing. It is a remarkable body of work, ranging from tender lyricism -

> Now wonderingly engrossed
> In your fearless delicacies,
> I am launched upon sacred seas,
> Humbly and utterly lost
> In the mystery of creation,
> Bells, bells of ocean

- to a deeply troubled vision of that same creation and of his place in it:

> Trees, drawn up, rustle forward in the steep
> time of gloaming;
> Crude green labours, gathers itself to a
> darkness, dreaming
> Of perished ice-world summers, birds few,
> unwieldly, tame.
> Darkness is astir, pondering, touching
> Kinship with the first Dark in a trunk's
> crouching.
> Darkness lays claim
> To that vague breath-labour of a century, my
> name.

The editors conclude their short introduction to this long-awaited collection with tributes to Webb from several of our most distinguished poets. "I think Frank at times went higher than any other poet who has ever written in Australia", says David Campbell. And Rosemary Dobson agrees, "I believe that the term 'great poetry' should be used most scrupulously, but I am sure that much of Francis Webb's poetry should be so termed". As translators of Mandelstam, Campbell and Dobson know about heights and greatness. They know that both poets, the Russian and the Australian, could raise phenomena to the tenth power.

Kevin Hart is Associate Professor of Critical Theory at Monash University. His most recent collection of poetry was Peniel *(Golvan Arts, 1990).*

Hire a Historian

John Barrett

John Rickard and Peter Spearritt (eds): *Packaging the Past? Public Histories* (Melbourne University Press/Australian Historical Studies, $24.95).

When a parcel of public land, say an army reserve, is no longer needed for its century-long purpose, what's best done with it? Signs of how it's been used might be preserved for their cultural - their human - value, or they could be removed and the area returned to 'nature'. Ecologists, the wilderness crowd, tend to go for the second - really for a world without people; but from the time of the Aborigines there was never an Australia like that. Create your 'wilderness' areas now, and should present-day Aborigines be kept out of them? Have the mountain cattlemen an historic and current place in Australian life, or should all sign of them, and hope for them, be obliterated as much as possible? Should the largest covered wooden wharf left in the world, the finger wharf at Woolloomooloo Bay, be demolished in favour of the 'colonial configuration' of the bay? Former-Treasurer Keating has argued for demolition, and might have his way in that case. If and when historians (and historical geographers) are employed as advisers to the decision makers, and are thus 'public historians', big questions like those might be seen in wider and richer contexts, and policies might be adopted that serve Australians well, and serve them over successive generations.

What makes a house historically important? Architects might declare one to be valuable. Occupation by a famous person might give a house interest. But we might welcome moves to preserve the ordinary homes of ordinary people down the years, so that the women who ran them, the husbands banished to the sleepouts attached to them, and the families who cramped up in them, can be felt for and understood. For good judgements to be made here, and action to be persisted in despite all kinds of contrary pressures, authorities will need to employ and support trained historians - public historians.

Such are the themes explored in *Packaging the Past? Public Histories.* Twenty-odd writers examine heritage legislation, case studies of local areas doing battle over conservation, the role of historical museums, the significance of public memorials, the need to promote the idea of public history and train people to do a professional job, and how the growing band of public historians have begun to organise to help each other as well as the community. There's much of significance and genuine interest in this collection, and many readers will find it enlightening and stimulating.

But reviewers are allowed, even expected, to grumble. The editors correctly assert that the volume is not just an issue of the journal *Australian Historical Studies*: it's a special issue. Their more questionable claim is that it's a book. Sure, it's over 200 pages long, it has an index (of a basic kind), and it's well introduced by John Rickard and in an opening piece by Graeme Davison on the history and scope of public history, but the diverse pieces badly need to be caught up in a good editorial conclusion. Then the whole might shape up into a book.

Yet, if it isn't quite a book, it's still a journal and so offers 25 interesting pages of book reviews. Do you want to hear about "a bubbly book" (Anthea Hyslop's history of the Ballarat Base Hospital - a public historian's job)? Do you want a pointer to where you can read about "the Wheatlands school and attached residence . . . only standing because the white ants held hands"? Would old (and I mean old) Adelaideians like to know that 'Doc' Oldham has come into his own at last? Do you want to know of a book on the setting aside of land in Victoria for the public interest that's "a delight to read and savour", and of a writer on Polynesia whose works "will outlast the present generation and many to come"? If so, and if you're getting interested in public history, you now know where to turn.

