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A NEW VIEW of FICTION

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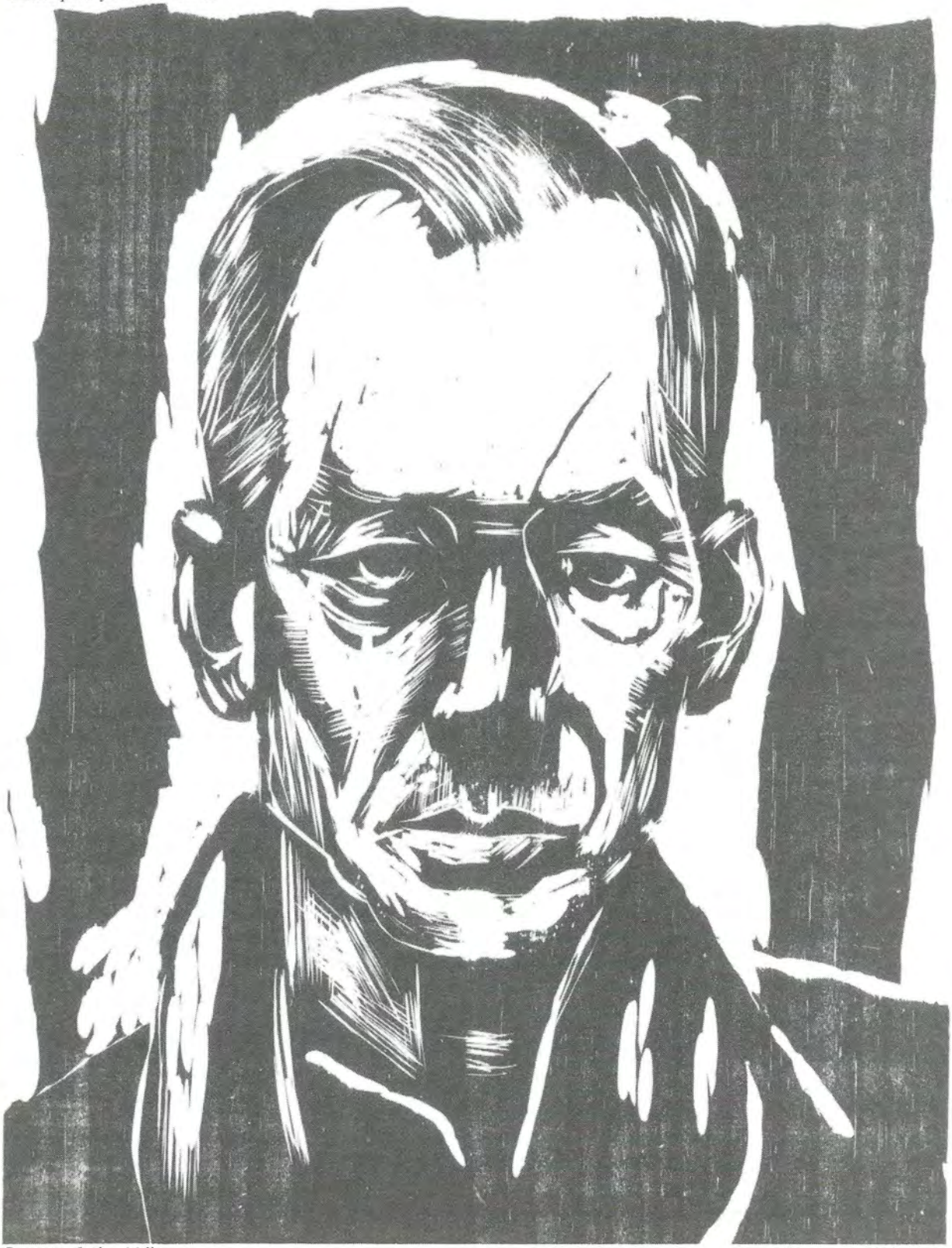


Portrait of Alex Miller *Woodcut by Rick Amor*

STEPHANIE GREEN

The Politics of Rubber

EACH MORNING you whisper a litany. Black tyres-*teakwood*-erasers-condoms-latex-elastic bands. You say these words each day as a reminder, as if at some point you had to list the reasons. You hold the reasons before you in the words. They are a pattern. *MacIntosh-monkeys*-snakes-safaris-Panama hats-Tarzan. Sometimes they change, with the comfort of cloth folding and refolding its original design. You have said them so often now that the words themselves are nothing, only sound. You no longer recognise when new meanings creep in. You whisper as you drive. *Chainsaws-logging-long-house-greenhouse-factories-jeeps and rifles-the murder of a man.* You remember the dark, the sound of cicadas railing like a funeral dirge to the rhythm of the engine. You drive on. Things are heating up. The sun rises early over the jungle. Already you can hear the hot belt of tyres on the road. Trees thin out in patches. The dark sky smears. The last cool breath fades. Your hands slip on the wheel. Already you are out here, pushing through the dust and heat. You want to get there first. You want the last drop. You rush for the last catch, the last possible crop.

The rubber trees are out there. You can still see them, leaking like abundant mothers, bleeding like maidens. Don't let them stand idle. Work them like street girls. Milk them before they dry up, before it is too late. Bleed and boil them, manufacture them into dollars, crisp and crumpled, lithe and brittle.

You pound roads out of rubber. Glued to the membrane of your vehicle, you enter the jungle, push back the forest edge. In and out, day in, day out, sweat turns to mud down your arms. Every day you drive this dusty road, ground down by trucks, its sidings littered with abandoned logs. There is light here now where deep shadow was before.

The sky is always white, except at dawn. It never rains now. The soft air has turned harsh. The forest curls back in upon itself. The rubber trees stagger with disease and thirst. Each crop, each day, could be the last. Heat grows with the light. Your shirt sticks to your back. There's no escape. The heat is always there.

The last day will be soon. You can smell the kill ahead of you. Pig flesh and bonfires. They cleared out the longhouses months ago.

A snake swerves across the road. You swerve and halt. The wheel burns under your hands. *Darkness.* Scales glint and shimmer, vast and undulant as an ocean. It is still. It could be dead. You sniff smoke on the tiny movement of the air. Words stammer in your ears. *Cicadas.* The black snake is a mark before you. It is a line, a gulf, a wavering end to an equation. You can't go on. You have come to the end. The snake's body is the sum. *A dirge.* It casts a shadow so wide that it stretches like a canyon between you and the future, so high that it reaches like a wall all the way up into the hot, white sky.

Now you are running. On the road you are running. The jeep is a mirage behind you. In the early morning you run, down the road, into the forest. The road is a snake behind you. Ahead there are only leaves and branches, the laceration of vines, the crash of your feet on the forest floor, the path your hands tear, the kiss of insects, the rot of the jungle, the fear you cannot leave behind.

A web of python vines snares your limbs. *Darkness enfolds.* You are captured. You are lost. The story has just begun. The fear is close behind you. *Cicadas cry.* It's hedging in. You can't turn back. You push on. You stumble on a jagged root. You stumble and fall. You push on. Branches strike your arms. You stumble and fall. Push up. You stumble and fall. Crying, you fall. *A dirge for the dead.* You fall. Falling, you fall.

In the village, the market begins. Everyone is here. Everyone comes here to sell or buy. Rice and dried fish, fruits and vegetables in wide baskets, it's all here, earrings and pink nylon underwear. People

Truck and Tramstop *Woodcut by Rick Amor*

are talking and laughing, bargaining under their bamboo shades. Children chase each other around the melon piles.

A tiny, old woman sits on her heels beside her mango baskets. She rubs her ears. There's something in the air. Something is happening. Her ears are itchy. The old woman's ears are very sensitive. They are small, round ears, smaller than the thumb of a man, yet more delicate than the tongue of a newborn child. The old woman can hear the flow of water even when it is buried underground. She knows with her ears the sound of growing rice, even before it bursts out of the earth. She can tell you when papaya seeds fall to the ground far away on the other side of the mountains. Nearby two men are haggling. They are tall, so tall that the little old woman has to lift up her chin to see them. They are large, so large that they stand taller than the huts of the village. One has a nose so cavernous and hairy that insects nestle inside his nostrils making nests and flying in and out as they please. He never notices this, except for an occasional sneeze which he attributes to a continual cold caused by the change in the weather. The other's belly is so round and protuberant that he uses it as if it were a ledge to rest his arms upon. When he laughs his belly quivers and bounces gently up and down. When he is angry, his belly turns hard and guards him against his enemies like a shield.

The old woman listens to them. Perhaps she will find out something she needs to know.

You can feel the sun. No one sees the sun any more. But you feel it on the back of your neck. You feel it on your arms, in the warmth of the water, in the hot way everything dries.

Here on the road, on the edge of the jungle at the market place where everybody comes, you hear the tall men argue. They are talking crops and prices. They talk about the dying factories, the dead rubber trees. They each try to bargain with the other's fear. They threaten each other with failure, with the loss of a rich man's dream, with destitution and despair.

The men are here to deal.

Their voices pass through the little crowd, through the growl of the road, the squawking of caged animals, the far-off clank of the factory. The sound of their voices rises with the sun. The tall men frown and shout. They laugh. You see the white scar of their teeth. The pink whips of their tongues. You smell the keenness of their breath.

Their voices float up on the hot noon air over the jungle. You can hear them above the trees. Their bargains, their loud secrecy and hints, their last desperate bluff and play, sharpen with the heat of the day.

One man's nose grows savage and jabs voluminously as he speaks. The other throws back his shoulders and thrusts his great belly forward. Each one seems invincible. Neither can see the end, though it is before them. It is about to come out of the jungle. It is rushing towards them as fast as the wind. Only the old woman smells it coming with her twitching nose. Only she hears its roar.

Stamp, rubber stamp, stamping boots, rubber boots stamp out of the boundaries, rub out black lines on a map, as a child rubs out pencil markings on a page. The little rubber, half white, half grey, slides so easily across the page, across the globe, correcting here, erasing there. The black boots of soldiers march through towns, crash through jungles crushing earth and water, battling light and shadow, fighting heat. Flat land lies now where once trees stood.

The tall men do not seem to notice. The hum of their voices grows, as if it is too big and greedy, too long and hungry for this little village market.

Their voices spin and rise, out and up, over the hills and mountains, over cities, over seas. They are talking rubber. They are squabbling over wood and gold. They can be heard around the world. Their voices grow louder. They are everywhere. You see them in every town, in every market, sitting on their smooth swivel chairs behind the walls of glassy buildings. You see them on TV. One blows his nose with a silk handkerchief. The other loosens his belt. They won't stop talking. They have plenty to say. They talk it up. They want the best price. They want as much as they can have.

They are taking a chance now. Everyone hears them. Everyone knows. We are listening now. The tall men are floating the market, laying out a last deal. They must bluff their way through.

Their faces are shiny with sweat. The heat is rising. Their hands grip the edges of their desks. Their eyes are desperate. You can see the end now. Here on the streets. You can see the moment coming. Everyone comes to watch. The heat goes up. The price rises and falls. You can smell the kill, the money men see it, clutch it. It presses up from the street below. It's so close. The crop yields. They snatch it in. It is the last one. The last deal. The Nikkei slides. The Dow Jones closes down. Soon, too soon, they say, nothing will be left.

On the pavement you feel it. Nights never cool down. You know it's hot in the jungle. You sense the danger. It's out there. The climate is changing. You can't get the heat down. Jungle comes to the city. Fear presses in. The streets darken. Safety melts. The labyrinth takes over. Nothing holds it back. Someone is out

there, someone with a knife, a fist, or a gun. You can feel it. You can't find a cool place. You can't stay out of it. The city clings. It won't let you go. Your one fan breaks down. There's nowhere to go.

You can't get cool. There's only the street. The street is no place to be. Only a few stay cool. Those are the ones who made it before it was too late. The ones with airconditioned rooms. The ones above you. You are cut off from them, the ones high above the city, high above you with your dusty, broken fan.

One of them can be heard at night blowing his nose, chilled by the coolness of his room. You knew who he once was. Another can be glimpsed through glass walls high above, eating oysters by candlelight with iced amber wine. You knew of him, too.

You are a long way down. Heat dances on your face from the pavements. There's grime in your pores. But the gap is narrowing. The climate is getting warmer. Their airconditioners break down. The city buildings shrink. The rubber soles of the cool ones wear thin.

Food is scarce now, even for those with money. One man picks his nose to stay alive. Another has his fat to fall back on. In the daytime you see them coming home, shuffling as the old tramps used to do, carrying dusty cotton totes, returning to their high places, the glass apartments, which uncooled are hotter than the hot streets below. Their worst fears confirmed, they are happy, blackmailing, conniving. They have not forgotten. They are the survivors. The world loves a bargain. And there is plenty of debris. There are still things money can buy.

They find him on the forest floor. Earth covers his face. Mushrooms sprout between his fingers. The scent of the jungle hides his smell. A snake has made its home in his belly. The vines have closed around him. He is theirs now and not easily released. Insects fly up, striking their hands softly as they lift him away.

They take him to the village and lay him down amidst their leaves and flowers. They lift his body-house onto their fires. His spirit rises with the fire smoke and swirls up into the sky. Flames melt him away. The smoke thickens and thins. Darkness enfolds him. Unweeping, they sing as the cicadas cry, a funeral song, an elegy of passing, a dirge for the dead.

MAX TEICHMANN

Free Trade and Free Fall

THE PROTECTION versus Free Trade debate is with us once more, after virtually disappearing for nearly twenty years. One of the received wisdoms of the cargo cult period under Hawke, Murdoch and Packer was that protection was dead, and we were now all deregulationists, economic rationalists and Free Traders. Those who weren't belonged, or should belong, to the Henry George League. The Age of Reason had arrived.

