overland

Registered by Australia Post—publication no. VBP 1440

features
stories
poetry
$4.95

126

Veronica Brady

Jennifer Maiden

John Millett

Barry Jones

Stuart Macintyre

THE VANGUARD IN CHINESE FICTION
Story by Can Xue
Article by Victor Ye

THE SIXTIES AND SWEET FOUCAULT
John Herouvim

SONGS OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA
Great Poems Rediscovered
Barry Hill

Helen Daniel

Bruce Dawe

Jan Owen

Eric Beach

Lauren Williams

CONTENTS

Paperback 248 pages ISBN 1 875285 05 9
Recommended retail price $14.95

OTHER LEFT BOOK CLUB TITLES

THE THIRD WAVE by Abe David and Ted Wheelwright November 1989 RRP $14.95

BREAD AND ROSES by Audrey Johnson. Published April 1990 RRP $14.95

QUESTIONS FOR THE 90s Edited by Anne Gollan. April 1990 RRP $13.95

TECHNOCRATIC DREAMING Edited by Paul James. June 1990 RRP $15.50

BACKGROUND TO THE GULF WAR by Malcolm Booker. February 1991 RRP $3

THE BASTARD WHO SQUASHED THE GRAPES IN ME BAG Denis Kevans March 1991 $10

SITTING IN by Barry Hill (with Heinemann Australia) May 1991 RRP $24.95

graphics
Design: Vane Lindesay. Front cover: 'A French Nun', 1944, by John Perceval, oil and tempera on board, 67.5 x 46 cm. Back cover: 'Woman with Bangles on her Arm', by John Perceval, 1987, pencil on paper, 36 x 26 cm. Photographs: Emmanuel Santos 5, 9, Hwa Goh 8, Ponch Hawkes 72. Graphics: Dennis Nicholson 19, 74, Lofo 27, Donald Greenfield 37, Bev Aisbett 49, 79, Kurt Wiese 51, Jiri Tibor 73

overland
Temper democratic, bias Australian

126
Autumn 1992
ISSN 0030 7416

Overland is a quarterly literary magazine founded by Stephen Murray-Smith.
The subscription rate is $26 a year (four issues at $4.95 an issue plus handling cost $6 p.a.) For pensioners and students there is a flat rate of $20. Overseas: $50. Life subscriptions are available for $300 each. Bankcard subscriptions and renewals are accepted (quote number). Manuscripts are welcomed, but a stamped self-addressed envelope is required, or two if poetry is sent with prose.

Editor Barrett Reid

Editorial Assistance: John Jenkins

Published by the OL Society Ltd incorporated in Victoria

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

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

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

Address all correspondence to:
Editor, *Overland,* PO Box 14146, Melbourne, Victoria 3000
Telephone: Editorial (03) 850 4347, Business (03) 380 1152
Fax: (03) 852 0527

Printing: Australian Print Group, Maryborough

CAN XUE

Things of Mine in that World

To a Friend

It is midnight now, friend. Outside it is pitch dark. It is pouring with rain and a crowd is surging in the courtyard, making a big noise. The heavy rain is thrashing their canvas raincoats with an unceasing thud. They are digging at that camphor tree beside which there is a tung tree that they have just hauled from a far-off place. Yesterday evening when they rushed into my house it was this that they were discussing. After a long discussion alternated with uproars and cries, jerks and uncertainties, they began to ransack my house for something. A strong man started having a cramp, blurting out, "Oh, I see, we are going to plant a tung tree!"

"A tung tree! Ha-Ha!" they roar in mad chorus, dripping with spit. Then the strong man painstakingly makes a noose and, blinking, throws it at my neck. "You, how dare you occupy this house?" he accuses me in a low voice. I do not even know how I came to be here. All I can remember is that it was snowing outside at first, not a soul to be seen in the empty country. Later, when it stopped, the moon-white heavens were hung with blinding icicles, and I was lying on my back, holding out a finger covered with frost. There were frozen cactuses and transparent reptiles, delicate icicles hanging down from the sky, thrusting to the ground. I turned my head sideways and heard a tearing sound, which was the icicles growing toward the centre of the earth. Then they came in, and they all claimed that they were my remote relatives and had saved me when I was young. I looked past their shoulders and saw the funeral procession snaking around the bare hill, the shadows like thin strings dangling up and down, a vertical bamboo flute, half visible in the air, playing a sad tune barely audible.

"We must get rid of that camphor tree first", the old woman at the gate suddenly announced. She is a hawk, shrouded in a black cloak, her shoulders quavering in a shrugging sort of way but her voice is as sharp as a chicken's.

"That's right," everyone agreed. Then in a panic: "Maybe someone is overhearing us? There are thieves everywhere. Nothing is reliable. We must not ignore such matters. Since the day the gale started there have been rifts in the sky..."

"We must plant the tung tree!" They emphasised their point with energetic certainty, stamping their feet, and bursting into hysterical tears. With brimming eyes, they prattled away about their fear over the years and the prospect spreading before them, and ended up kicking each other on the back and the bum, climbing onto the window-sill like monkeys, looking into the hill top in the twilight.

The hawk-turned-black-woman stealthily took the hoe from behind the door, and suddenly thrust it out. There rose a baby's unearthly shriek and the roosters, mistaking it for the dawn, started crowing in the distance. Cloth shoes dashed forward in the dust. Someone smashed a bottle in the middle of the house.

I saw that flute from the funeral procession groping about the window like a sneaking eavesdropper. When the strong man saw me watching he reached across to completely cover the window with his broad back.

I had wanted to speak out ever since they had come in. "Outside," I began. It was if I were driven by devils. "There is something eternal in the pond in the limestone. Whenever the frost starts falling from the sky the dead water will tinkle...There is a giant python lying in a pregnant coil...and a grey shadow banding over the water to retrieve something..."

They didn't hear me or probably didn't think I ever said anything except for shaking my head and twisting my body in a bizarre way like an earthworm. With great care they tiptoed away from me. An old woman was so curious as to try her pencil sharpener on the small of my back and say to

someone, "Gosh, it's stainless steel inside. Sh! Hush up! There's someone spying on us outside."

Eyes closed, I huddle into a corner. Friend, I am thinking of that iceberg. So long as the ocean thaws, I suppose, the iceberg will float. I raise my head from the water and see it moving slowly, like a meditating white whale. The icicles in the heavens are dripping, pit-a-pat. An ice column that thrusts into the sky snaps short, sending forth broken pieces shining with dreamy blue that shoot out long curves and disappear in the twinkling of an eye. The rays are infinite and dazzling, friend, have you ever had that experience in which the cluster of stars darken and the sun at once blackens and brightens, at a loss what to do when you open your breast and your head turns into a reflecting mirror? I raise my head from the water, shaking off the debris of ice struck on my forehead and blinking my eyes. Frost is falling from the sky. "There will be a morning." Gently I say to myself, "I said, 'just like that.'" So everything begins anew. The earth returns to its chaos. Under the vast, fluffy carpet there grow such vague desires and unusual stirrings that plants gradually take on a voluptuous green...But I can't renew myself. I have come into this world where rays of ice are perpetual and dazzling, where meteors are astonished and fall to earth as ugly stones and silent snowy peaks reflect uncanny brilliance. But I stick to this world, friend, I am growing upwards, to become one of those ice columns that link the earth with the sky. When that shimmering reflected light quakes/shines, my body itches all over as if many buds were at the point of bursting out of my skin. I turn my head and hear a cool breeze whistling between leaves and rising sap flows from under my arms.

My eyes stare out through the hazy window.

The camphor tree was dug out. And old wildly laughing woman jumped into the hole, running mad in the running water while all those around shovelled earth onto her body.

"Here's another one!" The strong man unexpectedly pointed straight at my eyes behind the window, maliciously sniggering.

"Another one?" They started at this and dispersed in a great commotion, flying in all directions. The woman buried in the hole kept silent, turned into a fossil in an instant.

I knew they would soon come back to catch me. I fastened the door and crept into a big wooden box pulling the lid down close. I wanted to fly there in a hurry. I wanted to hurry into that ice column again. I must hurry up. The prison of my skin was bursting open, the burning blood spurting out like a fountain. There wasn't much time left as the funeral procession was nearing the wild country, the thin strings blown into a tangle by the north wind, and a pack of hungry wolves were running on the other side of the swamp. "Oh...oh...oh..." an old man began to sing, the indistinct sound carrying as far as the ear could hear. To me, he seemed to be repeating in a singsong voice, "oh, the string, oh, the string, oh the string." And the strings were entangling themselves more vigorously. As the old man disappeared the song was echoed back from the horizon. With a clang the black vertical flute was knocked down.

I heard wolves' feet.

When the ocean starts wrinkling a little, I float face down, the scorching light expanding my heart. I turn over, looking for that mirror, and, in a quick glance, find my eyes have turned into violets. The meditation of the while whale remains eternally unbroken and the shattered pieces of ice are pounding each other in the distance... There are no days and nights in the world of ice. When I raise my head above the water I try to open my breast from which snow-white sparks are shooting into the sky and the icy peaks send out purple smoke booming deeply.

You of course know what it is all about, friend, I am talking about that world, about icicles. Once upon a time, the snow flakes were falling from the sky and we were sitting side by side on the curbstone, singing 'Mum's shoes' together. Then you knelt and started licking those white spirits from the ground. You said it was sugar, your tiny face frozen blue and your fingers greatly swollen. I saw it then, in the flash of lightning, but I could not tell you. When I remembered that I should tell you you'd grown into cool-headed manhood, surrounded with that smell of cigarettes. For years and years I have been pacing up and down, walking wildly along the river and scattering the broken willow twigs all over the place. Sometimes I paused, with tearful eyes gazing ahead at the distance which smiled at me but never came. Foolishly I sang from memory 'Mum's Shoes' calling to that ancient ghost. But day in and day out, year in and year out, it still hides itself in the fog.

For a time I did not wait any more because when my relatives found me running around on the river bank they thought there must be something wrong with me. They bound me up in my sleep and shut me away in a dilapidated temple. At night, the temple became alive with countless ghosts, and there was something wildly jumping up and down and running about under the ground. When they finally set me free there was really something wrong with me. My face was hugely swollen, with mucus oozing day and night, the wind-dried legs shaking all the

time. I'd seize at the collars or sleeves of whoever I ran into and say to him one word at a time, "What a nice evening!" The sunken eyes darted forth murder and the fingers twisted round in the pockets. I even made monkey mask and with it ran into relatives' houses, hanging about their necks like anything, screaming "What a nice evening!" They carefully looked at me, nodding their heads and whispering among themselves. I knew they had decided. They were waiting for a chance, just like an old hen waiting to lay eggs.

A great hole was bashed in the door, through which an iron shovel was thrust in.

Friend, it is time. Listen, the burning hail is raining down. The transparent trees are swaying with pure crowns and the waves are leaping voluptuously. Hand in hand, you and I rise above the sea, eyes half-closed and basking in icy fire, singing from deep within our breasts 'Mum's Shoes'...

This story appeared in New Wave Short Stories *(1989). When its editor, Chen Yongxin visited Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province, he heard of a woman tailor who wrote "very good stories". Not long after, a very unusual name, Can Xue (dregs of snow) appeared in the major literary magazines* People's Literature *and* China. *At an international conference in Shanghai many foreign scholars showed great interest in her stories. All her work has one theme, a woman obsessively afraid of being hurt by others.*

Translated by Ouyang Yu, Melbourne, 1991.

Emmanuel Santos: 'The Eye of the Dragon', China, Dec. 1991

VICTOR YE

New Fiction in China
Development and Detour

Ten years ago, modernism seemed strange to many Chinese readers, even to some literary people, in spite of it having been a literary fashion in the 1930s. This was partly due to ideological and political forces which isolated China culturally from the rest of the world. Hardly anyone had acquired any information about Western literature or culture for thirty years or so, let alone benefited from it. It was not until two or three years after China's 'open policy' was promulgated that the literary public began to be attracted to modernism again.

While many ordinary Chinese were immersed in a kind of painful meditation upon the sad effects of the Cultural Revolution on the young, as demonstrated in 'Class Teacher' – a well-known short story – and in similar literary pieces exposing the evils of that chaotic era, an essay entitled 'Modernisation and Modernism' suddenly caught the attention of literary circles. It was written by a writer called Xu Chi, who claimed that "China needs her own modernist art and literature, to allow us to carry out our four socialist modernisations." Xu Chi's article also attracted much criticism. In *Art and Literature Weekly,* Chen Sen countered: "We would have gone astray, led up a blind alley in terms of creative writing and theoretical exploration, if we had been poisoned by modernism." Obviously modernism was equivalent to decadent capitalism in some eyes, and the argument was presented as one between capitalism and socialism. To some critics, this seemed just a political strategy, but no-one could ignore these political scares.

Fortunately, not every critic stuck to this ultra-leftist line. Many others saw a link between socialist modernisation and modernist art and literature – an evolution in parallel with economic, scientific and social developments. But those opposed to modernism countered with three main objections. Firstly, that nationalist literature would suffer under its impact; secondly, classicism and critical realism (such as Balzac, Chekhov and Dickens) would be discarded; thirdly, that proletarian literature would be denied. Some critics, looking for a new way out of the dispute, claimed modernism would develop naturally as Western influences were absorbed. Chen Si-he, a critic from Shanghai, wrote in his influential essay, 'Modernism in the Development of Chinese Literature' that, "Having acquired the Western spirit of science and the doctrine of reason, the Chinese extricated themselves from their traditional (mythological) culture and began constructing a new life on the ruins of the old. Westerners, however, with the help of ideas obtained from the East, including aspects of Chinese mysticism and the linking of matter and self, may overcome the limitations of their own traditions." Chen Si-he's essay also pointed out ways in which modernism could reasonably be introduced into China. Gradually, more people came to realise that modernism was not a monster, but akin to a newly invented machine, something Chinese writers could use and benefit from.

Recent debate seems to have affirmed the positive aspects of modernism, also allowing experimental approaches. The focus, however, has shifted away from writers outside the country to those employing modernist techniques within China. To most readers, modernism no longer represents a theoretical problem, but a kind of practical reading, one involving a sense of absurdity, loss, solitude and nihilism. This is evident in an outpouring of new writing by mostly younger writers, reflecting perhaps the peculiar mood and taste of the young after the Cultural Revolution – which may also have something to do with existentialism, which was similarly influential in Europe after World War II.

Of course, Chinese modernism is not limited to a sense of absurdity or to existentialist despair over the damage of the Cultural Revolution. Hence the importance of the question: Is there anything genuinely characteristic of modernism in contemporary Chinese fiction? If so, is there any difference

between Western and Chinese modernism? Ji Hong-zhen, a young female critic, cites three causes for the dearth of home-grown modernism in contemporary Chinese fiction. Firstly, the absence of widespread affluence; secondly, the shallowness of the 'philosophical soil' that might nurture modernism; and lastly, obstructing cultural and psychological mechanisms. Before Ji Hong-zhen's essay was published, some critics had emphasised the spiritual connections Bei Dao, Zhang Xi-xing, Liu Suo-la and other Chinese vanguard writers held with Sartre, Camus and the lost generation, suggesting a dangerous course for modernist developments in China because, in the view of these critics, the latter were representatives of the decadent bourgeoisie. Even those who supported modernism tried to make a distinction between Chinese and Western varieties, partly for political reasons and partly out of the need for a national literature. Ji Hong-zhen's essay, refreshingly, evaded political and ideological narrowness to examine modernist aesthetics and techniques.

There are two main stages in the development of modernist writings in China since the early 1980s: the first was of writing that employed some modernist techniques; the second of works completely modernist in both style and content. However, all these works were the product of a distinctly Chinese temperament. Of the first stage, Wang Meng, the former Minister for Culture, is a good example. Since taking up his pen again in 1979, after a long break, he adopted a stream-of-consciousness technique in short stories like 'The Sound of the Spring', 'The Eye of the Night', 'Butterfly' and 'The Flying Ribbons of a Kite'. Yet his use of the technique is different from that of Western writers. He defined it thus: "We use some stream of consciousness, not to abandon sense nor to show sorrow on the day of doom, but to profoundly depict a more beautiful, richer and more civilised soul." Wang Meng's intention seems more sociologically oriented than those of Western writers who may affirm technique for its own sake.

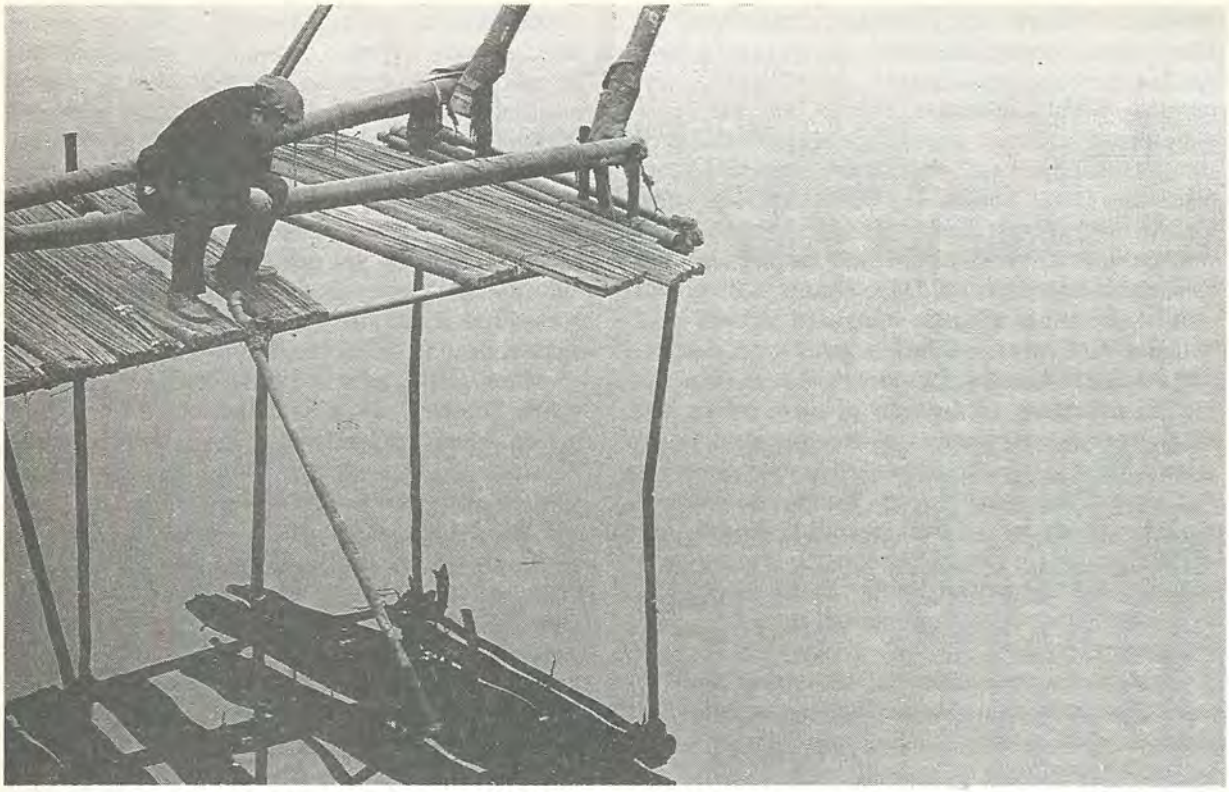
Other Chinese writers try to preserve their national roots while adapting new ideas or techniques from the West. Feng Ji-chai's 'Miraculous Pigtail' and 'Three-inch Feet of a Lady' are based on legends that have a particular Chinese flavor, as do the novelettes of Jia Ping-ao, Wan Chen-qi and Lin Jin-lan, who are all steeped in traditional culture. In their fiction they convey a sense of absurdity and confusion in a prosaic style and flat tone, and sometimes in a sort of montage style that pieces together fragments of a story without recourse to a complete plot. To some extent their stories have departed from traditional narrative structure and development. Wan Chen-chi's 'Initiation into Monkhood', for instance, is an evocation of customs and feelings, and made up of fragments or 'pictures', without any well-organised plot, sense of dramatic conflict or distinct characters. But these writers could not be called experimental, as basically they mirror real life, and share with traditional writers a concern for the apt portrayal of human nature, emotion and dignity. In a word, they are humanists, for whom humanist insight is a useful weapon against both feudalism and ultra-leftist extremism.

More characteristic of modernism in recent years, however, is the so-called new or vanguard fiction, which emerged only seven or eight years ago. Almost all the writers in this group are of the younger generation. Ah-chen and Ma Yan began writing in 1984, as did He Li-wei (with *The White Bird*). In 1985, Liu Suo-la and Mo Yan became known to the general public, and in 1986 Can Xue was celebrated for her novel *The Aging Clouds*. This vanguard writing is distinguished from conventional fiction by its narrative strategies. If traditional narrative focused on the telling of a story, vanguard fiction focuses on the many *ways* stories can be told, and is no longer so interested in the story itself. An example of this type of narrative is Ma Yuan's 'Goddess of Lhasa River', called by critics the first story written in China to be influenced by French neo-fiction. The narrator functions both as a character in the story and as the writer himself, then as neither of these two. His appearances and disappearances within the narrative puncture any illusion of reality, and also suggest multiple meanings and narrative points of view.

In stark contrast to Ma Yuan's multiple, many-angled narrative, Mo Yan restricts his narrative viewpoint to its narrowest limit. His stories are told from a radically subjective point of view. Even old stories that were first told or set in the distant past, can be witnessed or personally told by the author/narrator – something quite impossible in traditional stories.

Interestingly, Ah Chen, a vanguard writer famous for his Taoist aesthetics, provides another alternative outside the polarity of multiple viewpoints and extreme subjectivity. Through a Taoist technique he calls "self-forgetting", the writer's limited and personal ego is not allowed to obtrude between the text and its subject matter: Ah Chen strives to perceive and explore the reality of the outside world in a direct and immediate way unclouded by personal distractions and preferences.

Liu Suo-la omits all punctuation in some paragraphs of 'You Have No Other Choices', possibly



Emmanuel Santos: 'He Hai River, Tianjin'

for the first time in Chinese fiction, a practice also followed by other novelists a little later. Can Xue goes so far as to provide no clear ending to one of her stories while Zhang Xin-xing in her work attempts to break away from fictionality altogether, by using a tape recorder and camera in addition to pen and paper. Ah-chen and He Li-wei, on the other hand, no longer seek any deeper level of sense (the story development or content) but are interested rather in the surface level of sense (*parol,* lexicography and syntactical rhetorics). Thus text becomes texture in 'Talented and Dissolute People Everywhere' and 'Three Deaths One Night', and a sustained plot is replaced by fragmentary narrative; or, more precisely, by a sort of elaborate word-by-word delicacy of aesthetic nuance, a shifting and almost musical patterning of visual, aural and syntactic rhythms. Precisely speaking, this is a form of poetic fiction.

The above examples seem to indicate a shift: of valuing means above ends, 'how' above 'what', form above content – at least in some radical vanguard fiction. Is this tendency accidental? Maybe not, perhaps it's an inevitable result of historical change. The dominance of one or two styles or modes of writing could not have been sufficient to guarantee a richness and flowering of art and literature; and whether or not this flowering – this enrichment of Chinese civilisation – comes about must remain the test of pluralism. Of course, one also can't deny that the vanguard writers have a long way to go in China before they are fully recognised and established.

Foreign influences, both modernist and post-modernist, are many. Sartre, Salinger, Heller, Saul Bellow, Marquez, Proust, Joyce, Hemingway and many others have influenced Chinese vanguardists. Sometimes, however, one suspects that foreign writers have been imitated too closely and too slavishly. Some critics even argue that our vanguard writers are bogus modernists because present-day Chinese cannot, in any but the most superficial sense, share the worries and world view that motivated their Western counterparts. Furthermore, these critics say that the underdevelopment of China, divergent ways of thinking between East and West, plus deep-seated racial and cultural differences, all guarantee that it is impossible to establish a Chinese modernist canon through the mere imitation of Western texts. Often these criticisms seem reasonable, but they leave out certain crucial historical factors. The origins of vanguard fiction are not just to be found in the freedom writers began to enjoy after the country was opened to the outside

world. They also spring from a deep reflection on the spiritual crisis the Chinese people experienced during the Cultural Revolution. The shadow that this chaotic period cast over the Chinese people was as dark as that thrown by World War II over the West. Its psychological legacy was equally terrible. There is a great similarity of circumstances, a common soil out of which various strains of modernist fiction have grown.

Other younger Chinese writers seem heirs to the same spirit of revolt and absurdity that swept through the West during the Sixties and Seventies. The hippie-like characters and their crazy dances accompanied on the guitar in Liu Suo-la's story, 'You Have No Other Choice', remind one of the earlier Western worship of the Beatles and John Lennon. The fact that Liu Suo-la became famous almost overnight demonstrates the power of tapping into Western influences. Liu Suo-la also seems heavily influenced by Joseph Heller and Saul Bellow. One could argue that she is not yet in their league, yet Liu Suo-la's concern for the problems of young city people is a genuine and worthwhile continuation of the existentialist tradition.

Zhang Chen-zhi is famous for his traditional romanticism, yet he has written some very modern stories too. His 'Careless Scribbling' exposes the anxiety and apprehension of modern people. Lui Suo-la's representation of the Chinese hippies only concerns a small circle of the upper classes in the cities, while Zhang Chen-zhi's hero in 'Careless Scribbling' is of wider historical significance, because he travels from the rural heartland to the city. The uniqueness of Zhang Chen-zhi's story is its self-contained structure, the sole purpose of which is to make vivid the inner workings of his hero's mind. The story seems to be made up of "fragments of moods", and is often illogical and non-sequential.

Mo Yan is another young vanguard writer who has recently emerged. He defines his approach to writing poetically, as "a heavenly horse riding across the sky". Although his stories are set in rural Shandong province, they disclose a very modern and urban sense of unease. They are full of a kind of "poetic abnormality", the result of mixing an exaggerated and colorful romanticism with hallucination and everyday reality, and of relating his tales through simple characters. His fiction is flavored by an odd other-worldliness, perhaps because

Hwa Goh: 'Ming Tombs '91'

his perception of the world is a troubling one. Mo Yan's fear of man's primal lust and greed and his anxiety about the validity of human existence makes him deeply suspicious of human nature. Paradoxically, this provokes in him a powerful and instinctive recourse to the will to life, to the very primal ground that he finds so troubling. His famous *Red Sorghum* series (familiar to Western audiences through the 1988 film of the same name) may be understood in this context. His almost epic characters, with their iron-boned courage and uprightness shine brightly through the years of their struggle, a struggle that is at once bitter, harsh and exhilarating.

Han Shao-gong is a fiction writer who has vigorously promoted vanguard fiction. His 'Return to the Native Land' and 'Papapa' are examples of 'root-seeking' literature, which lays open the nation's weaknesses in its recalling of the history of his ancestors, and supplies vivid insights in terms of philosophy and cultural anthropology, underlying just how difficult it is for Chinese to throw off the cultural and traditional bondage that has shaped them over centuries of semi-feudalism. The 'root-seeking' Chinese writers investigate the remote and the primitive, as part of a rich and even semi-metaphysical meditation upon ordinary life.

As a woman writer of vanguard fiction, Can Xue's perception of human wretchedness is profound and extraordinary. Her frantic and soul-stirring short stories have introduced numerous deformed, abnormal and wretched characters – yet there is always something grand and even poetic about them. She relentlessly exposes the evils and ugliness both of human nature and the old traditions, and a so-called 'black soul' pervades all her fictions. Her novel *Performance at the Breakthrough* is about a woman called X and her neighbor, The Widow. Lady X is supposed to be having an affair with a man called Q, but sexual relations are a traditionally heated topic of gossip in Fragrance Street. The Widow is the spiritual leader of Fragrance Street and appears morally upright, but at one point she invites 'the writer' (also a minor character in the novel) into her bed. When she learns that he is impotent she curses him as a "crow" and "rat". Contrary to the hypocritical widow, Lady X refuses to join her neighbors in their endless accusations and gossip. She appears ignorant of the malice and darkness of human nature, but is fearless in her disregard of all the slanderous talk. X becomes lonely and isolated because of her rejection of the traditional culture represented by the widow, and works hard to break through this stiff cultural barrier. The question left to the reader is, can she succeed? Can Xue's symbolism and use of metaphor is both her weakness and her strength: in plumbing darkness and evil, an excess of dense imagery, metaphor and abstract ideas may alienate the popular readership.

Ma Yuan, in contrast, belongs to a group of young writers interested in *methods* of narrative. His writing is marked by its playfulness and word games, and has attracted the attention of both the general reader and the critic. His stories are about the terror of death, ambiguous love affairs, mysterious friendships and odd customs and traditions. They contain all manner of intriguing, odd and miscellaneous bits of information. His mature style is evident in his story 'Temptation of Ganis'. The 'temptation' of the title refers to the allure that the mysterious culture of the Tibetan plateau holds for the Han Chinese. The author tells three stories in turn, suggesting they are inter-related. But since there is no consistent narrator, this becomes problematic, and any sense of totality and reality is liable to disintegrate. One is left with a feeling of distance, of the 'beyond'. Thereby, the power of the 'temptation' and its fascination is only deepened, in spite of all efforts to explain it away.

Other writers take a speculative approach. Hong Feng's 'Broad Sea' and Su Tong's 'The Escape in 1934' are attempts to deconstruct historical 'objectivity'. Gei Fei's 'The Flock of Brown Birds' and Yu Hau's 'This Article is Presented to the Young Lady Yang Lui' present the disintegration of a unified and agreed-upon definition of reality and history, and affirm multiplicity and pluralism. Most characteristic of this group of writers is their attention to narrative structure and the inspiration of Derrida's theories of deconstruction.

Some critics object that fiction is more than theories and experiments with language, also taking issue with the slavish imitation of foreign texts – bordering sometimes on downright plagiarism – while stressing the need to respond to local culture and circumstances and to the preferences of a local and popular readership. Recently, in fact, vanguard fiction has suffered a decline in readership, suggesting that mere modishness is not sufficient. This is something of a tragedy, though it might be expected at the start of our literary experiment. Fortunately, more and more literary people have come to realise that China – with such a large population and such a long history and such deep-rooted cultural traditions – has to take a path both similar to and different from the West. We need to evolve a completely new literature responsive to our unique history and circumstances, but one as innovative and sophisticated as any other modern national literature,

through which our valuable traditions may be preserved and adapted to the demands of contemporary reality.

Another vigorous new genre in Chinese fiction is 'neo-realism', which appeared just three or four years ago, and is still subject to a great deal of discussion and definition. It is generally agreed to be different from both traditional realism and vanguard fiction. Unlike the latter, its focus is real life rather than the forms of fiction itself. Also, unlike vanguard fiction, it is not analytic and does not seek to uncover the unconscious viewpoints and ideological presuppositions that are built into various forms of story telling. It breaks from the traditional realist writing, too, in that it cares more for the real life of common people, for lives as they are actually lived, without being didactic or making moral judgements. Nor, as in traditional realism, does it reduce people to ciphers within some grand historical or abstract schema. Its description of real life and its employment of new narrative techniques make new realism acceptable to both vanguard and traditional realist writers. Neo-realist fiction has also won back readers scared off by the dazzling virtuosity of vanguard experimentation. Some vanguard writers have taken up the neo-realist form, and continue their experiments in an 'applied' rather than 'pure' sense. Su Tong, a young writer noted for his experiments with narrative, turns to neo-realism in his story 'Groups of Wives and Concubines'. He examines the marital problems of a family in decline, yet retains a distanced, post-historicist stance and the atmosphere proper to a fable. Neo-realist writers have so far proved very pragmatic and flexible in their incorporation of vanguard techniques.

Chinese fiction, drawing from its ancient resources, from traditional realism and Western modernism and post-modernism alike, finds itself at a crossroads where a growing number of writers, critics and readers now understand that the way to a brighter future points towards the new.

Victor Ye is a member of the English Department, Zhenjiang Teachers College, Jiangsu, People's Republic of China. A previous essay on contemporary Chinese literature appeared in Overland, *107, June, 1987.*

The Pitfalls of Iconophilia

Myth, Text and 'Reading' the Sixties

JOHN HEROUVIM

A discussion of Robin Gerster and Jan Bassett: Seizures of Youth: 'The Sixties' and Australia *(Hyland House, $35).*

I

"All the world's a text."
William Shakespeare. (If he'd known better.)

In the opening chapter of this book, three press photographs are discussed in succession. First, "the mini-skirted, bareheaded English model Jean Shrimpton 'outraging' the society matrons at Flemington Racecourse" in 1965. The authors comment: "it is doubtful if the general population was particularly shocked". Then, a woman wearing jewellery made from discarded kitchen utensils. This "constitutes an interesting sign of the sixties. It was an age when junk was taken seriously..." Finally, a smiling female Vietnam protester in trendy get-up shows how "protest became a pose".

The photos selected and the points made about them are the sort of material my Social Studies teacher covered twenty years ago. They are not so grand as to require the theoretical edifice which precedes them, a solid page of Roland Barthes; "pictorial rhetoric"; "plurality of meaning"; the "rich semiotic field" of the press photograph; its "connotative richness...beyond its literal denotation"; Michelangelo Antonioni; Susan Sontag on photography, and a whole lot more. The same happens with the fifty or so other press photos reproduced in the book. Again and again, the subtextual references discovered by the authors are too slight to support the mass of decoding and deconstruction that's loaded onto them.

The writers' hyperbole (Greek for 'overshooting') is as evident in their prose as it is in their theorising. A press shot shows Victorian Premier Henry Bolte posed as if writing, a framed photograph of Sir Winston Churchill beside him on his desk. The authors call this Bolte's "prostration before Churchill's image". Elsewhere, the Beatles and other bands are said to have "exercised a despotic influence" over youth culture "which Hitler could only have dreamed of".

Naïve hyperbole is compounded by narrative windiness. Let no noun venture forth unchaperoned by an adjective; let no verb's prayer for an adverb go unanswered. Thus, Jim Cairns's "photogenic and reassuringly mild persona". (Mind if I take a quick snap of your persona, Jim?) Thus, a poem that "pungently illustrates the exploitative indifference of some protesters". (Try saying that with a mouthful of post-structuralist marbles.) This is a book which avoids "the gratifications of sex and drugs", preferring to say "avenues of sexual and pharmaceutical gratification". "Definition" won't do, or even "dictionary definition". It's "lexicographical definition".

The principal author, Robin Gerster, is a lecturer in English, and *Seizures of Youth* enlists the characters and events depicted in contemporaneous Australian fiction to illustrate many of its points about the Sixties. Regrettably, it does this in the academic LIT-REF style:

> The 1960s witnessed the departure from public life of Robert Menzies, the political monolith who, according to his fictional bodyguard, Holden Shadbolt, hero of [Murray] Bail's *Holden's Performance,* had come to resemble a 'disintegrating statue' by the end of his long reign as prime minister.

Stumbly, tangled-up rigmarole sentences like these are almost useless because they contain too many bits of information. I didn't expect to find dozens of them in a "thoughtful, wry and educated swipe at the mythologising of that most turbulent of decades – the Sixties", which is how the publisher's release (entirely within the conventions of its genre) describes the book.

Nor did I expect to find this grossly English method of reading printed texts side by side with a swanky French method of reading visual texts. Holden Shadbolt's description of Menzies is quoted as if this...this...this *character in a novel* can somehow represent an actual person with observations to make about the real world! This is to 'naturalise' literary language, to 'recuperate' it to the real world.

Authors who explain photographs only after inoculating their readers with Roland Barthes on semiology and Susan Sontag on the pitfalls intrinsic to the medium of photography, could surely find space somewhere to point out the pitfalls intrinsic to *novels.* Literary language (well, all language) is artifice. It's self-referential, referring only to itself and certainly not to Sir Robert Menzies (who was himself constructed by a discourse, except for the eyebrows, which were real). Alternatively, literary language is non-referential, referring to nothing at all, not even itself. Holden Shadbolt's connection with the real world is an illusion. So is the real world, which is itself a text with no ultimate shape (though if it had one, it'd probably be flat).

I trust a note to this effect will be included in the next edition.

II

The iconoclastic spirit that is said to characterise the sixties is sadly absent from many attempts to remember them. It is this very iconoclasm which is needed to do the period justice. (Seizures of Youth, *p. 36)*

Iconoclasm was more characteristic of the Sixties than it is of present times, partly because in those days the big-name social theorists were criticising society, not 'reading' 'texts'. Gerster and Bassett do not break icons and they do not do their period justice. Instead of iconoclasm they engage in prosaic postmodern iconophilia.

The Sixties icons covered by the book – the Sixties images-texts-artefacts-symbols and what have you – are largely coessential with the Sixties as packaged and presented by the daily papers and the TV news. This is not to suggest that *Seizures* is just another chronicle of long hair, Vietnam, LBJ, *Don's Party,* the Aboriginal Embassy, Mick Jagger as Ned Kelly, Sonia bloody McMahon's split bloody skirt, and the shark that came to a screaming Holt. It's not just another book summarising and merchandising what made news during the Sixties.

But it could be such a book. Keep the photos, cartoons and posters, restrain the prose, jettison the unilluminating theoretical verbiage, chuck out the literary references, make the book bigger and you could just about pop it on the coffee table beside the Babyboomers edition of Trivial Pursuit.

The cover, which falls well within the scope of accustomed portrayals of 'the Sixties', could stay as it is. Under the title, *Seizures of Youth,* it shows a bouncer at a pop concert carrying away a screaming teenage girl. Thus, Australia's Sixties are reduced to a passing generational paroxysm aggravated by over-stimulation. The cover endorses one of the standard cliché-caricatures of the Sixties: a sort of Adolescent Epilepsy Theory that can't distinguish hormonal disturbances from social ones and therefore ends up identifying "the hysteria of the pop concert" with "the passion of the anti-war demonstration".

This book says it's *about* the mythologising, packaging and marketing of 'the Sixties', but it's actually *part* of it. This irreconcilable paradox worried me, so I consulted a text specialist. I told her the text strikes a revisionist, iconoclastic pose while finding only straw myths to demolish. I told her the text claims to "analyse what the decade means in historical terms", then recirculates the dominant myths about it.

I told her other things about the book. She showed no surprise, simply nodding her head. She said only one word, repeating it after each example: "*Aporia*". *Aporia,* she explained, is a mysterious virus endemic to all words and, according to some experts, all pictures too. It was discovered by Jacques Derrida, a ruggedly handsome Frenchman, who found that it causes all texts, inevitably, to undermine and deconstruct themselves.