John Barrett is an historian, author of We Were There *and other books. He says he has no axe to grind. He's as retired and as averse to work as editors will let him be.*

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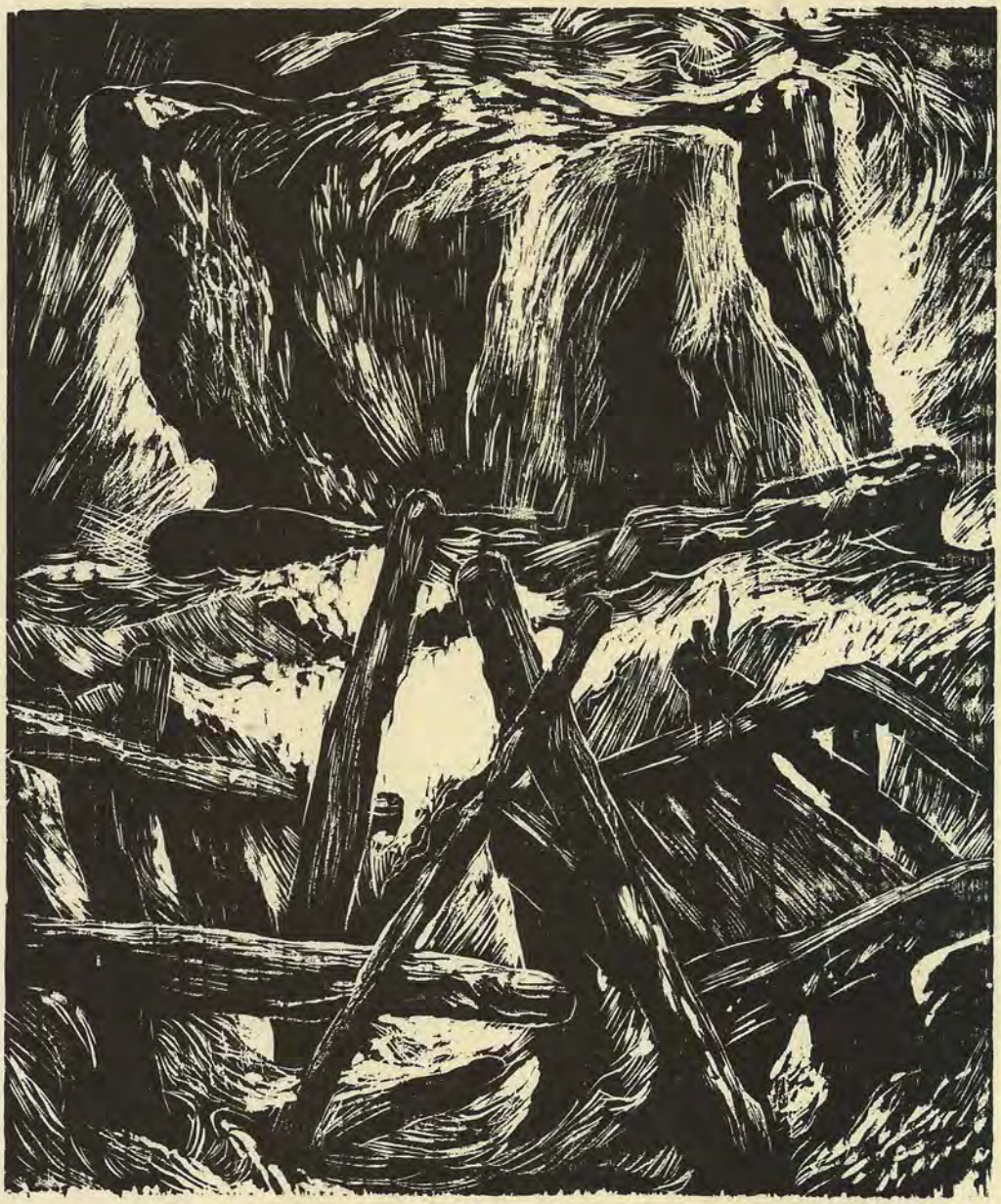

The Rock and the Sea

by *Rick Amor*

Woodcut. 350 by 290mm