But the economic certainties of that hallucinogenic decade are dissolving before our gaze. Australia is not *nearly* as solvent or as busy as it was under the dreaded Malcom Fraser. Conservatives now see the Menzies–McEwen period as the Age of Gold, Fraser's as that of Silver. Whitlam and Hawke dealt in Fools' Gold.

Certainly, the beginnings of deindustrialisation through wide-ranging tariff reductions began in Whitlam's time, just as economic rationalism, freeing of the financial markets, floating of the dollar and wringing the neck of Protectionism will be forever associated with Hawke, Button and Keating. While the first stole some of Peacock's clothes, the latter made off with much of the attire of the New Right. No, the Italian suits were his own.

Meantime, 1500 factories closed in the year to June 1991, and official employment figures record one million unemployed, though almost certainly there are a great many more: 350,000 are long-time unemployed – probably rising to 500,000 by 1995. There are now ten times as many as there were ten years ago (Tim Colebach, the *Age*, 2 July, 1992).

Under the circumstances, Protection is again being raised as a necessary and desirable feature of the Australian economy; but up to date very little serious debate has occurred. This is really quite remarkable, when one considers that this issue was thrashed out, quite passionately, in the colonial period leading up to Federation, and in the early years of Federation. The public took sides, the parties took sides, and the newspapers volleyed and thundered around the issue – to protect, or to trade freely. The issue was important enough. Everyone wanted Australia to grow, to take in more people, to create more jobs. Essentially, Australia was a quarry and a farm, to quote Sir Henry Bolte, who expressed his approval of this state of affairs to businessmen in Düsseldorf. He was wrong, in a way, for in, 1947, 37 per cent of the workforce was located in the manufacturing industry, although the bulk of our exports were minerals and food. They still comprise something like 80 per cent of exports. But most workers were not in mining or agriculture.

The Protection debate began last century as it became clear that agriculture and mining were not going to increase their labour forces, no matter how much they raised their outputs. Both sectors were becoming capital-intensive, labour being replaced by machines; small farms were being squeezed by larger holdings, and the increasing amount of capital needed was putting more and more strain on smaller producers and prospective entrants.

One obvious way to redress this employment situation was to replace imports, by providing those articles ourselves: import substitution. And so, large-scale Australian industry was born, behind a wall of tariffs, quotas and subsidies. This because our local industries could not compete with products of larger, more sophisticated economies, with all their advantages of big production runs, more R&D, access to many sources of credit and, sometimes, State support for local industries. Nor could we match the products of countries with cheap labour, defective union protection, and few laws on safety, pollution or under-age workers.

We had to assure the powerful advocates of Free Trade, Britain and America, that these were infant industries we had established and we would phase out the tariffs as they grew up, and became competitive. But we rarely have found a level playing field, so subsequent tariff reductions have meant the slow death of these local industries. And that is what is

happening, especially in Victoria, which was the industrial base of Australia.

It is now suffering death by a thousand cuts – and, as in North Eastern America, people and capital are going elsewhere.

Another argument for protection concerned the effects of big swings in our export returns, with periodic balance-of-current-account crises – caused by buying more than we sold. This imbalance could only be corrected by borrowing, or reducing imports by legal restrictions (government intervention). This, in turn, produced lower domestic activity; that is, recessions. Another way of damping domestic demand, and hence reducing imports, is by raising interest rates; that is, a credit squeeze. This produces the recession we had to have. Unfortunately, our ability to reduce a wide range of imports is now greatly circumscribed – for we make so few of things needed to replace the excluded imports. So, the more import substitution the better.

In this vein, interruptions to our supplies of overseas products caused by war, or the kind of economic catastrophes from with much of Eastern Europe is suffering – little to sell and no foreign exchange – will be less serious for those countries which can satisfy most of their own needs.

WHO BENEFITS: WHO "SUFFERS"

The people who *benefited* from Protection were those in manufacturing and those who supplied and serviced them. Those who *suffered*, at least according to themselves, were farmers and miners compelled to draw on higher-cost local goods, services and materials rather than cheaper, and often better, overseas equivalents. It raised prices. They also feared retaliation by other countries erecting barriers against *our* exports. This seldom happened, and when it did, it did not appear to have been for *that* reason.

THE LAW OF COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE FOR MINERS AND FARMERS

Those determining our economic policies have long maintained that we have a competitive advantage in mineral and rural products over our competitors. The opposite is true of our manufacturers. So, we should concentrate upon exporting food and minerals while importing the manufactured products of other countries, especially as there are so many who undercut us by paying low wages, maintaining heavy subsidies and artificially low exchange rates.

Now, even is all these assertions were true, one might still ask, why does our manufacturing sector have to be sacrificed in this way – is this some kind of trade off, and at whose behest? May we not defend, that is protect, ourselves, against such shoddy commercial practices? And, of course, our farm exports are now being savagely discriminated against, while at the same time cut-price foreign produce is being dumped there to finish off the growers.

But, in fact, our mining companies depend, and have always depended, upon tax breaks of remarkable generosity, of a kind denied to all other sectors, and in breach of GATT rules – which stipulates that subsidies of a kind likely to cause injury to a similar industry in another country, are disallowed. In fact, mining companies have been able to write off their full infrastructural costs, in toto, in the year in which they were incurred. Now under Section 10 of the Income Tax Act, miners and petroleum operators have a ten-year write-off period. Were these concessions abolished, they would no longer be internationally competitive. Yet they lobby for the ending of all tariffs, quotas and subsidies for others. All of this was pointed out by Tom Fitzgerald in 1974 in an article, 'The Contribution of the Minerals Industry to Australian Welfare', in which he discovered that many miners, including foreigners, paid no tax – in fact, after tax and other concessions, the Treasury received a negative contribution. Then one should add the construction of townships, roads and railways to remote areas, ports and subsidised transport charges, etc. If we in debt to the miners, they are certainly in debt to us. They should be silent. Bill Weeks of RMIT, also pointed up Fitzgerald's thesis, and amplified it in a recent article in the Melbourne *Age*. The farmers, on the other hand, have been dumped – possibly at the behest of agro business and world commodity traders – and handed over to the banks.

But it is by no means clear that an economy buttressed by protection *does* have to lag behind and eschew innovations, or that major job-shedding and restructuring *has* to produce the unemployment we are experiencing. Imperial Germany grew at a great rate under protection, its quantity and quality of R&D enabled it to not only supply its citizens with first-class products, but to dominate many of the world markets. A rather similar story could be told about Japan and the Asian Tigers: all are protected and symbiotic with the State. All repeatedly restructure. The political culture – the quality of the managers, the politicians and the workforce – are the dominating factors, whether under protection or trading freely.

There is another group who suffer from a country protecting its markets and financial system: those foreigners seeking unimpeded entry for their goods,

services and capital. If they are powerful enough, they can control the international economic institutions; for example, the IMF and the World Bank, which both assume they have the right to make laws and other rules for the rest of the world, and enforce them by various kinds of sanctions. The major international banks and the multinational corporations all benefit from their access to the markets and world financial systems. They have pressed Free Trade and full deregulation upon their governments and the international bodies, who have responded appropriately. Those States who haven't responded are under constant siege to do so. This is quite irrespective of what the various peoples may want, or their local politicians. Whether protection is a good or a bad thing, generally or in particular cases, are matters foreclosed, so far as the IMF and the World Bank are concerned.

We are looking at a recurring historical problem with varying outcomes. Britain, at the height of her power – the leading exporter and technologically in advance of all comers, with her pound the prime world currency – was still unable to compel Europe *not* to protect, nor the United States, nor Japan. The period between the wars saw the strongest economic actor, America, uninterested in enforcing economic dogma, so different countries did different things. The U.S. was deeply into Protection herself, and her trade, though large by world standards, was was not an important part of the GNP.

After World War II, America and Britain, under the guise of installing bodies that would regulate world trade in everyone's interest, proclaimed Free Trade as the way everyone should go, and sought to impose a stranglehold on the global system. The story was that the Depression, the rise of Fascism, Japanese aggression etc., were caused by the absence of a world economic order based upon Free Trade. There is simply no evidence for this hypothesis – suffice to say the New Economic Order suited both countries. However, as nations recovered from the war, and the new actors arose – for example the Asian Tigers – the Anglo-Saxons have had to fight to keep control of the agenda. They haven't been able to stop countries protecting, except those under their economic control and dependent upon continuing capital transfusion. Australia is one of these countries.

WORLD MARKET AND A GLOBAL VILLAGE?

This has been the dream of internationalists – starting with the nineteenth-century liberal vision of trade making war seem otiose and national boundaries increasingly outdated barriers over which not only produce would leap, but also ideas, art, science and the superior values of democracy. There would be an international division of labour; capital would go to where there was the greatest profit, labour where wages were best. (In a way, this is happening, and a lot of the 'economic refugees' are doing just that, viz. 'improving their condition'.) But there was no provision, bar the Unseen Hand, for producing a level playing field or greater equality within populations, or between States.

There was also a communist version of the world market cum global village, and our old friend the Thousand Year Reich. All have been confounded by events – but whereas liberals and communists probably wanted both a world more just, more equal and more prosperous, the Fascist World Empire was essentially a non-economic idea, with no intentions of disseminating equality, justice or raising the poor. Quite the contrary.

We have been assuming that our new Free Traders and rationalists aim at the same quasi-moral ends of the original economic liberals; but there are no particular reasons for believing that. After all, we are looking at great multinationals, banks with global reach, linked to arms, drug and black money industries of enormous size. The overhang of the money represented by these great industries, and the effects of its laundering into the international banking system, and into the political and law enforcement subcultures of so many countries, produces a *rather* different image of the free movement of money through the world.

If one sees the peak organisations of world finance capital as dominated by a few very large national players, and both subsets by a separate system of multinationals and giant banks, with all their latter-day connections with the dark side of the Force, to quote Darth Vader, then one should not feel positively obliged to buy a second-hand economic theory from such people. Even when they chant the names of Adam Smith, Samuel Smiles and Milton Friedman.

If this sounds to some sensitive ears like old-fashioned populist conspiracy talk – diddums. It's just that we've found that the actual performance of communism, socialism and, for example, the Corporate States of Leo XIII, Mussolini and Action Française, to be very different from what was in the prospectus. There is no stronger reason to accept the apparently rational and high-minded philosophising of contemporary advocates of Free Trade, of deregulation and sanitised Social Darwinism, than to accept the other ideologists. This model has as little resemblance to the realities as did the others.

Furthermore, there is the fact that many of the loudest Free Trading countries are simultaneously protecting – wherever and whenever they wish. The U.S. is protectionist in its sensitive areas as is Japan, and some of the Tigers; and what else is the EEC except a self-contained economic system, based on external protective walls, and internal free trade? (Although this latter is still a long way from total freedom.) And what else are the other regional economic blocs, Customs Unions and Zollvereins, formed or advocated, and which we are always trying to join? What else are they, except discriminatory devices to disfavor outsiders? Protectionist in intent and in effect.

The only answer that countries like America can give when confronted with the asymmetry between her exhortations and her behavior is that of Walt Whitman's: "I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself!" Or more bluntly, Washington says, "Do what I say, not what I do!" One needs the soul of a slave to rest easily with this.

MULTINATIONALS, SLASH AND BURN, AND THE TEN LITTLE NIGGERS EFFECT

Slash and burn tactics in Asian and Brazilian agriculture are now overshadowed by a similar process in the world industrial system, and parts of the financial system. Historically, as wages and working conditions improved, taxes and charges could no longer be avoided, and the jungle morality of pure capitalism began to come under some monitoring, *some* control by governments...businessmen and manufacturers have always looked around for other venues for their operations. Places where the labour was cheap and, ideally, unorganised; governments weak and corrupt, ideally dictators over their own people; where safety laws, labour laws and tax laws for the rich were seen as some kind of private Western joke. So constrained, capitalists export capital: go offshore. That is, if their governments are silly enough to allow them, or too weak to control them.

Britain did it, *thereby* degrading her indigenous industrial sector, as she had earlier her agricultural one in order to help her new industrial system. America did it after World War II; exporting jobs it was called, with the result that her leading banks and multinationals made more from their overseas operations that at home. The effects on the domestic economy and society are all fairly obvious. Japan helped set up South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and is now helping out with Thailand.

So far, so good. But the intensity of competition is speeding up this process, exponentially. This is not simply the ever-more-rapid rendering obsolescent of particular forms of manufacture, but nonstop progress in, for example, computers, micro chips, etc. And, of course, the making superfluous of the workforces trained to perform those now-arcane tasks. It is the moving of operations to countries where the wage is a dollar an hour (as in Thailand's fashion copying industry). Or Indonesia, at 40 cents an hour, and India at 25 cents an hour. A South Korean female textile worker gets $2.60 an hour for doing what an Indian or Indonesian does for 40 cents or 25 cents. How will she make out? Not only are *we* unable to compete with such prices, neither can Europe nor America, nor Japan – unless they protect. But neither will one after another of the Tigers. And then there is Mexico, Brazil and perhaps Argentina coming on stream to undercut other countries. This is the bottom line of the economic miracles of these countries, as recently recounted in *Time*, *Economist*, etc.

More and more nations face the deindustrialisation of one part after another of their economies, as has been happening to Britain, the U.S., and now Australia. Are *all* the redundant workers going to go into the service industries, tourism, female hospitality, and the sunrise industries trumpeted by Barry Jones a decade ago? Perhaps everyone should stay at school – *ad infinitum*. Australia could not survive in such a world, especially in Asia, where the process is so volatile, and destructive. If we become part of Asia, it will be as the Pope's nose.

This is the New World Economic Order in which we should be evaluating Protection versus Free Trade. As we should economic rationalism, and especially deregulation.