III

In the cultural kaleidoscope that is postmodern society, there are as many 'ways of reading' as there are 0055 numbers. What beckons is not an embarrassment of riches, but merely an embarrassment. Many people who enjoy reading show no curiosity in these proliferating new things, which they dismiss as waffle and distraction, amounting to sweet Foucault. It's a natural response, but not entirely justified.

How would the late Michel Foucault, French thinker *extraordinaire,* 'read' *Seizures of Youth*? Foucault wrote about how power circulates in society – in, through and around society. Power is ubiquitous and pervasive. Its operations can be seen in any of the myriad locations or 'sites' within society: at family get-togethers, in brothels, at book launches – everywhere, *Overland* included.

The book I am reviewing and the review I am

writing are made of words. Words, spoken and written, are the very stuff of social power. Authors and reviewers engage in literary practices and employ literary devices. Consciously or otherwise, they arrange words in such a way as to induce a desired response in the reader. In the present case, what's involved is the power to make social meanings, to determine what 'the Sixties' will stand for in the public mind. It is a highly visible contest in which you're directly involved, as reader.

Less visibly, said Foucault, this sort of thing is going on everywhere and all the time. Through all social contexts and human relationships – domestic, religious, medical, the lot – power flows constantly in all directions. Words and power flow along and across Foucault's theoretical web like electricity, forming complex connections between innumerable sites and practices.

All social phenomena and society itself can be 'read' as a 'text'. We can take 'The Economy' and 'read' it. Or we can take someone farting loudly during an English lecture and 'read' that. Of both social facts we can ask: What's this thing about? What's going on? (What's the story?) What is being said or communicated? What *isn't*? Why is it happening this way? Could it happen another way? What does it all mean and what do I think about it? We could address these questions to everything we read and every interaction with others, but we don't. Show me someone who says we *should,* and I'll show you someone who instils in people a lifelong aversion to Foucault.

How the Sixties will be remembered is contested across many cultural sites. What people feel when they hear the name *Whitlam,* how they respond to Hollywood versions of *Vietnam,* will be influenced strongly by who's winning the argument about what *Whitlam* and *Vietnam* meant. What people feel they *ought* to say about Whitlam, what Hollywood thinks Americans *want* to believe about Vietnam – these are also determined by the 'discourse' of the Sixties. In Foucault's terms, it's through the discourse of the Sixties – everything said and written about it – that our view of the Sixties is constructed.

Leaving aside the way it's written, my main objection to this book is that its contribution to the discourse of the Sixties buttresses the dominant view created by the mass media and the advertising industry.

IV

The media and advertising, in concert with comics, B-grade movies and other cultural merchandise, created many mythical archetypes. One was 'the Sixties demonstrator'. There are people who believed (and still believe) that there existed during the Sixties a homogeneous mass of demonstrators. *Seizures of Youth* takes most of its information about demonstrations from newspapers and ends up bolstering this cliché.

What credible evidence is there to warrant the assertion that most people at demonstrations were performing for the television cameras? "The practices of most demonstrators were...carefully and skilfully contrived". What a load of tripe! The only "practices" shared by "most demonstrators" were trudging along, falling behind, standing around listening to speeches and, intermittently, letting go with a few half-hearted chants. Being left holding the banner was a much more common demonstration experience than "carefully and skilfully" contriving anything. A tiny minority was interested in a disciplined, militant media event, but we hardly ever managed to stage one. We watched them, though, on the overseas news. The tightly organised mass-violence of the Japanese student demos used to make me drool.

This media myth about carefully organised protests is offered as a rebuttal to the 'myth' that most demonstrations were spontaneous. I don't know how many people believe this latter 'myth', but it can't be enough to make it qualify. Most of the other 'myths' tackled by the authors are also made of straw.

My first published article in a left-wing newspaper ended by declaring that the slogan "Smash U.S. Imperialism" could not be repeated often enough. *Smash,* as a word and a practice, is something I know about. *Seizures* asserts: "The peace movement was 'more hawkish than the myth allows...the verb most favored by the protesters was 'smash'." *Smash* may have been the Most Favored Verb among journalists, but the unnewsworthy fact of the Sixties remains that only a tiny minority of protesters talked (and sang – they don't mention the wonderful songs!) about smashing things. Hardly anyone did any actual smashing.

A less harmful media myth disseminated by the book is the sensationalised version of *The Little Red Schoolbook.* According to the authors, it "explicitly exhorts adolescent schoolchildren to give vent to their innate hostility toward authority based on an opening premise that 'All grown-ups are paper tigers'."

During the early-Seventies part of the Sixties, on a bumpy bus going in to a Vietnam demonstration, I read aloud to my companions from *The Little Red Schoolbook:*

> Homework...should give you a chance to work on things of your own and develop the ideas discussed in class. It's important for you to learn to think things out for yourself and to express them clearly...If you find it difficult to work at home, tell your teacher about it.

I'd wasted my money. Not a single exhortation to give vent to my innate hostility to authority! I'd fallen for a journalistic invention, a routine fib swallowed and repeated twenty years later by Gerster and Bassett.

Albert Langer, one of the most prominent student leaders of the Sixties, also gets the press treatment. He appears first as the "Monash campus pest", then as the radical figure rejected by a mass meeting of students. He pops up to call for "violent revolution" and "class struggle". In the middle of the most pointless account of the 1968 Melbourne Independence Day demonstration I have ever read, who should be there at the American consulate but "the burly figure of Albert Langer", soon to reappear as an "insouciant" Langer at Monash University, and then as a "three cheers for Chairman Mao" Langer at a May Day rally. By 1971 Albert has "gone teaching" and our myth-busting debunkers put away the 'LANGER, Albert' clippings and open up the next lot.

I know quite a few versions of Albert Langer – some mythical, some not so. I know quite a few of his personal qualities – some agreeable, some less so. I know them through direct experience and through research into 'the Sixties' forming part of a project since abandoned. The Albert Langer appearing here in cameo is immediately recognisable: he's the one that people producing news for the mass media during the Sixties found it most convenient to dish up to the punters.

V

The argument that the failures of the Whitlam government "are representative of the generation that supported him" is well presented and plausible. However, politics is not the authors' strongest area, and on the whole they leave it alone.

The debacle of McMahon's China policy isn't mentioned, nor are changing voting patterns, the extensive opposition to foreign investment, the painting of anti-war slogans on Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance, local Nazis, the 'New Nationalism', the Australia Party and the late Clarrie O'Shea, whose incarceration in 1969 triggered the strikes that *SMASHED* the penal provisions of the Arbitration Act.

The New Left, a diffuse but seminal political force with substantial and enduring influence, receives a long summary paragraph that could have appeared in *Time*. Marx and Marcuse are mentioned, but only to introduce another social caricature in the standard representations of the Sixties: the leftie student root-rats. At the "pleasurable task" of combining Marxism and sex, these people

> worked rather more diligently than they did over their studies [tut tut]: after all, it had been given intellectual sanction by Marcuse, who advocated a seductive combination of political and erotic protest, an unleashing of energies both social and sexual.

Marx on alienation and Marcuse on repressive tolerance are not discussed. Nor are any of the other radicalising notions that had a wide currency here during the Sixties. There is nothing about the vigorous and effective challenge by the intellectual New Left to the dominant Radical Nationalist interpretation of Australian history, or about indigenous factors in the political evolution of the Australian New Left.

Seizures covers a lot of ground in cultural history. The contrasting social images of pimply, clean-cut conscripts and heroic, bearded draft resisters are given a solid account, as is Barry Humphries' work and influence. Many topics are covered through Australian novels: the migrant experience, Australia's Vietnam veterans, relations with Asia.

World Championship Wrestling is not even mentioned!

The pill gets a mention, but that's all; rock 'n roll, the DLP and a sizeable list of other things are treated similarly. They're mentioned in the sense of being covered, ticked off the "Things We Mustn't Forget To Mention" list. The reader learns nothing about the impact of the pill, the ways in which rock 'n roll was consumed and experienced, or just how funny the DLP could be.

VI

We used to say "Cool it, man" and now you'll see this in advertisements everywhere...We said things like "blow your mind" and Harper's Bazaar *is advising women whose husbands earn $50,000 a year to blow their minds with pink blouses...I'll bet that within two years Buick will come out with full-page ads claiming that the 1972 Buick is a real motherfucker.*
(American student cited in Kent State, *by James Michener.)*

The main thing to come of age in the Sixties was consumer capitalism. Before full-blown consumer capitalism could get underway, a momentous cultu-

ral shift had to occur. Before the pursuit of pleasure through material consumption could become the agreed purpose of life, a serious and respectable society had to let its hair down, turn away from social virtues such as duty and frugality, and embrace hedonism.

The Sixties was the convergence of commerce, culture, technology and politics to create a new kind of society, the one we live in today. Its culture is often described as 'postmodern': 0055 numbers and a million 'ways of reading'. Lots of choice, no meaning. This spectacular historical convergence is much more interesting than the profusion of media-merchandised cultural paraphernalia it produced: mini-skirts, Tiny Tim, cops bashing hippies on the news.

In the Sixties, society was assaulted and affronted by the energetic, iconoclastic, all-sided critique conducted by the New Left and the cultural *avant garde*. Myths and taboos crumbled. But it didn't take long before today's outrage became tomorrow's mundanity. Advertisers found that 'freedom' and 'individuality' were among the emotional desires which could be manipulated to make people buy things. Subliminal appeals zeroed in on these desires. Merchandisers learnt quickly how to associate the spending of money with the satisfaction of personal needs and yearnings. Psychologists showed them how people's fears, inadequacies and dreams could be exploited to create more needs and larger yearnings.

To the rising generation, material comfort and an assured economic future were part of life's standard issue. The young were free to seek their dissatisfactions outside the material realm, in the abundant absurdity, injustice and hypocrisy of society. Most didn't. The 'protest generation' as Gerster and Bassett recognise, is a myth. Protest and rebellion were packaged and sold to youth; youth was packaged and sold to the wider population. Global marketing, global news: a machine now existed to create, convey and sell visual images, and the associations they embodied.

So, critique was turned into commodity; it was reduced to style and fetish. The frustrations this engendered were expressed (perhaps even felt) by Jim Morrison, singer-icon in the rock band, The Doors: "Rock is out, dynamite is coming in – let's see what Madison Avenue does to that."

Gerster and Bassett are correct to emphasise that protest became a fashion and a pose, but why is this the only aspect they see? The only social criticism produced in their version of the Sixties was the one-dimensional, commodified sort cooked up by the media and merchandisers. You'd think there was nothing around worth criticising.

The final image in "The Disobedient Age", the book's second chapter, is a press photo of a high school protest against restrictions on the length of boys' hair. In the foreground are several boys suspended for refusing to get a haircut. There is a detailed examination of the photograph, which finishes thus:

> Though their backs are turned, one surmises they enjoy their fame. Certainly, some of the girls in the crowd look suitably impressed. [Can anyone see which ones they mean?] A belligerent victory

sign is semaphored – or is it the peace sign, ubiquitous gesture of the anti-war period?

Victory? Peace? In the end it didn't matter. The protest was the thing: the issue was symbolical rather than one of real importance anyway. Male vanity, vainglory and the desire to defy authority were the key elements. The contretemps between the long-hairs and the headmaster at Mordialloc-Chelsea High forms a fitting epitaph to an age of disobedience.

A fitting epitaph: isn't this something that conveys what the life of the deceased has meant? The essence of the Sixties protest, then, was vanity and teenage defiance. This is the *only* view presented: "lairising", "sheer exhibitionism", "adolescent bravado", "an alternative to the discoteque", "a fashionable habit". No courage, no decent impulses – no real, spontaneous desire to do something to improve society and the quality of human existence, not a single laudable thought or action. They were all just posing. Whatever Gerster and Bassett set out to do, the final impression is that there was really nothing for anyone to get steamed up about.

But there was, there is and there always will be.

It's not just grandstanding schoolboys who are subjected to sneers and sarcasm. Germaine Greer turns fifty and publishes an article in *Vogue:* "a suitably chic medium for a product of the Sixties to canvas her mid-life ennui". Gough Whitlam is "unctuous".

This meanness of spirit and nastiness of tone are evident from first to last. The book opens with an attack on the "Australian baby boomers" and their "frantic attempts to reclaim, to seize, the season of their youth". It closes by gloating: "The youthful seizures of the 1960s will become the cardiac arrests of the 1990s". In between, it heaps criticism on all sorts of people, individually and collectively, for selling out – usually in unspecified ways. David Williamson, for example, "epitomises the general dissipation of the energies of Sixties radicalism into the mainstream consumer culture".

So vehemently and so often are such sentiments expressed, so Olympian is the castigation of middle-aged people "enmeshed in responsibility and approaching the career-path dead-end", that were it not for the photos on the back flap, I'd visualise the authors as headband-wearing, fist-clenching, joint-smoking, slogan-shouting unreconstructed Sixties ratbags. But no: Robin's got a tie on, Jan wears pearls and a smile. There's not a poster of Che or Mao in sight, or even Max Merritt.

Seizures of Youth is shot through with bombastic denunciations of Sixties radicals who've abandoned their radicalism: not only famous ones like Jerry Rubin, Germaine Greer and David Williamson, but "Sixties luminaries" and "despairing left-wing intellectuals" in general, as well as everyone who went to see 'Woodstock' at the movies. The authors, both born two years before me in 1953, write nothing to suggest that they are now (or have ever been) Sixties radicals. Moreover, there is nothing in their book to suggest they have any real idea what's happened to those who were.

To live an extended, irresponsible adolescence during a time when social criticism is widespread, ascendant, and therefore fashionable is a historical privilege, and it saddens me that adolescents since the Sixties have missed out on it. During all times of criticism, more adolescents come into contact with radical ideas than is usual, and more of them actually embrace some of these ideas. This is what happened in the Sixties. Many more people than usual developed a distaste for injustice, and for the bullshit by which it is hidden and justified. I doubt if most of them ever held a megaphone.

Many 'Sixties people' haven't changed their mind about what's right and what's wrong. This is not immediately apparent, because "Former Radicals Sing a Different Tune" is a much better headline than "People Radicalised During the Sixties Grow Up With Their Sixties Values Largely Intact". The first one is shorter, and it carries the official line.

What was good about the late 60s is that even if we didn't actually overthrow many reactionaries, we caused a lot of trouble for them. (Albert Langer, 'The Next 35,000 Years: Notes from a disoriented perspective', Red Rag, *no. 5, December 1985, p. 25.)*

John Herouvim is a Melbourne writer and stand-up comedian. He writes comedy for the Seven Network, and is currently working on a satirical revue of the news with composer and actor Darryl Emmerson.

JOHN MILLETT

The Priest from Kashmir

He arrived from Kashmir with a voice like Peter Sellers in his farting chair – a voice that told tales of cobras to the big-eyed boys of the village – that blessed crooked arthritic geriatric ladies with signs of the cross – hooked girls with stories of Indian Rope Tricks, bangled princesses with noses set with diamonds and lordly husbands. He was a parson – or more likely, a priest – black vest and sky-white collar, and no sooner was he there than Father Ahern had posters on The School of Arts and The General Store announcing that Mr Raj Sing, Doctor of Divinity, would deliver the morning mass at 6 am when the fences were tight with frost.

No one, in those days of long ago, had ever visited the town from a foreign place and the Indian Continent was still a magic land of viceroys, thugs and the vandals, ready to rule, cajole and caress, or garotte as the case may be.

We saw him first on a day of almost snow walk from Lucy Bonnick's boarding house to the bathing pool (no distance at all), dive in and swim three river lengths – dry off and, clothed in a red silk gown, like water flow up the hill and over a winter road – as if summer had kissed his little round buttocks and dried them off – and the frost crystals were ox-eye daisies.

Divided as it was by two Christian faiths the town listened to his ice-cream voice say whole masses in Latin with no book in his hand and sing long psalms from memory alone, so his voice floated, pure as truth, from the church window and across the river into atheist Jimmy Hoole's kitchen full of cats, smacked children, starved crockery and kindness.

And also by repute he was chess champion of Hyderbad and knew checkmates to test the brain power of the only two players in town, who nonetheless beat him in game after game – while he fingered his beads the way Father Ahern might finger the nipples of novitiates or those of the piano teacher – whose notes would lie idle for long intervals on the practising days he often interrupted.

Chummy Seaton met him with walking stick on the town common – for he (every day) dressed for the weather in plus fours or flannels and deer stalker cap, strolled on the rabbit-scratched footpaths and along the wallaby trails, for his bad knee. He took Dr Sing to the tiny hill house where remittance days passed with Dickens and Thackeray. They talked through a night full of wisdom and stars – and a fuel stove that kept them warm from the wind's malice – until it was time for breakfast.

and Tom Trapp, coming home from a dingo hunt with his twelve bore and two scalps worth a five pound bounty each, said good day Dr Sing, in a sing-song way that drawled the Australian landscape through every sentence he spoke – and they dawdled through speech for a while as Tom leaned on the Damascus steel barrel of the gun he shone with more love and affection than he would ever give to a woman. He too was handed the sign of the cross and some words, ripe as peach Melba, for comfort – together with a small tract written on cardboard in Dr Sing's handwriting, on the back of which Christ hung crucified on a blue background – and – "We will Tom Trapp; we will remember you in our prayers in the evening".

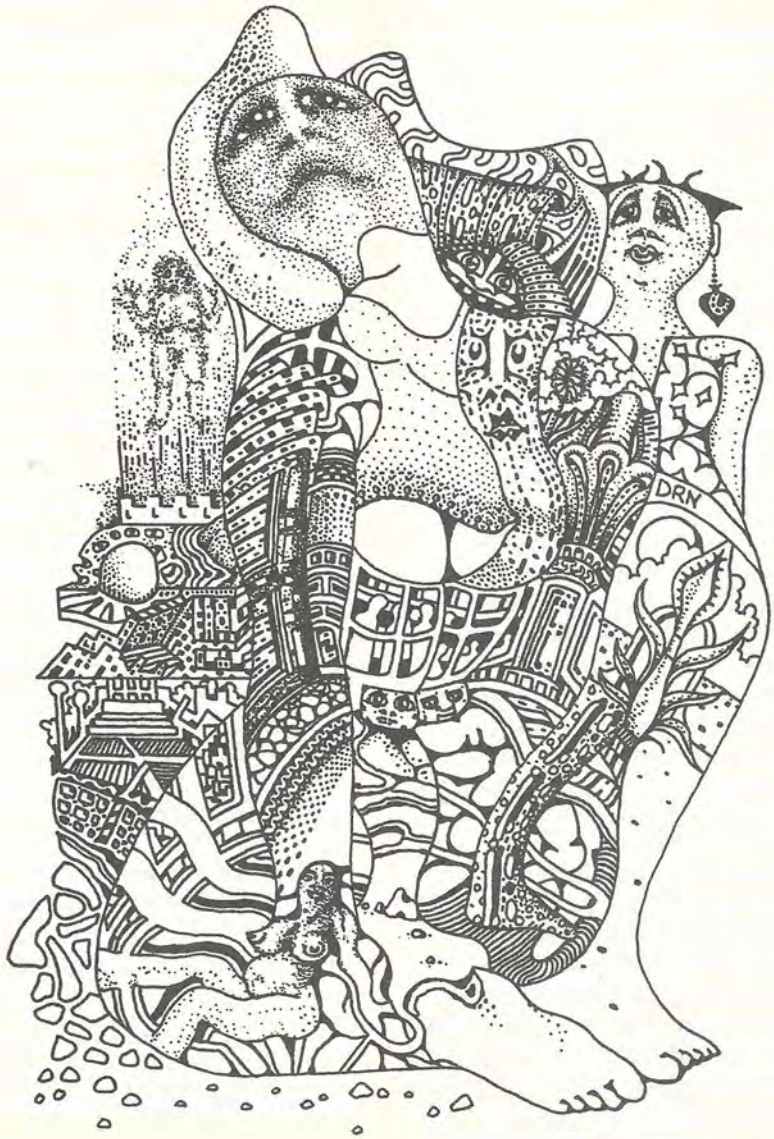
If it was only a day or month he was with us he did not leave the small church and the river, but one bright morning when the boarding house slept and it was too early for boys to be up, he dived under the willow wands and into the just before summer river water and forward with the current by willow buds thick as bees on a rosemary shrub that near to blooming they were – and he never came up. A wild gooseberry bush still fruits near the ripples that closed their eyelids on a Doctor of Divinity from Kashmir –

though a body was never found and spring floods

perhaps took him to rest in the gorges east of the town –

and no one ever asked – not the police – not a letter with a foreign post mark – not the church nor a princess – not Jimmy Hoole who'd begun to enjoy the psalms sung by the voice full of ripe fruit that floated across the Sunday riverbanks into his kitchen with the smacked children –

not even a chessplayer, a remittance man, a dingo hunter.



Dennis Nicholson: The Girl in the Bell-Jar

BARRY HILL

Welcoming Dance, Entrance of Strangers:

On reading Strehlow's *Songs of Central Australia*

In the heart of the heart of the country lies a huge, marvellous, astonishing gift of a book – a gem, a jewel in the lotus – T. G. H. Strehlow's *Songs of Central Australia* (Angus & Robertson). Astonishingly neglected too, all things considered. It was published in 1971 and is now tragically out of print and seems forgotten, even thought it is the great source book of the poetic lore of the region, the text that most extensively tables, with the authority of the *Torah,* the ancient poetry, the timeless utterance of what we now understand as our desert garden, Milton's "wilderness of sweets".

Songs is nothing less than a sustained celebration of those central delights, a book of teachings and expressions, a demonstration of ecstatic weavings of life larger than any book can possibly be – enough to change a life, in fact, as it was Strehlow's life, that cranky, mysterious anthropologist whose unresolved story is part of the text's mantric hum. In years to come *Songs* may be seen as a *manifestation* of many things, (Strehlow's foibles and confusions included, which I'll come to) most notably of the country's spiritual breath, of the love-sounds from the ground, and the aching and shouting and crooning and laughter that waters all understandings of living in the country. In significance and impact *Songs* approaches natural phenomena.

As with any big book, its power is accumulative, a product of body weight as well as pulse. But its central energy comes from the perspective that Strehlow articulated in his earlier work, *Aranda Traditions.* Speaking about that most "potent emotional attitude expressed in the Central Australian native's love of homeland", he said: "Mountains and creeks and springs and waterholes are to him, not merely interesting or beautiful scenic features in which his eyes may take a passing delight: they are the handiwork of ancestors from whom he himself has descended, and he sees recorded in the surrounding landscape the ancient story of the lives and deeds of the immortal beings whom he reveres: beings who for a brief space may take on human shape once more: beings, many of whom he has known in his own experience as his fathers and grandfathers and brothers and sisters. *The whole countryside is his living age-old family tree.*" [My italics.]

So when you start in on this big growth of a book, this proliferation of the family tree (roots in blooded earth, branches in night skies of eternity, its trunk in the clear light of the everyday...) you don't get the poems at first, you get their music. You get the basic tonal pattern of the sounds that have so long belonged to the earth, and patterns that belong (in all senses of that term) to the kangaroo, the honey ant, to the fire and so on. Strehlow documents phonetic change caused by chanting and the shifting stress accents that govern the song and which always dynamically interweave with the lyrics, one seldom dominating the other, each, more often than not, receiving the same attention as the other. By the time we reach the second part of the book *Language and Verse Structure,* Strehlow has drummed the musicology of the songs into us.

An early poem is five couplets of the *Ankkota Song,* which describes the Ankota ancestor at a sacred ceremony:

I am red like burning fire
I am covered with a glowing red down

I am red like burning fire
I am gleaming red, glistening with ochre

I am red like burning fire
Red is the hollow in which I am lying

A tjurunga is standing upon my head:
Red is the hollow in which I am lying.

The poem is, as Strehlow points out, vivid, and its power is obtained by the simple device of repetition that in each stanza pushes forward the description of the figure in eagle down. The technique, which is as old as the Hebrew psalms and the Gilgamesh Epic, is open to subtle variations when adjective and noun are played with, and when synonyms are employed down the page (so to speak). In the Aranda what also moves songs slowly forward is rhyme, as with the eagle song, where the birds circling over the MacDonnell Ranges can be sensed, even in a cumbersome looking translation:

One above the other we are hovering in the air
Both of us are hovering in the air

Off the edge of the mountain bluff we are hovering in the air
Near the jagged mountain edge we are hovering in the air.

With some ti-tree verses we have:

Let the little ti-tree bushes intertwine their branch tips
Let the little ti-tree bushes sprout blossom clusters on their branch tips!

Let the little ti-tree bushes spread their bushy crested tips;
Let the little ti-tree bushes sprout blossom clusters on their branch tips

Let the little ti-tree bushes raise high the foreheads of their branches;
Let the little ti-tree bushes sit fast and avert their faces.

Strehlow comments: "From an examination of these couplets it is clear that we find in the Central Australian songs not merely the balance of rhythms but also balance of thought". Yes, indeed. And an interanimation of thought as well. Even after a few couplets you sense that everything in the landscape is in dialogue with everything else. The eagle-downed ancestor is in communion with rocks that might tell the story as well. In the eagle poem an ancestor voice oversees the country and is in total communion with it. It comes as no surprise to be told by Strehlow that these ti-tree bushes are really mythical *alknarintja* women, who may not leave their homes, and who must always avert their faces from all men.

Even at this early stage of reading *Songs* the thought occurs to one that if everything *is* vitally interconnected then the whole world is a poem, an enchantment simply awaiting notation, or indication. This process is not a matter of Art so much as the simple arts of record, of pointing and not pointing, as the case may be. A poem is a coda of the seamless web of things, that may be named or not named, depending on the way we have cast ourselves in the greater song. Thus Strehlow is at pains to show us – in the context of describing the formal devices of Aranda poetry (its grammar and poetic diction as well as its musicology) – what lies between the lines and behind them, what is deliberately masked by the poem; or, to put this another way, what might be spiritually latent in a song's manifest carnality.

Take the marvellous *Bandicoot Song of Ilbalintja.* Strehlow lays it out in ten sets of couplets, beginning with the description of the sacred soak from which the ancestor people emerge, the place that is the navel of "Sire Karora", a supreme ancestor, through to events that involve the birth of the sun, (since Ilbalintja is also a sun-totem site) until the meeting with the chief [...] and the verses of "the final catastrophe" (as Strehlow calls them). The latter are the couplets that invoke the ancestral powers previously sung. Such verses typically conclude a song cycle, or the last narrative incidents of a myth. They are designed to put to rest or to lay to rest ("*gunama,* pushy down, push into the ground") the ancestors. In the case of the bandicoot song the story concludes with nothing less than a great flood of sweet *ntjuimabna* the dark nectar of honeysuckle blossom, which descends upon the totemic site from the east. Like a river it roars across the plains sweeping Karora and all of his sons back into the depths of the soak:

Their sweet dark juice is flowing forth;
From the centre of the chalice it is flowing forth

From the slender pistil it is flowing forth;
The sweet dark juice is flowing forth

[and later]
Let our sweet sap encircle them with rings;
Let the flood of nectar encircle them with rings!

Let our sweet sap ooze from the ground;
Let our dark honey ooze from the ground!

[and ending with]
Let the flood of our nectar encircle them with rings

Let our sweet sap encircle them with rings!

A better example, incidentally, of the effectiveness of repetition, parallelism and paraphrase is hard to find, but the point here is to also draw attention to the elliptical cryptic nature of the verse itself, which was, Strehlow is at pains to show, often designed for secrecy. This for practical and fundamental religious reasons. The practical reason was that songs were embedded in religious ritual, in spiritual practice that was at the time more important than narrative explicitness. Initiated elders would recount the sacred myths anyway, and the poetry need not be burdened with the whole story, it could allude, refer indefinitely, leap and dart in narrative terms. It was after all being enacted in the sacred place by the descendants of those who composed the verses, namely the timeless ancestors.

The religious aspect of naming is at the root of the secrecy. The taboo could be against naming the ancestor, or the totem site. The caution is an archaic spiritual premise for many cultures, as we know, and Strehlow makes the most of Frazer's *Golden Bough* to place the people of Central Australia in the company of the ancient Jews, Egyptians and Norwegians. Accordingly, the taboo might mean that a song's metre and syllable could be rendered so as to mask a name, if it was there in the song: and if it was not explicitly there its presence was understood, at least by initiates. And so we – people like us, that is – might move through the bandicoot song with limited access to the soak that was *the* sacred soak, the sun-totem, and the name of [...], the bandicoot chief. For in the story, it is only when they throw the tjurunga at an animal resembling a bandicoot and they break its leg that it turns out to be the local bandicoot chief called [...]. After the final catastrophe, he becomes their ceremonial chief, Strehlow also tells us, and adds: "This verse was regarded as the private property of my informant Gura, whose secret name was [the secret name omitted above], since he was looked upon as the reincarnation of this ancestor."

I am trying to convey the fecundity of Strehlow's book, its depth and scope as well as its mysteries. (All anthropology is perhaps a mystery, since it can't name everything either, least of all the metaphysical assumptions of 'strangers' who have entered into the process of describing the 'other' changing culture...) As you keep reading *Songs* the marvel is that its fertility increases. After the upstream expositions of forms, we come to *Subject Matter and Themes* where the poetry fans out as never before, and becomes, as you move through its four hundred pages, the great delta, the beauty of which is akin to one of those stunning aerial photographs of Central Australia; all bone and membrane and bloodstream of pale green spirit of matter that survived the inland sea.

The *Song of the Kwalba Chief of Tera* is one of the glories. We come to it after the charms (to do with sickness and health, vengeance, control of the weather etc.), songs for the increase of totemic ancestors, plants and animals, the commemorative and initiation songs. *Tera*, which is entered under Strehlow's most expansive and seductive section, *Songs of Human Beauty and Love Charms,* is eighty-eight verses long in his version and runs for sixteen pages. But something of its power and beauty can be gained from extracts, and without, I suggest, its mythological narrative gloss. It begins:

Let me descend from my very own home, –
Let me, Antjiroba, descend from it!

Let me descend from my very own home, –
Let me, the dark chested wallaby, descend
from it!

Against the ghost gum he rubs it, against
yonder ghost gum;
It is the tjilara that he is rubbing, the soft
(or red) tjilara.

The dense foliage is streaming in the breeze,
the dense foliage streams in the breeze;
The slender-stemmed tree is streaming
in the breeze, the slender-stemmed tree
streams in the breeze.

Upon the ground where I used to sit
let me set my feet!
Upon the powdered soil let me set my feet!

With fire heated soil he covers himself
With a short stick he throws it over himself.

The great sire, brandishing his short stick,
At his soft-soiled home scatters ash in all
directions.

The kwalba (chief) has wound his penis
around himself, –
The great sire is tied up, his penis is tied up.

Later we have:

She shall belong to the kwalba, –
Mine alone she shall be!

She shall belong to the kwalba, she shall
belong to the kwalba;
Mine alone she shall be, yes, mine alone
she shall be!

Gripping her by the throat, I would
raise her up, –
To be my very own I would raise her up;

The bell bird relentlessly rouses her;
The dark chested one relentlessly rouses her.

The bell bird fills her with madness,
The dark chested one fills her with madness...

Her desires he encloses with a fence, –
With the thicket he encloses her as
with a fence.

Her desires are shut in by a fence, –
a thicket shuts her in like a fence.

Piercing her very navel, let it tear open
a wound!
While she is at her soft-soiled home, let it
tear open a wound...

The bell bird fills her with madness.
The dark-chested one fills her with madness.

Until we get:

The njibantibanta woman is bringing all
her chattels to his home;
Advancing with dancing steps, she is
bringing all her chattels to his home...

Having gathered food, let me give way to my
passion!
Let me, the maiden, give way to my passion!

The crested rock pigeons
Are coming near at hand.

The crested rock pigeons
are cooing plaintively.

These sharp-crested pigeons
Move about in every rocky height.

The crested rock pigeons
Have fine, clear eyes.

Upon good ground let me set my feet, –
Upon firm hard ground let me set my feet!

And much later ending with:

The great sire, proud and handsome
Burns a fiery yellow.

I am a married man, a truly married man:
I am full of joy in my wife.

I am full of love for my wife;
I am a married man, a truly married man.

In any language this is clearly a bracing song of yearning and lust, wooing and seduction, consummation and marriage. Its events are both brutal and delicate, its manner frank and subtle. Even without any mythological explication, we can see its narrative cunning: it calls upon a metamorphosis (from wallaby to bellbird) and swings easily from third to first person, with the first person voice varying, from man to woman and back to the man again in the logic of its resolution. It is a song that begins with a lament to aloneness and ends with a celebration of union, a marriage manifoldly made according to the lore, by virtue of sacred things being what they are.

In the next long love-charm, *The Song of Kulurba,* we have:

In the deepest lakes of their bodies they are
churning with passion
In the depths of their fertile wombs they are
churning with passion

In their chalices of nectar they are churning
with passion
In their innermost fastness they are churning
with passion.

Which brings Strehlow to note, in ways that are as revealing of him as they are of anything else: "*Pmobuntja* normally means "serpent-lake", i.e. a pool of water deep...a fit home for a mythical water serpent. Here the deepest recesses of the female are also envisaged. These according to the Aranda view, are fountains of the inexhaustible fluid which pour from them during menstruation and on occasions of sexual excitement...Such women, when sexually aroused, resembled serpent lakes when whipped up by a storm."

Strehlow could be a laborious man in sexual matters. After the Malbanka song, where the black man wields a blazing firebrand to magical effect, he notes: "The woman sees this firebrand while she is asleep. She grasps this in her sleep, and the firebrand

enters into her through her navel. The woman thinks – Whatever has come to me? – (Whatever) has entered my body (Whatever) has struck me like lightning? She can think only of one man when she rises. "O, that is the man who has sung charms over me!" Upon thinking it, she proceeds to weep as well. Soon she departs and goes to lie with that man."

Enough! The poems keep coming, along with the variety of pregnant notations about music, language, sense. Songs of *Homelands* follow, then songs about *Man's Twin Souls, Death and the Sky Dwellers,* where the poetry reaches cosmic heights, and where we meet black notions of 'Paradise' as well as the Bird of Death. Thereafter the book begins to wind down: *Semi-Sacred Songs; Songs Sung at Folk Dances;* and finally, since this can be the most chauvinistic of books, the *Women's Songs.* In his *Final Summary* Strehlow reworks, with typical rotundity, his refrains about poetry, culture, and the future. His last sentence is: "It is my belief that when the strong web of Australian verse comes to be woven, probably some of its strands will be found to be poetic threads spun on the Stone Age hair spindles of Central Australia."

So there you are, Strehlow the Magnificent, we might say, the great white anthropologist who has brought a culture of dance, song and sandpainting down to us in tablets of stone; or the written body of a culture brought in from the desert by the *Inkata,* the white man who had become a great elder of the desert, a proclaimed and perhaps self-proclaimed Moses in his delivery. Now, having wished the book back into general circulation (why can't we republish an abridged edition, at least, as A. P. Elkin suggested in 1975?) because of the native gifts it carries, I want to worry it as a white man's book, to attend to the text's curious manoeuvres, tensions, and flaws.

To return to the poetry, Strehlow's sense of it and his proclamations about it. It has to be said that he is not much of a poet himself. Even from the above it is clear that he has a penchant for high-blown nineteenth century English diction. He points out that the Arunta from which he is working is often employing "archaic, and poetic diction", so one can see how this imposes a difficulty for translation. But this is a problem that can be surmounted without sounding like Rossetti, a thought that does not seem to have occurred to Strehlow whose idea of what modern poetry has been about, in terms of diction, extends no further than Yeats. When he cites *The Seafarer* one wishes he had used Pound. The anthropologist might have realised that contemporary rigor with rhythm and diction need not detract from the character of the original at all. On the contrary, the ancient poem might get new power.

Strehlow's lack of poetic tact goes further. Germanic polymath though he was, it's obvious from that grandiose closing sentence that he is not a man to pay many respects to the work of his contemporaries, even when they have already made contributions to the field in ways that he is calling for. On the matter of white Australian poets spinning from the "Stone-Age hair spindles" Strehlow may be excused for not being prescient about the work of Les Murray, who would break out with his *Buladelah–Taree Holiday Song Cycle* in 1974, only three years after the publication of *Songs;* but he should not get off so lightly for his studious obliteration of the Jindyworobaks who hailed from his native Adelaide. Even less should he be forgiven for his slight acknowledgement of the major poetic translations of other anthropologists, most notably the achievement of Ronald Berndt's Djanggawul, published six years before. Berndt's superiority in poetic terms was confirmed with the publication of *Love Songs From Arnhem Land,* (coauthored with Catherine Berndt) which arrived only four years after Strehlow's great prescription. Admittedly, *Songs* is the vaster work, but the Berndts' is poetically finer and more focused as a contribution to our culture. To put this another way, in the presentations of the former there is never too much of the white anthropologists whereas in *Songs* we become very conscious of how much there is of Strehlow.

Paradoxically, a central problem of the text of *Songs* is this: it is a monumental homage to Aboriginal culture that is rhetorically premised on incipiently paternalistic arguments. Most generally, the book's aim is to place the Australian poetry on the map of 'world literature'. With this in mind we are told, time and again, how this form or that content is comparable with ancient poetry in Hebrew of Greek or Old Norse or Old English – and all of these when Strehlow is into his most erudite stride. Now of course the thrust of the argument is laudable enough, *but only after one has repressed the question:* why shouldn't the Australian poetry be on the world map, how could it be anywhere else?! The more one encounters Strehlow's argument, the more defensive and anachronistic it starts to sound, especially when he moves to an explication of the mores it contains.

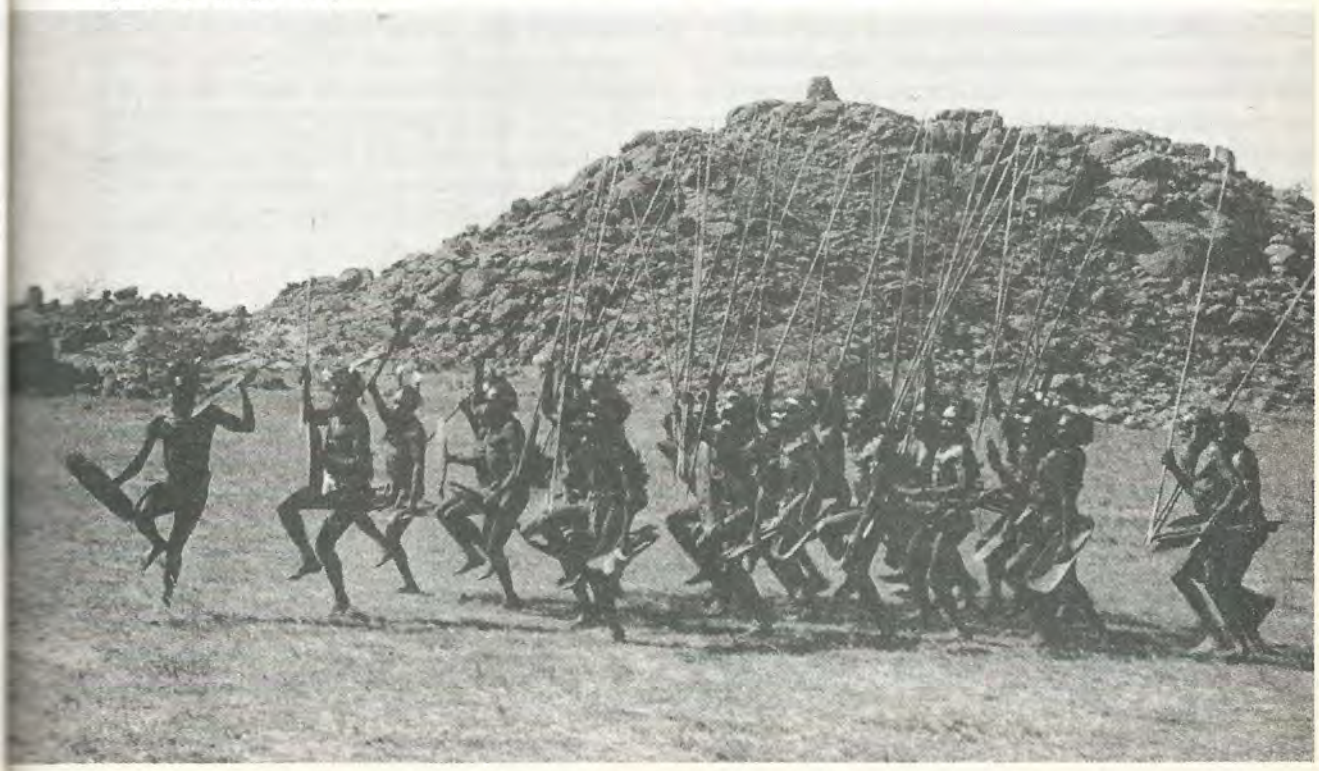
Take the extended discussion that accompanies the *Songs of Beauty and Love Charms.* He begins by warning us of the frankness and "violence" to come – it's "caveman" aspect – while at the same

time reminding us that we should not rush to judgement about Aboriginal sexuality. After all, he says, our own ways are not entirely known, and in so far as they are, they are riddled with double standards, and social problems such as prostitution and illegitimacy etc. We are then presented with the love songs – the diction of which on Strehlow's part, is both frank and coy, as we have seen. What follows is then a very worried discussion about "spirituality". There is none says Strehlow, just as there is nothing we should call a "lyric" in Australian verse. But his worries about 'spirituality' are surely overridden by the whole religious dimension in most of the songs he writes of; and the denial of the 'lyric' surely needs revision when you consider some of the exquisite poetic interludes – the cooing pigeons – I have mentioned.

Strehlow is talking about too many things at once here. Put most neutrally, he is discussing the artistic forms that allow for the expressive powers of individuals in a culture. This is a bigger question than matters of sexuality and frankness and the Christian tradition of 'love'. But these matters dominate him in ways that are compulsively defensive of Aboriginal ways, rather as if he felt there to be a reading public out there, one sitting in some dock of judgement with regard to black culture, black art. In fact, one detects something of a struggle within the anthropologist himself. Theo's worrying, sermonising tone recalls his memoir of his missionary father, Carl Strehlow, of the Lutheran Mission in Hermannsburg. "His clerical conscience", Strehlow wrote of his father, would not permit him to openly admit his deep respect for Aboriginal culture and the creative Aboriginal mind: the best he could do was restrain from condemning its "paganism". And so in a way with Strehlow. In many ways he openly praises the 'primitive' in its own terms, while at the same time viewing it through the eclectic lens of European culture. The very weight of his Germanic text hardly serves to liberate the light-footed desert songs he is so formally celebrating.

So a great irony of this great book is that it serves black voices while indirectly and unwillingly somewhat demeaning them. Here *Songs,* written by a man born in 1908 and who died in 1978, stands as yet another transitional text in the complicated history of race relations in this country. And you could go further and say that Strehlow's loving appropriation of the black poetry was an act of supreme paternalism. And belated paternalism, as we know, can make for puzzling contradictions. For soon after the publication of *Songs* we had Strehlow's strange opposition to the general politi-

"Aranda welcoming dance. Entrance of the strangers, Alice Springs, 1901" from The Aboriginal Photographs of Baldwin Spencer *(Viking O'Neil)*



cal formation of land councils in Central Australia, even though his *magnum opus* was the text, *par excellence,* of Aboriginal land rights. You don't get that paradox in the text itself, but what you do get is an acute awareness of the complicated 'responsibilities' of white people against the darker seams of Northern Territory history, riddled as it is by racism and sexism, slaughter and hypocrisy.

Songs begins, for instance, with the travels of Baldwin Spencer, the Darwinian anthropologist who wrote of the tribes without knowing their language, and who was utterly under the ideological sway of Sir James Frazer's armchair imperialisms; and his friend and colleague, the dour Alice Springs postmaster F. J. Gillen, who was to become famous for his attempts to bring a notorious killer of blacks to justice. That killer was W. H. Willshire. Willshire was Officer-in-Charge of the feared Interior Patrol on the Northern Territory throughout the 1880s, and much moved to vengeance after any incident where whites happened to suffer at the hands of blacks. Gillen thought Willshire's methods were "sheer bloody murder" and had him charged with murder in 1891.

Willshire was acquitted. Subsequently, he dispelled all doubts anyone might have about his racist credo by publishing a booklet, *The Land of the Dawning: being Facts Gleaned from the Cannibals in the Australian Stone Age* – an obscenity of a tract, as murderously disposed towards "black demons" as it was salacious towards "pretty black girls". Bear in mind here that the contemporary 'debate' over the killings of blacks in Capricornia often turned upon questions of 'justification'. The whites who had been killed had been too kind to the blacks, it was said. But, it was said in return, the whites had meddled with the black women. Either way, homicide pivoted upon the unspoken fate of the "gins". The wings of the Bird of Death shadowed an understanding of black sexuality the invading culture did not have, and had trouble wishing to find. Willshire looms large in *Songs,* and one feels that he does because some kind of complex troubled clerical conscience survived in Strehlow.

That is why, I think, so much of Theodore's extensive and erudite discussion reads so oddly today – even though it is redeemed overall by the relative nakedness of the black verse. It's as if the text embodies Strehlow's inner struggle so representative of white men when cohabiting with the 'primitive': the tension between desire and disapproval, between the all-embracing logic of social intercourse, and a fear of the loss of 'civilised' taboos. Overall though, the songs themselves win through. As they must. Because they are there – thanks to the monumental writing down by Theodore. It is perhaps unavoidable that his style of writing down and around that material served also to close it down, seal it off. The European musings of *Songs* is far from being an open text. Yet its physical presence, its force, and dignity brings to mind an image from Baldwin Spencer's pioneering photography – that shot which has been titled *Aranda Welcoming Dance, Entrance of the Strangers.* Looking at the Grecian warriors in that picture, the word that comes to mind is *heroic.* Heroically, albeit as an eccentric scribe, Strehlow erected his book as a welcoming monument to the image of that heroism.

*Barry Hill's books include fiction (*The Best Picture, *McPhee Gribble), poetry (*Raft, *Penguin) and the recent outstanding documentary memoir* Sitting In *(Heinemann) an account of the workers' occupation of the Altona petrochemical complex, the longest such industrial action in Australian history. An essay on Hill's books by Alex Selenitsch will appear in a future issue.*

floating fund

BARRETT REID writes: thanks to those who took out subscriptions as gifts, including two of you who presented subscriptions to your local public libraries. Thanks also for the many cards and notes with New Year greetings. Some of you added a practical emphasis by contributing to our not sinking but floating fund an amount, between November and March, of $773. Specific thanks to: $100, J.J.W., B.D.B.; $80, J.H.; $50, A.M.H.; $26, N.A.B., B.D.; $24, B.A., M.R., J.C., P.D.; $23, E.C.; $22, J.N.; $20, M. & J.P.; $14, M.M., V.B.; $13, K.R.; $10, D.H., H.A.H., H.R., F.W., R.O.C.; $9, M.C.P.; $6, C.S., M.T., J.F., J.G., V.S., I.M., P.H.; $4, E.C., D.J.O'S., V.B., A.M., R.F., E.M., B.G., A.D., B.N-S., J.H., I.M.W., N.G., M.G., B.G., H.S., J.B., J.F., R.S., J.W., M.S., D.M.M.; $2, D.W., J.S.

The Power of the Word (or lack of). A study by Lofo

HE ATE THE [redacted] ANYWAY. BECAUSE HE WAS HUNGRY.

GUSTS OF MEANINGS

TWO POEMS BY JOHN JENKINS

intelligible messages
break formation

they assemble in chance syllables
or lines of a foreign tongue,

whisper your name
and promise to do as well again

these are times of absence
when the wind bothers your footsteps

a glance to the feathery lift
of eyelids above a chin,
a sudden profile
half-shadowed in smoky light

Turn the corner
and there you are again

lit by a match in the dark
under the window's ballooning
curtain, the soft ash
on your sleeve

it is a dream's corona
and memory of something,
all in black and white
where soft and oily light
streams onto the polished floor

is it your old house
in your dream?

air of a future
placed just so
that it will compel the present
to focus here,

one day
at a time, perhaps

it is silent,
even when your hand pulls down
the window no sounds spill across
the gliding somnambulism of your hands

turning out into the ballooning night
of time and chance that hold you here,
an improbable glance of thought,
sleepy mirage

that may be just a ripple on deeper
waters where there's no meaning
either, but a purpose, and just
as unknown to you

though familiar
as your own blown dust

an old program on the computer,
flickers and fills the picture
you see there, in the corner
or screen, which you tilt in your hands
towards you

the lowered eyes of
a woman's face,
cold, classical, beautiful

she smiles

calm recognition
without emotion
a deeper beauty

gestures of identity
lost in chiaroscuro

in dust of stars
and night

WEEPING WOMAN

"Do you like my face? These days, it's passable.
But for years I looked a mess. That was when
I worked for Picasso.

You remember?
I was the one in all of those
Cubist paintings of his.

Sometimes I looked like a woman,
sometimes a man,
or even a violin or a chair,

You had to be versatile.

But I was making a living,
even though it was hard work

that legendary energy of his,
it was true. He'd paint all day,
and I'd often feel flat as a tack.

But being tired was not the worst of it.
No, the worst of it was what he did to my face.

First, both my eyes on the left side of
my nose. I could only see on that side. Not
only demeaning, but try crossing a road
like that. Dangerous!

Then Pablo flattened my nose.
And gave me just one huge blue ear,
he had no sense of anatomy.

Then, in the collage phase, pasted bits of
newspaper
all over me, or wallpaper.
Le Figaro!, I was constantly being renovated.

Do you think I was ever given the benefit
of the doubt –
I mean, any flesh tints at all! On no! Nothing
subtle for
Pablo – it was all aquamarine, bright orange,
the classics, with chicken suit and fright wig.

It was a relief when he'd finished for the day.
I'd jump
out of the frame and fix myself a scotch
from the studio bottle.

Sometimes he'd hear me
and take a look around. But, being
two-dimensional,
I'd only have to stand sideways, and
he couldn't see me.
I'd slide under the studio door, and ride
on the Metro till late.

Or go drinking with a friend called Gus,
though *you* know Gus as that little figure –
with his back to you, in a boat – in that Böcklin
painting (do you know it?) called Island Of The
Dead. Anyway, he's a sad
sack, Gus, and often needed cheering up –
painted with all that dark romanticism and
symbolist *morbidezza.*

But, sometimes, we got a party going –
Adam and God would drop in from the
Sistine ceiling,
with Donald and Goofy and the low-art
crowd. Or Venus (de Milo) got
the gang into her 'beetle' to go ten-pin bowling.

But, of course, I'd have to be in frame
by the morning,

Hurrying back, the Paris streets were damp
and I'd often catch a cold –

and that's how it happened that I'm *here.*

One day, I did catch a chill,
and I blew my nose – and became three-D!
Well, just a bit of me did, my *dnoze,* as I sneezed
into my hanky. Then I sneezed again and, POP! –
the rest of me was three-D!

And, feeling light-headed, I walked the boulevards
like that,
but in very heavy shoes –
otherwise the wind would have blown
me over.

Or, to go a little faster,
I'd let out bits of air, with a blurting sound,

whooshing round and round in circles,

over the rooftops of Paris,
and into the painted sky.

CABBAGE WHITE BUTTERFLY

The Cabbage White, Pieris rapae rapae, *was unintentionally introduced into Australia in the late 1930s. It is now well established along the whole eastern and southern coastlines.*

For half a century
moving from garden to garden
round the east coast, the south coast –

picnickers on a summer's day
taking possession of a site,
taking their ease, feeding...

Erratic flutterers,
they are everywhere
in their untouchable moment,

each wing an albino leaf
smudged charcoal
at the tip.

From pale yellow egg,
green caterpillar, grey pupa
they come – a study in

unprotesting, predatory white.

DIANE FAHEY

ON NOT REALISING THE POTENTIAL

When an attractive woman, like you, smiles
I can't manage the simple and natural response
she invites. I fall to cogitating:
Is it a mistake? Is she just practising,
likes to set men a-flutter as a boxer in training
keeps the light ball in rapid oscillation?
Or, tastes being notoriously inexplicable, have I
struck a chord, set something in her a-tremble?
If – I'm allowed to say anything after "if" –
it's the last, you'd be unlucky indeed.
Because, even suppose the smile and
so forth are enough to overcome my customary
cautious cerebrating, there's my next
debilitating reflex. You smile, linger, lean,
sway, and, fired by an allurement I can't resist, I
start to think of a poem.
My life might have been different if I
hadn't suffered from this poetic
premature ejaculation. The poems, as
even Prufrock knew, should come
afterwards: settling a pillow by her head
I wonder by my troth what thou and I
ignoring the censures of stiff-jointed old men
amang the rigs o'barley.

Come to think of it, my poems would
have been different too. Perhaps I should
start noticing plain women, contain my
excitement till it's time for a
retrospective, rather than prospective, poem.
But all the women I notice are
instantly transformed into the perturbing kind.
Maybe it would help if you frowned: I
don't think I've ever written a poem to
praise a frowning woman. Can what
    wasn't possible
be unrealised?

R. G. HAY

THE TRUTH

Christ was born in Bethlehem.
He was un-Australian.

He was not born in a hospital.
He never wore a coat and tie.
He couldn't hold a job down.

He claimed he was in the business of saving souls,
but he never asked for tax-deductible
donations.
Whenever anyone asked him for his business
card, he fobbed them off with some shit about
the many mansions in his father's house.
He didn't have life insurance or superannuation.

In his late twenties, when most blokes get
serious about settling down, he pissed off
bushwalking.
When he walked on water, he was not in
between the life savers' flags.

He disrupted the legitimate business interests of
the church by throwing their financial experts
out of the temple.
He totally undermined the basis of the health
care system by healing the sick without
charging a fee.
When he fed the crowd with bread and fishes,
the food was distributed by hand instead of
using metal tongs.

There's not a single recorded instance of Jesus
buying someone else a beer.
He never had a relationship with a woman.
He had twelve blokes following him but they
never applied to join the local cricket
competition.
He always talked big, but whenever it looked like
trouble, he'd hide behind the name of his
father.
In his darkest hour he got his best mates
together and told them they were gonna stab
him in the back. So is it any wonder that they
didn't give him a decent burial.

Jesus Christ is un-Australian.

GEOFF FOX

NAPOLETANA NIGHTS

Pneumatic in jowls, tattooed
with a slide-show of vacuum effects,
the breakfast celebrity is
motored across a pullulating city,
confesses to the odd moment
of loneliness: usually
six o'clock on Saturday night.
Grand and magnanimous by turns,
quipping like Socrates
filling in for the jaded host,
he dandles derisive shadows,
embraces the sadness of clownage –
until a safety curtain
lowers in the mind, defies
the lyric, won't hum the tune.
Dusk ushers inevitable comedies
of BYO restaurants, minor lunacies
of swollen vandals. A cyclist,
pelted with eggs, staggers away
through calumnious groves.
Yet life happens on two storeys,
discrete, finite, tenemental.
Flipping dough like dice,
Tiresias in his pizza parlour
philosophises at a greasy window,
arranges floured orbs in an
epic row. Waiting to lacerate,
burdensome seconds count down
under his breath, accelerate
like a disastrous climate.
The measure of the dark
is its narcissistic spite,
rage's glassy metabolism.
Overhead, in a room reeking
of cheap anchovies and paste,
two Chinese students play
soccer in a rented flat.
Deaf to the mutant traffic,
blind to iridescent night,
they pirouette in a logic
of ankles, spar and feint
on a carpeted Wembley.

PETER ROSE

on the line

The front and back covers of this issue are by way of a tribute to the great artist John Perceval (b. 1923), a Retrospective Exhibition of whose paintings, drawings, ceramic sculptures and decorated earthenware will be opened by Neville Wran at the National Gallery of Victoria on 29 April. After showing in Melbourne the exhibition will go to Sydney, to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, in August/September. The painting reproduced on the cover 'A French Nun' (1944), which looks as fresh as the day it was painted, is comparatively little known as compared to 'Boy with Cat' (1943) in the collection of the Australian National Gallery, which has become an icon of Australian modernism, and with the famous 'Williamstown' landscapes of the 1950s and 1960s which first brought Perceval fame and fortune. Since its first showing in The 6th Contemporary Art Society Exhibition in September 1944, the painting has been shown very rarely. It has remained with the artist and is never far from where he works. It was, however, given a full-page reproduction in *Angry Penguins* (No. 7, 1944) signifying its recognition, at least by a small group, as a major painting. The lively drawing on the back cover is one of many recent works.

I had the pleasure, as Guest Curator, of choosing the paintings for the Perceval Retrospective and also of writing the book *Of Dark and Light; The Art of John Perceval* which the National Gallery of Victoria is publishing to accompany the exhibition.

Another 'Angry Penguin' has also been much on my mind in recent months, my old mate and publishing companion, the poet Ern Malley. Michael Heyward, former co-editor of *Scripsi*, writes from New York to say that his book on Malley is completed and with his New York publisher. I was one of many Michael interviewed in the course of his research. He says that John Ashberry has kept on his shelves a copy of the original Autumn 1944 issue of *Angry Penguins* which first published Ern's poems.

How times have changed. Now we find that the new *Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry* (reviewed in this issue by Kevin Hart) contains all seventeen of Ern's poems, which is one reason, among others, which predisposes an old unreconstructed modernist like me to welcome the anthology. But John Tranter and Philip Mead raise many questions with their selection and I think Kevin Hart's review will be followed by more comment in subsequent issues of this magazine. Don Anderson, Martin Duwell and other lively and well-informed critics have already praised the book highly, Martin Duwell writing "I don't know of any anthology produced at any time this century which is as good, and it sets a standard which all future anthologies will have to match." My enthusiasm, which is real, is perhaps a little more qualified.

It would be useful for readers to compare the book with another published at the same time: *Australian Poetry in the Twentieth Century* edited by Robert Gray and Geoffrey Lehmann. It would be easy to describe the latter as conservative (in all its meanings) and the Penguin as radical (and exciting) but this is too easy a generalisation. A direct comparison is not quite in order because the aims of the two anthologies differ. Tranter and Mead set out to select the best of modern and post-modern poetry from around 1930. They begin with fourteen poems by Kenneth Slessor (1901–1971). Gray and Lehmann begin with three poems by Christopher Brennan (1870–1932) and eleven by Shaw Neilson (1872–1942). The Penguin ends with John Kinsella (b. 1963); the Heinemann with Jemal Sharah (b. 1969). The paperback Penguin has 86 poets, 411 poems (on one way of counting) and 474 pages and sells for $19.95. The hardback Heinemann has 53 poets, 230 poems and 452 pages and sells for $39.95. Tranter and Mead provide an introduction which gives a view of their intentions and some general argument for that view. Gray and Lehmann give the briefest of introductions because, they say "the biographical and critical notes that preface each poet's selection make up a history of our subject." This does not, of course, provide reasons for their exclusions as, for example, (to provide the one, among many, bound to become notorious) that of the poetry of Vincent Buckley. The prefaces are, in fact, often rather odd; at times they seem to chastise rather than introduce the poet. Many have

an appearance of potted biographies which do little to illuminate either the poems or the poets and are, indeed, sometimes inaccurate. Barry Humphries, for example, might be surprised to learn "He has been married several times and has one son." His other sons and daughters from his four marriages may well be bemused. If a book is sloppy in small details (in compilation and in editing) then we reasonably can question the more important comment.

That said, the comparison gets more interesting. In looking for the modern poets of the 1930s one seeks, surely, for Ronald McCuaig (b. 1908), Elizabeth Riddell (b. 1910) and Lesbia Harford (b. 1891). None of these are in Tranter/Mead, all three are in Gray/Lehmann. Move on a decade or so to look for one of the great breakthroughs in Australian modernism, R. D. Fitzgerald's 'The Face of the Waters'. We find this key work in Gray/Lehmann and neither that, or any other poem by Fitzgerald, in Tranter/Mead. One begins to suspect that Tranter's and Mead's credentials as literary historians of modernism are maybe shaky. Following the modernist trail into the 1940s we find nothing in Gray/Lehmann to surprise us and rather less than provided in earlier anthologies by Les Murray and Rodney Hall. Tranter and Mead, as we've seen, do provide Ern Malley. I looked in vain, in either anthology for poems by Max Harris, Geoffrey Dutton, Alister Kershaw and Muir Holburn. Most views of these four poets are superficial, distracted by other considerations, and, above all, uninformed. To find their best poems, and plenty of them, takes some hard searching. Holburn wrote some of our sharpest and wittiest verse but one has to search the 'little mags' for it. Our two groups of anthologists have other, and limited, agendas, but at least Gray and Lehmann have not missed John Manifold.

A direct comparison might be made by comparing the two selections from one poet. Let's take Judith Wright. The Penguin gives us eighteen poems, the Heinemann eleven. On my reading the Penguin is much more alert and sensitive, showing some insights into the late poems. Neither anthology, though, has 'Lament for Passenger Pigeons' (1971), which often seems to escape anthologies.

For the stodgy Gray and Lehmann, Dorothy Hewett's poetry, like that of Vincent Buckley, does not merit selection. How she gets up some distinguished, if rather pinched, noses!

Gray and Lehmann choose three poems by Rosemary Dobson and seven by Gray. Tranter and Mead choose two by Dobson and ten by Tranter. When we come to the verse of the last ten years both books include the predictable – Nigel Roberts, John Tranter, John Forbes, Kevin Hart and Philip Hodgins – but Gray and Lehmann omit Robert Adamson, J. S. Harry, Robert Harris and Philip Salom, all represented by Tranter and Mead. Both anthologies entirely omit the inventive Π.0., Jas L. Duke, Eric Beach, Graham Rowlands and indeed almost all those exploring the richness of everyday Australian speech in all its variety. What we are given is that curious construct, the refined 'discourse' of mid-Pacific persons of tertiary education. How anyone exploring modernism in Australian poetry could ignore the demotic, as shown, for example in the 'Greeklish' poems of Π.0., wonderfully crafted and highly original in their prosody, is beyond this commentator.

Behind all anthologies are attempts to construct public taste in conformity with the editors' tastes which, to greater or lesser degree, are formed by ideology and personal relationships. That is as acceptable as it is inescapable. For anthologies that aspire to create a canon (however, temporary) we expect agenda that are based on detailed knowledge of literary history and which, to at least a great degree, eschew personal power games. Do either of these anthologies meet these criteria? I would certainly recommend the Penguin but, at least, I have made some of my reservations plain. And I cannot see many of us buying two anthologies this year. Teachers should bear in mind the flaws in both.

There is always a problem created if publishers select as anthologists poets in mid-career. The most notorious oddity was W. B. Yeat's *Oxford Book of Modern Verse,* (1936), but there are many, many others. Great poets, good poets, goodish poets, are, almost by definition, idiosyncratic. "You shouldn't have singers in the position of selecting other singers", Alfredo Kraus said recently. Kraus was the first Spanish tenor, post-war, to gain international fame. He has not been invited by José Carreras music, director for the Barcelona Olympics, to perform at the opening ceremony. The soprano Caballe, the mezzo Bergenza, Domingo and, of course, Carreras, will appear. "This is an act of animosity equivalent to a symbolic declaration of war", sings Alfredo Kraus. Olé! And, as for singers, so for those poets still on stage or on page. Meanwhile I think I'll start work on *A Book of Contemporary Vernacular Verse.* Anyone for tension?

The inaugural Stephen Murray-Smith Memorial lecture will be held on Wednesday 8 April at 6.15 p.m. in the Queen's Hall, State Library of Victoria. You are all invited. Tickets are $5 each, from the State Library. The lecture is 'Some Stirrers and Shakers of the 1950s and 1960s' by Dr Geoffrey Serle. This is the first of an annual series to commemorate the contribution of the founder and long-time editor of *Overland,* Stephen Murray-Smith (1922–1988), to Australian intellectual life, and to promote research and debate in the broad areas of his interest and influence.

VALE Lloyd O'Neil (17 July, 1928–27 February, 1992), one of the great Australian publishers who recalled Andrew Fabinyi in his drive to deve-

lop a publishing home and a market for books by Australian writers. We are all indebted to Laurie Muller for his splendid obituary of Lloyd in the *Australian* (14 February). I do not wish to repeat the detail given by Laurie Muller so have called on an old friend of Lloyd O'Neil to add a personal memoir.

VANE LINDESAY writes:
"Among the many highlights experienced over a forty-year career working in the Australasian book publishing industry, I look back with pride to one such thirty-one years ago, when Lloyd O'Neil selected me as his first designer for his newly established Lansdowne Press.

This distinction came my way in a tiny, cramped office under an old letter-press printery in Tattersalls Lane, a part of Melbourne's Chinatown where Lloyd made welcome, not only me, but the first of his many authors – Max Harris, Don Whitington, Cyril Pearl, Harry Gordon, the then curator of Ayers Rock Bill Harney, John Hetherington, Stephen Murray-Smith, Geoffrey Dutton, Ivan Southall, and those many others I did not meet.

Our relationship quickly developed outside those pleasant business hours in Tattersalls Lane to all-weather Saturdays at football matches where later Noel Counihan joined us to make a loyal trio of 'South' barrackers. Then there were the camping trips – quite a few – roaming the Victorian high country at the invitation of our leader, the writer Chester Eagle, who was later to chronicle many of our experiences in his evocation of Gippsland *Hail and Farewell* – watching herds of brumbies being rounded up, sighting an albino dingo, and joining the night camps of hunters and cattle men. It was during one meeting-up when Lloyd, to our astonishment, after being given permission, mounted and galloped a stockman's horse.

When he heard of my wife Marcia's terminal cancer, Lloyd, no stranger to our house, became an even more frequent visitor trebly welcomed for his counselling, calm discussion and comforting presence. Lloyd was magnificent.

It is hard to believe that on exactly eleven years to the day, 27 February, he too died a victim of that illness he and Marcia so bravely discussed.

There are huge ozone voids in the lives of many, many friends who mourn him."

A little order in our lives: on Australia Day *Overland* took special pleasure in the Order of Australia awards honoring Phillip Adams AO, Thea Astley AO, Bruce Dawe AO, Don Charlwood AM and Eric Rolls AM. So many readers have been enriched by their books and the public culture is enriched by these awards. Congratulations, too, to Dr Beatrice Davis AM, MBE, for being awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters by the University of Sydney and to Georgia Savage, this year's recipient of the Canada–Australia Award.

Overland has always been supported by its readers, sometimes in the most literal sense. No more than when, a year ago, a subscriber, Greg Black, wrote to me to say he operated his own computer system advisory service and offered the magazine his assistance free of charge. Poor Greg! Come in, spinner. Greg designed and implemented the computerisation of our mailing list system, a job requiring many days of effort and which continues to need Greg's input. Our grateful thanks to Greg Black for all he has done and continues to do, and for the use of (here come de jargon) his "hardware and software on an ongoing basis".

And there are others, not mentioned in our rather extensive masthead, who regularly, for many years now, have donated their help. Thanks to Don Maynard for his sales trips to Sydney bookshops, to Gwen McDowell for typing part of the huge poetry correspondence, and to Shelton Lea the very voice of an amiable proof-reader (with jokes too). Good on youse.

Barrett Reid

DAVID DAVIES

Institutions in a Democratic State

A response to 'The Left and New Rights' by John Hirst

I was surprised to read the attack by John Hirst on the proposition that people should have "greater control over the institutions that affect them." (*Overland* No. 125).

Contrary to the main thrust of that article, I believe that a democratic society does not only mean a "democratic state", but democratic institutions as well. Indeed, authoritarian and alienating institutions can undermine a democratic state.

John Hirst writes that: "If people are given more control over institutions, the institutions will have less power. Institutions are powerful to the extent that those who belong to them accept obligations and forego rights."

In my view, if people gain more control over institutions, those who are currently in control (whether by bureaucratic position, economic power, or other means) will have less power, but the institution can be strengthened.

Secondly, institutions do not only, or even mainly, derive power from acceptance of obligations and the foregoing of rights. They derive much greater power if those who participate do so on the basis of a greater sense of belonging, on the basis of a commitment which flows from having their views taken into account. An institution is greatly strengthened if it is able to draw on the resources of those who belong to it, and that is ensured by democratic participation rather than by authoritarianism and alienation.

John Hirst provides two examples to support his case: in public housing and in education in the State of Victoria. I do not believe either example supports his case. Even if we accept John Hirst's accounts as being correct, in both cases it is professional élites or "louts" who have seized a large measure of control rather than the overwhelming majority of people who either want to live in the public housing sector or take part in the State education system. Such failures to democratise institutions do not necessarily negate the principle of people gaining greater control over the institutions that affect them.

I should like to quote two examples closer to my own experience: trade unions and the workplace.

John Hirst writes: "Trade union strength depends on workers being willing to go without wages if a majority decides to strike." This would be an extremely weak and narrow base indeed for the strength of a trade union.

A strong union is mainly characterised by a feeling of belonging – solidarity if you like. The members feel that the organisation (institution) is theirs, under their control, responsive to their needs and aspirations. It is only then that members really accept obligations.

In another part of his article, John Hirst correctly refers to the current parlous state of unionism in Australia. This crisis has many aspects, and one of them, in my opinion, is a general lack of union democracy, a common feeling of alienation on the part of workers towards the union movement.

In my second example, the workplace, the institution is again deprived of much of its strength by authoritarianism and alienation.

One of the most important pieces of legislation enacted by the Labor Government in Victoria was the 1985 Occupational Health and Safety Act. One of its salient features is the right of workers to participate in making the workplace a safer and healthier place. My experience as Health and Safety Coordinator for the Municipal Employees' Union (MEU) is that the assertion by workers of their right to a safe and healthy workplace tends to strengthen the institution as well as produce real benefits for the workers.

Let us take another workplace example: the purchase of plant and equipment. In most cases, operators of plant and equipment have little or no say in their purchase. Choices which result in plant and equipment which are unsafe or unsuitable for the job is the cause of a great deal of job dissatisfaction, disputes, injuries and inefficiency. The Health and Safety Act requires that elected Health and Safety Representatives be consulted on changes to the workplace, and in some (admittedly few) progressive municipalities, MEU members who operate equipment or drive vehicles have a measure of control over their choice. In those cases, the strength of the institution (the council) has been increased in terms of efficiency, job satisfaction, better industrial relations and fewer injuries.

A great deal could be written about the superiority of workplaces where workers have greater control over the design of their own jobs, in contrast to the old Taylorist "do as you're told!" approach.

The process of people gaining more control over the institutions that affect them is not an easy one. It involves learning, adjustment, and possible error and failure. The process may involve reconciliation of differing interests of groups and individuals affected by an institution. The process does not occur in isolation, being conditioned by such things as legislation, the general climate of opinion, and the general cultural level of society.

Finally, I think John Hirst is right to draw attention to the general inefficiency of the public sector and the way in which service institutions of the state are seen as not meeting the needs of the people they are designed to serve. Such inefficiency and alienation are exploited by the New Right.

However, I think he is wrong in suggesting that the "New Socialists" (whoever they are) and the New Right have a "common commitment to the language of rights". I believe that it would be even more erroneous to think that institutions can become more efficient and responsive to people's needs by the application of more commandism, more authoritarianism and more alienation.

[John Hirst responds:
I argued in my article that an exaggerated concern for individual rights can prevent an institution from fulfilling its purpose. The arrangements for worker participation in workplace safety and the purchase of equipment, as described by David Davies, appear positive developments. I am not sure how far *individual* rights are proclaimed and protected in this process. If an individual worker has the right to refuse to use a piece of equipment chosen by the majority of his workmates and the boss, and if he could carry his objection to a government board of enquiry advised by psychologists and social workers, that is if he were treated as a wayward schoolchild now is, then the arrangements would be as damaging to morale and efficiency as the disciplinary procedures of the state school.

David Davies is prepared to concede that state schools and public housing may not be ministering well to the needs of most of their clients. He is confident, though, that participation and democracy, properly implemented, would rectify the situation. But if the disrupters have the protection of individual rights and elaborate due process, then the promise to the rest that participation will lead to control is fraudulent. There is nothing more alienating than constant talk and no action. Ask at any public housing estate or state school staff room. Like many others, David Davies exaggerates the pleasures of 'participation' with its constant round of consultations, conferences and committee meetings. There is considerable satisfaction in belonging to an organisation where, without constant involvement of the members, responsible authority pursues the common good and deals expeditiously with threats to it.]

Conservation and Economic Rationalism

Max Teichmann writes:

The Jan/Feb edition of *Quadrant* is full of good and interesting things, as has usually been the case since Robert Manne assumed the editorship. *Quadrant* has come a long way from the days when it seemed but a mirror of *Encounter* and the Congress of Cultural Freedom, recycling Cold War, Old Right and then New Right nostrums. By far the most intriguing feature is the dialogue, or rather debate, between Manne and John Stone. Manne in effect asks what relation conservatism, as normally defined, has with economic rationalism. In the process, he can't avoid pouring a good deal of cold water on the deregulatory, small government, let-the-market-decide brigade.

His reward is a typically peevish, one-upping, grandiloquent reply from Stone, questioning Manne's economic credentials, as compared with Stone's brilliant career in Treasury. Stone sets out to muddy the waters as to what economic rationalism is, deregulation is, and how far the autonomy of the market should go. Having done that, he accuses Manne, and, presumably, the rest of us, of attacking straw men. There must be some more decorous mode of seeking the truth.

Anyway, it turns out that the economic rationalists have all the same compassionate feelings as everyone else. The non-economic consequences, the social fallout from state and private activities are economic policy corrective considerations which they regard as just as important as any Greenie, or Keynesian, or welfare statist might. It's really only a difference over choice of tactics to ensure the Common Good, and the health, happiness and rising prosperity of all of us. Passing in and out of Britain during Thatcher's long reign, I can only assume the woman didn't get the message.

Robert Manne is trying to envisage a conservative Australia not at all like the Britain of Thatcher or the America of Reagan and Bush. He is more of an Australian nationalist than Stone, he seems to have realised the Unseen Hand might turn out to be a claw, he is *not* impressed by the overall results of the Occam's Razor, look-no-hands brigade, even in terms of their stated goals. Like most traditional conservatives he doesn't necessarily hate or fear the state, and seems to feel that key notions such as society, community and social bonding don't really figure in the social engineering scenarios of the deregulatory, market-driven rationalists. For *them,* the market seems almost to have replaced Society, and would marginalise the state, i.e. our political system.

After all, conservatives don't like social engineering, or Revolutions of Left or Right. They believe chaos theory and Murphy's law play too persistent roles in our existence to trust everyone to always do their own thing, and follow their greedy amoral noses. They think both the Left and the New Right attribute far too much reason to people.

Manne has opened up an old breach in the unstable Coalition of Conservatives, Liberals, and Libertarians making up the contemporary Right, and I look forward to the fallout. It may be that Manne secretly fears that Hewson's people will take over, do what Labor has been doing, plus budgetary toe-cutting; and this will produce a Thatcherite society with a strong flavor of Argentina. So conservatives must stifle the ambitions of the New Right social engineers; the reductionists, the simplifiers. I wish them well.

Our Liberals and Conservatives can't be *blamed* for what has happened to a prosperous, still-developing country of ten years ago – a country with virtually no insoluble problems. We have to blame the rulers of this country, the company they have kept and the economic and political theories whereby they have virtually destroyed the Labor movement and turned a state like mine, Victoria, into a basket case. *There,* the collapse of the labor market has converted the creeping crisis in education into a rout. The question *there* is not whether youth should be educated in this, or that, or join the workforce but just how to keep them off wholly faked unemployment statistics. It is an insult to them and to the threadbare reception houses we call universities, colleges, etc, etc.

It reminds me of the last days of Rumania or Russia, with the official media still churning out ever more desperate lies and cover ups, while the Party boys unscrew the gold taps and the light fittings, salt their money away in various hiding places before they decamp.

Manne can see that if the Opposition take over with the kind of theories and friendships which Labor has employed, the cloud over the sun could turn into

a permanent winter. The question is, can he convince them?

The J.F.K. Film

Max Teichmann writes:

The J.F.K. film is running to full houses here, and giving our local American-owned media some embarrassing problems. They can't *not* mention the film, they can't argue the facts *and* implications which they, and the Americans, have been suppressing these last thirty years. They can only damn the film with faint praise, insert false headlines such as "Historical Inaccuracies" over reviews which accept the Oliver Stone story more or less in toto – and they can crank up the thirty year sexual slanders industry on the Kennedy family. Consumers of this tired, salacious, hypocritical rubbish might now see what the whole point of this world-wide diversionary exercise has been. Maybe Marilyn Monroe might now be left in peace – even if not the Kennedys.