HOW A RE-PROTECTED, REINDUSTRIALISED AUSTRALIA WOULD HAVE TO CHANGE

The two actors most crucial in a revived Protectionist Australia are the labour force, in particular the unions, and the employers, especially medium and small. It was the often shoddy products, poor service and high prices, all the results of low productivity and a partly unwitting indifference to the wishes and the rights of the consumer, that made it possible for anti-Protectionists to rely upon a large measure of passive support. That is, until the supporters found themselves suffering from the *effects* of deindustrialisation and deregulation. The unions are still denying the quite unflattering perception of *their* behavior – either as unionists or as workers – for they are not yet prepared to acknowledge their contribution to our present situation, nor

willing to change their ways; neither as leaders nor as followers. And change does not mean networking with Labor politicians, nor sweetheart deals with particular businessmen. This ends up as one of Adam Smith's conspiracies against the public interest.

The same could be said about a great many members of our banking, entrepreneurial and manufacturing classes, though there are glowing exceptions. The lassitude, complacency, swings between timidity and over-confidence, the lack of imagination and initiative, the impression of defective education and a distaste for hands-on experience, has made them a byword in international capitals. They are expected to drop every catch. And to these defects our bankers have, in recent years, added a dimension of crudely unprofessional behavior, amounting to some cases to corruption. Australia in the future cannot endure such behavior, nor such hosts of predators, local and overseas.

REINDUSTRIALISING

To reindustrialise would be no more revolutionary than deindustrialising, and obviously less destructive. The aim to create jobs, not eliminate them; to reduce imports, not increase them. And, by implication, to make it possible to start winding down our enormous debt, run up over the last decade by corporate greed, facilitated by financial deregulation, and urged on by our bankers and politicians.

Reindustrialisation would revive and add to many skills which are disappearing from this country, and which our youth will be unable to learn or try, the way things are going. The youth of other nations can, while *our* apprenticeship system withers on the vine.

Not everyone wants to work in the finance industry, or be part of the communications revolution – even if there *were* room for them. Nor does every young person want to squeeze the last drop of juice out of the 'education' orange; some actually want work, and training – and the ending of handouts. Nor should manufacturing industry mean hosts of process workers or dark satanic mills.

We now, in fact, have a rare opportunity – rather like Germany and Japan at the end of World War II; whose industries had been flattened by war. We can rebuild our devastated industries – and they could be new and state-of-the-art – and also set up places for training and retraining, providing the motivation for our *own* research. But they must be Australian owned, and legally defended against foreign takeover, or selling off by governments with one foot in the other camp. Or both. Otherwise we would have wasted our time. Perhaps it is of some interest here that Japan has two per cent foreign ownership and has just celebrated five years without even one month of a balance-of-payments deficit. It is estimated that Australia has sixty per cent foreign ownership, and has just celebrated her tenth year of balance-of-payments deficits.

OVERSEAS RETALIATION

This has been an argument produced since the time of Queen Victoria to make independent action seem dangerous, the childish folly of the rustic rebel without a cause. It has been used by our *compradores*, tied in with whatever dominant foreigner is exploiting us at the time; it was used by the WASP establishment, fearful of the rise of Australian radicalism, and nationalism, which would not only sweep away the colonialist privileges, but threaten their own. That native radicalism and nationalism, alas, was first diverted, devalued then neutered by the World Wars, by the Cold War and the Vietnam War and by cultural genocide, via the entertainment and electronic industries. Multiculturalism didn't help either. *Now*, the danger of overseas retaliation, if we protect, and move to retain what's left of the farm and our distinctive social fabric, is posited by those who talk of the world market, its irresistibility and the punitive ways of its spokesmen, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

This is an argument, by the way, against the idea of any independent government pursuing any policies which offend, or might offend, a major power or foreign economic cabal, whether the polices be economic, military or ideological. It is part of the cost of being a nation state, living in a world of nation states, and the only dignified and sensible way to go is to draw the lines yourself – not let others draw them. Otherwise they will pass through your loungeroom.

Fears of our short-term debt being suddenly called in – for most of it is short-term, including a lot of 30-day stints – are understandable; a flight of capital by way of disapproval, the organisation of a boycott, direct and indirect, against our goods, are all logically possible. They always have been and their plausibility, or feasibility, increases to the extent that we are in debt to foreigners; to the extent to which our financial system is controlled, or intertwined with others; our media owned and controlled by outsiders; our public utilities foreign-owned; our exports over-concentrated into a few areas; our indigenous research and development so thin as to make it mandatory for us to ask foreigners how to do things; our labour force so underskilled and poorly led as to

be unable to match the workers of other societies, be these either rich or poor; or whether our economy is protected or open to the gales. The past ten years have seen a process which almost looks like a political attempt to put us at the point of no return, in response to foreign suggestions.

We actually may have arrived at that point of it *not* being feasible to again embrace Protection and reregulation, in whole or in part. If that is found to be correct, then we as country have also reached the point of no return. We can only continue to decline. But we won't know unless we try: so we really have no option. In doing so, we may have to discard the existing main parties, and go after their little mates, here and abroad. A new kind of Melbourne Cup, or Trojan horse, finishing at the knackers' yard.

RECAPITULATION

The strategies adopted during the last decade were certain recipes for disaster. The removal of indigenous production by abandoning it to irresistible world competition, without first setting up sources of alternative employment, was either foolish or callous; just possibly a form of class warfare. The strategy of producing a structural increase in imports, without having put in place means for boosting exports to match them, was a recipe for greatly damaging our trade account, and balance of payments.

The only means of repairing a permanent balance of payments deficit under such conditions, is to entice ever-larger amounts of foreign money, in the form either of investments or loans. This we have tried and it involves selling slices of equity, private and public, or going further into debt. The flow of capital *out* to service loans, repatriate dividends and profit, as well as licensing fees, adds to our debt each year.

Incidentally, the terminal slandering of our manufacturing performance really goes too far. For one thing, manufacturing still has 1.1 million employees, second only to the public sector. It employs twice as many as agriculture, ten times as many as mining. Manufacturing underpins the service sector. Moreover, last year manufacturing exports reached $14.2 billion in export income, as against $14.1 billion in farm products. So our standards are not really as hopeless as the Free Traders suggest.

In a speech to the Securities Institute of Australia on 14 July, the Managing Director of ANI, Evan Rees, quoted a World Bank document which said, "The use of non tariff barriers by industrial countries has grown significantly". Rees continued, "Surveys show that the developed world was becoming more protectionist, not less so. Of 24 OECD economies, 20 were more protectionist than 10 years ago". The current anti-protectionist fad among economists and policy makers was not being mirrored elsewhere. So there it is. But you won't find *this* revealed, let alone discussed, in our foreign-owned media, nor by our university economists or politicians parroting the Treasury.

Again, the fiercely defended practice of mass immigration, right through these creeping crises of debt, balance of payments deficits and rising unemployment, only worsened the situation. We cannot continue this traffic until we have put our house in order and, I suspect, Protection and reindustrialisation are prerequisites for any rational and prudential resumption of immigration.

It seems as though the desire to curb then break the power of organised labour has been on the secret agenda of our conservatives, and on that of powerful overseas financial figures with considerable influence upon our duopoly media; all operating behind the various rubber figures catapulted into domination of the labour movements. Important ways of curbing unionism were indiscriminate and mass immigration, free trade and deregulation. The first failed in its object – our migrants didn't cooperate – but the others have virtually done the trick. But the cure is worse than the disease, as it has been in Britain.

WHERE WOULD THE CAPITAL COME FROM FOR A CHANGE OF TACK?

Given that Australians save very little of their earnings these days compared with earlier years, the story has been that foreign capital must be found if we are to grow.

However, the appearance of superannuation funds, belatedly as compared to many other countries, provides an entirely new option. Assets controlled by superannuation funds have grown from $32.6 billion in 1983, to about $140 billion now, and seem destined to increase to between $300 and $600 billion by the year 2000. By 2010 – which is not very far away – they could reach $1400 billion at today's dollar prices. That is 7½ per cent of GNP. If we were to follow suggestions by the Democrats, and Mr Santamaria, we would vest all of this in a single body, like Singapore's Compulsory Provident Fund, or similar bodies in countries like Germany – rather than hundreds of funds, difficult to monitor and running up enormous 'administrative' costs. And that money *would have to be lent*, or *invested*, in Australia – not offshore. By 2010, most of Australia's savings will be in these funds, and the role of

savings banks, etc., greatly reduced. It is therefore crucial to have that money available for Australians, including amounts for housing finance. Otherwise this country will be drained of its capital. Over $80 billion is already offshore while we run a foreign debt of $166 billion. Twenty years hence, both figures could be far, far larger, unless we adopt the ideas similar to the Democrats and Santamaria. But the relevance of this capital to the question, "How could we reindustrialise, how could we modernise, where's the money coming from?", is obvious.

The Hawke Government tried to lift Australia out of the process of slowdown and incipient decline starting to emerge under Fraser, by fabricating a boom based on credit expansion and overseas and domestic borrowing; that is, debt. Deregulation ensured that it would get out of control, until the bubble was burst by Himalayan interest rates. Meantime, tariff cuts continued, rural marketing structures were dismantled and migrants continued landing to go straight to the dole or to work at cut-throat rates in the gray market – rather like continuing to land new units of the 8th Division in Singapore as surrender was being planned.

The final painting in Hogarth's *Rake's Progress* says it all.

For many years Max Teichmann taught Politics at Monash University. he has co-written or edited seven books on politics. The fourth edition of his The Macmillan Dictionary of Australian Politics, *compiled with Dean Jaenoch, will be issued in November.*

GEOFFREY SERLE

Some Stirrers and Shakers of the 1950s and 1960s

The Inaugural Stephen Murray-Smith Memorial Lecture

The Council of the State Library of Victoria has established this annual series of lectures to commemorate Stephen Murray-Smith's contribution to Australian intellectual life. The Murray-Smith papers, including the Overland *archive, were acquired by the library in October, 1990. This inaugural lecture was given in the Queen's Hall, State Library of Victoria, on 8 April this year.*

IT IS MY HONOR and pleasure to present the first Murray-Smith lecture. When brooding about a possible subject, I tried to think of something relating to his life and work that Stephen would have liked or at least approved of; and so came up with 'Stirrers and Shakers', a category into which he fits so easily. Commemoration by this annual lecture will help to preserve his memory, not that he is in the least likely to be forgotten in view of all that he achieved.

I define stirrers and shakers in a limited sense: those who out of love for their country criticise and abuse it constructively.

I take the liberty of ruling out politicians, even though Gough Whitlam was in many ways the regenerator of Australian politics, and Arthur Calwell was largely responsible for the fundamental change in immigration policy and population composition; Jim Cairns, too, despite his extraordinary anti-Vietnam campaign. And I rule out ideologues like B. A. Santamaria, who for so long indirectly dominated Australian politics. What city other than ours could have produced two like Santamaria and Barry Humphries? And I rule *him* out – great actor and exposer of phonies though he has been, and despite his contribution to the development of Australian theatre – because, and I may be remiss, I have not noticed that he has ever had anything very constructive to say. I pass over some classical stirrers as too young – like Barry Jones, Germaine Greer and Phillip Adams – or the late Dorothy Green, whose period of fame was also after 1970, or Richard Neville or some other representative of the counter-culture, which interests me little. And I omit many whose stirring and reformist activity was largely confined to their profession or group interest – like Andrew Fabinyi in publishing, Dorothy Ross in education, Margaret Sutherland in music, Jessie Vasey and her war widows, or the writer Hal Porter.

I need to place my chosen subjects in context. Today the media and the younger generation broadly assume that everything in Australia was awful before the anti-Vietnam campaign and Whitlam; and that the vigorous and talented simply had to expatriate themselves from an Australia which was essentially colonial and backward. Well, there was everything to be said for young Australians seeing the world, as the only way to acquire standards of comparison and to *see* and begin to understand our country. Eventually they usually realised that there was much to be said in favor of old Australia, to which most soon returned. I admit that the Cold War aspects of the 1950s, the dropping behind in social reform and welfare, the hopeless prospects for political change given the existence of the Democratic Labor Party, were all profoundly depressing and give a superficial impression of stagnation.

Nevertheless, the context of the 1950s and 1960s is one of extraordinary change. Change largely for good, I maintain, in that Australia did diversify, accept new challenges and grew considerably out of isolationism, narrow prejudice and colonialism after the 1940s. (I dare say I sound Whiggish, but I do not necessarily imply that the pluses continued to outweigh the minuses into the 1980s, let alone into the 1990s.) World War II was cathartic in forcing Australia towards self-dependence in obvious ways and in the quality of our response. Industrialisation, getting off the sheep's back, is perhaps the most obvious: deriving from such ability as BHP's production of cheap steel from about 1930, and the demonstration during the war of capacity in manufacturing aircraft, guns, tanks, machine tools, muni-

tions, and in technological innovation. This led on, for example, to growth of a huge automobile industry, the Snowy River scheme, etc. We found we had a Commonwealth Public Service of the highest capacity at senior level (I only wish it had remained so). I might also argue that, in the 1950s, the quality of government demonstrably improved greatly on that of the interwar period. And part of the experience of war was a recognition as never before, among servicemen especially, that Australia had national interests. However, many of the best and brightest of my generation took an amazingly long time to unlock their colonial minds. And full recognition of those national interests in the structures

Stephen Murray-Smith *Louis Kahan*

of power and the ruling age-group was to be delayed for another twenty or so years. But I remember that the students whom I taught in the 1950s, although they were criticised for their cool political attitudes, were mostly unselfconscious Australians in outlook, despite the still prevailing Imperial rhetoric.

The Menzies governments *did* continue major Labor initiatives while the boom economy rumbled along well enough. Huge development of secondary and tertiary education continued. European immigration was diversified, and, despite all the hardships and difficulties, we brought in new people with far greater success than the United States did, historically speaking. Despite all his limitations, R. G. Casey as minister in the 1950s forced the External Affairs Department to give Asian affairs priority. Australian racism and xenophobia markedly diminished: perhaps hosting the Olympic Games helped to internationalise us, and I might almost be forced to admit that, in depicting the world's woes, television also contributed. The White Australia Policy was abolished in the 1960s: so, gradually, was political and cultural censorship.

The great change of course was growing out of the Empire/Commonwealth. After our reliance during the war years on the United States, a natural reversion followed towards the Empire/Commonwealth and the monarchy, and over the next twenty years Australia swayed back and forth in sentiment between Britain and the US. The eventual realisation that Britain no longer had any surviving interest in its former Empire, marked finally by its engagement with Europe in the 1960s, hastened basic economic trends – a quickly growing diversion of trade towards our natural area in Asia, and towards investment from the US and Japan rather than from Britain. For a time, during those depressing and alarming mid-1960s, it seemed that we might indeed go all the way with LBJ and become no more than an American satellite; but it was the anti-Vietnam movement which mainly demonstrated an intention to maintain what national identity could be preserved by a small power in the modern world.

Developments in the arts and intellectual life illustrate how far back before the 1960s one has to go to recognise the origins of and stages of change. There is something to be said in favor of the 1920s, such as the quality of Sydney Ure Smith's *Art in Australia* and his periodical *The Home*; a flourishing film industry killed almost stone dead by the advent of the talkies and the American stranglehold on distribution; foundation of the Walter and Eliza Hall and Baker medical research institutes and, in 1926, of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research; establishment of scholarly journals in economics, anthropology and the sciences, soon followed by others in international affairs and history; and, from the late 1920s, a steady flow of good novels; then, from the late 1930s, the appearance of major poets like Slessor, FitzGerald, Judith Wright and McAuley. *The* event of the '30s was the foundation of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, which for so long was to be the major civilising agency in this country. Initially its impact was on the performance and appreciation of music, then through its thriving radio dramas and its indepen-

dent news services and commentaries.

At last, we began to catch up with world painting, through the *Herald* exhibition of 1939 and the formation of the Contemporary Art Society: Nolan, Boyd and Tucker were at work, as well as Dobell and Drysdale; and from the 1940s there was a pleasing variety of modern painting. *Meanjin*, *Southerly* and *Angry Penguins* were all founded about 1940. We suddenly had a noticeable, lively avant garde in the arts. By the 1940s there were scientists and medical scientists of high world quality; Nobel Prize winners were soon to follow. Incidently, the Ph.D was not introduced until 1945 – in Melbourne. There also, Manning Clark began teaching Australian history in 1946. If there is one landmark signalling future promise in Australian Studies and the humanities in general, it may be Bernard Smith's *Place, Taste and Tradition* of 1945.

It was all still on a very small scale. I used to say about 1950–51 that one could comfortably keep up with what was going on in the arts. The scale entirely changed in the 1950s. Colonials interested only in the arts in general began to recognise, to their amazement, that Australia was capable of high artistic achievement. There were landmarks like Ray Lawler's *Doll* and Patrick White's *Tree of Man*. Good young composers were surreptitiously at work. About 1960 university research in science and the humanities really began to take off. Australia was now spending more on books than any other English-speaking country. The Elizabethan Theatre Trust, while not so successful in promoting drama, laid the foundation of the Australian Opera and the Australian Ballet, which by the 1970s were beginning to compete at world level. In the late 1960s the State began to subsidise the arts on a large scale. Enough of these indications. I think that achievement in the arts, and more obviously the huge recent growth in audiences for the arts, has probably been based, first, on the enormous post-war development of secondary education from the pitiable pre-war level, with the foundation literally of hundreds of free municipal libraries, while of course great State libraries were allowed to wither away.

The flourishing of the arts and scholarship from the 1970s – much good, much second rate – is almost hilariously unbelievable to my generation. I have said enough to suggest that the origins go a long way back. Let no one assume that the path was easy, especially because, in the nature of things, it was not so obvious that much progress was in fact being made.

Before presenting my pantheon (which of course reflects my prejudices, but also those of Stephen) allow me to mention a few of those who, for no very good reason, I have *not* singled out. Such as the mysterious Alf Conlon, the perpetual Sydney undergraduate who won the confidence during the war of Curtin and Blamey and ran the Army Research Directorate, whom many swear was a man of genius, who lost his power basis after the war and became an unconventional psychiatrist; of Jack Barry, a penal reformer and much else; or Ian Turner, Stephen's great mate, wide-ranging intellectual and man of action; or Clem Christesen, who throughout 35 years of stirring devoted his life to *Meanjin*; or some representative of the Melbourne-based Immigration Reform Movement – it would probably be Ken Rivett – which had so much to do with abolishing the White Australia Policy; or the cranky anthropologist Donald Thomson, as representative of the conciliatory movement towards Aborigines which, however weakly, has always been present in our history; or Larry Hartnett, who almost brought about the all-Australian automobile and, although an English migrant, became a great Australian patriot and scourge of bankers, lawyers and accountants.

For better of worse, here are my eight chosen, presented more or less chronologically. Most are from Melbourne – because I knew them personally – and there are no women unfortunately, for there were still so few prominent in public life. All throw light on the progressive movements of their time, and contributed to the qualitative improvement of Australian life.

I begin with Brian FITZPATRICK (1905–1965), a major historian who presented a counter-version of Australian history of considerable originality in his time and was a left-wing commentator over four decades. I bring him to you as a defender of civil liberties, not so much through the Australian Council of Civil Liberties, which he founded, but as a one-man band and independent publicist, a species which then was hardly known in the land. Opposition to political and cultural censorship and the defence of free speech was his constant activity until the end of his life. In the days of Cold War McCarthyism, when there were innumerable attempts to destroy the reputations of radicals and liberals, Fitzpatrick fought on their behalf, as he did in so many non-political cases of injustice. He was very effective in lobbying in high places on behalf of victims of all kinds, especially aliens and refugees, in the days when there were no ombudsmen. He denounced antisemitism whenever it arose.

Brian was full of contradictions: "a cold-hearted Marxist and a soft-hearted liberal", "a Utopian and a pragmatist" his biographer Don Watson says, "a

libertarian first, a socialist second". Brian had superb courtly manners. His headquarters was the Swanston Family Hotel, but I like to believe the legend that, at least once, he began his abstemious family holiday by walking from Geelong to Apollo Bay.

Next, R. D. WRIGHT, Pansy Wright (1907– 1990), Tasmanian farmboy, who, as professor of physiology, carried on the tradition of *his* great teachers Osborne and Wood Jones as lecturer of humane breadth. He was also a surgeon and scientist (who worked with Florey), an inspiration to medical scientists and a key man in the Florey and Peter MacCallum institutes, also something of an ombudsman in the medical profession and, eventually to his great delight, Chancellor of Melbourne University, where he saw a last chance to remedy some of its shortcomings.

He was a lateral thinker, who owed something to Alf Conlon. I swear I saw him once in full incongruous red-tabbed glory as a colonel in the Army Research Directorate. No one contributed more to the foundation of the Australian National University; as a secretary for two years of the interim council before a vice-chancellor was appointed, he used to spend Friday to Sunday in Canberra.

Pans was a very serious man with such high standards that there were few people of whom he could entirely approve. He was a boat-rocker and a confounded nuisance; an egalitarian; and a public controversialist, whether attacking the use of pesticides or police misbehavior or any manifestation of Big Brother – and not always wisely perhaps, as when he campaigned against compulsory seatbelts and blood-alcohol testing. He was Sydney Orr's best friend in his long ordeal.

But behind the gruffness and the growl, there was constant ribald merriment and wisecracking – as when (and there is some truth in this) he was warned that a demented professor was prowling the grounds, threatening to shoot him and the vice-chancellor George Paton, he responded, "Well that establishes that he's half sane, anyway."

As Vice Chancellor Medley quipped, "The trouble with Pansy is that he is so often Wright."

A. J. Jock MARSHALL (1911–1967), zoologist and Monash University professor, a born rebel who had no idea of how a professor ought to behave, was profoundly Australian despite or because of having spent fifteen years in England. A Sydney graduate, before the war he explored New Guinea and the New Hebrides as a scientific investigator. As a schoolboy he lost an arm in an accident (and in retrospect I have wondered whether he also had a glass eye, but I think not). In 1941 he wrote one of those early books of protest against Australia as it was, *Australia Limited*. During the war, despite his disability, he talked Tom Blamey into giving him an infantry commission and, back of Wewah, Jockforce was a great nuisance to the Japanese. At Oxford, after the war, he conducted an hilarious guerrilla campaign against the proctors.

On arrival at Monash he directed his department's research exclusively to the study of Australian fauna and insisted on planting thousands of native trees and shrubs on the campus. He delighted in attacking the medical professions and graziers, with highly original oaths. As an environmentalist he stood out in wildlife conservation – just one of many of a much earlier period of whom proud modern environmentalists have no knowledge. Jock had leading interests in Australian history (on which perhaps he was not quite the authority he though he was) and in art, as witnessed especially by the book jointly written with Russell Drysdale, *Journey Among Men*; he was happiest in pubs, especially in the Outback.

I might, instead of Jock, have put before you the late Professor John Turner, who may have been the father of the saner wing of the local environmental movement.

The story of Patrick WHITE (1912–1990) is the most dramatic we know of a returned expatriate. A poor devil, we might say, self-hating, given to terrible rages, his life full of feuds and broken friendships – yet so courageous, writing constantly in ill health, such an artist. How he hated Australia, and how little he knew about it after his return in 1948. How he railed against it in his 'Prodigal Son' essay about the "Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions, in which the rich man is the important man, in which the schoolmasters and journalists rule what intellectual roost there is, in which beautiful youths and girls stare at life through blind blue eyes", and so on. Yet he became increasingly involved: as he learned the Australian language for the purposes of his writing; became excited by painters and composers; became involved in the theatre, a scarifying experience but which also gave him warm friendships and support – though in fury at the Adelaide Festival's rejection of *The Ham Funeral* he wrote *Season at Sarsaparilla* as a blast at the "coy pretences of respectable Australia"; and he was exhilarated by the Opera House. He was not so exhilarated by Australian writers – though he eventually discovered Christina Stead and others – or by critics such as Leonie Kramer and Dorothy Green, whom he dubbed Goneril and Regan.

In the end, although he had never spoken in public before the age of 46, and although he was always a loose cannon, he became a fairly orthodox left-wing critic of society. From the mid-1960s he was writing magisterial letters to the *Sydney Morning Herald* about desecration of the environment, political corruption, and the anti-nuclear movement; demonstrating against Vietnam and the proposed rape of Centennial Park; or making an agonised appearance in court as a witness against the censoring of *Portnoy's Complaint*.

I must include my extraordinary friend and mentor Manning CLARK (1915–1991). I praise him simply as a very great teacher. I am in the privileged position of being able to claim that, by chance, no student was ever more exposed to him, certainly no one else so extended me. He dominated the presentation of Australian history at secondary and tertiary levels for at least twenty years, injecting a remarkable range of possible interpretations. He was an eccentric, but very much more. Early on, he was essentially a pessimistic sceptic, dwelling on the futility of 'future of humanity' men and women and on the futility of the search for happiness, and history as the stage for fools. He had his particular vocabulary for those of whom he disapproved: measurers, dry-as-dust scholars, spiritual bullies, the walnut-hearted, Yarrasiders, sneerers, straighteners (as against enlargers), together with most social scientists and all Cambridge philosophers. Yet in the end he became an improver, a patriot whose main theme in Volume Six of the *History* was the conflict between the Old Dead Tree and the Young Green Tree, as Australia struggled towards independent self-respect. He eventually emerged as a guru from the 1960s. The great public impact he made demonstrated his successful competition, as humanist, against the powerseekers, ideologues and charlatans who infest the media. And no one else, remotely, roused such interest in Australian history.

Tom FITZGERALD, born in 1918 and still crackling as a scourge of economic rationalists, I take as the leading spirit in the revolution of the press. He was educated at Sydney Catholic schools, spent much of his youth working on the family milkrun, studied part-time at university, was a navigator in the RAAF; revered Orwell, Keynes and T. S. Eliot but was more attracted to the United States; was not a leftwinger – "in Australia the liberal has no party", he said – and soon after the war became a brilliant financial editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. His conduct of the fortnightly *Nation* from 1958 to 1972 more than anything else broke down the narrowness, complacency and stodginess of serious Australian journalism. Working with George Munster, the cosmopolitan Viennese, and others such as the superb ratbag Francis James, essentially he attracted the brightest and best of contributors of the younger generation of thirty years ago. Australia was scrutinised as never before.

To give credit where it is due, the foundation by Rupert Murdoch of the *Australian*, Adrian Deamer's brief editing of that paper, and Graham Perkin's revitalising of the *Age* were other major contributions. And while on this subject, I remark that the most illuminating books on contemporary Australia then were written, not by academics, but by the Sydney journalists Douglas Pringle, the born-again Donald Horne and Craig McGregor.

I include Vincent BUCKLEY (1925–1988) not because he was a distinguished poet, critic and professor, but as representative, before and after Vatican 2, of the immensely significant movements in Catholicism at this time. The lay movement that sought pluralism within the Church, both of the liberal and ecumenical kind, and opposed rigid episcopal authority, was largely associated with the University of Melbourne through the Newman Society, the apostolate movement, the *Catholic Worker* and the journal *Prospect*. In the 1950s, Catholics emerged at last from their intellectual ghetto, and have since greatly enriched intellectual life in this country and contributed markedly to the withering away of the sectarianism in which my generation grew up. And that is surely one of the largest pluses of our recent history. So are the radical social concerns, in most aspects, of Catholic bishops today.

Vin Buckley was in the thick of all this. His autobiographical *Cutting the Green Hay*, despite some slight element of posturing to which our ethnic Irish are given, is one of the few major books on the 1950s and 1960s, a key guide.