The political facts speak for themselves, as they did in 1963. We saw a coup d'état whereby the military, industrial, spy establishment bought itself another twenty years of hegemony, as it did in 1945, and again in 1949, when it rejected Chinese overtures. The history of the world, and of this country was totally transformed – for the worse. Ironically, in the process, America, internationally and as a society, has defenestrated, and is trying to involve everyone else in its ruin.

Perhaps the most serious consequence of the Kennedy assassination and the colossal failure in Vietnam that followed, has been the American reaction formation – which is poisoning us as well as them. Their denial that they lost, *and* disgraced themselves and their friends is one thing: but the construction of an amoral, addictive, gun-happy macho counter-culture, where human life is worth nothing, where anything goes in terms of lying, betraying, torturing, spying and manipulating, where democracy and human rights, (e.g. a free press!) are private jokes...has subverted every moral system which it has touched. The global reach of this sado-sexual media ideology has inflicted more damage upon the contemporary human psyche than all the wars put together. Thus, current education debates about equality of outcomes, and the rise and rise of the unemployable – because psychologically de-skilled – don't address what has been done to the post-Kennedy generations. Presumably, our Establishments are preparing for some desperate last throws late this year – probably in the Middle East – to keep the old death machine on the road a little longer. Care for a ride?

Donald Greenfield

GEORGE PARSONS

Memories of My Aunt: or was Tilly Devine a Social Bandit?

I was three when my Uncle Eric married 'Tilly' Devine; my first memories of her are the big black car coming to our house in Bexley, 'Skinny' the bodyguard with his shoulder holster, and the hands covered in diamond rings. My father who adored his older brother refused to join the rest of his family in ignoring the marriage. At the pub he gloried in the relationship and became a staunch defender of Tilly. Indeed we were brought up to believe that she had been frequently 'set up' by the Vice Squad, although she performed an important social role – prostitution, declared my father was a social necessity, a safety valve which prevented rape and sexual assault – and was a benefactor to the poor and oppressed of Sydney.

Auntie Tilly was a fellow traveller. My mother and father – struggling, unskilled working-class people – committed to the left wing of the Australian Labor Party, accepted her as a supporter of the proletariat. Difficult problems were swept aside. When I asked why she was going to the Coronation in 1953 – a photo shows her in gothic splendour, wearing an incredibly complicated hat, and covered in jewels – I was slapped down with the statement that "she was showing them that we are as good as they are". It was almost as though crime, albeit the 'victimless' crime of prostitution, was being used to serve a social end. Certainly, my father believed that crime resulted from capitalist society; Uncle Eric suggested more than once that Tilly's running war with the police was political. It exposed the corruption and the immoralities of capitalism, brought the system into disrepute, and redistributed income. My mother was cynical but each time she came Auntie Tilly gave my two sisters and me a five pound note each, partly to get round my mother's refusal to accept any money, even though her housekeeping budget was pitifully small (especially after allowances were made for Dad's five nights and most of Saturday in Jack McGrath's pub in Bexley). Mother

Matilda Devine in 1941

kept her mouth closed even when my older sister, Robyn, delighted Tilly by holding the notes to the light to see if they were counterfeit.

Swearing in front of us was not permitted when we were taken by Tilly to her house in Maroubra. She was totally indulgent with small children, especially boys. During the time I was reading totally irrelevant accounts of life in the 'dorm' at English public schools I was able to experiment with the buns and cakes described in these novels, courtesy of my aunt. Tilly's 'girls' – "She treats them like daughters", said Dad – were also a source of money, food and affection.

The locals in Bexley were supportive of my aunt. I learned that she gave freely to every good cause, that she loved children, was a pillar of the Catholic faith, was revered by the Salvation Army, helped the 'down and outs', and protected the working class against the police. Mothers, heartbroken because their daughters had run away, sought her for help;

she was supposed to be good for a loan if you were in trouble. My aunt was a 'folk hero'; in Maroubra the bus stop outside her house was called 'Tilly's corner'.

We had other heroes; John Curtin, Ben Chifley, the 'Doc', Bob Heffron – Dad claimed to have loaned him a pair of shoes when they were both in the I.W.W. – and the whole Saint George Rugby League team. Darcy Dugan was also a hero, a social bandit, a political activist, an urban Robin Hood, 'stitched up' by the police for every crime in Sydney. Later when Darcy became a social worker my father felt vindicated in his view that Dugan was a rebel, not a criminal. He often made the distinction between *real* criminals, Marx's 'bribed tools' of the ruling class, and *social* dissidents; Tilly and Dugan were proletarians not lumpenproletarians.

Uncle Eric was Labor; we kids knew that! He told us that a bad Labor government was always better than a good Liberal government, that Karl Marx was right but it wouldn't work in Australia, and that the other side were full of 'rats' and 'scabs'. Tilly listened to all of this, although she never made any comment. However, she was inordinately proud when at twelve I had a letter published in the Sydney *Truth* denouncing the D.L.P. and the groupers. Countless bored locals were forced to read the piece and agree on my maturity, brilliant literary style, and political acumen. Even though she liked the Queen and didn't talk about politics I had no doubts that Auntie Tilly was on the Left, and on the Left there were no enemies.

If Tilly ever expressed any social philosophy it was along the lines of level up, not down. She did not agree with my father who thirsted for the day when the mighty would be torn down from their seats and humbled in the dust. We could all have a share of the good things in life. Education was crucial; *we* had to beat *them* at their own game. The only profession she valued was law, although she had a sneaking admiration for the Jesuits – (among my father's many contradictions was membership of the Masons; the priesthood was out as a career!) – and for motor mechanics.

Tilly is the subject of an entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, written by two of Australia's leading feminist historians. She would have appreciated the piece, although it fails to catch her shrewdness, her charm, her wit and her steely toughness. Many working-class people still remember her with fondness and a sense of nostalgia. Perhaps we have yet to come to terms with some of the real heroes of working-class Australia. Is it time for a real social history 'from below'? In the last resort history is what people think has happened.

Dr George Parsons teaches history at Macquarie University, N.S.W.

THIS WORLD

after Kevin Hart

You go to cast your vote which shall be Green
and there's Aunt Dahlia with outstretched arms
manning a polling booth. Your vote turns black.

Things in themselves begin to get you down;
by noon they've shrunk to shadows
    of their names,
a tiny silver stammering in the mind:

cats in the sunlight, jasmine in the wine,
and that perfected instrument of will,
Aunt Dahlia, hammering at your back door.

You take up jogging, oil your bike, keep bees.
Late afternoons develop holes like lace.
Aunt Dahlia arrives with more ripe plums.

Illiterate co-ordinates of fate,
your shadow's crooked cross upon the earth
transmanumits a cryptic Sanskrit note.

An answering letter comes – *Yrs faithfully, God.*
It states you're not on His Electoral Roll.
Reincarnation seems a safer bet.

You try some yoga, start to read Tu Fu
(but only in the morning facing east).
The plums can rot. Too hot for making jam.

Some days the mind is just a state of mind:
the border closed, the guard asleep, and like
Aunt Dahlia, the horizon moving in.

It is enough, more than enough, this world
in which we say *I smell a Norway rat.*
The telephone starts ringing in the hall.

LENNY'S LOST BALLS

after Graham Rowlands

The same day Blazing Eros loses the fourth
    at Gawler,
Border drops a catch & Lendl goes down
4-6, 3-6, 6-8, little Lenny
loses both his balls.
They're not in Grandma's false-teeth glass.
They're not in the biscuit jar.
Did Mutant Ninja Turtles eat them up?

TWO POEMS BY JAN OWEN

His mother finds two ping-pong balls.
Not them says Lenny. They're bastards.
Two tennis balls. Yellow bastards.
Grandma's bowls. Hard bastards.
One soccer ball, deflated. A sad bastard.
& the golf buggy's full of dimpled bastards.
Lenny's mother searches high and low.
There are Christ knows how many bastards.
Lenny's long-lost father in the shed,
spread out with disassembled parts.
A messy bastard.
Now the man in him watches the woman in her
guessing the woman in him wants the man in her
to reassemble the bloody car.
The cam shaft's loose & he can't get the piston
up the cylinder. It must be love.
No. It's vicarious sexual arrogance
they're having.
(Lots of time in the shed).
Courtesy of Marcel Marceau.
The Gallic gesture. The penetrating glare.
Spanner! says Lenny's Dad
and she lets him have it.

Inside, it's bath-time
(that's a pure bastard).
Look, Lenny, look!
Grandma's found two little marbles
& they're not aggies they're Lenny's.
Now Grandma's a bastard.
Mother's read On the Menu
and between the lines,
locks father in the shed
& hides the scissors.
Grandma locks herself in the loo
with the poem
and the Sunday Mail:
RIPPER WAS HUMANE KILLER SAYS WIFE.
Wife is a ripper says killer.
Art for Art's Sake says Grandma.
Almost believes she believes
she almost believes it.
Wipes herself with the poem.
With the poem for Chrissakes.
With the real ballsed-up bastard.

ON THE ROCKS

The day has lost its balance,
slips awkwardly
into the sea, where the dusk spreads

fields of shadow
sown with a crop of light.
Waves lacquer the rocks, then slip away,

leaving these pools
like glassed-in cases
filled with precise things. Dull

beneath incredible skies,
starfish hold
each other. They're like carpets thrown

on the scuffed sand;
aqua and pink, fading into the mute blue
of an evening. Bright lime weed

around the pools' edges,
and sea-urchins
fencing with themselves, their bloodied blades

clashing, as they snatch at anything
I drop to them. A sudden crab;
and these tinsel fish

littered everywhere. Here,
for the moment,
these beautiful surfaces, quivering in the night.

RAYS

Sunlight is snared
in the clear nylon sea
and the meshed, translucent sand:

in the surf, I wait for waves
that rise deliberately,
like someone about to take a stand

on a point of principle;
waves that goad you
into a scuffle, then roll smugly away.

Around me, grandfathers
pale as worms; tanned girls,
cooling off; and kids on styrofoam boards,

waiting. Suddenly, a ray
slides over the sand
below us, smooth and crisp

JOHN FOULCHER

THREE POEMS FROM THE SEA

as music; a shimmering black hole,
a dragged patch of night,
visible silence

at the sea's clashing edge.
Someone thinks it's a shark,
and shatters the water, getting out;

most of us, though, find time
only to watch, as fear
sets us in cement. Then the ray's gone,

leaving no trail or scent;
and we cling to the glistening surface,
lifted by wave after wave.

INTERIORS

Mid-afternoon. On the beach,
only mother huddling
with her children, under that umbrella

like a ruin. The air is stiff
with heat, and the sky
is hammered down, scorched and faded. Waves

sprawl and sigh. Everyone's at home,
listening to the radio
or reading. Now and then, a car shifts

on the street. A breeze
comes in, lifts a few papers
and moves on. The kettle boils, as if panting...

These dead things
in the kitchen: a porcupine fish,
its leaf-vein hide roughened by air,

its tail veering left
along the bench. Where its eyes were,
you can see straight through.

And a sea-horse, its slight mane
delicate as a web,
its long snout tender and opaque, its body

arched like a bow. Nuances
of motion, of purpose.
In the crevasses of its skin, sand...

THREE POEMS BY JILL JONES

GOING SOLO FOR THE STARS

I am one drum beating now,
among cracked and vacant lots,
feeling each touch that's dissolved,
(nothing will be the same again),
the world overflows with torn pockets, leaking taps,
(some things are easy to lose),
strange tongues fill the streets,
murmurs of a lost country,
this is the cold spell,
kindness hardly a whisper at the boundaries,
music, clear and dark, behind the wall
sounds like wind in an ancient forest,
like waves caressing the rocks,
like the siren ripping up the highway,
and in the last refuge, at one in the morning,
when the living areas are deserted,
farther than the warm sting of alcohol,
an insistent amazing vibrato continues
(but life's no longer a string quartet),
in a cupboard somewhere,
stuffed with crazed plates and plastic lids,
a household idol broods,
while I am dancing above in the cold stars,
free in the dying reaches,
one drum beating now.

GREAT MONSTER TIME

Time is your ogre,
the huge block of it,
growling, harassing, feinting
with its great hands,
keeps you running breathless,
needing to top up,
punch yourself full of flash
whenever it is quick
and available.
They say you keep doing this
til you drop one day,
and time, your time, dies laughing.

THE LOST SUNDAY GARDEN

Above the drowsy garden
chug of helicopter across the bay,
thin voices from the stone church:
"praise god from whom all blessings flow",
a breeze that barely breathes
across the green sun and shade,
a slightly mad toccata
ushers careful protestants
into lazy pagan heat,
butterflies on their dying day
flit and swoop through their empire,
backyards of the suburb slowly waking
by the water,
quick calling birds, and telephones
faintly ring under
whine/buzz/dust of renovating,
despite the clucking hen next door,
sound of kid's games in the next street,
same intonation as there ever was –
but no helicopters, power tools
or Japanese wind chimes
fit my childhood memory,
many wheels have turned,
grinding away
at the bedrock of certainty
I thought I had a right to
once in paradise.

TWO POEMS BY ERIC BEACH

BEING EROTIC

& being unemployed
just don't gel
imagine having to write down
two attempts at love on your dole form
with contact numbers
& a brief description of other attempts
to find love in th past fortnight
although there isn't any love
free at th moment
you have to be prepared to accept
what they can find for you
this may seem a little punitive
but beggars can't be choosers
you'd be surprised how many men
put themselves down as casanova
where are we going to find employment
for so many in such a specialised field?
if you would like to make an appointment
with our experienced counsellors
we have love re-training programs
you may like to discuss th options open to you
if you are a long-time loveless person
especially if your unlove has been continuous
for more than twelve months
lingerie & socks allowances
up to th value of $100 are available
to those about to start a relationship
we remind you that you are to make every effort
to find a love, & to apprise us of this
we can also put you in contact with
a variety of agencies, who may assist you
with your problem
with love
from th other side of th counter
where we have loves
join th unemployed lovers' union
& bring capitalism to its knees

CHAOS THEORY

my friend terry's about to spend $1500
on past lives therapy
it all comes out in th wash
gay matadors, egyptian princesses
she began by spending a few dollars on a
transformation game
pretty soon she was signed up for th full course
that's pyramid selling, I say
you must have been a tomb thief she says
she was a rajneesh of course
I make cracks about tantrum yoga
she says that she'd stick her head out in th
corridor
& tell them to go group grope somewhere else
(especially th japanese)
– she had meditation in th morning
she felt sorry for australian men for th first time
what with germans organising, swiss counting &
americans brainstorming
th good old aussie male went looking for th back
shed
her group's into north-american indian lore now
terry had trouble controlling th sexual vibes in the
sweat lodge
even though there were only two men to fifteen
women
sounds like th methodist church I went to as a kid
only this bible class is stark naked
being a lesbian, her warrior task was to race off a
bloke
he kept her up til five in th morning explaining
that he felt his personality might be submerged
by an older woman
that's show business
terry's buying into th most expensive
transformation game
where you get to be on th side of th earth
she's being led up th garden path
I listen to people recount past lives & wonder
where did all th slaves, helots, fellahin & char-
ladies go?
I get on well with becky, terry's daughter
she's a carpenter
she makes crosses for others to bear
talk of barefoot spirituality leaves her staring at
her work-boots
she knows hippies don't have nine lives
she wants to know about th generations to come
& why her mother is looking in th other direction,
back
to th golden age, before th bomb

PRISCILLA WHITE'S LUNCHEON PARTY

The guests in the drawing room began
to talk. Caught in the silence of old
furniture, they waited
for a signal from the other side of the door.
They were so still a maid
might have whisked them off
with an ostrich-tail duster – not one
eyelash would have moved.

Suddenly the signal, caught by each,
ran wildfire nouns and verbs together.
Did you read the Prime Minister died
in his dreamless sleep? Rosemary White
had three children at the same time –
someone else died – someone was born
on the horn of Africa – there were birds
migrating – lemons ripe in Seville.

Somehow all pieces of their conversation
fitted neatly into chairs and settees.
An Art Deco watercolor, a siren
playing on the sitar, blue pastel gown
flowing into the seawater – Everyone looked –
silence, a feel of wavelets on the feet –
a feel of sandcastles subsiding as the tide
began its touch and tell game with the truth.

At 5 pm the furniture closed over itself. A half
eaten biscuit on a blue plate, a glass
of Chardonnay
untouched, warned "Do not disturb
the disorder"–
statements on children, the economy,
a war just begun,
the last rainforest subdued. Fragments
of speech
no one wants to decipher – seawater
coming and going –
tides brushing away sandcastles,
Rosemary White,
lemons of Seville – a feeling of not
being anywhere.

JOHN MILLETT

ECONOMIC RATIONALISM

You have only to visit Doyle's On The Beach
to know the nation's really in pretty good nick.
Bowls and bowls of steaming paella
seem evidence enough
that all these years of governments
getting tough
have done the trick

Golden snapper and bream provide eloquent proof
that economic deregulation and a tight budgetary
hand
are good for us. As for them, the ones
who can't pay,
they can enjoy the glorious aroma of
lobster mornay
drifting across the sand.

How often do you hear seemingly intelligent
people say:
"The dickheads running this country haven't got
a clue"?
Such critics ought to wait at night outside
the Petite Auberge kitchen
when the garbage bins hit the bitumen
(some critics do).

What's this? What nutritious morsels! Quail
and duck!
Bite-size bits of beef! Piles of pasta! What a treat!
Calamari! Camembert! Cranberry crepe!
Clearly this country's in excellent shape.
Why, Australians have just too much to eat.

GUY MORRISON

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

After Poetry 12, A Quarterly Account of Recent Poetry

EXTREMES

I'm no purist, no aesthete. An artist's life of devotion to art may produce masterpieces – or just a narrow range. A life of devotion to a cause may use art as only one of many spheres of influence. Even so, a small output won't automatically be inferior to a large body of work.

The Black American novelists Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin differed on the issue of race and writing. Ellison thought that a black could beat white racism by subterfuge, by becoming an *Invisible Man*. He once said that segregated cinemas didn't bother him. He went to watch the movie. That's hardly putting the cause first.

Baldwin tended to put the cause first. Even so, his reasons need scrutiny. He said that, although he didn't want to write about race, he had to – or he wouldn't be able to write about anything else. He wanted to write about love and love was *Another Country*. In fact he increasingly wrote about love *in* other countries. Until he was pickled, however, he continued to write about race.

Mudrooroo's poetry collection *The Garden of Gethsemane* shows that there are strong similarities between him and Baldwin. The Aborigine could never be accused of forgetting the Aboriginal cause. Even so, he strives to identify with other colored people, the poor of any color and the human race in general. His social criticism and satire isn't automatically a black attack on whites. It's an assault on Western society. He includes introspective and *intellectual* poems. It's no coincidence that the Glossary lists the Kurdaitcha Man as an 'Aboriginal intellectual'. The 'Calcutta Dreaming' section reveals the poet more fulfilled than he is in Australia. As fulfilled as Baldwin in Paris and Istanbul? Probably.

The first section evokes the poet's thoughts and connections with Stradbroke Island. He's conscious of convicts, Christian apocalypse and his relationship with the elements. He plays with styles of communication. He half-fantasises, half-believes that his computer keyboard skills will infect white computers with a virus while he lives on his tree totem. When reading 'The Silence' it should also be remembered that the poet spent three years as a Buddhist monk in India.

> Somehow, the silence seems more intense
> Less a missing part of some song called
> solitude;
> Somehow, an absence is felt more as
> A presence projecting a past of discord;
> Somehow, music seems to mark out pauses
> Extending the silence until it becomes a shriek
> Of: when I was alone I could order my
> solitude,
> Fill my days and nights with things
> Meaningful in their absence of being.
> The lacks flow gap by gap into some
> imagined hole:
> A wholeness entire in its emptiness –
> Quiet, intense, filled with the catalogue
> Of despairs as weightly as air raid sirens;
> As felt as that constant sea rumble.
> Now, the hole has been filled to overflowing;
> I pull the plug and watch the solitude
> Tide rise to fill my self with nothingness

There's no hint of unassimilated knowledge now.

Although the second section contains poems about pain that could be anyone's pain, Australia's bicentennial gave Mudrooroo an opportunity for protest against the conquest on behalf of his people and satire at the expense of white Australians and "phallocratic" Western society generally. In his agony he identifies with American blacks; in his ecstasy he identifies with words shattering stone

wombs and (probably inappropriately) "the gallstones of Henry Lawson". The year 1988 happened to coincide with some of the Fitzgerald Inquiry's more lurid evidence of corruption. So Queensland politics of the Joh era looms large in the poet's rogue's gallery. Upwardly mobile black politicians and bureaucrats are almost as bad. Christianity is identified with violence, Alfred Hitchcock and other things holy and unholy. Discovering racism, he feels decidedly racist himself. He excavates a sacred site and finds desert snow on the other side of the world. However, he says he's in tune with his "archtype". His *archetype*. There even seems to be a discourse on post-modernism where "stone gunyah" is something more than satire. It's difficult to overemphasise the effectiveness of these long lines of sledgehammering repetition but 'Inside Daydreams and Nightmares' gives some idea of the poet's command of his oral medium:

The convict grimaces his aching scars
into the smile of beautiful Lincoln Town,
His skin eternals the sting of the lash,
and yet, and yet a party
On his sadness, on my sadness, on our
sadness, on the platform of our pain.
Bonza, indeed in juggling old resurrected
slang, a convict's creole,
I ache in my blasphemies, a blubbering
pain-filled swear-word-filled
Morsel of something unbeguiled by
part-time poverty-stricken cabaret
Mocking my aching. All I can perform,
aches, aches, aches, aches!

Whether or not 'Jacky's Song Circle' is art that conceals art is debatable. It's deliberately mundane and difficult to assess. Even so, like the first two sections, the third moves from the Aboriginal to more general concerns: Africa, Krishna, Allah, Kali. In fact the songs become chants of political 'terrorists' and of political satire.

The last section combines rhetorical poems with the Jacky-type poems. Throughout the book much is made of the Western need to build hard buildings out of hard straight walls. Here the pejorative use of the repeated word "straight" in 'City Suburban Lines' recalls the pounding rhetoric of the second section. 'Me Daddy' is a clear and elegant statement of common Aboriginal experience.

The second last section 'Calcutta Dreaming' could easily have been the last. It's fair to say that Mudrooroo is attracted to the erotic, exotic and magical in India, including the notion of renunciation. Potentially dangerous escapism for an Australian. That's why it's pleasing to note the retention of some scepticism. The Harijan have rejected the first Gandhi:

Our exile is over,
United we stand
With wrath, with humanity
Having earned our love.
We, the children of God,
That great man named us,
Going out to free a nation
In which we remain slaves,
Now, no more, no more,
Mahatmaji, no more!

Sarah's Day's *A Madder Dance* is a well edited second collection. Several early poems leave open the possibility that chaos in order and order in chaos isn't a cosmological issue but an historical one. The past might be static but history (our ways of finding and seeing the past) keeps changing. Fashions in art and clothes change but are also cyclical. It's impossible to say how the poet's perspective would have altered if she'd developed a cross-cultural perspective. At any rate, her European historical perspective fails to last the distance. Cosmology prevails. The last section contains these lines:

Concentration magnifies
the fly's journey to an epic,
cathedral windows in its wing;
the emergence of a white iris
from the blade of sumo sword
to an apocalypse;
discovers solar systems in atoms;
allows us to enter the pause within synapse
as we put baby to bed in a matchbox
or board the balsa sailing ship.
The threshold is the game's narcotic lure,
'going in' reveals the huge within the miniature

She concentrates on the small in the large and the large in the small. She explores the relation between presence and absence. She specialises in poems about something turning into something else. These inquiries are most distinctive when they remain inquiries. With the exception of 'Chaos' (the source of the title) perhaps the best of these poems is the intelligent and evocative 'Handles to the Invisible':

Everywhere there are handles to the invisible,
ornate illusions to the untold or half-told,
impenetrable

sepia clues to unfinished landscapes. Exquisite
borders clarify
the ill-defined...Blue gates, bridges, thresholds
to arcane landscapes,
into or out of which, the hindless white
horse gallops.

I'm less sure about the quality of Day's work when she crosses the threshold and becomes or tries to 'enter into' other existences. It's not just that she imagines being composed of animal, vegetable and mineral. She *becomes* a cow. As a cow she speculates on becoming a tree, a cloud, a shadow. When she becomes a tree, she's also water and clay. None of this prevents her from feeding livers to her cat and cooking twelve oysters (apostles) in a Christian communion.

In the body of her collection are some effective well-made poems that possibly relate to the poet's main preoccupation but can easily be seen separately. 'Biography' speculates on whether or not an old person's face could have turned out differently. 'Cleaning the Church' is a traditional immigrant poem. 'The Gambler' turns out to be 'not in this for the money'. Poets choose their conventions. Even so, I wonder about Day's dramatic monologues. Should a contemporary prison officer use language that's scarcely distinguishable from the language of two sisters in a painting circa 1600?

The title poem of Jean Kent's second collection *Practising Breathing* is her longest, most ambitious and best poem. It revolves around a man's suicide and the responses and memories of those close to him, including the poet. It has the focus of loss and pain. It has disciplined visual imagery suited to the event that triggered the poem, and contains the thoughts and feelings of people other than the poet. Its quality isn't limited to these fine lines:

should I have seen?
should I have warned you?

that between tail and rump, whiskers
and paws, there were no longer
live connections,

just synaptic shocks, blind after-
images –
white silence
sizzling in black space.

Unfortunately 'Practising Breathing' is surrounded by other poems that raise questions about the poet's editor, the collection and inevitably about the

Jean Kent

poet herself. Although there are exceptions, the other poems are top-heavy and heady with visual imagery. Only a poet who over-values her imagery could publish the turgid last stanzas of 'Storming Home' while failing to capitalise on the splendid spare lines such as "Two days alive. A lifetime dying." in the fine last poem that, like the title poem, deals with a death and others' grief.

Kent's imagery requires discipline. Unfortunately a pattern that was present in her first collection is prominent in her second – the old difference between fancy and imagination. When she writes about herself she uses only fancy; when she writes about others she uses imagination.

In a decade Caroline Caddy's poetry has moved from simple description to her own intellectual world. The poet's variety places great demands on the reader. If there was too much sensuousness for its own sake in *Letters From The North,* there's too much intellectuality for intellectuality's sake in her recent collection *Conquistadors.* Another collection with the thought feelings and the felt thoughts of her excellent *Beach Plastic* could have established her as a poet with unique voice. Unfortunately *Conquistadors* is largely impenetrable.

For Caddy, the conquistadors symbolise breakthroughs in thought, philosophy and scientific theories. The poems concern ideas, abstract explo-

rations. Although they pick and choose their images and scenes, they aren't primarily about the earth and the universe. They're *about* double helixes without being, containing or imaging double helixes.

Are these poems to equal those in *Beach Plastic*? Yes, when the words aren't abstract and prosaic. Yes, although the book's structure won't help the reader to find them.

Caddy's best poems display an educated intellect engaging with real people in a *concrete* universe. One character experiences physically (if playfully) the Certainty Principle, the reverse of Heisenberg's theory.

> Suddenly all theory turns hands-on!
> and he is cyclotroned
> head over feet per second
> with all the other particles

In 'Waldo' a robot is perfect in everything but timing and needs a God to crush. The 'Man of the World' undermines his sexist arguments just by expounding them. 'Loneliness' contains the stylish lines:

> Physicians can't agree on classification –
> a species
> or a disease –
> and the lack of the under-side of
> nothing to do with
> or the whole cause
> of love.

Although 'Post Holocaust Movie' concludes with the philosophy "we are because/we move", Caddy's discarded Cartesian philosophy sums up this collection more accurately: "I think therefore I am".

David P. Reiter never allows his reach to exceed his grasp in his second collection *Changing House*. The reader would search long and hard to find a wilful obscurity, an overblown image, a gauche line or a rhetorical flourish that isn't undercut with irony. It's humble, sensitive and intelligent poetry that is respectful of the earth and its past and present inhabitants, including all species. The poet is the perfect traveller who avoids imposing himself on the people and places of his journeys, particularly his journeys to Aztec and North American pasts. Even so, he's too attentive to detail to imply that the past is better then the present.

If modern society has almost disappeared from his pages, individual people remain. His relationship with his daughter is proud but unobtrusive. A lyric moment is still restrained – and put into perspective by its environment:

> In grey ahead, a loon quavers like a sultry
> myth. Our eyes expect a flicker of lamps:
> can night really go so unqualified?
>
> You shiver, the canoe rocking in its ripples.
>
> I whisper my love, and mean it.

The careful term 'changing house' introduces the most revealing section on personal relationships. Not surprisingly it's the last section. After Mexico and the Queen Charlotte Islands, the poet surprises himself by letting go:

> Decadence. We seek a nuzzle
> between its fleshy curves. Even
> the very letters are creamy thighs
>
> enclasping the dreamy, ascendant
> 'd'. What tease of cabaret is mimed
> when we unzip before a stranger's gaze?
>
> *I have watched my mother at bath*
> *in swirling, private waters she scents*
> *with tingling, bursting bubbles. This*
>
> *for no impatient male, my father long*

dead. I wonder at the door: it is half-closed against my shadow, or half-opened?

Well, *almost* letting go.

There's much that Reiter's well-made poetry can't be and can't do. If he has made a virtue of necessity, that's because he believes there's only way for life to survive on earth. Protest without protesting. Morality without moralisms.

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

Caroline Caddy: *Conquistadors* (Penguin Books, $14.95).
Sarah Day: *A Madder Dance* (Penguin Books, $14.95).
Jean Kent: *Practising Breathing* (Hale & Iremonger, $12.95).
Mudrooroo: *The Garden of Gethsemane* (Hyland House, $24.95).
David P. Reiter: *Changing House* (Jacaranda, $12.95).

Bev Aisbett

IRMTRAUD PETERSSON

Kurt Wiese and the Kangaroo: A Fortunate Internment Story

German-born American Kurt Wiese (1887–1974) gained a remarkable reputation as an author of children's books and even more so as the illustrator of almost four hundred books for children and young people, among them American editions of such international favorites as Felix Salten's *Bambi* and *Bambi's Children,* Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book,* Carlo Collodi's *Adventures of Pinocchio,* Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,* and Aesop's *Fables.* Just as remarkable as his professional career is the story of Wiese's adventurous life in his younger years. When he finally settled in the United States in the late twenties, he brought with him impressions and observations from five continents, having travelled all over the globe partly of his own choice and partly caught up in the turmoils of history. These impressions are inscribed in much of Wiese's work which introduced young Americans to some of the characteristics of the peoples and places he had seen. Australia features in two self-written and illustrated books by Wiese, *Karoo, the Kangaroo* (1929) and a koala story *Buddy the Bear* (1936), as well as in his illustrations for a number of books by other authors, such as *Blackfellow Bundi, a Native Australian Boy* (1939) by Leila and W. K. Harris, *Australia Calling* (1946) by Margaret L. Macpherson, and *Australia in Story and Pictures* (1946), part of a series on foreign countries he illustrated, written by Marguerite Henry and published by Albert Whitman. Wiese's Australian connection provides quite an interesting historical tidbit, for ironically the gentle and endearing images of Australia conveyed in Wiese's writings and illustrations stem from an experience calling up the Australian convict tradition, that is from Wiese's years of forced internment as a German civilian prisoner during World War I.

Born and educated in the small Northern German town of Minden in Westfalia, Wiese "grew up under a remarkable collection of paintings of the Düsseldorf school", as he writes in an autobiographical sketch (Kunitz and Haycraft 298), and he goes on: "A puppet show and books about foreign countries were two other factors of influence, although I never dared hope that one day I should see the countries I read about, with my own eyes." Despite artistic ambitions from an early age on, Wiese was to learn the export trade with China in Hamburg. His apprenticeship completed, his company sent him to China, where "after an unforgettable trip through Russia, through the snow-covered vastness of Siberia, along the edge of the Gobi desert, and last through fertile Manchuria", he spent six years of travelling and selling merchandise, studying the Chinese language and broadening his knowledge of the country and its people (Kunitz and Haycraft 298). When war broke out in 1914, Wiese went to the German colony of Tsingtao which was soon taken by Japanese troops. Captured by the Japanese, Wiese was handed over to the British authorities, and five years of internment began. After one year in Hong Kong, Wiese, together with other German nationals seized in the Pacific region, was shipped off to Australia for further and safer internment. At least in retrospect, Wiese seems to have viewed these rather unfortunate circumstances in the best possible light as they provided him with an opportunity to further explore some of the foreign regions he had read about: "Unforgettable again was the trip on board a small steamer through the islands of the South Seas and along the Great Barrier of Australia, till after three weeks our ship passed through the rock gates of Sydney harbour" (Kunitz and Haycraft 298). According to information provided by Australian Archives, Wiese's Australian internment began on 3 February 1916. He was kept at the Trial Bay Detention Barracks and deported back to Germany via Africa on the ship *Kursk* on 29 May 1919.

Kurt Wiese, Internee No. 5075

Much has been written in recent years about the internment of Germans in Australia during World War I, about the tensions between 'British' Australians and those who had the misfortune of having a German background, about real and imagined threats, and about the war effort at home which frequently resulted in injustice and in resentment and harassment of those deemed as enemy aliens. The most extensive study of Australian policy and practice of internment during World War I, *Enemy Aliens* (1989) by Sydney historian Gerhard Fischer, comprises the results of thorough research on life and conditions in German internment or concentration camps, as some of them were called. The chapter 'Beethoven's Fifth in Trial Bay: Culture and Everyday Life in an Australian Internment Camp' (246–266) examines conditions at Trial Bay, a beautifully situated jail on the coast of New South Wales midway between Sydney and Moreton Bay. Built in the late nineteenth century under a rehabilitation scheme which was later abandoned, the prison was reopened in 1915 to house enemy subjects. Trial Bay obviously became an 'élite' camp detaining mostly German civilian internees and prisoners of war of superior social standing (Fischer 248), including scholars, musicians, doctors and businessmen, and the internees were permitted "the enjoyment of conditions of semi-freedom not found in similar camps" (*The Story of Trial Bay Gaol* 13). To reduce the tensions and frustrations of camp reality the internees in Trial Bay soon organised an active social and cultural life which included continuing education courses, theatre and concert performances, and the publication of a camp newspaper (*Welt am Montag,* i.e. World on Monday). Following rumors of an impending German raid to release the prisoners at Trial Bay, the camp was closed before the end of the war and the internees were transferred to a specially built 'Eastern Compound' at the German Concentration Camp Holdsworthy near Sydney. The Trial Bay internees remained separate from other sections of Holdsworthy camp of worse repute, and obviously retained their privileged status. Fischer's study briefly mentions Wiese, "the camp caricaturist" (xii, 205), and includes reproductions of several camp theatre programs with illustrations and cartoons by Wiese. They reveal that Wiese was already a skilled draughtsman at that time, and also testify to a good sense of humor. One delightful cartoon, for instance, presents a vision of the internee's homecoming to Hamburg: a voluminous German policeman confronts the returning internee whose ragged Australian outfit and gear, drawn in loving detail (complete with a little 'roo on a leash and a kookaburra on the shoulder), are in stark contrast to the spiked helmet authority awaiting him reproachfully.

Trial Bay and the circumstances and consequences of internment are at the centre of interest in the Australian novel *Always Afternoon* (1981) by Gwen Kelly. *Always Afternoon* was made into a TV mini-series shown by SBS in Australia and in a dubbed version under the title *Gefangen in Paradies* by ARD in Germany in October 1988. Mainly a

Return to civilisation: the Hamburg policeman does not approve of the internee's Australian outfit.

romance by genre, the novel tells the fictitious story of the love between a local girl and a German internee, a gifted violinist deported from Hong Kong. However, the novel also provides a detailed and evidently quite accurate account of life and problems in and around the internment camp, and as the author indicates in her dedication and acknowledgements, this part of the novel is based on careful historical research. And indeed, even Wiese gets a fleeting mention in the novel when the frustrated protagonist Franz Müller, who like the majority of German internees rejects the Australian environment (cf. Fischer 263), at one stage contemplates, "Probably I should do something useful. Study the flora and fauna on the cliffs like Mr Weise [sic],[1] or write a monograph on the country, especially the so-interesting sheep, like Mr Haas" (Kelly 69). This calls up a German naturalist tradition represented for instance by Ferdinand von Müller or, in a literary context, Baron von Krause in H. H. Richardson's *Ultima Thule,* and Wiese is seen as making the best of the situation by familiarising himself with what his surroundings have to offer.

This certainly fits the impression Kurt Wiese conveys in his later reminiscences. "Deeply impressed by the landscape and the animal world of Australia, I began to take up drawing and writing," Wiese writes in an autobiographical sketch (Kunitz and Haycraft 298), and in another statement he even gives his Australian experience the credit of having prompted his career:

> Captured by the Japanese and handed over to the British, I was sent to Australia and lived for five years in the Australian bush as a prisoner of war. These years gave me the courage to throw the Chinese trade into the Australian dust and do the thing I wanted to do. Thus I began to draw.
> (Qtd. in Bertram 196)

When Wiese returned to Germany in 1919, he evidently brought with him a great deal of material in sketchbooks. He began to write and illustrate children's books and designed exotic backgrounds for a film company formed by the well-known animal dealers Hagenbeck of Hamburg. When the film company had to close during the Depression, Wiese went to Brazil where he again travelled widely, and successfully continued his work as an illustrator and newspaper cartoonist. After three years he took up an attractive offer from the United States and eventually settled in New Jersey. He must have been a prolific writer and artist; for the year 1929 alone, *Contemporary Authors* lists Wiese as illustrator for six books and author-illustrator of another two, *Karoo, the Kangaroo* and *The Chinese Ink Stick. Karoo,* Wiese's first book drawing on his Australian experience, was received favorably by the reviewers, in one case even enthusiastically:

> While much less ambitious than the 'Jungle Book', it is perfect of its kind. Its utter simplicity carries conviction of greatness. 'Karoo' ought to be a nursery word. Best of all, it is a complete whole. Kurt Wiese's own illustrations are not less beautiful than his text. Even to the jacket the book is a distinguished modern achievement.
> (Catharine Woodbridge in *Saturday Review of Literature* 6, 16 November 1929: 429; qtd. from *Book Review Digest 1929* 1026)

By 1931, as Bertram notes, "Wiese's reputation as a children's illustrator was well established in America" (199). In 1937 he received an award at the World's Fair in Paris, and his book *Fish in the Air* (1948) won the *New York Herald Tribune* Children's Spring Book Festival award. His last self-written book, *Thief in the Attic,* appeared in 1965, and he continued publishing until the early Seventies.[2] Wiese's death at the age of 87 was acknowledged in an obituary in the *New York Times* (29 May 1974: 44). His work is listed and discussed in numerous American handbooks and studies on children's authors and illustrators, and he even gets a short entry in the *Oxford Companion to Children's Literature.* Apart from his ability to give his young readers a great deal of information about other parts of the world, Wiese has been particularly appreciated for his delightful animal representations, for his fine craftsmanship and his admirable diversity of style and technique ranging from Chinese brushes to lithography, for his gift of observation, his attention to detail and his humor.

In his research on American writer, journalist and historian C. Hartley Grattan, Laurie Hergenhan came upon a letter by Grattan to Vance and Nettie Palmer where the former warmly recommends Wiese's *Karoo* to his Australian friends:

> First of all, there are two Australian books that I have recently come upon that I want to tell you about. The first is "Karoo the Kangaroo" by an Austrian, Kurt Wiese, who illustrated Felix Salten's "Bambi." "Karoo" is a book for children, excellently illustrated and with a charming story. Wiese spent the war years in an internment camp in the bush of Australia and kept a kangaroo as a pet. How he got there I

don't know, but that's the story. Have you see[n] it? if not, let me know and I'll send you a copy. (Letter of 5 January 1930. Palmer Papers ANL 1174/1/3445)

Whether or not the Palmers ever got a chance to see the book is not known. The fact is, however, that *Karoo* is extremely rare in Australia: only one copy could be located, in the State Library of Victoria, and is not available on interlibrary loan. Presumably some readers with American connections might find a copy of one of Wiese's Australian books in their children's books sections. If this is so, its donation to one of the library collections of Australiana, for instance at the Fryer Library of the University of Queensland, would surely be appreciated as a testimony to the quite successful outcome of Kurt Wiese's Australian internment experience.

[1] The misspelling of the name mirrors a common confusion deriving from the contrasting pronunciations in English and German of *ie* and *ei*.

[2] An extensive list of Wiese's work can be found in *Contemporary Authors* 11/12, a shorter version in *Something About the Author* 3 (both Detroit: Gale).

Works Cited

Bertram, Jean De Sales. 'Kurt Wiese – Prolific Artist, Author.' *Elementary English* (Chicago) 33.4 (April 1956): 195–200.

Fischer, Gerhard. *Enemy Aliens: Internment and the Homefront Experience in Australia 1914–1920.* St Lucia, Qld: Univ. of Queensland Press, 1989.

Kelly Gwen. *Always Afternoon.* Sydney; London: Collins, 1981.

Kunitz, Stanley J. and Howard Haycraft, eds. *The Junior Book of Authors.* 2nd rev. ed. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1951.

Reviews of *Karoo the Kangaroo* in *Book Review Digest 1929.* New York: H. W. Wilson, 1930. 1025–26.

The Story of Trial Bay Gaol. Prep. by The Macleay River Historical Society. n.p., 1966.

Irmtraud Petersson is the author of German Images in Australian Literature from the 1940s to the 1980s *(Peter Lang, 1990). She is a research assistant at the University of Queensland and editorial assistant of* Australian Literary Studies.

VERONICA BRADY

Learning Our ABC

Tom Molomby's Memoir

Tom Molomby, *Is There a Moderate On The Roof? The A.B.C. Years* (William Heinemann, $19.95)

Communications and the media seem to have moved to the centre of public discussion recently, so there is something timely, yet somehow poignant, about the title of Tom Molomby's book about the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), *Is There a Moderate On The Roof?* Molomby asked this question during one of the last big sit-in demonstrations of the 1970s in Sydney. "People had locked themselves inside, climbed on to the roofs, chained themselves to the chimneys", the police and the fire brigade had arrived to eject them. Molomby, reporting for *P.M.*, called out to a fellow ABC staff member he recognised amongst the protesters, "Liz, is there a moderate on the roof?"

The incident is a kind of parable about the role of the coolly detached observer who is able to provoke thought in the midst of confusion. As Molomby describes it, the ABC is often like that embattled building; one also respects that those laying siege are under similar pressures, hence the continuing importance of Molomby's question. In a world where there seems little place for moderation, where ruthless efficiency is overprized, Molomby's humor and personal touch become doubly valuable. Anecdotal rather than analytic, personal rather than theoretical, Molomby nevertheless tells a story that is exemplary of much wider issues.

Molomby joined the ABC in the 1970s, in the heady days of dissent, demonstration and discussion, when both money and energy were plentiful in the ABC. He tells about working for programs like *P.M.* on radio and *Four Corners* on TV, moving from one medium to the other, fomenting change and engaging with people, events and ideas. The differences he helped to make may have been largely a matter of style, of a comic and parodic approach – but irony was seen as a political tool in those days. His book is also about the people he worked with – about intelligent and eccentric but, above all, first-class broadcasters. They included Tony Joyce, a brilliant journalist killed in Zambia, Huw Evans, Carolyn Jones, Michael Charlton (whose farewell party reads like something out of *Brideshead Revisited*) and Tim Bowden. There is even a cheerful picture of Bob Carr (the present leader of the NSW Opposition) putting his head out of window of Broadcasting House to barrack a student procession.

But might not all of this give comfort to the ABC's present critics, who accuse it of being a frivolous and privileged organisation, full of irresponsible people assured of tenured jobs, Paul Keating's "Balmain Basketweavers"? I don't think so. Molomby's account, rather, suggests that the great problem facing the ABC is the bureaucratic habit of mind; the desublimation of cultural values that robs them of their rational content, and functionalises them for purposes of organisation and control as ends in themselves, the means not merely justifying the ends but becoming the ends themselves. In this context, to use humor as Molomby does is subversive, interrupting these purposes and undercutting their great solemnity and importance, while also asserting the value of independent thought and feeling, and even of pleasure.

Thus Molomby's favorite attack upon the bureaucratic mind, he tells us, is the "expanding memo": bureaucratic detail is piled up in ever-expanding complexity, exasperating those to whom it is directed and gathering momentum as it goes, until the defences tumble down under their own weight. As he describes it, this is not merely good fun and a declaration of independence, but also an effective tactic to immobilise the enemy. As a member of the ABC Staff Association Union, then as its president, then as the staff-elected member of the ABC Board, Molomby seems to have used it with devastating effect.

Just as importantly, his high-heartedness suggests an ideological position of strength. Although he does not spell out his reasons, Molomby believes in the importance of the ABC and its values, regarding them as "essential" to Australian society and "irreplaceable". It remains a pity, therefore, that he does not declare his rationale, because the confidence of his assumptions lays him open to charges of élitism. It can be seen as a kind of snobbery to assume a necessary link between the ABC and the tastes, ideas and values of the educated middle classes. Reading between the lines, however, it becomes clear that there is more at stake, and that the good health of Australian society as a whole is involved. Implicitly, Molomby's position criticises present trends towards an authoritarian and totally administered society in which economic considerations and notions of efficiency, material productivity and the technico-rational dominate all else. In contrast, Molomby insists on the importance of ethics.

In this respect it is significant that Molomby is also a civil rights lawyer, notable in the Leith Ratten and Ananda Marga cases. Politics for him is not just a living but a way of life, a means of consciously asserting the value of social responsibilities and relationships. For him, the good life and the political practice growing out of it encourage qualities like mutual respect, cooperation and trust. These qualities are just as important as growth in the GNP. The ABC matters to him because it is able to resist the authoritarian tendencies of the State and the totalising pressures of the economy. It is able to expose corruption and abuse, and provide people with the information to make decisions for themselves and the means to enjoy themselves in their own way.

The general tendency of the commercial media is towards passivity and compliance, but a major part of the ABC's task is interrogation. Its programs must provoke intelligent discussion and encourage aspirations towards knowledge and happiness – the free play of mind and feeling – while maintaining forums for freedom and creativity, all so essential if Australia is to become the 'Clever Country'.

This is not as unrealistic as its sounds. The nexus between power and knowledge is unarguable, and it is clear that control of the media gives control of some of the most significant forms of knowledge. However, as Jurgen Habermas reminds us in his essay, 'The Task of a Critical Theory of Society' (in S. E. Bonner and D. M. Kellar [eds], *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader,* Routledge, 1989), there are two sorts of media. The first, commercial media (including advertising) provides generalised forms of information, condensing it and making it easy to absorb by means of sanitised and ideologically laden stereotypes which tend merely to replicate what is already the case. The second he calls "steering media", in which different lifestyles and ways of thinking are separated out from the general system and given expression, and in which endangered ideas and traditions are defended and new alternatives proposed. This task, of defending and empowering subcultures is, in my view, perhaps the ABC's greatest contribution to our broadcasting system and political life.

Molomby might not put it exactly this way, but the explanation might help account for his apparent rage over trampled ethics, especially in the discussion of the methods of ABC management both past and present. The charges made against past management before the reforms initiated by the Board appointed under the new Act of 1983 and carried through by Managing Director Geoffrey Whitehead, are mainly of sloth and incompetence. More recently, under David Hill as Managing Director, Molomby's complaint is that the ABC is losing its identity and becoming the same as the rest of the media. Furthermore, instead of resisting, management is furthering the domination of bureaucratic system above independence, intelligence and quality broadcasting; that efficiency and technological skill is being emphasised at the expense of quality, innovation and critical thinking. In this sense, Hill's apparent eagerness to please the prime ministers is perhaps less troubling than his concern to make the ABC more 'popular' and to bring eccentric broadcasters into line. Also troubling was Hill's less than robust defence of the ABC's right to air independent viewpoints during the Gulf War.

What at first seems almost melodramatic in Molomby's denunciation of management, however, becomes clearer in the light of his political and ethical concerns. He believes the ABC is important in the struggle for a different kind of politics concerned with human rights, quality of life, equality of opportunity, individual self-realisation and democratic participation. The behavior of the mere organisation men – they were nearly all men – seemed, in this context, both stupid and dangerous, which would account for the venom of attacks such as this:

> I found it hard to believe the behaviour of some management personnel, [he wrote]. It seemed to me that their adamant resistance to the truth, their deceit, evasion, and apparent lack of appreciation of the possible consequences [of their actions and policies] for individuals, was characteristic of the unfeeling villains of history who

have allowed people to die unnecessarily in many situations, from the mud of foolish front line trenches to phosphorous- or asbestos-polluted work places.

For all his self-deprecating irony, Molomby is a "true believer", but not a fanatic. To him managers like this "were not evil people, they were simply hopelessly, haplessly inadequate" and the adverbs give the game away, bringing us back to what is poignant about Molomby's book and his position. Like many who work for the ABC, or who believe in its importance, Molomby has a touching faith in the power of intelligence and decency to prevail. Perhaps the evidence also supports his view. If we do not think harder and more creatively we shall indeed become "the poor white trash of Asia"; and, just as importantly, unless we pay more attention to ethical matters, and understand and sympathise with one another better, Australia faces profound social dislocation and unrest, perhaps even social violence. Nevertheless, in the prevailing climate of economic rationalism – in which pragmatism is equally a way of thinking and of living – this faith in decency opens him to charges of naïvety. Yet Molomby's story suggests he is anything but naïve.

It centres first on his struggle as a member of the Staff Association to defend the ABC against financial cuts began under the Fraser government, and to preserve its independence in program matters as well as funding. Subsequently, he gives an account of his period as the staff-elected director of the ABC Board, appointed in 1983 – a position that was the result of a long union campaign inspired by the conviction that staff had an important part to play in making policy as well as programs. Here anecdote provides a vivid picture of the people and events involved. But it would have also been helpful to give an account of the issues involved. These, it seemed to me, as someone who played a small part in these events (as a member of the Board from 1983 to 1986), revolved around the already mentioned disagreement between those who emphasised organisation and efficiency as opposed to those who put a premium upon the human element.

In my view, this underlies the disagreement between Molomby and the Managing Director appointed by the new Board, Geoffrey Whitehead. It was not merely a clash of temperaments. At first, in fact, Molomby welcomed Whitehead and sympathised with him and his task. In the old ABC, as Molomby describes it, disorganisation bordered at times on anarchy; management was incompetent, complacent and self-serving – bent on preserving its own comfort and keeping "the bureaucratic tail [wagging] the program dog". But Whitehead seemed different. He wanted to reorganise the ABC and set about dividing it into a series of directorates, with each director responsible for various activities: television, radio, engineering, finance, human relations and marketing. Significantly, the position of news and current affairs remained ambiguous. With the strong support of the Board and its businessman chairman, Ken Myer, whose visionary concern with high-tech soon became legendary, he also set about the mammoth task of re-equipping the ABC, replacing ancient equipment – allowed to run down in the financially stringent Fraser years – with state-of-the-art technology. Even though he was the staff-elected director, Molomby was prepared to support the staff cuts necessary to fund these policies.

As an insider, Molomby also appreciated the difficulties facing Whitehead and the Board, while most of us who had come in from the outside did not. He believed management had destroyed all attempts at reform in the past, and he writes with especial anger of "the ruthlessness and indignity" with which Keith Jennings was treated in the early 1980s, just before the new Act and Board. It was not true, therefore, that Molomby's position on the Board was from the beginning adversarial. He sympathised with Whitehead's exasperation, frequently expressed in the early days in his saying that "the place was unmanageable". Indeed, he was only too aware of the games the old guard were playing:

> There was hardly anyone he [Whitehead] could rely on, he called meetings, and no one came or they came late, and tasks promised were not done by their deadline if at all. (I thought of Keith Jennings and knew what he meant.)

Important and even crucial information was sometimes withheld – on one occasion, for instance, a request from Canberra for the ABC to put up proposals to fund new initiatives to the tune of millions of dollars was not passed on. This description of the old guard at Molomby's first Board meeting sums them up, in an almost melodramatic way, as an evil and destructive force:

> They sat across the end of the table...like a line of crows on a fence. I recognized several moments in discussion when I knew that they must have known things which would assist, but they said nothing; almost the only times they spoke, except to answer to direct questions, were to say something in defence of their own positions.

Against this weight of inertia, however, he sets the expectations of the staff. The new Board with its new Managing Director and its aboundingly energetic and enthusiastic Chairman, they hoped, might transform the organisation:

> It is difficult to imagine the atmosphere of that time. There was an enormous amount of hope, even exuberance. To many of the staff, it seemed at last that the organization was in the charge of a group of people who were committed, interested, accessible; that there would be a new recognition of problems, a new honesty, a new willingness to do what so many had been crying out for since the grim days had begun in 1976, to stand up for the A.B.C.

Implicit in these hopes is the sense that a new alliance had formed between policy makers, executives and staff and a new kind of management – consultative and cooperative rather than bureaucratic – had come into being. Some of us certainly hoped so. Gradually, however, it began to appear that this was not to be, and that bureaucratic habit dies hard.

With a part-time Board, everything depended on the Managing Director and, in Molomby's view, he was not up to the task. Partly this was a matter of personality, and Molomby puts it in tragic terms, declaring that "the seeds of destruction lay within" Whitehead. There is perhaps a measure of truth in this. Whitehead was a shy man with little experience in program making and little ability to communicate with people – especially well-educated, quirky and often opinionated people like Molomby. He was also an Englishman – though he had made his name in New Zealand with the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation – and not at home in Australia or with things Australian. His capacity to lead was therefore limited, and towards the end of his time as Managing Director he was a lonely, even isolated and insecure figure. "Beyond his immediate circle of senior executives", Molomby notes, "his personal relationships within the organization were almost non-existent". He had considerable organisational skills, but they were of a bureaucratic and instrumental kind; he seemed to prefer paper to people, and would draw up plans, have them ratified by the Board and then expect them to be carried out with very little discussion or input by staff members.

As I see it, Whitehead's real problem was his practice and perhaps philosophy of management. In effect, Whitehead was different from the old guard, but not different enough. Where they were incompetent and seemingly unconcerned for anything but their position, he was competent but purely concerned with organisation, with efficiency and the technological appropriateness of means. However, in Molomby's view, as in mine, what mattered most in the ABC was the staff: people's talents, creative abilities, broadcasting skills and technical expertise. True, Molomby may have exaggerated the abilities and goodwill of the staff. As he tells the story, particularly about the Union, it seems as if only the staff ever stood up to defend the ABC against the financial cuts of the Fraser years, and that management was almost useless. Against this, one has to set the impression of cheerful anarchism. One of Tony Joyce's witticisms, which Molomby quotes, was that the ABC was "like a reverse *Marie Celeste,* you can't move for the crew and everyone's looking for the boat", not a picture of a healthy organisation, or perhaps of a constructive approach of staff to management.

Nevertheless, when the division came to a head, I was one of those Board members who supported Molomby rather than Whitehead. What brought about the crisis was a request by Molomby, as a member of the Board, for access to certain documents. These had to do with certain contracts which had been signed without the Board's knowledge; also with the terms on which a senior executive had been made redundant; with a claim made on the ABC for a substantial amount of money – a claim Molomby suspected to be fraudulent – and with the files on two defamation cases against the ABC. In Molomby's view this request was within his rights as a Board member. Whitehead, however, seems to have regarded the staff-elected Molomby as somehow less than a full Board member. More provocatively, it appears that Whitehead suspected Molomby of leaking information to the press and to other members of the staff, and was therefore unwilling to hand over the documents. Accusing Whitehead of "deliberate obstruction of my rights as a director", Molomby took the case to court and won.

This was an important victory for the principle of staff representation. But when it was discovered that the ABC had funded Whitehead's case without consulting the full Board, division over the matter widened within the Board. The position of those who supported Whitehead is understandable. Having appointed him as Managing Director, the argument went, depending on him to carry through its policies, the Board ought to have supported him. Besides, there was the added factor that open conflict between Whitehead and the Board would embarrass the government and damage the ABC's always limited credibility in Canberra. As I saw it, however – and I do not want to speak for my collea-

gues – it was even more crucial to preserve the full rights of the staff representative if there was to be a real change of management style within the organisation. Furthermore, since the Board has ultimate responsibility, it was also a matter of concern that a Board member should not have access to documents, especially if there were doubts about propriety or wisdom. In other words, it seemed to me essential that the executive should be accountable to the Board and that the staff representative's status be that of any other Board member's.

In this sense it could be said that the conflict was between practicality and principle, and that the upshot proved the practical people right. Angered by Molomby's constant interrogation of management, and by division in the Board, the Chairman resigned soon afterwards, and the subsequent appointment of David Hill brought about the resignation of Whitehead – in Molomby's account a fairly ruthlessly pragmatic affair. Moreover, the government supported those who stood by Whitehead and did not reappoint those of us who supported Molomby.

This is not an exercise in self-justification. But Molomby's account of the affair does offset the one Whitehead offers in his book, *Inside the A.B.C.* In retrospect, it seems even more crucial now to have supported the principle of staff involvement in policy making and executive decisions, as the difference between the two notions of management is an essential one. Questions of integrity, honesty, intellectual openness and rigor must be asked of the ABC, as its position in Australian society hinges on ethics as well as economics. It matters, therefore, to insist upon the highest quality of leadership.

One of my problems with Whitehead was that he seemed unwilling to consult with staff. When Richard Boyer wrote a paper on *The Philosophy of a National Broadcaster,* having consulted staff as well as fellow Board members, Whitehead did little to publicise or distribute it, either within the ABC or general community. This was unfortunate since, in my view at least, discussion of the philosophical reasons for the ABC's existence would have helped staff morale as well as given them greater understanding of the changes taking place. Without any clear view of the ABC's position in Australian society, it is all too easy to evaluate its success in terms of ratings and audience reach, mere qualitative terms, and this, it seems, was something that neither Whitehead nor his successor, David Hill, fully understood.

Another reason for concern was the position the Managing Director took up in what came to be know as the "PNG Affair", which Molomby describes in detail. For political reasons the Papua New Guinea Government asked the ABC to suppress an interview with the leader of the Irian Jiya Independence Movement which had been filmed by a *Four Corners* reporter, Alan Hogan. Acting as Managing Director during Whitehead's absence overseas, Stuart Revill agreed, and on his return Whitehead endorsed the decision. But this, as the rest of the media and many within the ABC argued vociferously, represented a threat not only to the independence of the ABC but also, by implication, the rest of the Australian media. To make matters worse, some incautious remarks by the ABC Chairman, Ken Myer, gave the impression that he believed the ABC should not broadcast views critical of existing governments.

When the Board met to discuss the matter, in the midst of widespread public concern, it voted to let the interview go to air. But the Managing Director's failure to grasp the implications of his decision for the public perception of the ABC was troubling. Maybe it was simply that, as Molomby suggests, his political judgement was poor. But it also suggested that, like management in the past and, as Molomby suggests, like David Hill in the present, he was not as fully alive as he should have been to the dangers of political interference. True, the ABC's position is always a parlous one, depending on government for annual funding yet at the same time obliged by its Charter to remain independent.

Its position, however, has ethical as well as political overtones, and these are perhaps summed up in Molomby's remark, that "when one knows something is wrong, one must protest. If it is wrong enough, and the protest is not heeded, one must go further". That is not to say that the ABC should dissent for the sake of dissenting. But in a world in which communications and the media have become an essential part of the market economy, it is crucially important, politically as well as economically, that part of the media should remain independent, committed to the common good rather than to the particular interests of those with money and influence enough to control the rest of the media. This, of course, is why advertising and sponsorship represent such a threat to the ABC and thus to the Australian community, not just because of commercial pressures which might follow, but also because we need to keep alive the notion that there are some qualitative needs for information, entertainment and argument which cannot be satisfied by market mechanisms. There are important human and social matters which escape its logic and goods which cannot be bought and sold.

One of these, of course, is the notion of democratic society itself. It is crucial that there should be

at least part of the broadcasting system free from commercial pressures and independent of the government of the day, able to pursue ideas and provide information without fear or favor. In their better moments most politicians would agree, and Molomby quotes from Bill Hayden's eloquent defence of Radio Australia and thus, by implication, of the ABC of which it is a part, a defence provoked, ironically enough, by the apparent readiness of the ABC's David Hill to bow to political pressure over Radio Australia's broadcasts about Indonesia. Radio Australia's "independence and ethical standards should be preserved, the latter of a high order", Hayden insisted. This independence he saw as an essential part of the interplay of various kinds of power within democratic society. Even though he admits to having been bruised at times "from being on the receiving end of media treatment" and disapproved of their handling of many matters, he was convinced that:

> The separation of independence of various powers which provide the checks and balances in our system, preserving liberalism and freedoms in democracy, are extremely important. The media have an extremely important role as one of those powers and, accordingly, its discharge of its role according to guaranteed standards of independence is essential.
> ...if Radio Australia is to be muzzled or converted into some sort of government propaganda utility I would rather that it be closed down as a waste of tax payers' funds.

To increase the concern, Molomby cites troubling instances of political interference in the ABC in the 1970s; for example, a story about possible financial corruption was suppressed at the insistence of the politician involved, and on another occasion management refused to run a story exposing overcharging in the Post Master General's Department because, Molomby alleges, it would have embarrassed the Minister who was also responsible for the ABC. Consequently, the possibility that the ABC's Board or its Managing Director might not be not passionately committed to the ABC's independence and its right to criticise governments is troubling.

We return, then, to the poignancy of Molomby's position and of the way he writes – at times ironic and even comic in tone, and concerned more with people and events than theory. This is his way of challenging the myth of "things as they are", the general surrender to the pragmatic and the bureaucratic which assumed, in the case of the ABC, for example, that all that was needed to defend the ABC was to make it more efficient and cost effective and its programs more popular. Molomby's joking anecdotal approach challenges these assumptions, by unfixing certainties and challenging modish habits of thought. Where, as Horkheimer and Adorno remark in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader:*

> The dutiful child of modern civilization is possessed by a fear of departing from the facts which, in the very act of perception, the dominant conventions of science, commerce and politics have, cliché-like, already moulded. His [her] anxiety is none other than the fear of social deviation.

Molomby's ABC delights in deviation. His concern is to rescue the individual who risks becoming devalued in relation to organisation, technology and the economy.

It is this, of course, which makes him a moderate, and he is in search of other moderates, increasingly beleaguered in a world arranged to increasingly totalitarian ends. But this is also the reason why the ABC matters, though he has little to say directly about this – he is post-modernist enough to be suspicious of grand theory. In effect, however, he sees the ABC as "anti-consumerist" and "anti-escapist", and thus an essential element in Australian society in which more and more people are being sacrificed to the economy while being distracted from distraction by the rapid distractions of the commercial media. It is easy, of course, to characterise this position as élitist, the special pleading of a group of educated middle-class people. But if it is true, as I suspect it may be, that the great problem facing us today is the way in which systems of knowledge and power define value in merely economic terms, in which we know the price of everything and the value of nothing, then the search for a moderate position, one in which people can think, feel and choose for themselves, may be essential if Australia is to survive as a decent and democratic society. If, as Socrates said, the unexamined life is not worth living, then unquestioned authority, especially the authority of the market, is, if not worth obeying, at least in need of interrogation. To conclude on a more practical note, the best managed organisation is probably the one in which staff and management work together cooperatively, in mutual trust rather than suspicion or antagonism.

Veronica Brady is a past member of the ABC Board (1983–1986). She is now an Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Western Australia.

ANTARCTICA

(i.m. Stephen Murray-Smith)

Continents swallow the Island governments,
a Housing Ministry can produce a plan
to rid the earth of presbyters in gum boots
whose tiny meetings quote *The Rights of Man*.
Persuasion, influence and the supercession
of staple fishing left the birds in charge,
wind-ruffled, they, with no-one to disturb them,
found the new silence tedious and large.
It was the same whichever way he looked,
a lake here fouled and there an island gone,
credentials in control and hierarchy.
He held to grammar as a neutral zone,
evolved the idea and action, pipe in mouth,
stared into extremes, the mildest observer,
found the way through, took ship to logical South,
steamed into our mirror: Antarctica.

The strategy was simple and it worked.
Balance two continents as a magazine,
broad nets would land
the silver centre, squirming at the margin:
of penguins he wrote, I didn't expect
    there'd be *people*.
Sonar picks up footfalls on the ice.
"Here," says the operator, hands you
the headset, "listen, Future Echo..."
Then smirks, your features register
the Leopard Seal that also stalks below.
The fat man spinning in a bosun's chair
defied the sledging kids to make a transfer,
riding Melville's wildest metaphor:
if in one place the wrong could be undone,
the ugly Bases rectified, the waste...
then benefits might flow back from the margin,
the raddled centre might in time be chaste.
Companions rose around him in the dream,
bone-cold legionnaires whose
    unrecovered Eagees
were thought in the forest of Rome,
    recovered Rome,
Manhattan's poet, hearing the rocking cradles
and early sneezing visionary Governors
in New South Wales, beset by gentlemen.

Enormous fortunes paused to do their sums.
    The anxious young suspired in careers.
Blue collar shopped at Target, did with crumbs.
    Aspiration chose designer beers.
And what a game he played with the machine,
lodging his wedges of evidence in the spokes,
sowing on the page, that white and pure horizon,
where no help ever moves and nothing wakes.
New prick-tunes sang Old Left behind his back
who'd searched for Islands where the free
were dauntlessly themselves. How now, my
crisp chopper pilots, rotating in buzz-word updrafts
within range, that you ever got
compliance from resignation?
Manner skedaddled across the white terrain,
the lifts were C.V. stuff, not works,
chit-chat jamming the radio net,
stunts thinly fuelled on loose association
till snow and perspex hurt the eyes
the whole monkey-show distorting everything
and his report: an idiom grows thin.

Continents swallow the Island governments.
Winds probe the empty cottages.
"The chair revolved by turns so all could lead,
we were our own, we had few arguments,
lived peacefully here and like our island home,
now leave this for curious eyes from calling boats."
Tristan remembers. St Kilda and Erith and Pitcairn.
Like Gael our language recovers, our dialects
recruit their living speakers, where one
thousand were stand two, where two, forty.
and what shall we say,
    so far from Mawson's cabin
now? It's drumming eighteen-wheelers on the Hume
and not the old blizzard haunted goggled vision
blue in the winter day-dark, neglected, parting
clinker from stud, by ice or ataraxia;
the original he'd go back to build upon
with the iceblock growing inside it,
thrusting the joists out, groaning.
And the ice channel barring the door,
little by little the womb of *civitas*
crushed out as ice meets ice,
erased by the ice's encomium.
What shall be said in the traffic
and further by starlight, travelling state to state?
Out in the cold, clear Australian night,
servos and hamburger stops all shut
as rigs in convoy roar from quiet to quiet.

Two generations had an Editor. Because of him
dispersed lights stayed on all night.

ROBERT HARRIS

ONE DICK POEM TOO MANY

From behind a mike and the skirts of poetry
he bellowed about his dick;
a crescendo of images ending
with the Apollo Moon shot.
Then that chap who went on and on;
his heart-numbing, sordid forays
into hitherto straight blokes' bums
with attendant syringe detours
and solitary ejaculations –
the William Burroughs school of Jismism.
Or the obviously Catholic lad
revenge on the Bothers by giving it to Jesus
inch by inch as the audience winced
and Poetry hid in the toilet.
Ah, men. Pissing out their poetry.
Where are their female counterparts?
Women poets who declare themselves
deeper than the Grand Canyon,
wetter than a Wagga Wagga flood,
hotter than a breakdown on the Nullabor,
hornier than an Italian traffic jam,
so well-endowed they make Uluru look
like the breast of a flat-chested Amazon?
Who list insertions made and accepted
with notches on belt, offhand,
by hand, look-no-hands description
and "If you don't think this is Art
you're a frigid, impotent, stuffy old fart"
conviction.
Such female poets are rare –
It seems most women suffer no illusion
that they are sitting on their poems.

LAUREN WILLIAMS

TAKING IT OUT

Once a month she takes it out on the toilet.
The dunny. The rest room. The women's. The loo.
Depending on where you were raised.
She gets whacked on booze, pops a few pills,
heads in the door marked "Ladies,"
destroys the place and the word.
Last month a record:
four doors off their hinges,
holes the shape of Tasmania,
three toilet seats heaved off –
hard-boiled eggs with the eyes poked out.
Chipboard, tile, enamel everywhere.
The sinks smiled toothy white.
News bulletins flashed round the centre:
"Damage gives manager stroke."

She doesn't know her own strength
when she drinks.
With her muscles she could go far as something.
Sixteen, slim as a hope,
she believes in weakness as much as others
believe in God's help. Those who would help.
Her boyfriend, in between fights,
knows she's no fool.
She lives like she drives
(no licence for either) –
both hands on the wheel, foot to the floor,
and to hell with the weather.
And she's cunning even when she's off the road.
She never forgets the layout of the ladies,
always spares her favorite cubicle.
Everyone needs a room of their own.

Next week, the manager lays down the law,
a new version for her.
Behavior contract, work for repairs,
before he forgives, hoping his bosses will, too,
and the insurance mob, tallying this year's binges.
Three weeks later, things are better.
Only one door's off its hinges.

JERI KROLL

SHAKY STEPS INTO EXTREME OLD AGE

You know you're getting old
When your children start scolding you
For doing anything the least bit chancy
that could get them called in later
When it all goes wrong.

And then voices aimed at you
Start getting slower and louder
And emptier of content
Until there's hardly any point in mentioning
That you can hear very well, thank you
Because nobody's saying a damned thing.

The people enquiring about
How you are
Or if you have eaten
Or where you've had your nap
Turn to whoever you're with
And ask them.
What do the mannerless louts imagine
Has happened to your I.Q.?

Then after a while whatever you do
Or wear or sing or eat or say
Gets the same bland, indulgent response.
"We must let them have their funny little ways,"
They keep on saying.
Why?
And every damned remark you make
Is greeted with a silly smile.

And finally they rake in God-forsaken groups
Of chronic non-performers
And force a clutch of you to herd together
To sit there by the hour
And then CLAP.
You know you're really sunk
When you're powerless even to boo
    the buggers.

But searching you out every now and then
    in your twilight
Will be random strangers earning their
    Brownie points
In community good-deeding;
And even quite small children
Will be drilled in it
With you as their lay figure.

Your sons will sit with you often
Enduring their own virtue
And sneaking quick looks at their watches
As they force dry, stretched smiles
Until they can, at last,
Allow themselves to depart.
And you won't even dare to snarl
Or let rip one final fart
In case you hurt somebody's bloody feelings

KATE O'NEILL

HOW THE TIMES CHANGED

For Ricky Morris

The old days it was the A-B-C,
Punishment and Rehabilitation,
One-letter-in-and-out-a-week!
Tobacco-and-toothpaste-money!
Top-lips-top-buttons-done-up!
'H' Division's holy hypocrisy,
If-ya'll-give-it-ya'll-cop-it,
'fnot-from-the-screw-the-con!
The simple order of men 1-2-3
serving the first 2 centuries,
gone with time and technology,
Remote and Management Control,
colour tvs and contact visits,
If-you-wann'a-kiss-the-missus,
bend-over-and-touch-your-toes!
prefab concrete constructions,
two heads to each prison cell,
kid with killer, mad with bad,
old lag in with the young lad.
How the times changed nothing,
some things much like some men
never changing but by moniker;
Jika Jika, alias 'K' Division,
Jika Jika, computer-age prison
with a stolen, Stone Age name.

ALLAN ERIC MARTIN

SMOOTH UNICORNS

Coincidentally,
twice last week, I was given unicorns.
The first was from a student, on a card
to say thank-you. This displayed
La Dame a La Licorne on a Fifteenth
Century French tapestry. The second,
my daughter colored-in in mauve, tore out
from her pony coloring book. They both
have a velvet, nasal smile. The French
one is cream, on tip-toe (tip-hoof,
rather) with arched forelocks and a long
rump like a sexy girl. The lion
on the other side of La Dame looks male –
although nude, too. Its buttock is round
and shorter. The pretty horse, which my daughter
empurpled has swishy hair with
long curls and a ribbon of the sort
I can never tie correctly on her toys.
It gazes out at the indulgent Sun – who
here seems smiling sucker for such small
foals – with tip-tilted muzzle and horn.
Its horn is thick and squat like soft
ice cream, but the French one
has a horn as stylised and tall
as a steeple up above its modern fringe.
You could stake doughnuts on it. Before,
I thought of unicorns as male power-symbols, said
– rather oddly – to represent purity in
the company of virgins, but these
two are complacently girls, the bridge
of each nose acute with pleasure, and
both mouths curved plump with promise,
and with poise. The background of
the tapestry is majestic red. My daughter
hasn't often the patience yet to color-
in the background of her gifts. The French
artist filled in spaces with obsession.
Every fraction has a plume, bloom, marmoset,
rabbit or the Lady's little whippets.
The blossoms gleam with gilt. There is
full fruit on every branch. The trees
have slim boles higher than the horn,
or the half-mooned standards that the lion
and Cette Dieuxieme Dame, La Licorne,
bear. On the Lady's train, a baleful
pug puppy sits in state, more like
a lion than is the man-lion, whose tongue
swells out from his hook-teeth like burst proud flesh.
The gowns of La Dame and her maid are rich,
baubled blue and gold; themselves
stiff tapestries within the bustling cloth.
My daughter's colored-in the baby horse
so finely now that the diamonds on its flank
are left untouched by wild indigo. In
Melbourne, where we just went to collect
the Victorian prize for my poems about her,
the Premier's dress delighted my daughter:
like a warm midnight glinting round with stars.
She told Joan Kirner:
"You look like a sparkle pony", in true praise,
and drew a small wombat for her.
I think the thesis
that smooth unicorns can be women eases
my blood. My daughter takes it for granted. That
it deflates medieval celibacy, one guesses
never matters. The tapestry glitters, whether
black or iron-red – and, complex as a child's bed,
is cluttered safe with infants of all species.

JENNIFER MAIDEN

TWO POEMS BY LEON SLADE

AUGUST DAYS

Left to choose between Lotto, football
and municipal elections, we do as compelled.
August is a cruel month, too.
I voted for the successful candidate
who didn't show up at the booth
to introduce himself and shake my hand:
my neighbor voted for the loser because he did.
My brother-in-law, in a three way contest,
more rationally cast his lot
for the contestant who hadn't stood each year
to give electors a choice and a broken day,
who hadn't parked her car across two bays
and caused a further walk to poll,
and pleased his wife and daughter.
Cynically my son observed that, in every case,
the candidate drawn at the top of the ticket
enjoyed a landslide win.
Democrats applaud their symbols.
The press relegates results to the sporting page,
and concentrates its editorial guns
on Eastern Europe and talk of the triumph
of democracy through martyrdom.

ON SPRING OFFSPRING

The kids are engaged
at the Caulfield races
making selections
of names for my grandchildren.
Inbred class requires a little rough:
blood of the shires toughens
the gloss of a good black type family.
Harry is legged up.
Andy dislikes shortened handles,
nicknames. If we call him that,
the old man will saddle him
with Handbrake, he says.

I get the gist, suggest
it's time for us to put
Harry down for Scotch and the MCC.
Oh no, says Andrew, he's
a younger son, not the first
and nominates his elders.
The girl will be Rachel.
Only the God of the list knows
why mother chose my name
or never had me christened.
I have hurried though the airports
of the world, hanging my hat
over luggage labels. A tattoo
on a girl is unbecoming.

TILL DEBT DO US PART...

Firstly, in line with your avowed preference for
a booming economy at all costs,
you run yourself heavily into debt with someone
who has megabucks to spare,
then when you are fresh out of real estate
of any sort left to sell
you start flogging off (as though there were no end of it)
the very air,
and when your new-found friends
(whom you may have formerly secretly despised)
have your whole nation
considerably short of breath,
you won't be surprised if, some sunny day,
you're cordially invited
(albeit at rather short notice)
to be present at your death,
and whether the ceremony is conducted at
a sub-tropical golf-course
or at some luxurious five-star
northern beach-front hotel
or at a board-room or two
in some other country where they never even
got around to learning to pronounce
your last name very well
will matter less than bub-kiss because
(let's face it) you weren't
very big potatoes to them
even to begin with
– being neither very strong nor very bright
nor the sort of culturally unified
group-oriented folk such perceptive people
would ever seriously contemplate being kin with...

BRUCE DAWE

ILLITERATE

In a language I cannot read he sits
across the aisle, moves limbs and torso,
head turning. How to read the clothing
Of such controlled choreography? Is he prince,
merchant, mystic, peasant? I am embarrassed
by a black man more perceptive than I.
He is remote, noble, He is fearful, rigid.