I might equally well have chosen Max Charlesworth for comment.

Finally I want to dwell a little on Robin BOYD (1919–1971), on whose biography I am engaged. He was a brilliant architect who was never given opportunity enough, a reformer of his profession and eventually spokesman for it, and architectural critic of world renown. He was also a gifted writer, and communicator on radio and television, a teacher at the university and in general, a major campaigner for the arts, and a pioneer historian (*Australia's Home* 1952 was an astonishing achievement in its time). Boyd taught us in *The Australian Ugliness* of 1960, to observe, to see our surroundings. Above all

he was a patriot, who guyed our deficiencies with the primary intention of rousing us to discrimination, to a higher level of civilisation. He was a hero of the long losing battle against the imposition of American junk culture – of America systematically exporting its worst – and after a year at MIT few people knew better what better things America had to offer. And he campaigned vigorously, with Hector Crawford, for Australian content on TV.

Robin didn't have much of a formal education at Lloyd Street East Malvern and Malvern Grammar School, as one of the very last architects' apprentices and at Melbourne Tech. He was largely self-educated – I am fairly certain that by knocking round with his cousin Arthur in their teens they considerably educated each other. It was probably here in the State Library of Victoria that he was reading the London *Architectural Review*, the New York *Pencil Points*, the *New Yorker* for which Lewis Mumford was art and architectural critic, and other journals. By 1939 he was editor of *Smudges*, the monthly news-sheet of VASS, the Victorian Architectural Students' Society, which is by far the best student writing I know of, awarding its monthly bouquets and blots for current buildings, inevitably sometimes silly but mostly brilliantly spot on. Then came four years of exile mostly in New Guinea and Queensland, mapmaking, when I guess he was constantly reading Richards' Pelican on Modern Architecture, Mumford's *Culture of Cities*, Pevsner, Betjeman and Osbert Lancaster and everything else. And, as so many of us did, in prolonged boredom, brooding on what it was to be an Australian, crafting a personal ideology which almost inevitably at that time and in those circumstances was broadly utopian left-wing.

After the war he ran the *Age* Small Homes service for six years, accompanied by the weekly article which he continued later in the *Herald* and the *Australian*, and was extraordinarily prolific. How gifted he was as a writer, especially, as academics trying to revise their lectures will appreciate. How, in having frequently to repeat his messages, he did so freshly and attractively! He joined Roy Grounds and Frederic Romberg in a partnership in 1953, which broke up in distressing circumstances in 1962 after Grounds personally accepted the commission for the Arts Centre. In the 1960s when, still in his forties, Boyd was being honored in every conventional way, nationally and internationally, his business did not prosper, partly because he had been too much of a stirrer. When he died suddenly in 1971 he was very probably about to be appointed professor of architecture at Melbourne University, a post for which he was superbly suited.

Robin and Stephen did not know each other well, did not often run across each other, but they had much in common: the patrician manner, the media skills, their role as spokesmen for the arts, the disinterestedness of their campaigning, their common assumption (uncommon in Australia) that people of good will could strongly disagree with each other without suffering personal breaches, and that what Australia desperately needed was more outspoken controversy. Public intellectuals were all too few in those days. Both had a very wide range, but in this regard I suppose Stephen takes the honors, as also against all the others I have named, for wherever did he draw the line? Metrication, lighthouses, remote island communities, Antarctica, quiz shows, bawdy songs – almost nothing was beyond his ken, as his innumerable unpublished as well as published letters to the papers also show. To say nothing of his campaigns on behalf of individuals in distress – as some one has said, he would always go in to bat for you.

What did these stirrers and shakers have in common? I have gathered them fairly randomly, but I suppose it is not surprising that my choices all turn out to be native born of Anglo-Celtic background and also natural unselfconscious Australians, post-colonialists entirely free from the bonds of Empire, and all of them resistant to American political and cultural domination. Yet they were all cosmopolitan internationalists, none of them narrow nationalists. All but one were university graduates. They were all bonny fighters, cussed in varying degree, yet open-minded advocates of free discussion. A significant minority had an Irish Catholic background. Most of them served in the war. None of them was for very long a member of any political party and they were mostly irreligious. And they were all funny men, anecdotalists, delighting in the human comedy. In the arid Menzies–Bolte years they were harbingers of the future who gave us hope and encouragement. Stephen approved of them all.

Author and historian Dr Geoffrey Serle, amongst whose best-known books are From Deserts the Prophets Come *(1973) and* John Monash *(1982) is presently writing a biography of Robin Boyd. He was a long time friend of Stephen Murray-Smith.*

PETER COCHRANE

Writing for the Cold War;

The Man with the Donkey, the Making of a Legend

In 1956 the Reverend Clarence Irving Benson went home to England. He was collecting material for a biography of John Simpson Kirkpatrick, the Gallipoli hero known to most Australians as 'The Man With The Donkey'. Benson was in luck. Simpson's sister, Annie, was alive and well in Durham, in the north of England. Annie was generous. She gave him fruit cake and tea, and some time later she surrendered the family's treasure – a collection of seventy-two letters and post-cards, written by her brother between 1909 and his death in May 1915.

At the time of his trip, Benson was possibly the best-known churchman in Australia. As a young man he had emigrated from Yorkshire in 1916, probably for his health which had prevented his enlistment in the British army. From the 1920s he was a leading figure in the Methodist Church in Melbourne. He was known to thousands as the presenter of 'A Pleasant Sunday Afternoon' on radio 3LO and later radio 3DB, and a regular columnist for the Melbourne *Herald*. He was a watchful anti-Communist after World War II, a keen supporter and acquaintance of Robert Menzies, a collector of signed first editions by Winston Churchill, and a celebrator of England's green and pleasant land. With his biographical sketch of Simpson he aimed to sustain a good Christian tale of one man's devotion to his mother, his family and his empire.

The Man with the Donkey. The Good Samaritan of Gallipoli was published almost a decade later, in 1965, just in time for the fiftieth anniversary of the Gallipoli landing. It included a generous sample of the letters (forty-two in all) which took up nearly a third of the book and provided a first-hand commentary on five years of wandering and seafaring, serial impressions of an itinerant working life in a new country, followed by the experience of enlistment and war. But a reading of the original letters reveals that Benson was a ruthless censor with a preference for a moral tale of his own making rather than an historical one.

He chopped out those passages that revealed Simpson the radical labour man, reflecting on his attitude to the 'old country' and on his working life in the new: "I often wonder", he wrote, "when the working men of England will wake up and see things as other people see them. What they want in England is a good revolution and that will clear some of these Millionaires and lords and Dukes out of it".

Benson also cut out the language that displayed Simpson's wilful temperament and his short fuse, notably the language of domestic violence. "If I was to get a wife like her", he told his mother, "I would be getting hanged inside a year." On another occasion he wrote home about a brawl he had had with his landlord:

> he smote me across the head with the poker and put a cut in my head about an inch long after that I sailed in and then you could not see anything for dust. I broke a chair over his head and in the struggle we upscuttled and broke a good few things so he got a summons out against me for assault and "abreaking hup of the appy ome", but as both him and the wife was drunk and I wasn't the case was dismissed.

The man of the letters-in-full is clearly not the sanitised Simpson of Benson's book. Benson left his readers with a Simpson who could describe where he was going and what he was doing, who talked a lot about food, who joked with his sister, suggesting she had "the worrums" – "Peur wee Annie...tell her to try wormcake" – and who regularly sent money to his mother.

The uncut letters reveal a Simpson who was fiery and compassionate about political and industrial affairs, who was pained by the injustice of the class

system he had left behind in England and who wanted things to change. Benson cut out Simpson's hostility to class privilege, his references to the House of Lords as being full of "a lot of empty-headed fools", to England as a "Lousebound" country in need of a revolution, and a lot more. He cut out most of his brawling and bravado.

These letters are the principal source of information on the life that preceded the legend, but the fragments that Benson published are so diminished as to be of no value whatsoever as a source for biography. An account of the life that preceded the legend, and of the historical process whereby the

Simpson and the Donkey, posing for the camera in Shrapnel Gully. (Courtesy Queen Elizabeth II Museum, New Zealand).

legend was made and remade from 1915, appears elsewhere.* This essay is confined to Benson's moment in that larger history, to his possession of the letters and the motivation behind his use of them. The Simpson that Benson found in the letters must have been a great disappointment to him, but he was not deterred. It was 1956. His need for a hero of his own making was great.

When Benson left South Shields, late in 1956, he and Annie were on the best of terms. A correspondence began that was to continue, intermittently, over eleven years. Benson was overjoyed at having found the letters, and even happier when Annie said that he could take them back to Australia. Annie was flushed with his promise of a book and his talk of friends in high places. They each believed in respectability, they expressed a mutual desire "to walk humbly with God", they both loved Winston Churchill and a nice cup of tea. Annie wanted Simpson to be remembered and she hoped to find a place in the legend for herself. Benson wanted all the help Annie could give. It seemed a sound basis for collaboration and the good-will on both sides survived until the book was about to appear. Then it began to wear thin.

In 1964 Benson wrote to say that the book was almost complete, and Annie replied, delighted and looking forward to the three copies that he had promised her. It was to be launched in Melbourne and Sydney to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the Gallipoli landing. Benson wondered if Annie was well enough to travel. Perhaps he could arrange for her to visit Australia as a guest of the government. He would talk to his friend the Prime Minister about it.

The invitation stirred Annie to great excitement. She went off to the photographers to have a portrait done, to send to Benson for advance publicity. Then she went to see her doctor to win his approval for the trip. The visit would make her very proud, she told Benson. She would bring Jack's medals and his identity disc and give them to Sir Robert herself:

> I had intended giving them to Sir Robert when he was here for dear Sir Winston Churchill's funeral but he was so busy and so far I haven't heard any further from the High Commissioner at Australia House.

Benson was shocked. It seemed Annie had written to the PM, direct. She was going to hand over Jack's things herself, in his absence. Why had she not gone through him? He felt like a middleman cut out of the trade. He was compelled to point to her *faux pas*: "I was a little surprised," he told her, "that you had written direct to Sir Robert during his crowded days in London re the disc and medals which we discussed carefully on my last visit." Benson knew the right way to go about it, for he had, he told her, "specifically refrained from approaching Sir Robert on the matter until he had returned to Australia". He wanted to know what she had said. He was quite upset. He dealt with the PM. The PM was his friend.

Simpson (third from left, standing) with other members of the 3rd Field Ambulance at Blackboy Hill Training Camp, WA, 1914. (Courtesy Australian War Memorial).

What Benson failed to realise was that Sir Robert Menzies did not see things in quite the same light. Sir Robert had been sidestepping Benson's unctuous overtures for more than thirty years. Benson was always asking favors, offering gilded praise, recalling promises not kept, badgering for an autographed photo or a copy of a speech, and yearning to be seen at lunch with his dear Prime Minister: "I am sorry that we have not been able to manage that lunch. It is now five years since we had a meal together!" Benson wrote, in 1952. Three years later he reminded Menzies that eight years had now passed and that lunch "still awaits your leisure", and in 1967 he was begging for a mere "twenty minutes" in Walmer Castle.

Menzies treated his latest proposal – for Annie's visit – as he did most others that came from Benson without any significant political advantage attached. The episode fits neatly into the evasive pattern. Early in March 1965 Benson had to tell Annie that he had written twice but heard nothing from Sir Robert. "The dear man is so overwhelmed with affairs that mail banks up on him." The Duke of Gloucester had been invited but that, of course, was a visit of another order. A fortnight later he told her that his hopes were fading and he was a disappointed man. (He had in fact been unable to get past Sir Robert's secretary.) Then came the answer – a definite no: "For some reason [wrote Benson], he is apprehensive about the strain and risk of your visiting Australia...However he has asked the High Commissioner to invite you to the celebration at Australia House [London] for the 25th April."

Annie was mortified. She took it as a slight. Why had this happened: "Surely you would get a reason?" she asked Benson. Her disappointment bordered on despair, then switched to anger, but not resignation. She had wanted to be there to honor her brother. "I am very very hurt but will still hope at this late stage that something will happen to clear away the doubts." And there was a dramatic note beneath her signature: "P.S. cannot write more as I'm so very upset at this treatment." Nothing ever came of Benson's proposal and more than two years passed before she wrote to him again.

There were two sharp letters in 1967, one after the other, each revealing that a sourness had been stewing for some time. Annie wanted her photo-

graphs back. She had asked Benson to lodge her brother's letters in the archive at the Australian War Memorial, a gift to the nation from her family. But Benson, it seemed, would not give them up: "Please place those sacred letters in the Archives – as promised and return my possessions." Annie said her letter would be duplicated and the copy sent to "someone in Authority in Australia". Her patience had run out.

Worst of all, it seemed the book itself had been a great disappointment to her. "You did not stick to the truth", she told him. There were devious and upsetting distortions in the book. The account of Benson's visit to South Shields in 1956 was so inaccurate, according to Annie, that it read like a complete fiction. The niece with whom Benson was travelling had not got a mention, the details of Annie's hospitality – fruit cake and tea over two days – had been completely overlooked, and the details of how and when she handed over the letters bore no resemblance to the occasion that Annie remembered.

There seems to have been no doubt in Annie's mind that she was defending important things that Benson had neglected: "You did not stick to the truth", she repeated. Yet other truths were missing, truths that did not concern her in the slightest. She did not touch on the truths in Jack's letters that Benson had obliterated altogether, about his politics, his temper, the strains within the family, the bitter memories of home. When Benson took away Jack's politics, all that was left was an apolitical itinerant who slogged for King and Country and who appeared to love his mother dearly, a conservative hero for a conservative legend. That suited Annie just fine. She did not object to the utter misrepresentation of Simpson because appearances and respectability were important to her. In fact, in some respects, she had wanted a more severe censorship than Benson. She wanted her brother's misspelling corrected; she hoped Benson would delete certain unfortunate events that remained in the manuscript, she objected to any mention of the amounts of money Simpson had sent home to his mother, and she wanted no references to his swearing.