I leave not knowing who I have seen.
He is the edge of Africa, the heart of
the city of love, beyond imagination.

CONNIE BARBER

CHET BAKER AND ME

Chet Baker, a noted jazz trumpet player and drug addict, died in 1988 in mysterious circumstances after falling through the window of his hotel room in Amsterdam.

The fingers
pressed the valves of the horn
like the long ringing
of a door bell
and

the sound from the trumpet
rushed past me
like another weather.

Even now,
30 years after,
it is always a cloudless blue day
    at the beach
when I hear Chet Baker play;

the sun rippling like water
on the hoods and trunks
of '55 Chevy's,
the chrome fences of bumper
too bright to bear

We all wanted to be
Chet Baker
the looks,
the voice,
the detachment that was attached,
living a life
without vibrato.

We copied him
as if this unlettered lesson
could be learned.

Eventually we all learned
other
lessons
and Chet was left
with his finger on the bell.

In Amsterdam,
a life of back against the wall
ended
when the wall
was a window.

The last flight
was a fall
to lie
on the film strip of the sidewalk
for careful citizens of the
    Netherlands
to pick their way past.

The beach at Hermosa,
the sand dinted with footprints,
is empty;
the sky a hardtop blue, scratched with contrails;
the waves skid in
showing white like light under
    a door

And I finish this
in my office
in Australia
deep in the opposite season.

L. R. HARD

HELEN DANIEL

Plotting 8, An Account of Some Recent Australian Fiction

A Moment in the Sensible Flow

Perhaps because it summons so rhythmically notions of gender, myth and landscape, playing between "unfurnished land" and "storied landscapes", the piece by Robert Dessaix in George Papaellinas' collection, *Homeland,* came to mind in my reading of recent Australian fiction. The piece is framed by two paintings and is a seductive meditation on the space between them. The first is the interior of a home: *"There's the intimacy, first of all, the notion of a refuge where you can take your ease among your middling own",* and family too, *"a moment in a sensible flow of time".* Yet *"I am politely excluded".*

The second painting, the end frame, is different:

> *A plane of squared grey at the bottom, lit blindingly this time, indifferently, by an unseen sun... These patio slabs are blank, unreadable, pure, just there, anonymous, quite uncrafted, public.*

In this painting, a wall of glass, with six oblong panes, throws back a fractured view. Two lifeless planes:

> *Now, straddling both these planes is something grimly real. A woman and a man...sit speechless at a low, round table on spindly chairs staring with vacant satisfaction at us and past us, sated, sedated by the surfaces they've come to rest amongst. And ramming down between them is a vertical line of white, quite thin, a window frame.* (154)

On the one hand, enclosure, privacy and intimacy, and on the other, lines of fracture, slabs of division, sedative surfaces. And the light which glares on the one and is muted, softened, in the other.

Recent fiction too is lit by different flares of light and dark, different notions of intimacy and fracture, of sensuality within the sensible flow of time, division within the fragmentation of surface. There is too a sense of the "blank", the plane of squared grey, the unclaimed, the anonymous.

Some novels are driven by the lure of intimacy, family and sensuality, Dessaix's first painting. In Gillion Mears' *The Mint Lawn,* a play of light and dark amid the sensible flow of time, and the darker side of family in Maureen de Vallance's *Edie's Little Girl, The One That...* Davida Allens' *The Autobiography of Vicki Myers* straddles planes, plays lustily across the lines, never sedated by the surfaces. And in Helen Garner's *Cosmo Cosmolino,* a household of strangers inhabiting seperate panes, wait for intimacy or an angel amid biblical images of desolation and salvation.

Other novels are crisscrossed by lines of intersection, scribbles across public space: the face of a city in Victor Barker's *The Tangier Script* and, in Garry Disher's *Flamingo Gate,* another city, with stories of characters without history, clustered around a block of flats. And just below the surface, a glimpse, an apprehension of the squared grey, the blank and the anonymous.

There are other enclosures too: in *The Second Bridegroom,* Rodney Hall's narrator enclosed in a shed on the edge of an alien landscape, caught between two planes. In *Double-Wolf,* Brian Castro's Sergei Wespe, enclosed, *encased* as Wolf-Man, life and writings usurped by Freud. Atkinson's Grey family, hidden in the valley and become the stuff of legend. And Rob Drewe's Ned Kelly, in *Our Sunshine,* about to be enclosed in the armour of myth.

Which is also Dessaix's third painting, in the centre of the piece. Another blankness, the slit in the armour:

> *It's the blank bluish slit, not the arid ochre plain, I find so unsettling...Is it because this half-mythic figure seems to be riding through the landscape without encountering it, as if from another dimen-*

sion? Or is he so at one with it that he's become transparent? (151 *Homeland*)

lit blindingly this time

Running between flaring light and the mute black figure of myth, Robert Drewe's *Our Sunshine* is a novel about Ned Kelly's becoming enarmoured, becoming myth. The great icon of Kelly's armour enters the narrative only at a point when Kelly is already enclosed and masked within claddings of stories, gossip, the collective imperatives and fabrications that make up myth: only then does the figure of legend don the armour.

From the start it is clear that this is a novel about a war of words as much as gunfire and blood. After the shootings at Stringybark, Ned reflects on the word the newspapers use:

> Massacre, there's a word. Worse then killing, worse than murder, worse than slaughter. Massacre's what they said we did. *What I, the monster did...*Massacre sounds like butchering the innocents. Massacre has the soft, crispy-moist, knife-blade sound, the stabbing, hacking, ruptured-vein sound. Massacre sounds like Indians slashing and scalping in the night. Massacre sounds like dead women and children, not armed troopers. Massacre doesn't sound like four men against four men. Massacre sounds like you relish flesh explosions and mutilations. *The sort of thing a maniac does.* (19)

Robert Drewe

Throughout the novel, there is a constant drumming, as if Ned Kelly, Our Sunshine, is pounding on the inside of the myth, struggling to be heard above layers of words and fabrications in which he is trapped.

The novel is poised in the last hours before Kelly's capture at the Glenrowan Hotel, not just poised, taut and stiff with tension in those last hours. But inside that still, cramped waiting, it is also rippling and spilling out in circles of memory, reflection and dream, a quicksilver spiral of time, memory, self and image, flashing and flaring through the past, across the tension of waiting.

Our Sunshine is pitted against our complacency, the belief that we know that story, pitted against myth. The ending, foreknown and expected throughout, yet breaks over the reader with horror and shock. Against all the flare and flash through landscape, drumming through this splendid novel are the rhythms and sensual energies of the language Drewe offers the silent figure trapped in the armour of myth, a language at once wry, witty, and savage and yet marvellously exuberant.

an unfurnished land

For Australian readers, Rodney Hall's *The Second Bridegroom* has that *frisson* of recognition that is to do not only with convict and colonial images but with the *shape* of landscape and enclosure, the dimensions of place. In compelling circles of narrative, with paradoxes of landscape, settlement, language and vision rising from every movement, the novel turns between competing images of enclosure and journey, absence and presence.

In July 1836, the narrator, a young convict and apprentice printer from the Isle of Man, transported for forgery, escapes and, in a blur of myopia, blunders off into the alien landscape. For nearly two years, he travels inside a ceremonial "circle of Men", Aboriginal protectors who form a wandering circle of enclosure. Inside the circle, the narrator is also a figure of self-imprisonment, isolated and mute yet awakening to an Aboriginal sense of the land – until he breaks the contract of his sanctuary. Ultimately the circles of narrative close around a climactic night of fire and death at the settlement, a fire light that seems to lick menacingly over the whole novel.

Captive in a shed in the newest British colony, in 1838, he squints into the gloom, writing letters

of confession and memory of his journey and of his past in the oldest British colony, the Isle of Man. Here, Hall draws on Manx fable and Celtic myth, including the ancient story of the Goddess and the two bridegrooms.

At once lyrical, elegant and gripping, *The Second Bridegroom* reaches large into notions of art and forgery, fable and faith, landscape and truth. Together with *Captivity Captive,* winner of the 1989 Victorian Premier's Award, *The Second Bridegroom* is part of a trilogy which will include a middle volume, set in 1868. The trilogy I believe will be monumental in Australian writing, a trio composition of voices playing over patterns of enclosure, exile and absence.

storied landscapes

In Hugh Atkinson's *Grey's Valley,* stories lick around the unknown, beget new stories and fatten into legend. First published five years ago, *Grey's Valley* is a dark gem of contemporary Australian writing and one of three novellas in Atkinson's new book, *A Twist in the Tale. Grey's Valley* is in part a fable of foundation, of pioneering and settlement, the bonds of family and place. Yet Atkinson twists the conventions of the family saga to explore the nature of legend, the way stories change shape and sheen through generations of telling, become a recitation of communal lore.

Set on the plains beyond the Blue Mountains from the mid-nineteenth century, its hundred-year passage follows the family line of Alec Grey in the enclosure of a hidden, lush valley, of almost edenic abundance. The valley itself is more than a presence, almost a character, as if with its own intentions. With his prosperity, his brooding silence, his implacable purpose, Alec Grey becomes the stuff of legend and lore which clings to the family and mutates with the times. Here, legends are caught in the act of shaping and tangling themselves around the unknown, all beautifully told with a rhythmic, incantatory style, which carries biblical resonances.

The two new novellas are slight and uneasy companions. A few characters from *Grey's Valley* appear briefly in 'The Burial of Robinson Crusoe', which is set in the same district in the early 1930s, in the old gold town of Sunny Corner – once a thriving gold rush town, now shrunk into itself. When a mute stranger arrives in Sunny Corner, winking and cackling and clutching his jar of reef gold, he awakens old dreams of renewal and gold. While it toys with things hidden, secret and underground, this novella takes on a light, comic air, with touches of unlikely yarn. The third novella, 'The Language of Flowers', is a gently polished narrative of a cycle of hope and despair in a marriage disturbed by outside pressures and internal defeats. Although this counterpoints the collective and legendary thrust of the other two, the trio of *A Twist in the Tale* is an unlikely gathering. Yet *Grey's Valley* is a masterly work and perhaps one such gem is enough.

I am politely excluded

Reaching back to European origins and myth, Brian Castro's *Double-Wolf* lifts out of turn of century Europe and pre-Revolution Russia and loops through the twentieth century to Australia. The novel is set in parentheses, literally with brackets opening and closing the narrative, but also thematically, in parentheses of history, culture, place, psychoanalysis, sexuality, writing, fabrication and paradoxes of interpretation.

Winner of the 1991 *Age* award for fiction, *Double-Wolf* is rich fare, profound, witty, inventive, a bold questioning of the origins of Freud's influence on the culture and philosophy of the twentieth century – and the truth of Freud's interpretations. Its core is a reconstruction of the life of Sergei Wespe, Russian aristocrat and the Wolf-Man, one of Freud's most famous cases, which became the basis of his theories of infantile sexuality and the interpretation of dreams. Here, with marvellous wit, Wolf-Man is a writer whose writings were usurped by his reader and interpreter, Freud.

From Sergei in Vienna in 1972, aged 85, it cuts to and from Katoomba in 1978, where, prowling the streets and the second-hand bookshop, is Artie Catacomb, Australian con-man, impostor, former undercover agent of the American Freudians, ghost writer of Wolf-Man's (auto)biography, and later, diarist, offering his own Catacomb Diaries. Between Artie, the con-man biographer and Wolf-Man, his subject, between Sergei and Freud, Castro plays over their mutual dependencies, writers and dissemblers all.

The doubleness theme runs also in matters of history, hemispheres, sexuality, reason and truth, with much about the edges of fiction and history, and the shapes of narrative. With a dual thrust, the novel keeps turning backwards, along notions of retroversion in many guises. The energies of the novel double up too: the constant intellectual appeal and yet the vitality and color of time and place. Prowling through the century, *Double-Wolf* is an impressive novel, at once elaborate and a free-wheeling, ludic work about life as "a game with the Other".

a fractured view

Victor Barker's first novel, *The Tangier Script,* also reaches back through time and history, but here the main character is Tangier, a city which "vibrates with messages, present, past and future", city of intersections, contradictions and labyrinthine alleyways, where spies and history inhabit the shadows. Like William Burroughs "cut-ups", the narrative scissors in and out of a collage of figures in Tangier from ancient times to the present, with contemporary characters and historical figures jostling each other across centuries.

Here "flesh and bone must share the narrow streets with spirit and essence". Here too, contemporary characters must share the narrative alleyways with Hannibal and his elephants, Numidians, Berbers, ancient Roman sailors, Moors and Carthaginians, plus intelligence agencies during the Second World War, as well as such diverse figures as Guy Burgess, Mark Antony and Cleopatra, Prime Minister Gladstone, Barbara Hutton, Daniel Defoe, Ian Fleming, Gaddafi, Eisenhower, and General Franco, to mention a few.

There are also some arcane touches from the I Ching, the Kabbalah and the Tarot, hermetic teachings, the Library of Alexandria, the Adepts of Fes, the sect of the Children of Fatima – and a gold bracelet that slips from one wrist to another across centuries. Meanwhile, the narrative keeps ducking down alleys, with the stories of Samuel Pepys and his lecherous brother-in-law, Balthazar St Michel, Treasurer of Tangier during the bloody siege of Tangier by Moors.

In the midst of this exotica, loosely holding the narrative together in the present are Miriam-Ann Dunne, middle-aged actress, and her lover, the film director, a story line which becomes increasingly banal. About half way through *The Tangier Script* Miriam-Ann has a mysterious swoon which the later part of the novel investigates. *(Can Fatima's Hand attract evil? Was she spooked by the old mokaddem?)* My own theory of her breakdown is exhaustion from the stress of the narrative, although, for a time, this shifting confederation of time and space is intriguing.

just there, anonymous

Garry Disher's *Flamingo Gate,* a novella and six short stories, is a mix of inner suburban gritty realism and a mood of urban enigma, with the menace of clandestine patterns and the dark underside of city. The style is calculated, playing coolly along surfaces, relying on gaps and silences, but faintly slick. With recurring details, such as makes of car, different logos, the six short stories seem about to spill or distil into the next. Clustered around a Fitzroy block of flats called Flamingo Gate, the stories are of characters without history, the only context geographical, Fitzroy and the Flamingo Gate flats.

The whole has a filmic quality, with details stirring at the edge of vision, and in the title novella, the main character, Maslen, a lawyer, is also a devotee of 1950s crime films. Maslen becomes intrigued by the activities of a serial killer, the "Safeway Slasher" and plays detective, calculating the time and place of the fourth and fifth murders. For a time the 'Flamingo Gate' novella is gripping as Maslen disturbs and intrudes on the pattern of murders. Yet with the clustered stories, the whole becomes too calculated and the connections finally seem spurious, gesturing at larger purposes across anonymous blanks.

sedated by the surfaces

In Gillian Mears' *The Mint Lawn,* her first novel after two acclaimed short story collections, *Ride a Cock Horse* and *Fineflour,* I had difficulty distinguishing between the tedium of country town life and the tedium of reading about the tedium of country town life. Although it won the *Australian*/Vogel award, for me the mystery of *The Mint Lawn* is why it takes so long for Clementine to understand obvious truths about her unhappy marriage, her affair with Thomas Flight, her attitude to her dead mother and her inability to leave the town.

While I delighted at times in the immediacy of the writing, with memories of childhood and adolescence opening and closing within the present, yet the habitual gait of narrative is a trudge. Page 269: Clementine realises "it is quite possible I used the dark, grey, glass of memory to plunder my mother's past as some kind of justification for the affair I had with Thomas." Page 283: "in both my mother and me, no more than a need for the exotic or the erotic to alleviate tedium." And at long last, she realises her love for her music teacher, later her husband, was "girl-love and should never have been taken seriously".

Clementine's husband, Hugh, is never taken seriously, by Mears. He is an easy target, mocked for his bad taste and his favorite Lady Diana teatowel, or portrayed as darkly repulsive with an array of unlovely bodily activities. So why stay for seven years? And why such gratuitous mystery about her mother's death?

Like Clementine's mother, with her mint lawn, "an attempt to transform the great and stretching tedium...to eroticise the ordinary", I wished there were some lawny counterpart available to the reader to transform the tedium of the narrative. If Clementine in her misery was driven to eating lollies and icecreams, I suppose that was a clue. At one point, Clementine recalls Cairo's saying, "If you listen very hard...it's possible to hear the mites piercing the rose stem and sucking the sap". The novel is more than listening to the mites piercing the rose stems of the town, but it was a relief to read in the biographical notes that Mears' next novel is to be set in South Africa.

take your ease among your middling own

Like *The Mint Lawn,* Antonio Casella's novel, *The Sensualist,* has some powerful and passionate writing, in a declaration of difference between husband and wife, but it moves at a trudge. Here, Nick Amedeo, of Sicilian origin, is a shrewd and ambitious businessman, full of aggressive, confident energies. His wife, Joyce, introverted, aware of "an oscillating reality which tends to mutate and escape". For Nick things like reality are fixed. With his pride in "the Amedeo touch", Nick is a type, forceful, stubborn, complacent, with an attractive reckless energy but the narrative about him is never reckless, content with the sedative surface.

A third voice is that of Steve, loyal employee and quasi-son, and, among the three voices, for a time Casella engages different viewpoints on Nick and his domineering presence. But the limitations of Nick so clearly drawn at the outset become the limitations of the novel too. Incredibly, after years of general complacency, changes in the marriage, the family, even the reconstruction of memories of Sicily, are crowded into a single weekend and accelerated beyond belief. Although the movement between the three voices sometimes works, *The Sensualist,* like Mears' novel, is too long and predictable, and faintly cloying.

something grimly real

The darkness of families, in Maureen de Vallance's novella, *Edie's Girl, The One That...,* which begins succinctly, poised in scenes from Edie's childhood, as she is wrenched from her family to her aunt's home and back again. Like brush strokes on a canvas, the opening is assured, moving across silences in Edie's life. It moves then to Edie's life with her husband, Paddy, and her two children, among itinerant workers living in NSW caravan parks. What seemed a succinct and stylish move across a surface, conjuring pictures that lingered, becomes instead a skid. Content to leave the aftermath of Edie's fractured childhood unexplored, de Vallance only hints at the dark tangles of Edie's character and, for much of the novel, Edie is remote and dull.

The plot focuses on the death of Edie's baby daughter in a swimming pool in the caravan park, narrated through the fractured time sequence, as if to suggest a mystery of circumstance, while remaining relentlessly obvious. The real focus of the author's attention appears to be the sexual entanglements of Edie and Paddy with their neighbors in the caravan park, with exhausting detail about varieties of sexual position and kinds of grunting. Although the writing lifts the account of Paddy's and Edie's grief over the drowning, attempts to explore the moral attitudes of the characters and the townspeople are token and the novella slides away into a vague dismay.

Now, straddling both these planes

Rapid and fiery negotiation between two selves, in the first novel by artist Davida Allen, *The Autobiography of Vicki Myers: Close to the Bone.* Racing lustily across the lines, straddling the planes, this is a raw play of two voices, never sated, never sedated. "As a scavenger the artist lurks, as a servant the mother sighs, as a lover the woman grabs...Guilt everywhere." Vicki Myers is scavenger, servant, lover, mother, artist, all in fierce contention, in guilty trysts with each other. Mother, enraged and suffocated by domestic rituals with her four children, the daily domestic horror, the artist conjuring powerful and savage images out of the stuff and ravage of the contest.

The novel begins and ends with a portrait and, in the space between, constant movement between the I and she, each keeping watch on the contestant self. "I AM a dismembered woman: artist's womb with pubic-hair apron". The language is urgent and passionate, the narrative thrust impatient, irritated by hollows of time and running from peak to peak across years. No loitering here, it runs down years, from Vicki's adolescence, her marriage, her exhibitions, her pregnancies, down supermarket aisles to easel. With fiery energy running between the two voices, each subsuming the other, it is a remarkable first novel, naked and glowing.

a vertical line of white

With themes of loyalty, loneliness, intimacy and

Helen Garner ©Ponch Hawkes

communal living, Helen Garner's *Cosmo Cosmolino* is at once faithful to the domain of her earlier work and yet pushing into new territory about death, religion, soul and the sanctity of the mundane. A novella and two stories, or a novel in three dissonant movements, *Cosmo Cosmolino* begins with dark harbingers, angels of death, crucifix figures, and infernal images of underworld, with despair waiting to pounce, before the whole thrusts to celebration.

As if the first movement within a musical form, the first story, 'Recording Angel', ushers in concerns of loyalty and keeping faith which the second story contests. Here, the illness of a friend, the keeper of an intimate record of the narrator's life, provokes images of death and shock, from a glimpse of a figure in cruciform on a blank wall to a sense of dark shadow, as if "Something in soft soles was keeping pace with me...padding along silently". Like the extra cello in a quintet, the shadow prowls, as if "the bad dream of the quartet, brooding, ravening outside the fold, and its argument was doubt and panic, a desolation as yet unlived". The writing prowls too, brooding and ravening.

The second short piece, 'A Vigil', counterpoints the first, through the story of Raymond's disloyalty and desertion, his complicity in a death by default. With dark brilliance, this story builds to an horrific and infernal sequence of grey underworld and crematorium ovens, where the writing is ablaze with dark energies, a fiery moral passion that is stern and relentless, yet beautifully controlled in the telling.

Yet the trio that makes up *Cosmo Cosmolino* is not full of despair and the title piece prowls around, unearthing possibilities of celebration. In motion as if by its own volition, the story starts with Janet and Maxine, then admits Ray who appears one day, several years after the end of 'A Vigil'. The trio of strangers become a communal household in Melbourne. Although there is nostalgia for the 1970s, the focus is now, the 1990s, amid New Age philosophies and a house now chaotic, ramshackle, littered with the past.

The three inhabit separate panes. Janet, the owner, is forty-five, conscious of the "fleetingness of things" and the makeshift arrangements of reality. Maxine is enclosed in her shed, carving and creating things like a cradle, a ritual bride doll, out of twigs and leaves. Beneath the doll hanging cruciform above the bed, she waits for her angel to declare himself. Ray is a sombre, restless figure, fighting off his own inner demons, but for Maxine he is sent, a courier with celestial purposes, an angel. A figure of light, Maxine has a weird innocence, awkward, stick-like, and oblivious, a serenity that is otherworldly and weirdly memorable.

In this title piece, with characters stumbling into the secrets of the others, there are some rough edges of plot on which it snags and slows. The surface of it is sometimes disappointing. Even so, *Cosmo Cosmolino* seems to me a powerful book, which I, not usually keen on Garner's work, find impressive. Motifs run like veins beneath the surface of the trio pieces, motifs which are ancient and biblical. Garner keeps summoning up ritual motifs and religious emblems, shaping them anew and anointing them with contemporary meanings. Beneath the surface of *Cosmo Cosmolino* is a profound engagement with the sanctity of the mundane, until the final bold movement, with a figure soaring upward.

storied landscapes

A figure in cruciform, a shed, armour, a swimming pool, a mint lawn, a block of flats, a bride doll, a gold bracelet, a Lady Diana teatowel, a supermarket aisle, a circle of Men, a dismembered woman, *massacre,* communal lore, mites and rose stems, a game with the Other, alleyways, something in soft soles, an easel.

> *There's the intimacy, first of all, the notion of a refuge where you can take your ease among your middling own.*

blank, unreadable, pure, just there, anonymous, quite uncrafted, public.

Now, straddling both these planes is something grimly real.

A moment in the sensible flow of Australian fiction.

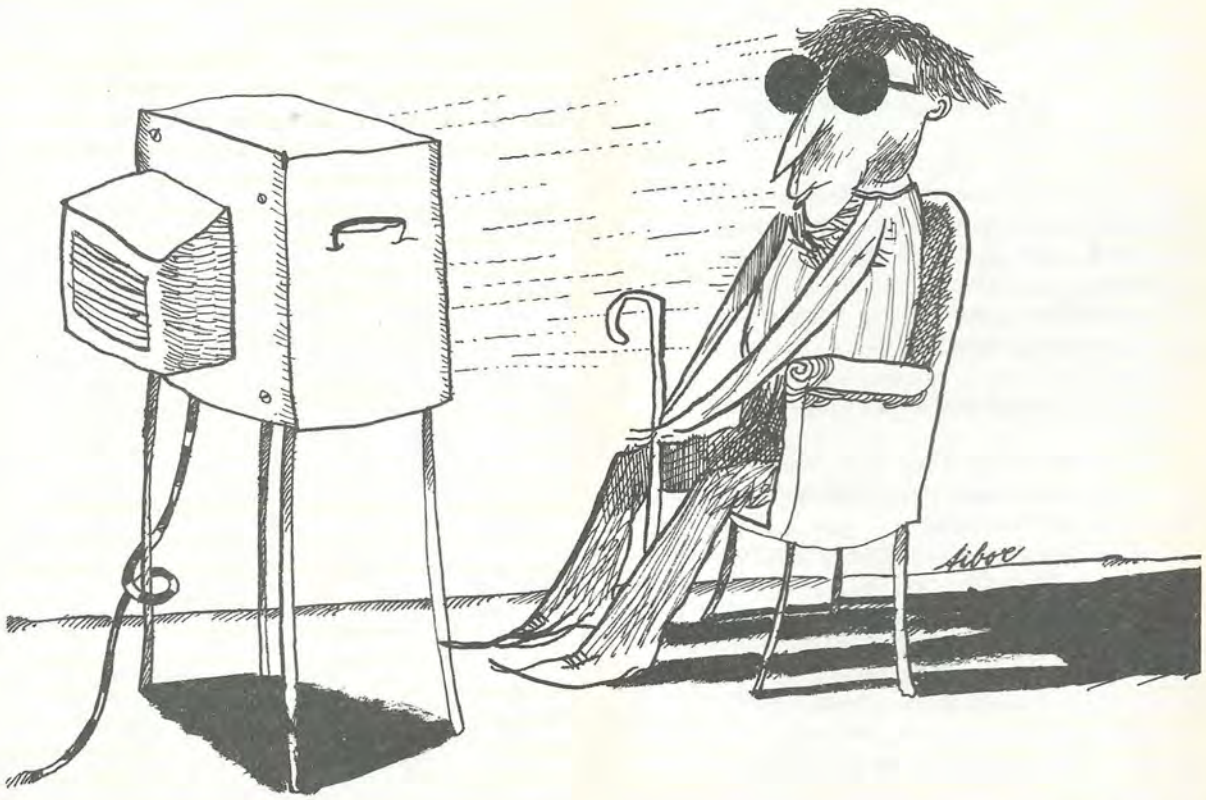
A fractured view.

BOOKS DISCUSSED:

Davida Allen: *Close to the Bone: The Autobiography of Vicki Myers* (Simon & Schuster/New Endeavour Press, $12.95).
Hugh Atkinson: *A Twist in the Tale* (Penguin, $16.95).
Victor Barker: *The Tangier Script* (Simon & Schuster/New Endeavour Press, $12.95).
Antonio Casella: *The Sensualist* (Hodder & Stoughton, $24.95).
Brian Castro: *Double-Wolf* (Allen & Unwin, $19.95).
Maureen de Vallance: *Edie's Little Girl, The One That...* (Simon & Schuster/New Endeavour Press, $12.95).
Garry Disher: *Flamingo Gate* (Imprint, $12.95).
Robert Drewe: *Our Sunshine* (Picador, $14.95).
Helen Garner: *Cosmo Cosmolino* (McPhee Gribble, $29.95).
Rodney Hall: *The Second Bridegroom* (McPhee Gribble, $29.95).
Gillian Mears: *The Mint Lawn* (Allen & Unwin, $19.95).

Quotations from George Papaellinas (ed.): *Homeland* (Allen & Unwin for Carnivale, 1991)

Helen Daniel is the author of Liars: Australian New Novelists *(Penguin, 1988) and the editor of* Expressway *(Penguin, 1989), now in its fourth printing, and* Millennium *(Penguin, 1991).*



Jiri Tibor Novak

JOHN KERR

Smile

"How's Sam?" said Simon, replacing his glass on the bar.

Simon's enquiry was standard for Alex and Simon's fortnightly ritual meetings on Thursday at the Vine, an old-style lino-and-dartboard Richmond pub.

"OK." But his son Sam was not OK. In his father's view, Sam was sailing blind into new waters with no compass. "He's cutting a record."

The enquiry put Alex in mind of a drive to the Valhalla Cinema with his son the evening before. He asked after a friend of Sam's, Steve, the drummer in Sam's band.

"Huh? Bloody Steve! He's being a real prick. Christ, he's so bloody stupid."

"How?"

"Aw, you know how he's going out with Blanche and that."

Alex pulled up at a red light, wipers on full, a bit stoned and extra careful because of it. No more words were forthcoming.

"Yeah!" he prodded irritably. He recalled the bright-eyed Blanche, an intelligent and pretty young woman; he guessed she combined some of adulthood's good sense with the fresh innocence of youth retained; he remembered wishing Sam's stocks of the former were at such a level and that he had retained as much of the latter. Finally, Sam went on: "He's going to lose that woman the way he's going."

"How's that?" At forty-plus years, most women Alex knew complained of inattention from husbands and lovers, but Blanche was squirming under Steve's constant company, his conversational attentions, his 'hovering'. Alex felt almost certain Sam got 'hovering' from Blanche.

"And he, you know, thinks that Blanche and me are, you know..." Alex knew, said "But you're not?" and got an indignant "No!"

The movie was *Raging Bull.* The sound technician had reconstructed the noise a middle heavyweight's glove makes when it smacks heads, made it sound just as if the contender was hitting the filmgoer. There is all the difference in the world between the gentlemanly sound ringside patrons hear when a punch connects and the way it sounds conducted through a boxer's skull, direct to hammer, anvil, stirrup, drum. The progress of the contender's rise and fall unfolded. They left the cinema well pleased.

Things had gone on outside, as they always do. Rain was falling and frisky winds flung it in rushes over pools in the street, sounding like a steel brush passed over tight drum skin, as they, heads down, collars up, reached the car. Like the contender in the movie, going up or going down, they had, still, the drive home.

"Hey, Alex," said Sam brightening, "did I tell you we're cutting a record?"

"No!" This was basically good news, but the father could not simply celebrate. On the one hand it was progress, a new venture; a departure from the endless evidence of scoring dope, lying in late, hassles with Telecom, landlords and music-shop proprietors, dole cheques and checks, and all the scrapes that seemed to make up his son's life. There

were questions, and one couldn't be put in any other way:

"Who's paying for all this?" Studio time, mixing, the master, the pressing, printing the sleeve, marketing costs, distribution percentages. In short, explain the economics, forgive my disbelief that this has all been thought through. What followed was a list of players in the band, "Joe's too busy saving the rainforest," for example, with the chorus "And he's got no money". The hoped-for Polygram was not mentioned. In the manner of the last green bottle, emerged Steve, drummer, driver and singer, of the number Blanche and Steve, now financier. The father changed the subject, then:

"What do you think about Blanche anyhow?"

Are you fucking her? was a question he thought of and rejected. He'd soon know. The joint Sam was rolling received wet finishing touches, he lit up and hurled himself into the paternal trap: "She is – " a pause followed that signalled he had thought about this and had organised his thoughts; it also allowed for a lungful of dope – "the most superb woman I know. She is the kindest, most generous, lovely, sweetest, good-natured, friendliest..." and more in that mode.

"So, if she wasn't fucking Steve, you'd be up her like a rat up a drainpipe if you could?"

"Aw, shit, Alex. *No way*. No way would I..." and various revealing protests about his strict morality in this matter. Also the unfortunate unreconstructed turn of phrase was reviled in passing as anti-progressive and insensitive. This speech was The Mate's Bird classic from the *Declaration of Tinnie Hooper* album, odd stoned in a rainswept parked-car father-and-son talk, but it was the same old standard.

As Alex understood it, Steve the Salesman-Drummer went to work during the day, Blanche the Student visited Sam the Unemployed-Lead Guitarist, and they sat around, went for walks, looked longingly at each other, acknowledged how fine Steve was and longed to tear off each other's clothes.

They finished the joint and Alex's inescapable Presbyterianism found voice in a short sermon. Remember: Steve has been the friend, unique in your acquaintance thus far, who has remained faithful though time and distance, writing to you in other lands where fate took you. Note: the band depends on Steve, 1 vocals, 2 drums, 3 frontman, 4 trucking gear, 5 popularity with publican employers and 6 sobriety, dependability, good sense. Think: Steve has a perfect right to feel put out if the EP sales don't recover investment, as is highly likely. Consider: he is crazy about her. Imagine: how he will feel if you take his girlfriend. Question: what is treachery? All this Alex said, and tried not to thunder. Sam said "Yeah, I know that" and "Fair enough" a lot. Even before he had finished Alex realised fatherhood's duties were done, probably overdone, and that the young vegetarian who heard him out was going to have the lady sunny-side up at some future date and Steve was just going to have to accommodate that.

Sam wanted to change the subject and he found the bridge. Alex concentrated on not sounding cross, maintaining his disinterested analytical Solomon's Judgement mode.

"Actually, Alex, Blanche is sort of on the record, actually."

"How come?"

"Two of the tracks are our own stuff, and Steve wrote one called 'Smile'. Sort of about Blanche's smile. Kind of 'inspired by' or 'dedicated to' I suppose you could say. Sounds sappy, but it's really pretty good, you know. It's got a, I don't know, sort of *bluesy* thing, you know?" Alex didn't, but he was used to that in discussion with musicians. What he heard was more evidence of the pedestal on which Steve had placed Blanche, a love song to honor her, and no apparent understanding of this from Sam.

"What else is on it?"

Sam put the seat right back, stretched his long legs and cupped his hands behind his head. Broke, he had done a lot of walking last summer and his sun-bleached hair was flaxen, green under street lamp glow. Sam talked about cover versions of music by long-dead black men working in joints Alex knew nothing of in Chicago and The South. That these tunes were out of copyright was a mercy; no law suits from EMI at least. Sam was happy. Alex was happy. The wind eased. Raindrops, few now but big ones, plopped on bonnet and roof, like a drummer flicking a bongo drum to see if the skin was tight. Inside conversation dried up the way it does late at night. Goodnights.

This time we will talk more. No dope. Not his place. Not here. Pub. Alex rang.

"Sure. OK if Steve comes along too?"

Damn. "Sure, Sam."

Before they got to the pub, Sam had to have food. Alex parked outside Short Stop Pizza and Sam left the front passenger's seat. The muffled roars of cars rose and fell as drivers made their way straight off the freeway and too fast along Burnley Street.

He turned to Steve in the back seat, a dark outline lit from behind: "How're things, Steve?" led to the news that Steve and Blanche were, as a number, cancelled. Alex's eyes stared straight ahead, fixed

on the receding traffic. Steve was "pretty upset" about that, "but life must go on." The much-married Alex experienced a longish moment of confusion while the tail lights grew smaller and blinkers blinked, a truck's slipstream rocked the car and Steve's words might have been those of a wah-wah girl for all the sense he made to his listener. Alex's thoughts drifted off-limits. Judgement returned more slowly than it left. Tuning back in he was somewhat reassured. Steve's good sense and feet-on-the-ground attitudes marked him out as a fellow survivor. He judged Steve's easy nature, Latin looks, infectious laugh, attentiveness, consideration and excellent position as the presenter for a rock'n'roll band would soon see those other fish in the sea swimming through a sea of sound to look more closely at that generous mouth, those curly black locks. Yes, solace should not prove difficult for Steve to find.

There were other things Steve wanted to do. He had saved up for an overseas trip.

"Then, well, this record thing came up and, well, it was the last chance for the band to make a record doing the sort of music we've been doing up until now, so..."

"So you spent the money for the trip on the record?"

"Yeah, basically." Steve laughed his unique careless youthful laugh. You don't hear men over thirty laugh about substantial savings diverted, Alex noted as he nodded.

Sam returned wolfing a small vegetarian pizza. They joined the stream down Burnley Street to a cold hotel bar, told jokes and went three ways.

This time Alex arranged they'd eat, then watch two Westerns. At the video shop Alex chose *High Noon* and *Cat Ballou.* If Baby Bear's porridge was right for Goldilocks, then the strong women and the responsible citizen-sheriff of *High Noon* would be just right for Sam, *Cat Ballou* for laughs. Couple of joints for Sam, bottle of red for Alex and a glass each of Stolichnaya to be drunk with ceremony, sophistication and moderation, standing before the fridge, a short account of the Russian way of doing it, but don't smash the glasses please. The hamburgers, textured vegetable protein for the sensibilities of the guest, were ready to fry, Extra Virgin Olive Oil for the cholesterol worries of the host. The chips tossed in mixed herbs, onion and garlic just needed crisping.

Exactly how Blanche's name came up, Alex could not later recall but he finished printing some business letters in the sure knowledge the lead guitarist had replaced the drummer in Blanche's bed. It had to be confirmed: "You fucking her, Sam?"

"That was inevitable."

"Don't *ever* say that to me again." Alex used the words Sam's mother once used when Alex, in an agony of guilt and confusion about a tryst he had lied about and been caught out over, had said *it just happened:* "It isn't true and you know it isn't. There is going for it and not going for it. There's Yes and there's No. Your dick doesn't get out of your pants on its own. So don't kid yourself and don't kid me. The bugger who said 'It takes two to tango' wasn't a genius."

Sam looked at his father and didn't look away. "Fair enough," he said, as he often said when he did not want a fight, but he didn't look away. The son got the point, but did not think it all that relevant.

Dinner and ceremonials went well. Alex did not ask about Steve's feelings. The recording session had gone off with no more than the usual hassles of producing things. Later Sam asked if he could make a phone call and when he came back he casually asked, "Alex, is it all right if Blanche comes round later?" as he settled himself back into an armchair, stretching out in the peculiar rigid way he had of relaxing, no curves at all. The set showed *High Noon* titles frozen ready to start.

"Sure." Alex felt he should have been appalled. But he was used to sheer gall from that quarter. Besides, she was lovely and bright. Sam had once reported she thought his father was really interesting and he was impressed by this evidence of youthful perspicacity.

"That's good, because I've invited her."

Alex remained not appalled.

High Noon enjoyed great critical success with Sam. The stoned love it high, in drama, suspense, motives and issues.

Blanche arrived to watch Lee Marvin's drunken antics, but comedy was not right for the night. Alex decided thrillers, better corn and tragedy were best for stoned social television. Blanche declined wine, Victorian provisional licence driving laws, toyed with a joint just enough to be social and remain unaffected.

When Alex turned in with his paperback, he decided two corners of the triangle seemed happy enough; hoped the entire triangle had disintegrated into a happy square with a central X of affection and a new woman player. Such pretty patterns he imagined as he drifted off, but in toying with Utopia he recognised the marijuana in it. He had taken a short holiday from what life had taught him about

the messy old loose spluttering ends that emanate from love triangles.

"How's the record coming along?" Simon asked when he and Alex next met, Thursday at the Vine.

"They've recorded it and had the master tape back from the studio. It's OK apparently. Just got to cut a thousand copies, get the sleeve printed. I haven't heard it yet."

"Look, what are they doing it for, do you know?"

This pub is full of bitter lemons tonight, Alex thought. No banter, an unwatched TV set, newspapers rolled up, the busiest of them smoking. He wondered how long it would take to start a singalong, and decided there was not a note to be had until the Tigers won a Grand Final.

"Not really. A permanent record of the sort of stuff they've been playing so far. Useful for playing it to pub owners to get gigs, for agents and record producers, that sort of thing. And they intend to sell it too, eight dollars a shot."

"Where I buy my tapes – I play a lot of tapes in the car you know, like when I drove to Adelaide to see that jerk I told you about, country trips and that – there's a big sign up. 'Final vinyl clearance sale.' Why are they making a platter? Read in the *Age* tapes and CDs outsold plastic last year. Smoke?"

Alex had read it too. The local record shop's proprietor had given him the cynical trade view of self-cut music, the odds, the problems, the usual fate of such ventures, an off-hand surmise about ego motives. The economy was worsening as well. Steve was going to do his dough or a miracle would occur.

He walked in the joint. The joint was the New Moon Hotel, new residency of Plain Black Armchair, permanent line-up: Robert Collier on harmonica, sax and vocals on 'Pretty Mamma' and other tunes; Joseph ('Treeman') Greaves on bass guitar; Steve Paparella on drums and vocal; and Sam Galbraith on lead guitar. However, tonight there were seven. Big Max, eyes closed behind his spectacles, a Dreamtime Buddy Holly, Alex knew. A skinhead in a tassled waistcoat he didn't know, a boardsman. The sax player looked like the kid who played sax with Sam and Steve in the core of the band at a school concert years ago, maybe, maybe not.

Alex had not intended to be there, but Gary had rung, wanting release from the daily grind of the schoolroom that Friday, hot to trot, wanting to get lost in rock'n'roll, eager for a companion to cruise with and not to be diverted. Gary's woman's little girl had a prophecy when Alex called for him.

"I know what youse are go-ing to do."

"What?"

"Get spasticated."

"Right on!" Gary called back down the corridor. "Whatever happened to 'altered states of consciousness'? Come on, I'm dying for a bloody drink."

Then they were out of the night, past the fluorescent-lit regulars resigned to the 'bloody noise' in the 'other' bar, past the table-lit poolroom, into the smoky gloom and the sound of Plain Black Armchair and friends, a journey forty souls before them had made and sixty would make after. A journey for the blues, sax high notes wailing, winding a web of illusion of pain shared. For the drummer's high hat work, skin, cymbal, skin, cymbal, the rock beat to drive away yesterday's and tomorrow's cares and fears. To be out of it and not care what 'it' was when the bass throbs heartbeats. For a magic carpet ride behind the eyelids when the lead guitar swells up in a single note reverb and strings you up somewhere exquisite for a long second. To know someone else's girl left them, someone else's boy will be back and tough for him then too, that chasing a lover can mean hard driving all night long and no guarantees, because the song will end 24 hours from Tulsa or somewhere short of somewhere exciting in America that just might mean true love again. To share phone connection tragedies and hear hymns to night or summers in the sack looked forward to or hoped for or, more often, remembered with pain and loss and longing and regret.

Oh-oh, Blanche is attending gigs. Is that wise? Foregoing a decent period of mourning between drummer and lead guitarist? Wouldn't it be better not to be sitting on that speaker case within the blue light pool three paces in front of them both?

"What'll you have?" said Gary impatiently, fishing coins from his pocket.

"I'll get it."

"OK, scotch'n'coke. Ice." Gary was flying; Alex vowed to take it easy. He could get spasticated in a joint like this.

Steve's drums led into 'Mamma Don't Allow No Guitar Playing 'Round Here', perfect standby vehicle for Steve's raw voice and Sam's pyrotechnic plucking.

"Christ," said Gary slapping Alex's shoulder, as much to make sure he was heard as anything, "your boy can play." He was right. The drum-anchored guitar solos that picked the audience up and set them down gently as granny's cat between lap and floor proved it.

Guitar coda note, drum full point, end of song, end of bracket.

"We're going to take a short break. Bar's open, open till midnight. Don't go away. Back soon. Thank you." Steve was master of ceremonies.

A microphone whinny, temporary shutdown. Sam set his guitar aside and walked past Blanche saying he was just getting a drink, then past Alex greeting him in mid-stride with a catch-you-later and was at the bar in a trice.

Blanche turned around and smiled. Alex saluted with a raised glass.

Steve came over.

Gary asked Alex who she was.

"A friend..." said Alex to Gary, "of the band" dying on his lips as Steve joined them.

"How are things, Steve. Steve, you know Gary? Gary, Steve."

"Yeah, how are you?" said Steve.

"Great, great. You guys want a drink?"

"No thanks," said Steve.

"Beer, thanks," said Alex.

"Good bloke," said Steve of Gary.

"He is a good bloke, actually, Steve, but I've never heard you say anybody wasn't yet." Alex smiled and Steve laughed. They talked of Steve's level of satisfaction with life. There was no mention of Blanche, but the rest was an inventory of woes. Fighting with his family, bored to screams with his job to the point of leaving at the end of the month come what may and no alternatives in the wings, hassles with flatmates, half-worried about the fact he was not studying but feeling disinclined to anyhow, and, above all, a restless urge to travel, escape, be on the road, be somewhere far away from where he was.

Alex saw Steve's eyes on the clock, taking in the joint's mood. Play a hundred gigs or so and you know how long a break between brackets should be: about ten minutes. Musicians acquire a sense, too, that tells them if and how long they can stretch it. Steve looked over the crowd. Bar flat out still. None of the band had gone walkabout for an inconvenient joint, all within whistle. Tables and standing groups were still talking freely, no faces looking about pleading to the band to take them away yet, but they would any moment soon. Where was he? Oh, yes. He summarised.

"So, I'm pretty shitted off," and threw a big laugh. But there were connections between the various grumbles. Alex could see that. And they added up to a big trap. Steve could not have his overseas solution because of the combination of the things that held him where he was, some that he spoke of and some Alex guessed.

He recalled Steve's silhouette in the back seat outside Short Stop Pizza as the cars swept past, heard again that other disappointment, the cars moving, waiting for Sam.

Blanche's eye met his again and he raised his empty glass, pointed at her and her glass, his glass, the bar, a mute show of offering to buy her a drink. She smiled, nodded 'yes'. She looked a prize.

He felt the joint stirring. How long has Steve got now? Alex felt the opening of the next bracket pressing on them. He spoke quickly.

"Look, mate, you've got no money left much, some $2000 you say. You're sick of this old town, you mum, your dad. Your older sister thinks white goods are The Way and she and you are in a culture clash. The job's a dead bore, you feel you're not going anywhere here. But on the other hand you're fit, likeable, multi-talented, a good worker, confident, good-looking and curious. You want to travel. What's waiting for you in Italy? Visiting bloody rellies you've never met and getting to know your roots that are already two generations cold isn't *urgent*. Your Italian's lousy, we both know that. Ruins and all that stuff from Romulus to Mussolini won't go away. Take your two grand to Sydney and live there for a bit, *soon*. At your age," Alex gulped, thinking he must remember not to say that, stop giving advice altogether in fact, "you're all trying one another like suits..."

"We are, aren't we?" A moment's great release of laughter and a smile big enough for a Manly amusement park hoarding convinced Alex the subtext was shared. Steve got up to return to the drummer's stool, the mike, the skins, the sticks. Alex rose too. He had promised to buy Blanche a beer.

"...so whaddya got to lose?"

Alex joined Blanche on the speaker case, they exchanged pleasantries, no time for more. Gary had met some people he knew and was flying. The skinhead musician was dealing with a hitch. Sam was a bundle of wild riffs, pure chords and masterful harmonies. The band needed only Steve's introduction or the first drumbeats to pick the number from the repertoire and unleash more rock'n'roll magic for the people.

A youth with the swaying walk and exaggerated courtesy of the modestly but definitely pissed 'scused himself down on the unoccupied third of the speaker case beside Blanche.

Microphone whine announced the band were on. "Hello, again..." said Steve's amplified voice and he glanced about.

"Hey, mate," said the youth on the speaker case. "'Scuse me, do you do requests?"

"Sometimes." Steve handled drunks efficiently, but with bad grace. A professional frown of severity grew on his brow.

"Canya do some slow-hand blues?"

For a moment Steve considered it. They had plenty. Then Alex's eyes met his by happenstance and a grin broke over his face, and he decided right then to change his plan, breaking some band rule, and he said:

"Did that before. No, we're going to do one of our own compositions. It's called 'Smile'."

A slight body flick backwards. Then forward to hunch over the drums, he brought the sticks down on the minor drum in a fast tattoo, looked sideways to see where Rob was with the harmonica and to judge how long to keep the tattoo up. Rob blew. Bass came in then. Unprepared, Sam on lead floundered a bit, then caught it. Guilt? Stoned? Bit of both? The skinhead's contribution was modest at first, he'd never heard it played, but he was a music scholar with half a dozen instruments mastered and wide experience, so he found the keys soon enough. When all was in place, the sticks set the beat rock-solid, Steve eased back and up and sang his lover's blues-hymn to her smile. And to her. And to the slow-hand fan drunk on the speaker box. And to Gary, who closed his eyes and pursed his lips and put his scotch-and-coke down to rock gently to the beat. And to the two bar-keeps grateful for respite, planning to get the dishwasher going soon. And to the tables and the stand-arounds, the folk who came in from the night weary of talk that could wait anyway. And to Alex, who cherished the neatly packaged thought that Steve was telling him everything was, indeed, OK, despite life's little trials.

"How's Sam?"

"Smiling, Simon. Him and all his mates and his girlfriend, they're all smiling. Me too." A week later the bitter lemons of the Vine Hotel were all looking like plump red peppers and if nothing had really changed, Alex's feelings when asked that question certainly had.

"Christ. Look at that old bastard willya? What a crop of gin blossoms on that nose. Wonder how long he took to grow it. Sam doing all right?" said Simon a fortnight later.

It was four weeks after the New Moon Hotel gig before Alex learned what the up-shot was. He had totally mis-read Steve. The details were obscure, but Steve and Sam did not remain in communication long after that night. Plain Black Armchair got a new line-up, he heard. New lead guitarist anyway.

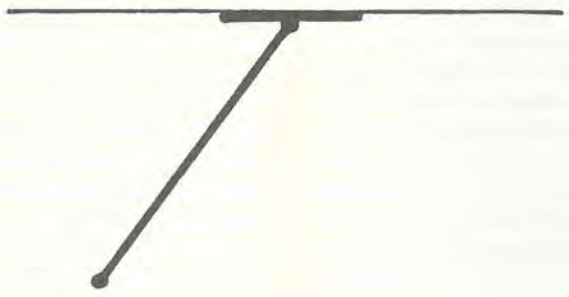
"OK, you know, just OK."

"But he's still smiling?"

"Yeah."

"Good. That's good. Jesus, you can't ask more than that. At 20, for Christ's sake."

"No, poor bastard, you can't."



Tram

Bev Aisbett

books

The True Believers

Barry Jones

Michael Pusey: *Economic Rationalism in Canberra* (Cambridge University Press, $65.00 hardcover, $25.00 paperback).

Michael Pusey, now a full Professor in Sociology at the University of New South Wales, was educated at Melbourne University, Harvard (where he gained his PhD) and the Australian National University. *Economic Rationalism in Canberra,* a long time in the making, is based on 215 ninety-minute interviews he conducted in Canberra from May 1985 to October 1986. The sample covered about one-seventh of the whole Australian government Senior Executive Service and nearly one-half of the SES in the three 'coordinating' departments, Prime Minister and Cabinet, Treasury and Finance.

He found that in the coordinating departments, officers with economics, business or accounting degrees accounted for 70 per cent of the intake. Job vacancies and promotions are filled by people with converging if not identical views. The narrow base of recruitment to the SES suggests some degree of cloning. (This may suggest some similarity to the bad old days when Catholics or Jews were routinely excluded from public service jobs in areas dominated by public school or masonic hegemony.) The chances of a Keynesian being appointed – unless he abjured or concealed his faith – are too remote to be considered. In practice, a very narrow range of views is pushed by the coordinating departments – and the range of debate *within* the department is limited. In the Budget-making process, as ministers become increasingly exhausted, the bureaucratic role impinges significantly in policy areas. The Industries Commission (like ASIO) also has a very narrow intake.

Pusey also points to the relatively narrow range of professional experience of SES recruits: regrettable, no doubt, but probably inevitable, and compares this unfavorably with previous generations. Invoking the names and experience of Nugget Coombs and his distinguished cohort of public servants forty or more years ago misses several large points: the war-time and post-war experiences which concentrated their minds wonderfully are no longer available. Pusey's analysis of the background and beliefs of SES officials is valuable – but he might have referred to the converging tendencies of other professional groups, such as lawyers, doctors, accountants or engineers.

How is 'frank and fearless' advice to be provided to ministers if the options presented are only minute variations of the same argument? The prevailing orthodoxy then becomes unanimous. Pusey insists that such convergence is not in the national interest. Even worse, if economics faculties, economic commentators and senior bureaucrats all reinforce the prevailing orthodoxy, then the essential questions which need to be asked, dissenting views and subjects which need debating, won't be ventilated.

The pursuit of the 'level playing field' became an ideological obsession in Canberra in the mid-1980s because of the domination of economic policy by the 'neoclassical' or economic rationalist model. Pointing out that the level playing field was rather elusive, and perhaps not possible except on a flat earth, was regarded as evidence of obtuseness on the part of sceptics. Treasury and Finance officials used to return from visits to Japan and Germany, where interventionist policies were skilfully and selectively applied, shaking their heads: "How could they get it so wrong?"

In the mid-1980s withdrawal of traditional industry support and scaling down funding for CSIRO were regarded as courageous steps in the direction of economic rationalism. The market knew best about product development and research – that is, some market, somewhere. But which one?

That was never addressed, because there was no debate worthy of the name within the public service. Universities were coerced into adopting corporate models (Bond? Skase?), again without much debate. Deregulation, especially the deregulation of banking, was regarded as an obvious success. There was no need to impose the prudential requirements in the 1974 Whitlam legislation (unrepealed but unproclaimed) since the market would be self-correcting. At least that was the prevailing view. The prevailing view now, evidence of some degree of self-correction, is that the case for and against deregulation, its extent and degree, should have been argued out earlier. But it wasn't.

The Bastille Day (14 July) 1987 restructuring of the Commonwealth Government with the abolition of twenty-seven departments and the creation of thirteen megadepartments was a bureaucratic coup-d'état, carried out by the Prime Minister in conjunction with senior officials, notably Michael Codd and Stewart Hamilton, following the Block Report and without any reference to Cabinet, let alone Caucus. Some senior ministers were aware of some proposed changes but, to the best of my limited knowledge (I was not in any inner circles) not one supported all the changes. No legislation was needed, only a document signed by the Governor-General and the Prime Minister and published in the Government Gazette.

There was no media speculation, no media analysis, no media commentaries about the coup. It just happened, on a scale far beyond anything depicted in 'Yes, Minister'.

Pusey's book has been harshly dealt with in articles by Peter Walsh (*Financial Review*), P. P. McGuinness (the *Australian*) and Max Walsh (*Sydney Morning Herald*) and in a review by Stephen Mills (*Financial Review*). Given the strong ideological position of each writer the reaction was predictable. Collectively they tend to confirm Pusey's thesis about sensitivity to criticism and the hijacking of economic debate.

Not one writer examined his argument or methodology. Peter Walsh provides (*AFR*, 19 Nov.) an interesting list of Cabinet "losses" by economic rationalism: failure to cut immigration, maintaining constraints on uranium mining and enrichment and giving in to "green extremism". He sees this as an invalidation of Pusey's thesis that economic rationalists set the economic agenda. Oddly, he leaves out the politics. Treasury and Finance don't have a very large constituency outside Canberra, while migrant groups and environmentalists are important at elections. Peter Walsh comments "there were *probably* [my emphasis] in both departments [Treasury and Finance] individual dissenters from the prevailing view". Gosh.

Padraic P. McGuinness provides no textual analysis. Invoking the name of E. G. Whitlam, referring to the Golden Age of the 1970s when "the chattering classes were wallowing in the public trough" is enough to damn the book out of hand.

Max Walsh attacks Pusey's sociological jargon, with some justice. He approves Ian Castle's assertion (quoted by Pusey on page 175) that "neoclassical economics, for better or worse, is the only one we got [sic]": that it is no more than the best shot at explaining contemporary economic phenomena. J. M. Keynes had the best shot at explaining economics in the period 1920-45, but not only is he no longer around, the world he described is not around either. (I may be giving Max Walsh too much of the benefit of the doubt, but I *think* this is what he is saying.) He goes on: "The USSR represents the most determined assault ever undertaken on market forces. For 70 years the communist society held them at bay; now market forces are prevailing in a most painful fashion."

"It is Dr. Pusey's personal fantasy that societal forces can be mobilised in such a fashion that market forces can be suspended indefinitely."

I find nothing in Pusey's book to sustain this idea. Indeed, the contrary can be argued. In the Moscow equivalent of Treasury and Finance under Brezhnev and even in the first years of Gorbachev, there would have been no opportunities for young free-marketeers to attack the conventional wisdom. If prevailing policies were not working, the response would have been "we must try harder. Don't give up now."

One of Pusey's main arguments is that the political process becomes irrelevant when major economic decisions are made administratively, behind closed doors, by like-minded bureaucrats – the point John Major was making at Maastricht recently.

Would a change of Treasurer, or even a change of government change Australia's broad economic policy? Probably not. What, then, would an election be *about* other than personality politics or the auctioning of competitive catch-cries.

Pusey deplores the prevailing view that there are no values other than economic values, indeed that society *is* the economy, the concept of society as community being anachronistic.

I can confirm the general thrust of Pusey's thesis from my own experience – at the risk of being accused of special pleading. In July 1987 among the departments which disappeared were Education, Science, and the Public Service Board. After the

abolition of Science (a long-held aim of the economic rationalists and the Australian Science and Technology Council – ASTEC), I devoted myself to getting science back on the political and bureaucratic agenda. By January 1988, I had persuaded Cabinet, with the Prime Minister's support, to authorise me to prepare a submission examining the adequacy of research funding and proposing changes. The Secretary of my host department (DITAC) was dismayed by my apparent success: "We will try to negotiate all policy matters directly with Treasury and Finance. If we lose their goodwill with a Cabinet submission which questions Government priorities, the situation will be far worse. Your political victory is a real setback for us."

When I saw the Cabinet submission prepared in my name by officers some weeks later, I could hardly believe it. Far from criticising Australia's decline in the international R&D pecking order, it endorsed past Budget decisions and said that we should merely be continuing our pursuit of the level playing field. When I asked for an explanation officials told me: "We can't afford to antagonise Treasury and Finance." I refused to submit my own submission.

After sixteen month of struggle, the Science and Technology Statement of May 1989 was a victory, but of the Pyrrhic variety. It recognised research as an anomalous area, where reliance on market forces was inadequate, and provided extra funds. However, I won no friends in the bureaucracy or with Cabinet's economic rationalists. In dealing with the bureaucracy, I sometimes felt like an agnostic talking to monks is a closed order.

There is excessive deference in other departments to the views of the Department of Finance. It wins many engagements by default because some departments which ought to be arguing an alternative view are nervous about being carved up by their bureaucratic peers, and unless they can get a big tick in advance are unwilling to submit alternatives to be resolved by Cabinet. (The bureaucracy prefers to settle things within the public service.)

Finance was quite ignorant about research and innovation. Bureaucratic methodology and underlying assumptions are not open to scrutiny.

The extent of government intellectual dependency on the public service was shown recently by the abject failure to respond to Hewson's Fightback! package until departments had checked it out, a factor which was central to Bob Hawke's removal. Finance had its own political and social agenda and its own hit list. Sometimes they would support the prejudices of a sympathetic minister. Peter Walsh, an able and likeable Minister for Finance, had a robust series of prejudices which he made no attempt to hide. I accused him once of working out a stereotypical enemy: a female environmental scientist working for CSIRO, who used child care facilities, was an occasional patron of the Australian Opera and voted for the Democrats. He commented: "You left out 'a user of the ABC'."

Victoria presented a reverse mirror-image. Victoria has been a happy hunting ground for Keynesians: Friedmanites were not encouraged and potentially dangerous issues were not debated internally. This convergence of view contributed enormously to John Cains's problems.

There were two other factors which increased bureaucratic power: 'disjointed incrementalism' and the choice of 'decision pathways'.

'Disjointed incrementalism', a useful term coined by the American political scientist Charles Lindblom, refers to the process of segmentation, where policy recommendations are made in isolation and not examined in a context where broad priorities are set out. A striking illustration is the discrepancy between treatment for the two major research funding bodies, the Australian Research Grants Scheme and the National Health and Medical Research Council. Between 1966 and 1987, ARGS with 86 per cent of the 'post doc' constituency, received a real increase of 37 per cent, and NH&MRC of 1073 per cent, a discrepancy of 29:1. This was the result of a long series of incremental decisions taken in isolation. It could never have been justified if there had been a comprehensive review of all research funding.

Who would have guessed that of eleven broad categories of Federal Government expenditure between 1983 and 1988, two had actually regressed: 'industry assistance and science'; and 'transport and communication'? Piecemeal decisions lead to the establishment of a de facto policy, almost by default. 'Decision pathways' are decisive in determining policy outcomes. If Finance proposes a policy, it is adopted by the Expenditure Review Committee, and Cabinet is then locked in, Caucus then faces an ultimatum: it must accept a policy it doesn't like (selling uranium to France, for example) or reject the whole Budget.

This is an important and challenging book, not least for provoking a long overdue debate. However, there are irritating slips in the text. In a single paragraph (p. 30) Australia is described as having eight states, then seven (actually six). Population is given as sixteen million (p. 32), then fifteen (p. 240), while the correct figure is seventeen million. Bob McMullin [sic] is confused with Rob Cameron. The names of Manning Clark and John Elliot are misspelt. At one point (p. 24) the number of inter-

viewees is given as 240, elsewhere the figure is 215. Regrettably, Pusey fails to mention, let alone examine, *Making Economic Policy in Australia* by Michael Keating, now Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra's most powerful bureaucrat.

Barry Jones is Chair of the House of Representatives Committee for Long-Term Strategies and Australia's representative on the Executive Board of Unesco. His books include Sleepers Wake!: Technology and the Future of Work.

Immigration, a Call for a New Policy

Max Teichmann

Joseph Wayne-Smith ed.: *Immigration, Population and Sustainable Environment; The Limits to Australia's Growth* (The Flinders Press, University of Flinders, $40).

Given the enormous influence immigration and migrants have had upon this land throughout its entire history, the quite dramatic changes in Australian politics and society as a result of non-stop mass migration since the Second World War, and the fact that the consequences of migration policies cannot be reversed, but of their very nature multiply, even into the third and fourth generations, we have had a surprisingly small number of serious books upon migration *per se*, and these of quite uneven quality. We *have* had, since the rise and rise of the lavishly funded multicultural–migrant lobbies – funds supplied by the government – large numbers of reports, projections, media releases and implants, mostly frankly partisan, leaning heavily on the *non sequiteur* and the *ignoratio elenchi*; using models only too frequently unbalanced through the exclusion of key factors and the inclusion of thinly disguised polemics. Alleluya, we have had those, simultaneously trivialising and obfuscating matters of complexity and high importance, written with a breadknife, the signature tune of the New Illiterati.

There was the Fitzgerald Report – quickly repudiated and some of its signatories coarsely abused, if not intimidated; and serious studies by people like Betts, Birrell, Joske and Rimmer; passing impolitely unnoticed. And that is about all.

If it were true that the various objections to different aspects of immigration programs and practices, or to the doctrines of multiculturalism, were held only by a minority, that would be no reason for marginalising and censoring the critics; but in fact they speak for a majority of Australians (70 per cent at present) who either wish immigration greatly reduced or suspended altogether. This is no mere product of the ongoing depression, but rather of a change in public attitudes which began almost a decade ago. A transformation of public sentiment which has occurred virtually without leadership or organisation, without easy access to many of the cogent criticisms made of the present shape of our immigration policies and the kind of people and lobbies orchestrating the whole gigantic enterprise. The fact that the majority of us find fault with the scale of contemporary mass migration is either ignored or dismissed as showing the incorrigible racism of most Australians, even though very many former migrants are to be found among that 70 per cent.

The dismissal of public opinion and the suppression of anti-Establishment views are important devices in people management by a government which knows best, along with their advisers and the intelligentsia manque who perform the PR. The guided democracies of Eastern Europe are with us no more, but the antipodean version here still lives and wheezes.

The Wayne-Smith book under review fills a very important gap in the debate, bringing together twenty-seven contributors to produce the most exhaustive study I have seen. Economic, environmental, (thus, the Fitzgerald Report had only 235 words on the environment), cultural, demographic, political, philosophical, ideological and psychological chapters and sections all appear, the book being no easy read, but a valuable compendium. The absence of an index is a serious loss.

Wayne-Smith's collection had to be privately produced and funded – as was an earlier book by him, which was favorably reviewed by the *Times Literary Supplement*. Neither has been noticed by the mainstream media, print or electronic. Australians may not be incorrigibly racist – I have no reason to believe that they are – but intolerance of others and their different ideas is accepted as the normal way of maintaining a privileged position. In the case of the institutional beneficiaries of the ethnic industry, the result has been polarisation and the stifling of discussion, all in the name of greater tolerance towards putative newcomers.

It may be better at this point to examine some of the more central issues. The economic attraction of mass migration in the post-war years has very nearly disappeared, because our economy has utterly changed, some say for the worse. In 1947, 37 per cent of the work force was in manufacturing industry: now it is only 16 per cent. The strong manufacturing sectors which still drive Germany,

Japan and the Tigers have been killed off here. The slack in the employment market was taken up by service industries, and increased government spending i.e. disguised forms of job provision; none of which contributed to exports, all of which added to imports. We have what used to be called a milk-bar economy; earlier on, seven Chinamen living by taking in one another's washing.

Mass migration hasn't caused these changes, but in recent years greatly exacerbated the effects. The spreading wide of our capital to provide the same things for ever-rising numbers of people, instead of investing deeply and selectively, has created a fiscal treadmill which has driven up debt and government charges, while preserving a strangely static and old-fashioned economy.

Steven Joske and Senator Walsh suggest that migration is adding to our balance of payments deficit by $8 billion per annum, and could be the main element in the debt trap – both overseas and domestic. At least migration is the only malign economic process which we could remove by a single change of public policy. Certainly we may have to choose between Free Trade and mass migration.

The arguments that migrants create jobs for others, or that, alternatively, they don't push existing workers out, have never been satisfactorily supported let alone proved, and the costs of being wrong can be very high. The situations where they *do* generate fresh economic activity exist all right, but are now an important factor impeding the restoration of a rational economic order.

The pressure groups favoring continuing mass migration irrespective of consequences are, of course, those selling cars and whitegoods (mostly now foreign owned), the building and construction industries, estate agents and developers, cheap labor hunters and deeply entrenched ethnic–multicultural industries. In days of high unemployment it is brave, and politically quixotic, to suggest that these taps be either turned off or turned down, but our chances of substantial economic recovery could depend upon realisms such as these.

The environmental arguments against continuing to strain our tired old land, and pile up millions more in Sydney and Melbourne, where 70 per cent of our migrants settle, seem quite cogent: Kathleen Betts points out that of the extra 10 million added to the population by 2031 only 2 million will be natural increase of the 1990 population – recent migrants and Australians put together. The rest will be future immigrants and their Australian-born children – another Melbourne,. Sydney and Canberra. For what, she asks.

Phil Ruthven is quoted as saying we can, should, have 100 to 150 million without any adverse environmental effects, or indeed, any other. Kerry Packer calls for 30–70 million, the *Australian* 35 million. Koo suggests 1 million Taiwanese would transform us (covert racism?). This has been a nightmare fifteen years of magical thinking, saloon bar hyperbole, and policy formation by journalists, PR men, globe trotting millionaires, and ethnic politicians coming from nowhere, and intent on taking us back to their origins. We are now savoring the bitter dregs of this era of hallucinogenic politics and awesome intolerance by unlettered and Luddite minorities in our midst.

Apropos of the great ethnic constituency which the Press and politicians talk about, or quake about. Fifty-two per cent of our migrants belong to some club or another, but only 3 per cent to clubs or organisations of ethnic origins. Only 7.4 per cent of the population thought of themselves as belonging to an ethnic group that wasn't either Australian or British. Like the RSL, we have been dealing with paper tigers: patronage systems drummed up for the advancement of cliques. Most migrants are trying to assimilate, despite all the efforts of street corner demagogues; (mainly anomic Old Australians, deeply at odds with their own country.) Betts speculates upon the transformation of élite attitudes, using slogans such as multiculturalism, which has occurred these last fifteen years. She describes the use of ideologically correct attitudes to define the status gulf between intellectuals and less-educated Australians. Tertiary people set themselves against the majority – whom they soon call 'racist', and materialist' (the pot inspecting the kettle). The difference between 'us' and 'them', in yet another form. Multiculturalism has become one of the prized ideological sources of identity, and difference, of the New Class – the new intellectually shabby genteel.

A number of symposiasts are discontented with the purely economic or, even, environmental approach. They are concerned about identity, a sense of place, and of polarisation which can lead to racist standoffs. They deplore the debasement of the term 'racist', whereby those who resist change are called racist because "they oppose the position assumed to be taken by the members of some group". (Smyth) Or, come to think of it, sexist, Fascist, Commo, Anti-Semite. As this era of Newspeak draws to a close, we will need a Chomsky or a Wittgenstein to see if there is any hope of rescuing such terms, along with others like liberty, egality or justice. And, if so, how in future to protect the patient from the molestations of the political and academic shysters. Meantime, to be monocultural-

ist is *not* to be racist. People are now being seen not as individuals, but as members of communities. There is no formal political mechanism for allowing each community to play its role, whatever it is. The nearest analogue could be corporate Fascism, or integralism.

Smyth argues that if we wish to achieve the melting pot result we shouldn't simultaneously push multiculturalism. Neither should we if we aim at cosmopolitanism and its universal culture (The Cosby Show?). If we desire homogeneity (and most people do), we should go for selective migration and return multiculturalism to Peter Pan and Wendy. It is a fantasy to see immigration as providing Australia with eternal youth. Nor has cosmopolitanism taken on – ethnic enclaves being even less interested in or *au fait* with the literature, history and psychologies of the other 135 migrant groups than are the Old Australians. For many of these, it is a new status conferring hobby, like foreign wines and miners' cottages.

Post-war immigration movements have never been planned: being only responses to pressure groups seeking cheap labor (just wait till the labor market is 'filled up'); small men with large valises, or Rabbit and his relations. It is politically easier to accommodate a lobby group pushing for a certain kind of immigrant by expanding total numbers rather than by readjusting the composition of the existing numbers and thus possibly offending some other pressure group.

There is a gruesome list of multinational and multicultural societies which have not worked or are in intensive care; appended by one of the writers. He asks – what makes us believe things here will go any differently? This all assumes that we are the master of our fate – have certain choices, and the right to choose. Phil (150 million population) Ruthven says it is a matter of "what does *the world* believe is the right population for Australia? Where does the *the world* think our immigrants could, or should or will come from?". Unbelievable.

As James says, a limited sense of place has been forged in Australia but it is fragile and contradictory. The question is, how many Australians *wish* to preserve it, or, indeed, *anything*?

For many years Max Teichmann taught Politics at Monash University. A freelance lecturer, he has co-written or edited seven books on politics.

Creating Foreign Policy

John Schauble

Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant: *Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s* (Melbourne University Press, $34.95).

Ironically, *Australia's Foreign Relations* had been in the bookshops for barely a week when the Indonesian military opened fire on a crowd of mourners in Santa Cruz cemetery in the East Timor capital, Dili. As the Federal Government wrestled with how to respond to a human tragedy which posed an immediate foreign policy crisis on the nation's doorstep, journalists and commentators turned to the Evans–Grant book in search of practical insights into how the government might react.

They found little on the subject of East Timor, which is perhaps surprising given that the fate of the former Portuguese colony invaded by Indonesia in 1975 has been a running sore in relations with that most proximate and powerful of our Asian neighbors.

East Timor must largely be seen as one of the great failures of Australian foreign policy. It has been so since the Whitlam years. Leaving aside whatever the wishes and aspirations the people of East Timor might be, successive Australian governments have been for the most part out of touch with domestic sentiment on the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia. Over the past sixteen years, it has been an issue for the 'too hard basket'; finding a solution more difficult and less expedient than an accommodation with an important and powerful neighbor.

Precisely how Australia arrives at its foreign policy has been a matter of considerable public interest over the past year or so. In the light of Australia's involvement in the Gulf War, one could be forgiven for believing that the whole process is a reactive one, with policy decisions made 'on the fly' or predicated on one government's desire to ingratiate itself with another more powerful or intimidating one. Of course it is not so simple, but as the recent events in East Timor so amply demonstrate, even where Australia's foreign policy on a particular issue is arrived at deliberately, the results are sometimes far from auspicious.

Of all Australia's bilateral relationships, our one with Indonesia has been the most tentative and easily ruptured over recent years. It is here that Western and Asian values and approaches meet and often chafe. Indeed, it is this relationship which highlights many of the dilemmas of the thrusts of Australian foreign policy in the 1990s.

It almost goes without saying that Australians have a deeply-rooted unease about our place in the world. The continent dangles like an enormous

bauble from the Asian continent, isolated by race, religion, culture, language and history from its immediate neighbors. Such fundamental differences have led to generations of phobias. Fears of a descending 'yellow peril', albeit now brandishing chequebooks rather then rifles, are far from dead. Decades of an immigration policy designed to maintain racial purity and an abiding cultural and defence dependency on Britain and more recently the United States have further isolated Australia from the region.

Australians are wont to forget that there are reverse perceptions too. The Asian view of Australia has been – especially in recent years – largely dismissive. In economic terms, among the newly industrialised countries of Asia, Australia is regarded as a rich, developed nation, but something of a basket case. In political and cultural terms, we are variously regarded as anachronistic or largely irrelevant.

Evans and Grant point to a growing realisation in Australia (and Asia) that if we are to survive in a global economy soon to be dominated by powerful European and American trading blocs, then "comprehensive engagement" with our immediate neighbors is vital.

It is this assumption which predicates much of the current direction of Australia's foreign policy. So Australia has increased its economic ties with regional countries, such as Indonesia, in recent years. It also underpins why Australia took the singular step of recognising as lawful the integration of East Timor as Indonesia's 27th province, while the United Nations does not. From it flowed the Timor Gap Treaty between Australia and Indonesia under which the joint exploration and exploitation of oil and gas reserves beneath the Timor Sea were agreed on a joint and equitable basis. Growing trade, closer political and cultural links, and cooperation on international issues of mutual interest have all marked the Australian–Indonesian relationship during the years of Evan's tenure as foreign minister.

Part of the Evans theorem in relation to Indonesia has been to inject what he calls "ballast" into the relationship, upon which an intercourse based on mutual understanding and respect could blossom over the coming years. This has meant juggling pronounced Australian societal interests in such questions as human rights with the need for economic cooperation. The inherent fragility of the links between two countries probably more different than any other two neighbors in the world was thrown into stark relief by the Dili massacre on 12 November. The official 'wait-and-see' response of the Australian Government was juxtaposed against a rebellious Labor Caucus which sought a firm and equivocal reaction and by a public whose latent unease with Australia's official attitude to the whole East Timor issue bubbled to the surface in no uncertain terms.

The full impact of the Dili shootings on Australian–Indonesian relations will take some months to unfold. Many of the factors to which Evans and Grant refer in their book have already come into play and will continue to influence the future direction (and more particularly any change of direction) in that relationship.

Australian Foreign Relations provides an overview of how Australian foreign policy is developed, although given the nature and depth of the subject, it is necessarily a broad brush approach. Those already familiar with the processes of Australian foreign policy will find little new here. Inevitably, the book presents a snapshot of the situation at the time of publication. As such, parts of it are already out of date, but it nevertheless provides an interesting insight into the nuts and bolts of foreign policy making, ranging across such issues as foreign aid, defence and security, trade and human rights. Roughly half of the text outlines the development and status of Australian relations with individual countries and regional blocs. No doubt it will become obligatory reading for students of international relations and the standard primer of would-be diplomats. From it, they will glean such wisdom as:

> The conduct of foreign affairs is about responding realistically to the world as we find it. We have to have trade relations with many regimes of which we disapprove. We have to have working relations with many forms of government we think less than ideal. We have to balance questions of international morality against the 'pragmatic acceptance of irreversible fact'.

Grant wrote the first draft of this collaboration, Evans revised and rewrote. Both men are key players in the formulation of Australian foreign policy under the Hawke Government. Senator Gareth Evans has been Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade since 1988, a period in which the international geo-political landscape has been fundamentally reshaped by such events as the collapse of Eastern Europe, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War. During the same period, Evans has devoted much energy to refocussing Australia's role within the immediate region, through the efforts to find a lasting peace in Cambodia and in developing closer and more substan-

tial ties with our Asian neighbors. Bruce Grant is a former journalist, one time High Commissioner to India, author and currently an adviser to Evans. He is also chairman of the Australia–Indonesia Institute, a body established in 1989 to foster closer cultural relations between the two countries through people-to-people contact.

The jacket blurb of *Australia's Foreign Relations* promises that the reader will feel "privy to the act of forging policy – and that is an exciting experience". Instead of imparting his warm, fuzzy feeling, it left me wondering what precisely the authors had hoped such an exposition would achieve, in whose interests it was written and to precisely which audience it was directed. But it does illustrate just how imprecise a business the formulation of government policy can be and that some of it is indeed made 'on the fly'.