Benson obliged her by correcting the misspelling, but he would not concede the other requests. Simpson's generosity to his mother was a key part of the story and some of the unfortunate events, a Christmas day brawl for instance, were to his liking:

> I should be sorry indeed to cut this out because it reveals his fun and frolic and manliness. We must not make him look like a saint with a halo, because he was not...In my view they [the letters] make the man of the legend all the more human, manly and attractive...Please trust me because the total effect of the book will be to make him more attractive and lovable than ever. And you are the heroine of the story....I softly whisper that the Queen [has] conferred a Knighthood on me.

The Knight prevailed. Annie did not press these matters any further, though she continued to be most unhappy about the heroine she found in Benson's story.

The forces that shaped Benson's version of Simpson continued to be powerful after the author hurriedly handed over the letters to the Australian War Memorial in 1967. He was spurred on, no doubt, by Annie's threat to write to "someone in Authority". The letters have been at the AWM in Canberra ever since. Journalists, historians, poets and playwrights have pored over them on many occasions, yet all accounts conform to the politically conservative limits set by Benson. They have been perused every April as Anzac Day has drawn near, and frequently cited or quoted in books or newspapers. The best-known account based on the letters is to be found in Patsy Adam-Smith's *The Anzacs* where Simpson becomes part of the bush mythology of Australian nationalism, one of the "boozers and brawlers and ships' deserters and blokes who hump their blueys". The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry is merely a reiteration of the conservative myth. A recent play, *Simpson J. 202*, by Richard Benyon, managed to portray its subject as a lovable half-wit, although the author had read the letters. Anzac Day in 1990 gave rise, specifically, to a review of the letters by Petra Rees in the *Australian*. Rees' account revealed that Simpson was a bit of a larrikin, but censored the politics and invective of the letters completely.

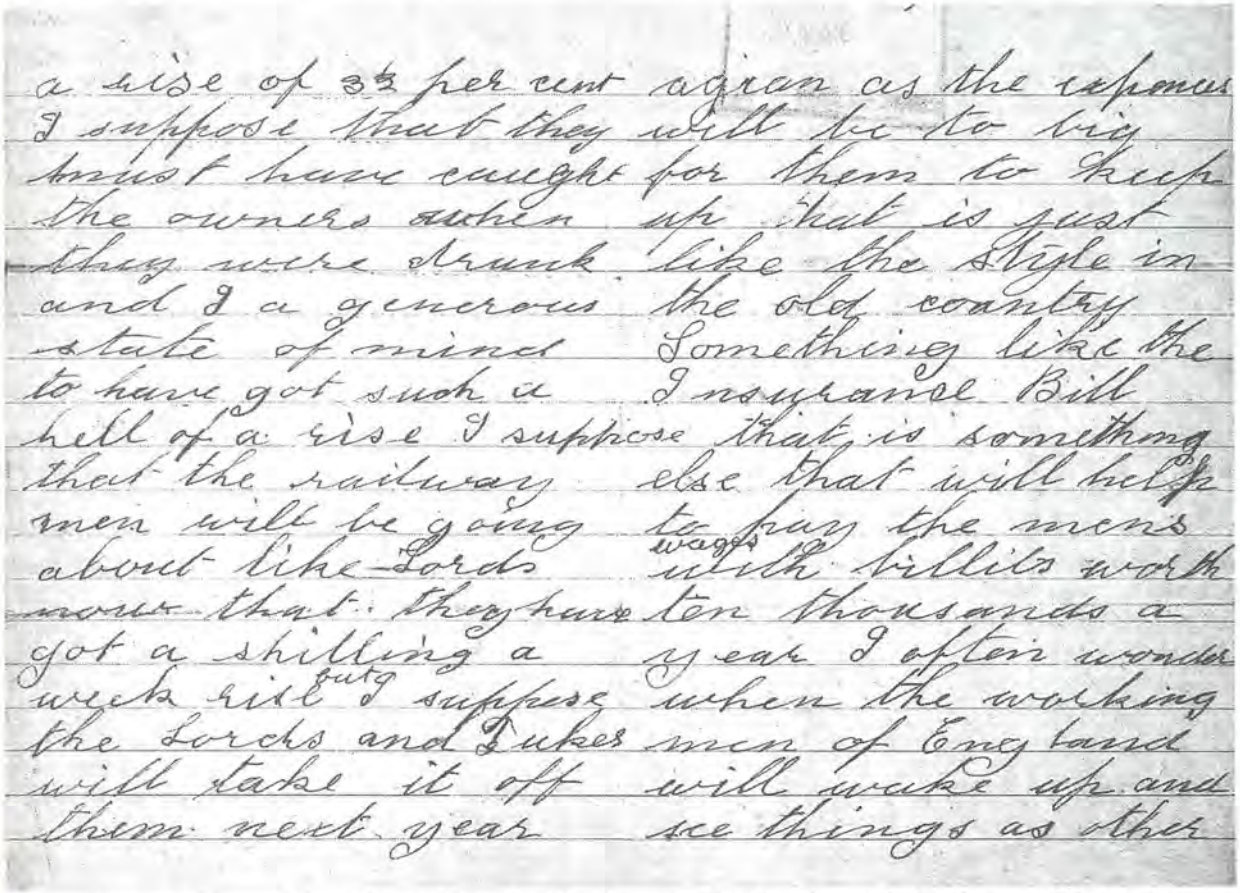
None of these distortions was a case of what Bernard Crick has called "the gentler question of the biases found in all history". As Crick pointed out, the late Sir Lewis Namier and Eric Hobsbawm gave rather different accounts of the past, but they did not consciously falsify. Of the four examples cited, however, only Adam-Smith's account can match Benson for pure craft: Adam-Smith had a special place for Simpson in her gallery of knockabouts for he was one of "those toughest, roughest of all men, the ships' firemen, shovelling coal with a bullocky's tongue [sic]...Jack Simpson was a *real* man". A tongue used in that way must have been a diverting notion, but it can hardly excuse Adam-Smith's selective use of the letters. Simpson's class

consciousness was ignored in preference for the barely disguised sexual appeal of the legendary itinerant. Not content with censorship, Adam-Smith claimed to have revealed the "*real* man" and denounced the official version of Simpson as fictional. Her fiction was as complete as the official one, made worse by a trench of clichés and the zeugmatic figure of speech. In her preface she went further, claiming that the popular distortion of Simpson reminded her of the "affected paintings in churches of St. Therese which bore no resemblance to the real woman as revealed in the diaries held by the Vatican. Adam-Smith summoned up some indignation: "None of your men who 'walk down Piccadilly with a poppy or a lily' could have done what Simpson did. I was sick at heart at the proliferation of simpering words for schoolchildren about this delightful man's man."

It would appear that all subsequent accounts conformed to the conservative limits set by Benson and approved by Annie, as though an hypnotic spell had been at work. Again and again Simpson's allegiance to class, his vehemence and anger, have been erased, in favour of the simple tale centred on his alleged loyalty to mother, nation, empire and, in the last instance, to his manhood. In another context it is the kind of censorship that Benson would have branded 'Bolshevik'.

The question remains of how Benson could square such a violation of his texts with his professed aim to uncover "the man behind the legend", or, for that matter, with his Christian principles? His disposition in this regard was probably set long before he encountered the letters, having its origins in his love of northern England and his identification with the physical landscape and social world of Simpson's childhood, for he too had grown up in northern England and his memories, unlike Simpson's, were fond ones.

When Benson was researching Simpson's life he was also recovering his own childhood. This affinity with Simpson, and thus the furtive presence of autobiography, might have been strengthened by the loss of his two brothers in the war, and by some barely recognised need to merge something of himself into


a rise of 3½ per cent again as the expenses
I suppose that they will be so big
must have caught for them to keep
the owners when up that is just
they were drunk like the Style in
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state of mind Something like the
to have got such a Insurance Bill
hell of a rise I suppose that is something
that the railway else that will help
men will be going to pay the men's
about like Lords wages with billits worth
more that they have ten thousands a
got a shilling a year I often wonder
week rise but I suppose when the working
the Lords and Dukes men of England
will take it off will wake up and
them next year see things as they

Excerpt from one of Simpson's letters home to his mother. He is discussing the railway bosses who have just conceded the workers a rise. His scepticism shines through.

the Gallipoli hero's life. But the deep background is necessarily sketchy and tentative. A more tangible answer comes out of the connection between Benson's religious principles and his politics, which cannot be separated from the Cold War and his fear of Communism.

Benson had grown up with Kipling's jungle books beside his bed. In the post-war period, knowing the bard was out of fashion, he was fond of quoting T. S. Eliot in Kipling's defence. Like Menzies he loved the Empire with a great fervour, believing it was the bearer of "new visions of service and self-government". Its coming apart saddened him, as he was still an advocate for colonialism in the 1960s, fond of quoting Cecil Rhodes, and denying that empire had anything to do with 'imperialism' because, he said, the only imperialists in the world were the Communists. For Benson the fight against Communism was paramount as its "relentless aim is world domination". Benson saw the democracies besieged by Russia whose objective was "to convert our grandchildren into communists", and by China "which sought war to finish the job in our lifetime". Against such evil he advocated "a crusading fervour for the things we believe", and it was here that the legend of the Man with the Donkey converged with the politics underpinned by his Christianity.

Benson believed Australia needed Christian heroes to inspire the fight against Communism. Post-war prosperity had led to a "drowsy apathy" and a "reluctance to develop and defend this great heritage". Everywhere he looked he saw indifference or hostility to the values that mattered to him and he believed Communism would thrive on this. He railed against what he called "the flabby, easy-going Christians". He saw himself amongst a small rearguard of leaner types whom he called "The Saving Remnant" which was a reference to Isaiah's belief in a chosen few who would save the people of Israel, a "loyal, dependable, clear-visioned minority...the seed of the future":

> When the race had lost its sense of direction – their hearts were fat, their ears [sic] heavy, their eyes shut – in such a time the prophet saw a small remnant that could be gathered amid the godless mass.

This small remnant could save the world from Communism. By way of analogy he expressed the view that less than one hundred people had produced the Renaissance in Europe.

The Anzacs were also a saving remnant. What Benson espoused was a biblical version of the editorial line of the conservative press which argued that just as diggers had fought against tyranny in two world wars, so they would carry on that tradition in South East Asia. He was finishing his book when conscription was reintroduced for the purpose of sending troops to Vietnam. Benson wrote and spoke about the Anzacs regularly, for they fitted neatly into the "saving tradition" as he wanted it to be understood. They had turned military disaster into noble and meaningful defeat. When he likened them to martyrs, he also spoke of "the spiritual affinity in the nearness of Good Friday to Anzac Day for the Crucifixion and the Resurrection speak to us of the success of failure".

The Anzacs had confronted what Benson referred to as "the worst influences that had assailed civilisation", and they had prevailed in a "baptism of blood that was to weld us into a nation". Their ordeal suggested the dignity and purpose that a defeat could bestow. They were moral exemplars the likes of whom could again renew the nation and save the world. From here it is hardly surprising that Benson singled out the Man with the Donkey whose image was rich with Christian associations, who had surely been "loyal, dependable and clear-visioned" and whose work rate for the cause was second to none. Simpson, for Benson, was a free-world Stakhanov; the letters that spoke of slackness and unemployment must have chilled him to the bone.

Benson conjured up his own moral conception of heroism and went looking for an epic figure for the fight against Communism. What he found was someone who might well have ended up on the other side had he survived. Yet there is no evidence that Benson agonised as he wielded his censor's blue pencil. His political convictions and alignments were too firm. He and the legend had a higher calling in the fight against "drowsy apathy" and Communism.

* *The life before the legend and the history of the legend between 1915 and 1990 is dealt with in* Simpson and the Donkey. The Making of a Legend *which will be published by Melbourne University Press in November. Endnotes have been omitted here. Full references will appear in the book.*

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MICHAEL PRYOR

Like Gold to Airy Thinness Beat

It was the day the boy's grandmother died that the hawker came to town. The boy was playing under the tank stand with the peculiar intensity of children. He was sheltered from the outside world by the abundance of opportunistic wandering jew and morning glory. His world was dark and damp, a haven from the stunning heat that was the rest of the yard. Through the twining growth he could see the bare earth expanse in front of the chook yard and the shed, but the boy rarely looked out, absorbed as he was in his game.

The fine, ochre soil that caused such havoc when the wind blew became a thick, dark sludge when wet. The boy had mended an old tin kettle himself and used this to bring water from the tank's tap, two handed, with precise care lest a drop fall where it was not meant to be. Once the kettle was settled, he dipped into it with a delicate scooping motion, caressing the water a lingering moment before he lifted a handful to fill the plate-sized hole he'd made. The pool drained quickly to leave a muddy wallow, the greedy earth whisking the moisture away, but before it was gone the boy felt sure that this was how a beach was, water and sand.

Around the tiny pool stood small figures, some lurching to one side like lopsided sentinels. Wooden animals and people gazed at the miracle of the disappearing sea, entranced by the spectacle of its periodic renewal. Every now and then one would topple as the edges of the pool crumbled softly, lying defeated before being righted and resuming its place wistfully looking out from the shore.

The boy was seriously considering whether he should construct another pool, with a connecting channel, when he dimly heard the hawker's wagon. The hawker had visited three times that the boy could remember; each visit was revelation, for the hawker came from far away, from over the sea that the boy had only heard about. The boy knew it was the hawker coming, for the wagon announced it with tiny silver bells and beads jingling on the horse's bridle and the buckboard.