Both Evans and Grant are persuasive writers, as this text amply demonstrates. Evans also uses the opportunity to take the odd pot shot and to recite a few of his favorite one-liners. He is critical, for example, of a fickle Australian media so intent on promoting conflict that it routinely berates Australian foreign ministers:

> for not being aggressively objectionable enough on matters like self-determination for East Timor or human rights in China. If we are not rowing, we must be kowtowing.

Well, that is ultimately something those whose interests Australian foreign policy is designed to serve – the Australian public – must determine.

But it is difficult not to conclude that the authors may be overly optimistic about the future prospects of Australia's role in the region and, more pointedly, the level of influence we might have there. In other respects, they may be overly optimistic about the future of the region itself. They suggest, for example, that "Asia has now been through its twentieth century upheavals and revolutions and now is preoccupied with economic development..." While this may be correct in relation to several Asian countries, I find it difficult to accept these processes are complete in Laos, Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, China, or Korea.

And in Indonesia – for the last quarter of a century as 'stable' a society as any in the world – one now hears voices demanding change. When change comes there, as past experience has shown, it is unlikely to come without upheaval.

John Schauble is the Foreign Editor of the Sunday Age. *He is also a board member of the Australia–Indonesia Institute.*

A Canon in Question; Modern Australian Poetry

Kevin Hart

John Tranter and Philip Mead eds.: *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry* (Penguin, $19.95).

Since the late eighteenth century anthologists have played a major role in determining the canon of poetry written in English. Today, only scholars have reason to ponder Robert Anderson's *Works of the British Poets* (13 vols, 1792–5) or Alexander Chalmers' *Works of the English Poets* (21 vols, 1810); but even though these massive compilations remain almost entirely unread, they have, for better or worse, shaped everyone's ideas of English verse. Until quite recently, anthologists and literary historians based their work on the labors of Anderson, Chalmers and on their inevitable model, *The Works of the Most Eminent English Poets* (68 vols, 1781), with its authoritative prefaces, biographical and critical, by Samuel Johnson. Anderson's and Chalmers' inclusions and exclusions affected not only how their contemporaries saw English poetry but also how every later generation has seen it. Turning over the pages of those thick volumes now, scholars do not so much read the verse – even if one wants to, the print is far too small – as decode the ideologies of the time: a politics of literary revolution (Romanticism) and a politics of social containment (largely in response to Jacobinism).

For all the limitations in their collections, Anderson and Chalmers did important work in preserving large tracts of English verse. Not all anthologies have preservation of national literature as their chief aim, however. Once material is readily accessible, anthologists can do something else, namely revise the canon in any one of a number of ways. Revision can mean extension or contraction: and so we have collections (like the successive editions of the *Norton Anthology of Poetry*) that vaunt their pluralism, and other collectanea devoted exclusively to regional or group interests (*The East Side Scene, The Poetry of Surrealism*). No one expects contracting anthologies to be representative – that is part of their point – but the chances are that we read the extending anthologies with a grain of suspicion. More often than not, they give the impression of being blandly normative while editing out disruptive or unfashionable literary and social interests.

There is no single anthology of Australian poetry that tries to establish a broad canon, and it is unlikely that one will appear in the foreseeable

future. (When it does, it will be on disk, not paper.) Instead, we have anthologies that serve complex ends, though being considered normative is one of them: Harry Heseltine's *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse* and Vincent Buckley's *The Faber Book of Modern Australian Verse* are two amongst many. (That 'normative' need not be culturally simple is made abundantly clear by Thomas Shapcott's lively *Contemporary American and Australian Poetry.*) And we have anthologies that are openly partisan, like John Tranter's *The New Australian Poetry* and Kevin Gilbert's *Inside Black Australia.* This new publication, *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry,* is perhaps unique in that it tries to be two kinds of book at once: normative and revisionary, widely representative and sectarian.

One would be hard pressed to begin an anthology of modern Australian poetry with anyone other than Kenneth Slessor. Tranter and Mead start with 'Nuremburg', a poem which celebrates art and the artist. It is not an innocent choice – how could it be? – since one effect of placing this poem first is that it naturalises a tradition of self-reflexive writing, one that steadily emerges as the book progresses. Following Slessor we find stretches of A. D. Hope, John Blight, Kenneth Mackenzie, David Campbell, Judith Wright and James McAuley. We see a sudden flash of William Hart-Smith (just one poem, 'Nullarbor') and a trace of aboriginal writing (Jack Davis has four poems). The revisionary impulse behind the book becomes obvious in including Ern Malley's complete works, then, immediately after, dismissing Rosemary Dobson with only two lyrics. Are the editors suggesting that Dobson does not write good modern Australian poetry? Or are they implying that, because her work is easily accessible, there is no point in representing her more fully? This kind of ambiguity persists throughout the anthology.

Certainly the introduction is of little help in guiding the perplexed reader. The book opens with a declaration: "In our experience, poets don't write poems merely to be graded, studied or analysed; they write them, above all, to create for readers the enjoyment of a complex and intense aesthetic experience". It is doubtful whether all poets have precisely that intention, are ever quite that altruistic, or are so independent of educational institutions and the publishing industry; but even if the picture were that rosy, it is by no means clear what the poet's intentions have to do with the reader's desires. Nor do the difficulties stop here. The writer-centred model of criticism commended at the start of the introduction is at odds with the reader-centred literary theories – 'post-colonial, 'deconstructive', 'feminist' – invoked later, theories which, so the editors argue, "all urge us to rethink the way we read Australian poetry".

Later in the introduction, we are told that a range of polarities ("modern versus anti-modern, international versus local, closed versus open form; traditional versus postmodern techniques; accessibility versus obscurity; humanist sermonising versus verbal abstraction") are "anxiety-laden terms we came across in the (often defensive) introductions to anthologies published over the last decade or so", and that "most of the argument based on these terms" has now faded "into that muted region beyond controversy". The editorial voice is wholly normative here. Yet the introduction is itself regulated by an hierarchic opposition between 'experimental' and 'conservative'. If we ask what 'conservative' means in this context, the answer can be paraphrased 'not experimental enough'; and if we inquire what 'experimental' means, we hear, inevitably, something like, 'reacting against conservative poetics'. It is by way of this circularity that the anthology's ideology is introduced. The editors take 'modern to mean, in effect, 'experimental' and, even more narrowly, 'modernist' and 'postmodernist'. It if were what it claims to be, this book would contain poems by many writers whose names do not appear – including Gary Catalano, Alison Clark, Sarah Day, Stephen Edgar, Evan Jones, John Manifold, Ronald McCuaig, Elizabeth Riddell, Roland Robinson, Ron Simpson, Vivian Smith and Douglas Stewart – as well as a quite different selection of poems by individual authors.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the anthology, though, is the self-canonisation of John Tranter. With scrupulously disinterested judgement, the editors find that Tranter should have more poems than (to name just a handful) David Campbell, Bruce Dawe, Gwen Harwood, A. D. Hope, Peter Porter and Chris Wallace-Crabbe. By the time we get to Tranter's own poems, it seems as though Australian poetry were naturally leading up to an ephebe of Frank O'Hara. Although the edition generally eschews annotations, a gloss is added to the first of Bruce Beaver's *Letters to Live Poets,* letting us know that it is addressed to O'Hara; and we read Peter Porter's 'On This Day I Complete My Fortieth Year' long before we get to Tranter's rewriting of that poem, 'Having Completed My Fortieth Year', in which Porter's poetic hero, Byron is replaced by O'Hara. If *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry* seems to lead to John Tranter, it also dwindles afterwards. We see all too little, for example, of those who offer competing versions of Australian modernism and

postmodernism. (Given that 'modern' is to be reduced to 'modernist' and 'postmodernist', more space could have been found for John Forbes and John A. Scott.) The anthology limps to an end, with poems in which modernism and postmodernism have become reflex actions.

While this book may not be the "widely-representative and credible anthology of modern Australian poetry" it sets out to be, it is none the less interesting as a social document. Never before in this country has a literary ideology been presented in such a transparent way. *The Penguin Book of Modern Poetry* is of limited use for readers of poetry but is an indispensable text for anyone at all interested in the politics of canon formation.

Kevin Hart is Associate Professor of Critical Theory at Monash University.

Surface Sex Sociobiology

Joan Symington

Beatrice Faust: *Apprenticeship in Liberty: Sex, Feminism and Sociobiology* (Angus & Robertson, $29.85).

Feminism has achieved a great deal but it tends repeatedly to get blocked in its progress. In this book Beatrice Faust aims to make a contribution to its onward movement by looking at the way in which the sexual biological facts of women's existence contribute to female subordination. She elaborates this by looking at the concept of gender identity, that is, the sense of one's own sexual identity as opposed to gender role which is society's idea of behavior appropriate to gender.

The author's deep interest in and knowledge of the biological underpinning of our sexual identity and behavior is obvious in the wealth of material from both man and animals packed into the early chapters. We are by heredity essentially bisexual. Not surprisingly therefore there is a considerable overlap in sexual behavior between the sexes and a great variety of sexual expression within each sex.

Faust then elaborates on the ways in which socio-cultural factors act on this biological substrate in a complex way to form gender identity. She shows that cultural values markedly affect women's reactions to menstruation, and the menopause. "Women who most strongly intraject the housewife and mother role into their identities also suffer the most psychiatric disturbance in the climacteric." (83)

The oppression of women is then dealt with and an intriguing history from first wave feminism to the present day is given, illustrating the different and often mutually conflicting movements towards emancipation between those who, for example, strove for equal work and pay opportunities to those who exalted domestic feminist virtues and pushed for a single standard of sexual morality for both sexes. She sees these different thrusts as arising from women of varying gender identities trying to fit the social gender role to their gender identity. Faust exemplifies how the changing status of women in society was and is reflected in novels, films, jobs, fashions as well as in the political arena. Feminist movements tend to cling to a favorite cause of oppression, whether men's brutality, neglect of the clitoris, neglect of the erotic significance of childbirth and so on. Biological facts such as those that emerged from the studies of Masters and Johnson tend to be ignored in the service of maintaining the enemy unchanged. Thus there still is in feminism an emphasis on the need for men to change their sexual practice but not for women to do so.

Fitting the various movements of feminism into a model describing the different ways in which a subordinate culture reacts to the dominant culture, Beatrice Faust comes up with a solution for feminism which is that model in which the best elements of each culture are used and the dysfunctional elements of each are discarded. Thus, for example, men might learn more about expressing themselves verbally, and women might understand and even share something of men's imaginative sexual life.

The place of aggression is important because aggression physically expressed is typical of men in comparison with its verbal expression in women. Violence, especially rape, must be dealt with if men and women are to come closer together. Faust suggests that "aggression can be most effectively attacked through removal of environmental pollutants as well as re-education of susceptible men. Newly available techniques for reversible chemical castration would probably facilitate re-education of patterned offenders." (162) It is also suggested that men and women be educated to learn to communicate clearly their sexual signals because one of the factors contributing to rape, in addition to the much stronger drive to orgasm of the male and his aggressive potential, is the absence today of unambiguous social signals like the chimpanzee's red bottom or the "dropped handkerchief of the era before Kleenex." (149)

Although feminists have promoted reforms such as the ready availability of contraceptives and abortion, they tend not to deal with the broader issues of, in this instance, sex education. Faust

believes that the teenage pregnancy rate did not decrease when contraceptives became freely available because they did not have "cultural permission and confidence in their own personal autonomy" (378) to use contraceptives. This overlooks factors in teenagers that might motivate them to get pregnant or to rebel against cultural permission even if they had it.

There are many valuable insights brought out by Faust, in particular the enrichment that comes from a fuller understanding of our biological bisexual background. If men and women could understand their mutual differences in sexual style and could accommodate more to each other, this would lead to mutual enrichment, and a push towards a more flexible society that allows for biological variability. This greater understanding is to be achieved through education, particularly sex education, starting in primary schools and emphasising communication between boys and girls but also female autonomy.

In comparison with the richness of material with which this book abounds, these conclusions are somewhat disappointing. Society's problems for women and for getting the sexes together are not adequately described by biology and sociocultural facts. There is a mind that interacts with these factors, that is not adequately described by the concept of "mindset, that is internalised like an electrode planted in the brain," (33) nor yet by "Humans are programmed for language and language permits us to reprogramme ourselves," (61) and it is from this individual mind that lasting change comes. Faust's mechanistic view of the mind makes for simplistic conclusions such as her solution for the problem of aggression and her belief that cultural permission to use contraceptives would lower the teenage pregnancy rate. Similarly society cannot be understood from sociological statistics but only through the mind which plays a major part in either promoting or interfering with desirable trends such as a closer understanding and working together of men and women. There are powerful disintegrative forces within the personality aimed at breaking bonds between individuals, between men and women, just as there are aspects of the mind that make us cling together in a rigidly defined social group, such as a feminist group with an enemy.

The neglect of the mind's capacity to initiate or interfere with change gives a superficial flavor to the conclusions arrived at in this otherwise very interesting and readable book.

Joan Symington is a psychoanalyst and child psychiatrist in Sydney.

Spunk and Femomythy

Rosemary Sorensen

Germaine Greer: *The Change; Women, Ageing and the Menopause* (Hamish Hamilton, $35).

Part way though reading this hefty book I had a nightmare. It was one of those vaguely horrible dreams but not, however, to do with the usual darkly menacing presences or threats. This particular dream was rather different since the fearful presence that night was words – cystic hyperplasia, oestrogen, progestogen, endometrial, tubal cautery, oophorectomy (ooph!), fibromas, atherosclerosis, gonadotrophins... Wonderful words all about the things that go on (and go wrong) inside people of similar sex to myself. I woke sweating (I'm sorry I don't know the scientific word for waking sweating) from a dream in which all these words swirled around me. I think they were accusing me of not knowing, or really caring, what they meant.

If you know what all these words mean, then you're well on the way to enjoying Germaine Greer's book on menopause and female ageing. If you don't, you may have nightmares. Power over one's own body implies, apparently, a naming of the parts, an implication worth considering, especially since medicine is still riddled with misogynistic loathing of the female body and all its sticky dark cavities. You only have to look at breasts and the myths of mastectomy (which are not discussed in Greer's book) to understand quickly enough the way in which women's medicine gives us distressingly revealing information about the status of women and the feminine identity even in such enlightened societies as we imagine we live in today.

And yet this naming of the parts that gave me nightmares seems more designed to give the writer credentials than the reader real information. Several early chapters strain to impress with all the "research" about menopause. Lumpy with statistics, the writing in these chapters is also an odd mixture of fact and fancy: "The human female is unique among living organisms on this earth because she can live twice the time of her reproductive span and more. Many a butterfly might like to continue making love to flowers once her eggs were laid but the choice is not hers. The human female, having served the species, is the only one that can build a life of her own; it is too bitter a biological irony to think that she may not have the heart."

If this is Greer quirkiness, it is quirky to the point of queasy. Making love to flowers indeed! And as for the human female serving the species (even

allowing for irony), this is the kind of bunkum that we've unfortunately grown used to in the latter years of the 1980s when procreation has again become a mystery and motherhood a saintly pastime for which the world's women ought to be congratulated.

There's quite a bit of this kind of *femomythy*, which can be read as Greer backsliding on her earlier polemic, but at the same time there's plenty of the spunk for which she is famous and much admired. While the chapter on "The Aged Wife" will infuriate older men who still fancy themselves as rakishly debonair Don Juans, able to beguile the little things who type for them, it is also very funny and delightfully irreverent.

That is what Greer is good at, and why perhaps she is read with such interest. While this book has been discussed seriously for its content, especially the medical facts and fictions that it tries to sort through, the style and the bravado are what makes it interesting. Such a comment is perhaps rather damning since the book is trying to do much more; it is trying to confront the malpractice of contemporary medicine and to change women's lives through positive role models and down-to-earth advice about ways of coping with life changes. But these proselytising aims are hard to take seriously since the soapbox platforms that used to excite us and delight us are not longer productive nor even functional. It's a pity perhaps, but the fact that books such as *The Female Eunuch, The Second Sex,* even *The Women's Room* for that matter, can no longer be written in the same way suggests that they did change the world. They were groundbreaking. They left many of us breathless with hope and admiration and excitement. And they changed forever (she writes, keeping her fingers crossed), the forms, contents and limitations of writing. Things could be said. Women's experiences, beyond the domestic, beyond the gentle and the ironic, were headlines. Vagina was a very trendy word.

In *The Change* there is both a nostalgia for that exciting time and an echo of it. Greer drifts constantly into the old-fashioned forms of polemic, half personal experience, half extrapolation and proselytising. The adequacy of this manner of campaigning remains a matter of trust in the writer's word. And that's all very well, all very entertaining, and often jolly useful and even enlightening. But it's also often self-indulgent, cranky, sloppy and fatuous. The attack, constant and nasty, on Simone de Beauvoir, who belongs, surely, to a previous and superseded generation of feminism, is a particular instance of this.

Simone de Beauvoir has been criticised thoroughly and not always convincingly for her relationship with the monstrously original Sartre. Greer constantly uses de Beauvoir's writing and life as examples of how not to age graciously, how not to age with courage and conviction (like a witch). Writing *The Second Sex* when she was forty-one, Greer tells us, de Beauvoir "faces the future as unprovided as any empty-headed beauty queen". Let's leave aside the squawks of protest from the 'beauty queens' (isn't that a lovely expression) and notice only the virulence of the attack on de Beauvoir. Personally, I don't want that particular writer to incorporate some ideal of womanhood but read her because she was pushing the ways of writing ahead and into places that I wanted to explore myself. She also *wrote* with a strong and particular style, with flair and elegance – rather like Greer herself.

Greer's desire to be the queen of the witches is a bit tedious but, paradoxically, the chapters in which she advocates witchiness are the most entertaining. Why she should attack with such bias certain women writers (Iris Murdoch comes under odd, ambivalent scrutiny) and therefore indulge in exactly the same kind of sneering jealousy as her own critics are prone to is puzzling.

Although she herself is unforgiving of women such as Simone de Beauvoir, it is easy to forgive in Greer's book the muddledness, the occasional pompous cant, the lack of restraint and the poor organisation of some of the chapters in the face of her lusty strength and vigorous courage. A Greer book is bound to be an event. This one is full of polemic and provocation. It can't possibly have the same effect as the early feminist books had, and its major weakness is the assumption that the same kind of book can be written as was possible then. If this had not been assumed, the book may well have been half as long and it may well have cleared out some of the baggage and been argued more persuasively. Greer's own voice may have been more clearly identified. As it is, behind a front of nightmarish scientific words and bulky statistics, Greer darts in and out of range like a witch on a particularly difficult to control broomstick.

The Change is oddly old-fashioned but, like many old-fashioned things, it has a lot of charm. It might not change your life, and it may not be just what the doctor ordered, but it is the work of one of our most interesting and intelligent writers. The pity is that no one dared edit it into shape.

Rosemary Sorensen is the editor of Australian Book Review.

Bill Bowyang

Russel Ward

Hugh Anderson: *On the Track with Bill Bowyang Part 1. Includes* Old Bush Recitations *2nd ed. and* Australian Bush Recitations *3rd ed.* Edited by Dawn Anderson. Studies in Australian Folklore no. 7 (Red Rooster Press, $25).

I first met Hugh Anderson in 1953 when we were both busily collecting bush ballads and folk songs. In those days we both believed that a song was not genuine unless it had been composed collectively by the 'folk', as everyone believed European folk songs had been. Now it is clear to both of us that most folk songs began life as written compositions of one individual.

We would also tend to agree that European folk songs were in fact composed in the same way by individual minstrels and entertainers; though because they began hundreds of years earlier it will be forever impossible to track down the original authors. Although a Robin Hood ballad, for instance, started as an original composition by one person, it was an illiterate age and as it passed from county to county it gained verses and changed as it went along.

No one has done more than Hugh Anderson to elucidate this process and to track down individuals who created the first version of Australian songs, like Charles Richmond Thatcher, a goldfields entertainer, who made a better living than most of the diggers by singing to them about their lives.

In Hugh Anderson's last book *The Man who Wrote Bush Ballads,* he tracked down George Loyau who launched *The Overlander* and other ballads. In this book he has detailed the life and work of 'Bill Bowyang', another journalist who collected and wrote many bush songs in Queensland until his death in 1947.

His life, if not stranger than fiction, was certainly more appropriate for a knockabout bush versifier. 'Bill Bowyang' was actually christened by the extraordinary name Alexander Vindex Vennard. Son of a Scottish immigrant mother and an Irish father, he was born on Vindex Station near Winton in 1884.

When he was four years old the family moved on their bullock dray from Vindex to Normanton, a tidal port on the Gulf of Carpentaria, joined to the Croydon goldfield by rail.

He later claimed he "ran wild" at this time, with his best friend, an Aboriginal boy, and he certainly stowed away on a steamer to Thursday Island. While still in his teens he joined the crew of a pearling lugger and knocked about the Torres Straits as a beachcomber.

On his return home he was packed off to school in Brisbane, but after two years he signed on as a cook's offsider, with a trading vessel bound for the South Seas. After a little copra trading he returned to Brisbane.

He worked for a few months on the Coolgardie goldfield, and then in New Guinea but, broken in health, probably by malaria, he came to anchor, temporarily in Brisbane, and drawing on his adventurous youth, he tried to make a living by journalism. He joined the *Port Dennison Times,* the first newspaper in North Queensland. It was at this time that he married Isobel Nichol. He was the last editor when the newspaper closed down in 1910.

The young couple moved to Sydney where 'Bowyang' lived as a freelance journalist working for the *Sydney Morning Herald,* and sometimes the *Sun,* the *Bulletin* and the London *Daily Mail.* In 1913 he went walkabout again and carried his swag along the Castlereagh to see how the shearers lived. In 1915 he enlisted in the AIF under the name of Frank Reid, in time to see service on Gallipoli.

Wounded and sent to Egypt, he transferred to the Imperial Camel Corps. Wounded again, and while still recovering, with the help of his friends Charles Barrett and David Barker, he published the *Kia Ora Coo-ee,* a popular newspaper for AIF men in the Middle East.

The end of the war found him back in North Queensland where under the name 'Bill Bowyang' he became a columnist for the *North Queensland Register.*

As Banjo Paterson had done in the Sydney *Bulletin* he regularly invited readers to send in old bush songs and yarns that they knew. His column

was called "On the Track" and many verses sent in were published in it. He used hundreds of yarns, ballads and anecdotes about bush life. He also published some of them in no fewer than nine paper-covered pamphlets called *Bill Bowyang's Bush Reciters.*

Like some other collectors of folk material, he was not averse to publishing some of his own compositions along with other bush material. Some are well known, some not. His work was a two-way process. Bush people who bought the pamphlets often learned some of the songs and passed them along until the original author was lost to sight.

In 1958, in Broken Hill, a shearer named Stan Lowe recited to me 'The Flash Stockman'. To him it was just another old bush song. No one will ever know if it was written by Bowyang himself, or printed by him as one of the anonymous poems sent in to the *North Queensland Register.* I think the latter more probable, as Stan's version was much better than that printed by Bowyang and reproduced by Anderson. Here it is:

The Flash Stockman

I'm a stockman to me trade and they
call me ugly Dave,
I'm old and grey and only got one eye.
In the yard I'm good of course, but just
put me on a horse
And I'll go where lots of young'uns
daren't try.
I can lead 'em through the Gidgee o'er
country rough an ridgy,
I can head 'em in the very worst of scrub.
I can ride both rough and easy, with a
'dewdrop' I'm a daisy
And a right down 'Bobby Dazzler' in a pub.

You should watch me skin a sheep. It's so
lovely you could weep.
I can act the 'Silver Tail' as if me blood
was blue.
You can strike me pink or dead, if I stood
upon me head
I'd be just as good as any other two.
I've a notion in me pate that it's luck,
it isn't fate
That I'm so far above the common run.
So in everything I do, you could cut me
fair in two
For I'm far too bloody good to be in one.

Among others Russel Ward's books include The Australian Legend *and* The Penguin Book of Australian Ballads.

Non-judging the Nineties

Stuart Macintyre

John Docker: *The Nervous Nineties: Australian Cultural Life in the 1890s* (Oxford University Press, $24.95).

"When I first thought of this book I was going to call it 'The Amazing Nineties' or 'The Astonishing Nineties'." There's a certain nerveless confidence in an author who can tell you of his false beginnings and dilate so insistently on his stumbling discovery that his subject is in fact *The Nervous Nineties.* It's a form of assumed modesty, and not only because it assumes the reader's interest in the long gestation of the project through postgraduate candidature, doctoral thesis (examined in Stephen Murray-Smith's office in 1981) and several Literature Board grants. For all his diffidence, John Docker does not hesitate to take other writers on the Nineties to task. Even his deference has an egotistical quality, as in his introduction to a volley of fourteen epigraphs with the mock apology: "I remember Dorothy Green once advising a brash young boy that must have been me that I used epigraphs too much. But, obstinately, I like them."

The Nervous Nineties offers a reappraisal of that much-debated moment in cultural history, a debate that Docker sketches in his Introduction. He suggests that all the contestants, from the radical nationalists and the new critics to the New Left and the feminists, have erred in seeking an essential spirit of the period. His contention is that there is no such centre. Rather, it was a period of liminal space between the old and the new, a time of economic, political and social crisis when gloom and despair fused with hope, utopia with dystopia, and the tensions normally held in check found full play.

Docker's cultural history is more cultural than historical. He does not give sustained attention to the concatenation of historical forces that, say, Brian Fitzpatrick discussed in his elegy for the hopes lost in the lean last years of the century, nor is there anything more than passing reference to the recent work of historians. (On one of the few occasions Docker does contextualise the period, his claim that New Liberalism "fell on its feet in the antipodes" is so inaccurate, and his description of Deakin, Murdoch, Strong and Higgins as confidently rational optimists so wildly awry, as to make me wonder which historians he has read.) Rather, the book works with a body of Australian writing drawn from the Nineties that is read against contemporary

non-Australian writing and through a theory of popular culture informed by Bakhtin.

The Nervous Nineties consists of three discrete parts that are loosely brought together at the end. The first part concentrates on the Lawsons – Louisa Lawson's *Dawn* and Sylvia Lawson's *Bulletin*. Both embody elements of the Enlightenment project, the application of reason and purpose in the cause of social progress, and both combine cosmopolitanism with insularity; yet the *Dawn*'s feminism of the educated professional class collides with the *Bulletin*'s anti-urban, bohemian misogyny. Docker's destabilisation of the conventional interpretation of both publications seeks to trump Sylvia Lawson. He follows her in seeing how journalism worked as a "great print circus" that mocked and inverted the conventional hierarchy of genres along with the established order of power, social prestige and official culture; but he criticises her for the "relentless elegance" of her own writing and the "unceasing flow of authorial judgements". She is right in her appreciation of the rich diversity of the Nineties, wrong in her modernist, high cultural condemnation of what came after.

The second part considers some utopian visions. Lengthy summaries of the novels of Bellamy, Morris and Donnelly introduce a reading of Joseph Furphy's *Rigby's Romance* as Menippean satire, Henry Lawson as chameleon and William Lane as left pessimist. I'm not sure that the laborious plot summaries of the American and English writers contribute much new insight to the discussion of the Australian ones, but Dockers' preference for the carnivalesque becomes clear when he sets Furphy and Lawson against Lane. Lane's chief limitation, it appears, is not his racism or sexism (as recent critics have proposed) but his contempt for mass culture.

He articulates the radical intelligentsia's project of a proletarian public sphere that will be the site of an alternative, oppositional culture and provide the unregenerate masses with emancipatory leadership. In his distaste for the bestial pleasures of the degraded slum-dwellers, and his failure to appreciate the richness of possibilities in Paddy's Market, he is guilty of left pessimism. Equally, a feminist critic like Marilyn Lake, who sees in Lane only a male anxiety to maintain masculine supremacy, is herself blind to the emancipatory ambivalence of the texts she reads so reductively. Even – unlikely though it may sound – Manning Clark is found guilty of the same left pessimism in the last volume of his *History of Australia* for the way he juxtaposes the high seriousness of the Palmers, Esson and Pritchard against the froth and bubble of popular songs and picture palaces. Docker joins here in criticism of what he calls the Gloom Thesis – the idea that Australian history is a story of racism, sexism, oppression and suffering, endless grey – that others such as John Hirst have recently advanced.

The third part of the book considers one form of writing where the fears and anxieties of the age were played out, the fantasy fiction of journeys and encounters with lost worlds which invert male and female relations, and problematise the expectation of historical progress. Rider Haggard, H. G. Wells and Bram Stoker prepare us for the Australian equivalent, which typically takes the form of a journey into the mysterious centre. Docker's treatment of this literature is challenging, and he demonstrates its capacity to serve as a theatre of possibilities and desires that confront and challenge the accepted order.

But I'm not sure that it establishes the claims he makes about popular culture. In contrast to the cultural genres he has championed elsewhere, notably popular television serials such as 'Prisoner', these novels remain distinctively literary in their form and circulated among a restricted educated audience. It is a more general feature of this avowedly iconoclastic book that it works with a highly conventional range of cultural material and indeed discriminates within it on the basis of a text's richness and complexity. Docker shakes up our understanding of the Nineties, but the very insistence of his refusal of determinate judgement on the meaning of the period itself constitutes a judgement.

Stuart Macintyre teaches history at the University of Melbourne. His most recent book is A Colonial Liberalism.

A Life of Olga Masters

Mary Lord

Julie Lewis: *Olga Masters: A Lot of Living* (University of Queensland Press, $22.95).

Here is an immensely readable account of a writer who, all too briefly, lit up Australia's literary landscape, gaining immediate popular and critical success and winning the unqualified admiration of all those women writers whose writing careers had been put on hold by domestic responsibility. Olga Masters was sixty-three and the mother of seven children when her first book, the award-winning *The Home Girls,* was published in 1982. She died

four years later with two more books published and two in preparation, *Amy's Children* and *The Rose Fancier,* both published posthumously.

Julie Lewis is very much in sympathy with her subject yet tells her story with a restraint that compels the reader to tease out the elements which explain Masters' late flowering and which reveal the ways she coped with her repressed creativity through the long non-literary years. The frustration of her passion to write had a range of side-effects which Lewis handles with considerable tact. Even so it is clear that, from time to time, there were marked tensions in her marriage to a schoolteacher who was not especially ambitious and who was regularly transferred from one country school to another.

Masters gained some satisfaction through journalism which provided a little money to supplement

Olga Masters

the family income and which allowed her to use her writing skills even if in a fairly confined way. Yet her creative impulses would not be denied. They expressed themselves in her devotion to her children, obviously, but also in a passion for cookery. When not banging away at her typewriter, she was happiest banging away with pots and pans in a kitchen where the sink was always full of washing-up from the cooking in progress. It is also clear that she had periodically to resist her husband's plans to improve the family's situation by opening a cake shop for which she would have to abandon the typewriter to do the baking.

She was a tempestuous character with boundless energy and a grim determination that, eventually, she would make time to write even if it meant getting up at four am to get it down before the family stirred and even if it meant the accumulation of rejection slips. Once her faith in herself was confirmed and her stories began collecting prizes, her productivity was astonishing. We all owe a debt of thanks to Craig Monro of U.Q.P. who recognised her exceptional talent and encouraged her to produce enough stories for a collection. *The Home Girls* was the result and the books that followed are testimony to his judgement. The great pity is that she died when her vast reservoir of stories was barely tapped.

This book does not aim to be a scholarly biography and lacks the kind of apparatus, such as an index and bibliography, that these works are expected to contain. Instead we have Masters' life told as a story for the general reader and, as such, it is interesting, enjoyable and, at times, very moving. In Lewis's version, Masters' life may not have been one of unalloyed happiness, yet one is left with the impression that it was one which gave her a profound sense of fulfilment.

Perhaps the most debatable matter in the book is Masters' insistence that her late start at creative writing was because it took her many years to find her voice, her unique, breathless style. Reading this biography, it is easy to believe she would have found it many years earlier if she had ever had time to settle down to writing for herself instead of for local newspapers. That she finally did is a matter for rejoicing.

Mary Lord's most recent book is The Penguin Best Australian Short Stories. *When Director of the National Book Council she organised a literary tour for Olga Masters.*

George Loyau and Our Folksong Heritage

Graham Seal

Hugh Anderson: *George Loyau; The Man Who Wrote Bush Ballads (Together with the Queenslanders' New Colonial Camp Fire Song Book, and the Sydney Songster). Studies in Australian Folklore No. 6* (Red Rooster Press, $37).

For many years Hugh Anderson has been one of a small group of writers, researchers and collectors prepared to take Australia's folklore seriously.

Anderson's commitment has resulted in an impressive list of published works, both here and overseas. This latest addition to his corpus proves that quantity and quality can indeed go hand in hand.

George Loyau was one of those people who wrote what most think of as Australian 'folk' songs – in this context, sung rather than recited bush ballads. That great body of supposedly anonymous, authentic verse and song of the bush was in large part, as we now increasingly recognise, a creation of a number of gifted, if mostly obscure, individuals who apparently threw off reams of verse, usually set to the popular tunes of their day. While this news will not, I hope, surprise folklorists, it will perhaps temper the often more romantic views of some literary critics and historians, as well as the general public. Anderson opens his extensively researched introduction by making just this point:

> Certainly the most persistent, and some would say pernicious, idea in the study of the sources of popular songs in Australia is that they are regarded as the anonymous compositions of some mythic bush community, while continuing research indicates that most of them are simply local songs parodied, for the most part, by journalists who printed them in whatever publication they happened to be working for at the time.

If Anderson's work on Loyau did no more than scotch the romantic notion of communal creation it would be well worth the read and the inevitably steep price. But Anderson also seems to have gone a long way towards solving a persistent mystery about the authorship of some best-known and loved (if not positively spoiled) bush ballads. Anderson strongly suggests that 'George Chanson' and Philip Somer (or 'Remos') are one and the same person, and that person was the often itinerant journalist, author, poet and jack-of-most-trades, George Loyau, 1835–1898. Loyau was therefore the author/compiler of two important early anthologies of bush ballads, *The Queenslanders' New Colonial Camp Fire Song Book* (1865) and George Chanson's *The Sydney Songster* (1869), both reprinted in this volume.

Both these works contain some of the 'classics' of our rural folksong heritage (though Anderson is, shrewdly I think, sceptical about the supposedly wide currency of many of these). *The Queenslanders' New Colonial Camp Fire Song Book* holds versions of 'The Overlander' and 'The Stockman's Last Bed', the former attributed to 'Remos', while the later and much more theatrically oriented *Sydney Songster* contains 'Stringybark and Greenhide' and 'Chinese Emigration', along with a number of other items that trade on the anti-Chinese sentiment of the time, often in the style of the more famous Charles Thatcher. Some of these songs were still remembered in the 1890s when the *Queenslander* published them and others, in a column eventually known as 'Songs of the Bush', between 1894 and 1895.

Loyau's exact role in the authorship and compilation of these anthologies may never be known. While Anderson is reluctant to accuse Loyau of lying, it is clear from the discussion of his other literary work that Loyau was no stranger to the literary form of the yarn. There is already some dispute amongst ballad scholars regarding the identity and output of 'Remos' – a dispute that has made for some lively contributions to the last few issues of the journal *Australian Folklore*. What is now emerging from such healthy scholarly debates is a new and much more realistic picture of the social contexts that generated that important if uneven segment of our folk and literary heritage, the bush ballad. That many better known poets were able to extend the form of the bush ballad has long been a commonplace of literary scholarship. The extent to which poets, such as Paterson in particular, exploited the genre, is now coming to light in work like this, as well as that of Philip Butterss, who has recently shown in his *Songs of the Bush: The First Collection of Australian Folk Song* (Rams Skull Press, 1991) how Paterson borrowed, mostly without acknowledgement, from the songs published in the *Queenslander* for one-quarter of his own famous and influential anthology of *Old Bush Songs,* first published in 1905.

Hugh Anderson, assisted by the research of Dawn Anderson, has made another valuable contribution to the developing field of Australian folklore studies. This kind of hard slog scholarship is very unfashionable in these times of theorising and 'problematising'. It is ironic that such work is perhaps doing more to dispel some of our myths than the spectacular but usually less substantial theoretical pyrotechnics that currently clog the academy.

Graham Seal, School of Communication and Cultural Studies, Curtin University, is co-editor of the forthcoming Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore *and author of* The Hidden Culture; Folklore in Australian Society *(OUP).*

Recent tape releases from NMA Publications

The Best of Jas H. Duke

-Jas Duke

This is the first recorded release of the sound poetry of Jas H. Duke, featuring 32 readings and containing a 16pp offset - printed insert booklet with notes to the poems, biography, and text compositions. Includes *Dada, California Love Story, A Dream, Duncan Bagel* and many more.

$12.00 + $2.40pp

"...These poems, with their energy, dada wit, fierce political and social satire, wide ranging historical references are a memorable performance. Here is poetry after the fire alarm, at speed, all bells ringing, racing down Main St. to the fire."

-Barrett Reid, ***Overland***

Brigid Burke, Clarinet

-Brigid Burke

A collection of five Australian clarinet compositions, performed by Brigid Burke. Includes pieces by Robert Smallwood, Neil Kelly, Don Banks, Ross Hazeldine, & Stephen Leek.

$12.00 + $2.40pp

"Brigid Burke shows a sensitivity and complete understanding of the music on this recording. Her playing has tremendous drive and flair, and her mastery of contemporary techniques is especially evident...Brigid enthrals the listener with quiet pianissimo passages and achieves a huge variety of sound colours. A very impressive debut recording."

-Judy Neutze

The Birth of Peace

-Chris Mann

A complete performance documentation of the multi media piece **The Birth of Peace**. Produced in a *limited edition* of 250 signed and numbered copies, this release contains a 16 page booklet offset-printed in two colours, a cassette of the first performance, plus additional materials in a plastic enclosure.

$29.95 + $4.95pp

"It is very striking. Congratulations. I would also like to know how you wrote this piece..."

-John Cage

Mixed Doubles

-compilation

Twenty four short soundworks from thirteen different contributors, including Amanda Stewart, Simone De Haan, Ernie Althofi, Rainer Linz, Jon Rose, Rodney Berry, Graeme Davis, and more.

Includes a 16 page insert booklet containing notes to the pieces and contributors.

$12.00 + $2.40pp

Electronic and tape works, sound poetry, music theatre performance, improvisation, music installations, vocal and instrumental music.

These tapes are available only through mail order. For full details or a complete catalogue send SAE to:

NMA Publications PO Box 185 Brunswick Vic 3056

J.P. 87