The boy dashed out of his haven, unfazed by the sudden leap from the dark to the crushing midday light. Barefoot and oblivious to the threat of three cornered jacks he scampered pell-mell along the side of the house, past the grapevine enclosed side verandah. There were small knots of men in hats, standing around the front door, smoking pungent cigarettes the boy loved watching them roll. The way they left the cigarette paper hanging from the corner of their bottom lip made him think of sails and kites, and the exotic tobacco tins were a joy in themselves. His favorite was White Ox, redolent of strength and vitality, but it made the boy fearful as it reminded him of the terrible stories he'd heard of bulls thundering red-eyed and frothing, throwing men like chaff bags.

The men did not notice the boy as he swung delightedly on the front gate. They were nodding, murmuring in low voices, black crows holding parliament, and a small boy was not part of their concern.

The boy could see nothing coming along the road, even when he made binoculars of his hands as his father had taught him to do. To the north the road merged with the sun. To the south, the railway stretched out in the distance, but no hawker. The boy turned, disappointed that he'd let himself hope for something wonderful.

A breeze so slight that it barely overcame the inertia of the parched air ruffled the boy's shirt as he turned back towards the house. The breeze was sweet and fragrant with cardamom and camphor, and the boy looked back over his shoulder. The hawker's wagon was coming down the road from the north, and the merry jingling came again, as if only waiting for the boy's attention to resume its gaiety.

The boy took a few paces, and stood waving, and

the wagon slowed to a halt beneath a gnarled and crotchety old peppercorn tree, some distance from the house. The boy ran, forgetting his shyness, until he stood looking at the hawker.

The hawker was old. The boy's father had told stories of when the hawker visited while he was a lad, and the marvels he'd brought. His face was dark, darker than anyone the boy had seen apart from the blacks, but somehow the boy never noticed the color of the hawker's skin. It was the eyes that attracted him. They were black not brown, blacker than charcoal.

The hawker was slim and tall, and he moved with elegant economy and grace. He bowed as easily as he walked, in one supple movement which never failed to amuse his customers. On his head he invariably wore a hat, but not the strange bucket shaped hat that the boy had half expected from the Coffee and Chicory bottle, but a battered leather hat, and the hawker once explained to the boy that the hat was a handy drinking cup for himself and his horse if necessary.

"You know that they don't make pepper out of these, don't you boy?" The hawker reached up and stripped a handful of pink berries from the pendulous branch near his head. He held out his hand for the boy, and the pungent aroma tickled the boy's nose.

"But it's a peppercorn tree, isn't it?" the boy asked as he rubbed his nose.

"True, but giving something a name doesn't make it that thing, does it?" The hawker dropped the berries to the ground near the wheel of the wagon where they lay like rosy planets plucked from their orbits. "Now, come and have a look in the back. Come and see what I've brought this time."

The hawker tied back the faded green canvas and ushered the boy into the depths of the wagon. Initially it was so dark that it made the boy's place under the water tank seem bright, but the hawker soon tied back various panels and began rummaging around in boxes and bales. He was surrounded on all sides by drawers and doors, cunningly inset into every surface of the interior, with no respect for uniformity or the right angle. Small drawers opened in large drawers. Doors were set in recesses in the ceiling, and drawers at angles to the floor had minute hooks fastened to prevent their jolting open. It seemed a haphazard sort of whimsy, but the hawker moved about with certainty, peering in here and there, sometimes banging a drawer hastily closed. The boy watched unwilling to miss anything, for he had heard of no-one else who had been inside the hawker's wagon.

Out of an obscure sense of politeness, the boy spoke up. "They say that grandma's dying."

The hawker paused, and looked heavenwards for a moment. "I see," he said and he carefully withdrew a bolt of cloth from a box. "See this, boy? It's cloth of gold. Kings and queens use it all the time." The boy reached out timidly, then encouraged by the hawker's nod, touched it. It was warm, not cold, and the boy wondered what kings and queens did with it.

The hawker looked at the boy for a long time, and the boy began to feel uncomfortable under the imperturbable gaze. Then the hawker looked outside and seemed to make up his mind, and he opened a drawer that was behind him and to the right, all without taking his eyes off the boy. "Look," he commanded.

The boy scrambled over and stared into the drawer. It was one of the large drawers, and there were two compartments. One was full of tin people, brightly painted thumb sized mannikins. The other held a brass tube, nestled in cotton. "What's that?" the boy asked.

"It's a kaleidoscope. Hold the end up to your eye."

Immediately he did so, the wagon's interior was gone. The shimmering fractal patterns became the boy's world and he was lost in it, open mouthed until the hawker gently took the tube from his eye.

"You have a choice," the hawker said. "The people, or the kaleidoscope. A gift."

The boy fumbled for a response. He turned to face the hawker, and noticed the shiny black ringlets escaping from his hat. "I..." he began, and gestured towards the drawer.

The hawker nodded. "I thought so. I thought so," and sighed. "Take them my boy, they are yours." He gave the boy a tin with a tightly fitting lid, and he fitted the people neatly into it. The boy held onto the tin as his mother had told him to hold the new baby: as if his life depended on it. He paused before scampering off. "Thank you," he whispered to the hawker. The hawker smiled benignly, and the boy was gone.

Once back under the tank stand, the boy carelessly swept the wooden figures into a muddy heap. They lay forlorn near a broken china teapot that had been cast out of the house long ago. The smell of damp wood made the place seem at once foreign and comforting as the boy arranged the new tin figures carefully, finding the most artful position for each. He placed them deliberately, often trying each in several positions before he was content.

The argument had been going on for some time before it drew the boy's attention from his careful play. Strangely, it sounded like a voice arguing with itself, for there was no rejoinder that the boy could hear. He closed the lid on the tin of figures, and crept from his bower, along the side verandah until he was near the front verandah. It was here that the disagreement seemed to be. As he moved, it was as if the disputants sensed his coming, for the loud voice quietened. The boy understood then that there was more than one voice. One had simply been pitched too low for the boy to hear.

"You can't be serious. Why would she want to see you?"

"Ask her," answered the hawker softly. "She will want to see me."

"Look," said a third voice the boy knew as one of his uncles who had been in the group waiting near the front door, "she's not going to be with us for much longer. You can't sell her anything."

"I do not wish to sell her anything. Tell her I am here, and then we shall see."

The voices receded, muttering, and the boy crawled through the grapevine until he could see the whole front of the house.

It made a strange tableau. The knot of men in hats and dark clothes at one end of the verandah, discussing with some animation, glancing back at the hawker with distaste and curiosity. The hawker stood immobile at the other end of the verandah, his back to the men. His clothes seemed oddly inappropriate to the boy: bright blue checked shirt, red leather vest, dark trousers, parrot bright in the pall surrounding the house. His face was serene, his hands clasped behind his back. To the boy he seemed to be rocking slowly on the balls of his feet, even though he was motionless.

The knot of men fell apart, and one gestured to the hawker. With surprise, the boy saw it was his father. He had not recognised the solemn man in black. "I'll ask her," he said. He took off his hat, opened the screen door, and went into the gloomy house.

The boy flitted from his place of concealment, rushed around the back of the house past the kitchen where he could hear muted women's voices, to the shaded side of the house where his grandmother's bedroom was.

This side of the house was always dim, cooled by tangles of overhanging silky oak, mirror plant and extraordinary thickets of pomegranates that the boy's mother had planted to attract the birds when she was young. The boy knew from long experience that a certain fork in the silky oak gave an unimpeded view into the bedroom. He hadn't used it for a long time, not since his grandmother had been taken ill. But when she was the tall woman who swept around the house, managing everyone with an air of extravagant insouciance, the boy loved looking into her room at all the ornaments she had.

She never allowed children into her room. "Sanctuary!" she would claim, laughing. "I must have a sanctuary!" Naturally her room became an Aladdin's Cave to all the children, tantalised as they were by glimpses of china and crystal as she glided in and out. The boy had spent hours in the tree, admiring her glass animals, painted vases and tiny dolls from far away, things he'd never seen anywhere else. His grandmother knew, of course, about his perch, but she smiled at him, pleased at his ingenuity. And she used her blinds.

By the time the boy had made his place in the tree, the door of his grandmother's bedroom was closing. The hawker was leaning against the door, his worn hat still on his head. His clothes did not seem as out of place in the room as they did on the verandah.

The boy's grandmother lay in her bed, and the boy wondered if all people about to die looked as she did. She was pallid, her hair drawn up, but her face was still animated as she half raised herself at the hawker's entrance.

The hawker knelt by her bedside. he took her hand and bowed his head. She closed her eyes.

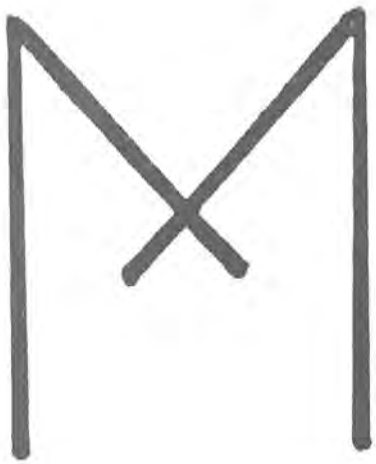
The boy watched, round-eyed. They stayed in that pose unmoving, not speaking, a last sharing that did not need words.

"Time to come down, son." His father's voice ended the moment for the boy, but, even as he slid down the rough bark, he was awhirl. His father put a hand on the boy's shoulder, guiding him, and he went uncomplainingly. His father paused at the back door. "Do you want to see your mum, son?" The boy shook his head and plodded to his refuge, ducking low and stumbling in.

He sat there crying softly, not knowing why. He looked blearily at his world, the tin figures proudly admiring what was once a promising lake. Slowly the boy moved his leg, and tipped each figure into the mud, and watched as one by one they sank into the thick, red ooze and were lost to sight.

He heard the jingling of the hawker's wagon growing fainter as it drew away from the house, and sobbing coming from the kitchen.

He drew up his knees, rested his head on them, and stopped crying. Slowly he began fumbling for and righting the helpless tin people.



Modesty

Bev Aisbett

THE GUGGENHEIM'S VACATION

'Masterpieces from the Guggenheim' on display in Sydney while the New York Gallery was closed.

Maybe
in the U.S. they finally wonder
what it's *doing*, like a wife
on a separate holiday. And I,
refusing to view America
as a spectator sport like
most Australians, said
with strained naivety: "The
best response to art's still
art." And *that* was the week
George Bush also visited
Sydney, but with what
seemed like more security: an entire
hotel full of entourage and agents.
The Guggenheim had little red lights
fixed above each art work, and
some "Noli me tangere" signs, which
my daughter, for once, respected. I
was the one whose hungry fingers stopped
only a fraction short each time:
esp. at the Arp sculpture (that was like
a soft icecream with buttocks, made
of stone with glitter in it, nearly
levitating, like a flying buttress,
built
on one wild trust in God). Maybe
the idea of the hotel rooms
lingered too long but each art work
reminded me of one (of a hotel room, I
mean, but yes: of an art work,
too, because they never seemed –
however ruby a Chagall, or goose-
necked and Orphan-Annie-eyed
a Modigliani – to be
the *originals*...
I always thought:
the template is elsewhere
still. Maybe it was.) I stood
in a roomful of brilliant hotel rooms
as empty as George Bush, and thought:
am I the ball or the referee? with
the integrity of Juan Gris. My kid
saw the marmalade Modigliani: she
said, "nipples", with enthusiasm. I
said, "Yes, what a beautiful nude." Someone
with his ears in a walkman – telling him
about all this art – overheard us, glared. I
pointed my little finger past him, said
"And you've seen your first Picasso." She
may remember all Picassos like dawn cats:
sperm-grey, sperm-thin, or squat as fruit
and that all Giacometti busts
have noses like macho erections, but
I noticed that female spectators'
eyes were less respectful, more involved
than those of the men. This, I
said to myself, is a roomful of Holiday Inns
for once designed for women, bought
and sold by women, collected
in the way that women collect, who love,
and love
sameness and skin and nightmares and big bits
of brightness as pure and sudden
as a come. But then I thought of sculptures
stroked possessively, by rich refugee
women whose eyes are sometimes
bright black fear-stars: that these
are the paintings bought by pogroms,
and travel
autistic and naked together like Kirchner's
soldiers in the shower, and to
rephrase Dylan Thomas ("after
the first death there is no other"),
after
the first world war there was
no other, and this
is all there ever was again: the
consummate confidence of never
fearing any audience but mother.
George Bush
(you don't easily call him "Bush", as if
all politics needs metre) left before
the Guggenheim did. It lingered, and
in the end exploded – in quiet queues
a hundred deep, while a truck,
painted "NEW WHEAT ORDERS NOT
NEW WORLD ORDER" trundled
away down a freeway, like thunder.
My daughter
refound her Modigliani wife: at last
at home in a book from my past. But of course
she loves hotels: almost has
a refugee's taste for the high life.

JENNIFER MAIDEN

TO HUESCA

Going through Aragon
green swell of cereals,
soft heads creaming,
lapping like lake water.

Here and there,
stark, stiffly remote,
among swirls of lamentation,
bright red poppies
wimpled about their private grief.

Where did they come from?
The richness of how many men
gave them their brilliance?

JOHN CROYSTON

GIRL TEASING A CAT WITH A MOUSE

after the painting by Guiseppe Maria Crespi, 1665–1747

Girl dangles mouse –
its body half-crouched
head turned away, eyes feverish
while the cat stretches
larger-than-life ready to spring.
It jet-eyes glint, pacing the moment,
impatient with the game.

These are the ingredients of war:
predators, lust, the moment of no return –
all spinning out of control.
And the girl knowing and not caring.

KATHERINE GALLAGHER

ENOUGH

When I saw you
I said that it would be enough,
That it would do.
I didn't mistake the light
In your eyes
For any chip of stone
That collects light,
Or your mouth for berries
Pumped from bitter trees.
Though my breath wasn't mine.
It was something
To do with the way you held your head.

I used to think I had money and apples.
But there was only your voice curdling in the hall.
I used to think the stones under the water were
piano notes.
And I was guilty of your tears.

I spin the ashtray,
I spin the salt.
We watch each other
As cold as the spoon.
Every word's a prompt.
I still don't know
Why we sit so long
At this table
By the mirrors.

It might have been because
There were no stars that night,
Or you cut your finger on the canopener;
Or children's rhymes in our pillow voices,
Or that you moved your arm
When the wind punched the house.

PETER TIERNAN

TWO POEMS BY MAL MORGAN

YOU AND THE SALMON

I believe in small g god and Brunswick Street
in my bi-attitude and yours in literary grants
death after life and a cure for warts.
I believe in the color green in being drunk
some of the time in little brown ducks
which always form the letter V when they swim.
I believe in giving blood in Virginia Woolf
the singing detective but not Sinatra.
I believe Elvis *is* dead in my idiosyncrasy
but not your peculiarity. Genuflecting
before a craven image *may* be good for the knees.
If you point a child long enough in one direction
it will go the other way. You *can* lead a duck
to water. If you try to scoop the moon
from a lake at night you may drown but you can
dance with the sun in your hair anytime.
Directories and maps are for the lost.
Geography has no direction. Nothing lasts forever
least of all your gravestone. Silicone breasts
do not compensate a deflated marriage. I believe
in the Irish Bartok the blues and bad dreams
in penicillin and passive aggression in the
ordination of the great apes particularly the female
that there will come a time when the people
will rise up and stay that way continually
for what they believe. The time is not yet
ripe the cherries are. The trout jumps
and you and the salmon continue
to swim upstream.

MOUNTAIN BREAD

We fall into lust and greed easily
early. Of course it was the Sirens
and all that birdsong and Circe showed us
our true piggishness. Mountain bread
does not make us taller than this.
Cabana and a slice of silence in the suburbs
is no panacea. I eat more cabana and light
candles in brown clay holders on the back
of a brown clay horse. Between the candles
two naked lovers sit. He is behind her
ramming it in. She is pendulously
melon-breasted. They ride with eyes closed
clays heads held high into the future
with spitting candlewax cabana
and mountain bread.
Motionlessly
all this gallops with the lust and greed
that we cannot change.
I settle for Gluck
and the sweet operas of all our strivings
for the wine the color of a man's blood
for animal love from a dog gazing
at me with eyes glossy as the cover
of an R rated video.

ROSE

The sky has a small daughter called Rose
And Rose, now idling at her heavy fingerpaints
In exchange for watercolors,
Knocked over her bowl of softly thinning paint
And let it seep languidly through passive
banks of clouds.
Ridged and glistening like sand-banks
They were drowned in translucent pink,
Their edges befurred and minutely tentacled,
While through this glowing flamingo blush
The sky appeared cerulean and unapologetic,
Lending her aniline face to the departing day.
A benevolent moon,
Wreathed in hazy forgetfulness,
Smiled benignly at this childish mistake
And rose higher above quiescent clouds
In appreciation of Rose's accidental artistry.

VALERIE POTTER

KATHERINE

The night charcoal shapes
on the cream asphalt road
like milk opal in the desert.
Thin paperbark peels from the trunks
of the aged silver trees.
Katherine taxis through grey dust.
Campfires with beaten black billies,
white flour,
damper and pikelets,
sugar and tea.
Concrete slabs,
corrugated iron.
A general store.
Instant mash potatoes,
canned peas and rotisserie chickens,
going round and around
dripping fat.
Stocks of rubber thongs and
freshly painted token poles
for tourists.
Babies curled up with mangy pups for warmth in
old mattresses with rusty springs torn through.
Cracked bare feet,
alcohol and numbed bodies,
swollen cheeks and puffed sad eyes –
infected.

The same eyes that reveal
mirrors of a billabong.

Women gracefully wading,
laughing white teeth
shining black bodies.
Collecting lily roots, bulbs,
tubers and seeds,
wild honey and fish.
Black eyes that reflect memories of
damper made from lily seeds,
gouged out from the buds
by their grandmothers' fingers.
Their spirit beings
not part of any time,
still hover in the trees,
not visiting,
but still heard
by the women
at their camps.
Disconnected and
lost in time.

Their spirit children
wait on the milky way,
to be reborn
again
to find their time,
through the sacred tracks
that join their sites,
like spider webs which
only they can find.

BETH Z. CHARLES

TWO POEMS BY RICHARD MURPHY

COMMUTER CRIMES

Looping the Loop here
means squaring the square;
cut to homages to Pollock
from the devil-may-care
coo-ees of contempt
scrolling across a terracotta sea.

CRANES

Subito
you realise
why poordead Vincent is
so sexy
wheeling
The Crane Cooling Its Wings in
a sunshower.
Vincent
Crying Our Beloved Childhood dashed
from Time's minarets and domes
has formed
this icicle
wets me laughing shimmying past.

from PLACES OF AUSTRALIA

CLEAR MOUNTAIN, QUEENSLAND

Away from the mundane, the top of a mountain provides a propitious site for promoting thought and *salubritas*. This one had its health resort, specialising in new age treatments. It revived the appetite for life and took in corporate executives with torrefied outlooks for inlooks and patients, poisoned by the late twentieth century, for detoxification. On the white board in reception, the neologisms of medical science attended classes in *tai chi* and aromatherapy. And in the seminar room garrulous academics, grounded by the era of the managed university, did the unthinkable and fashioned action plans and *esprit d'corps* from the nephocephalism. Punctuated by reports from rifle birds, their arguments advanced and retreated across the floor and were washed down with purified water and, at night, neat tequila. Not for them nephalism, the cocktails of vitamins and beetroot juice; or a regime in the mechanical gym, pinioned to the engines of fitness – just bran muffins to assist with the digestion of nebulous cavil.

FLAGSTAFF HILL, WOLLONGONG

At the history conference, he reread a chapter of his own pornography. The green man assisted him to reminisce. Bedspreads of rapture, quilted with a triangle of lovers, shot silk into his solitary promenade. She rang the bell whilst he ate fish fingers and read epistemology. She wore her eroticism close to the surface and spouted the libertarianism of a small magazine of glebous poets, who freely coupled monogamy with home units and inhibition. The landscape where their amity strolled into adultery, now sported plaques of industrial archaeology, epitaphs to the work that was. He remembered the footballers exercising their beer guts into shape, whilst they embedded themselves in lubricous innuendo. As the historians theorised loss and absence, he practised them in the caressing sand. The footprints of euphoria have been chastened in the intervening years. The tryst with the past was telling, of a desire still desired; for in this theatre of memory, a romance was ruptured when the orgasms were still multiplying.

DEADMAN'S BEACH, NORTH STRADBROKE

Moving images are decisive in the sea picture. An acrobatic friar bird hangs around a honey-soaked grevillea. It chants an editorial of protest against the incessant surf. The allure is pungent with molasses grass. The heliotropes have reclaimed their territory in the sand. Beneath beach umbrellas and plaited straw hats, they mark out the boundaries of obscenity. Stripped and oiled, and prepared for the tropical torpor, they parade their january ontology in the waves and primeval exclamations, the vowels of fun and the arias of pain. And cordoned off by towels and beach regalia, they guard their oasis of sybaritism in the ultra violet sun with crosswords and feral dogs. In this indulgence of natural selves, when discipline is disrobed, the vowals of oughtness are consonant with the mood. At lunch time, the holiday from routine ceases and they return in concert to their dacha, for another page of the boring story. And the vanity of abstinence is conspicuous in fixed images of bean sprouts and diet water.

COLIN SYMES

A FORMER LIFE

I was a scientist once.
I published papers
with titles like
'The $C0_2/0_2$ specificity
of ribulose 1,5-bisphosphate
carboxylase/oxygenase.'
I contemplated the workings of
the pentose phosphate pathway
I measured 3-phosphoglycerate
and the activation state
of Rubisco.
I wanted to know
why it was not inhibited
by RuBP *in vivo*.
Many German scientists
visited our laboratory.
Dr Bleschshmidt-Schneider
taught me useful phrases
like *Sauerstoff Abhängigkeit*.
I became handy
with a *Schraubenzieher*
to delve into our
infra-red gas-analyser.
I took succulent leaves
of *Spinacia oleracea*
and surrounded them
with instruments stacked
to twice my height.
A computer spat out
the vital statistics
of their metabolism
all day long.
When their photosynthesis stabilised
I smashed them suddenly
in metal jaws
frozen to -80°C
in *flüssiger Stickstoff*,
then pulverised them to powder
in a mortar and pestle
spluttering and spitting
with liquid nitrogen,
leaving a white frost
on the green remnants of life.
Oh, it still had activity –
when I added the radioactive bicarbonate
it fixed carbon at good rates
which correlated well
with the previous parameters
of irradiance, $C0_2$,
temperature and 0_2.
It looked good on paper –
they gave me a Ph.D.
and I went to the U.S.A. for
more intensive research
on Rubisco and RuBP.

But someone fought back.
There was a girl
who preferred her leaves
still attached to trees
and did not care
to analyse their
enzymic reactions.
She was nearly ground down
to powder herself
and definitely frozen,
but finally rose and
quit the job,
quit the country...
now she writes poetry.

ANNA BROOKS

ALEX MILLER

Modern, European and Novel

THE POWER OF FICTION to mean – the thrall of the narrative thread – is made apparent to the person enthralled only when the illusion is sharply broken and present reality is revealed standing behind the fiction, seamless, unaltered and impenetrable as ever. In his introduction to his Clark Lectures, delivered at Cambridge in 1927, and later published as *Aspects of the Novel*, becoming probably the most popularly read of any book on the novel in English, E. M. Forster – himself one of the foremost among English novelists of his time – saw no difficulty defining what a novel is. "This, he wrote, "will not take a second". And then, as he might well have today, he found it convenient to quote a French critic. With an enclosing directness that is no longer available to French critics, this one had written, "A novel is a fiction in prose of a certain extent". The 'certain extent' Forster required was at least 50,000 words. This would disqualify quite a few works by some of our best-known novelists today: Elizabeth Jolley, Rod Jones, Helen Garner, Anita Brookner, and many others would have difficulty mustering the wordage. Quantity has ceased to be the defining factor it was in his day. And it isn't simply that the novel has got shorter in the past sixty years, nor is it merely that we have abandoned thinking about a genre between the length of a long short story and a novel, which we used to call the novella – the word is still in the dictionary, of course, and reviewers occasionally employ it, but the problem of the novella no longer presents an active field of endeavour for the scholar. The fact is, since Forster gave his lectures in 1927, the novel has emerged from the enclosure it fashioned for itself in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The novel's length is not its only dimension to have been affected. As for the proper form or subject of the novel, anyone who today suggested limitations would rightly have their opinion regarded. Only five years ago, in 1987, to be certain, presumably, readers did not take it for an autobiography, V. S. Naipaul felt a need to subtitle *The Enigma of Arrival*, 'A Novel'. One wonders why he bothered, for by then it had surely become a commonplace that the novel can masquerade in the costume of autobiography or history or travel account, or whatever generic cloak might suit the writer's purpose. And there is no need to refer to self-consciously experimental works for examples. The point *is*, after all, that the practice had become commonplace and could be illustrated from the mainstream. John Fowles' *The Maggot* – published two years before Naipaul's *Enigma* – begins conventionally enough; "In the late and last afternoon of an April long ago, a forlorn little group of travellers cross a remote upland in the far south-west of England". After fifty pages this conventional narration ends and there is a facsimile of two pages from the *Historical Chronicle* for April, 1736. This is followed by an extract from *The Western Gazette* for the same year. Then follow almost four hundred pages of trial depositions in the form of short questions and answers, interspersed with the transcripts of a number of letters. Fowles is not doing anything unconventional with the language in this book, but he is doing something unconventional with the traditional form. I doubt if Forster could have brought himself to have acknowledged the result as a novel, and Henry James would almost certainly have delighted in dismissing it – harshly, if his record on reviewing is anything to go by. John Banville's intelligent and amusing novel, *The Book of Evidence* (published in 1989 and short listed for the Booker the following year), lightly masquerades as the first-person account to the trial judge of a murderer's confession. Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* is as much a travel book written by an enthusiast on the life of modern nomads as it is a conventional novel, yet we confidently expect to find it on the shelves in the library where Emily Brontë's book can also be found. Edmund White, reviewing *Songlines* in the *Sunday Times* wrote, "Towards the end of his life

Sartre wondered why people still write novels; had he read Chatwin's he might have found new excitement in the genre". (I suppose what Sartre really wondered was why *other* people still wrote novels, as he no longer saw a need to).

Fiction is the other word Forster's French critic used in his definition of the novel. It has been amply demonstrated that fiction is implicit in all the elaborated genres of writing – in histories and biographies and travel literature as well as in the novel; and even, despite the regard of the authors for a *rigorous* (that is, non-subjective) use of language, in theoretical, philosophical and theological works. The processes of fictionalisation undoubtedly constitute one of the most irresistible, pervasive and complex of our ways of dealing with the seemingly impermeable and unambiguous nature of objective reality and with its apparent randomness and lack of stable meanings. If perception is interpretation and all interpretation entails a degree of fictionalisation, then our perception of reality is always a partial fiction – and who is to say with any certainty which parts are the fiction and which are not? What do we mean to indicate that is not *other than fiction* when we use the word fiction? Can there be a strict sense in which to employ this word? A fact, like Tuesday, is a fact, but *fiction* is rather like *truth*, a matter of subjective perception as to where it is to be located. Isn't the irresistible process of fictionalisation to be seen as something like our attempt to make sense of our subjective reality, to impose the quasi-logic of a connected narrative upon what otherwise would be a nightmare of random impressions? The theorist seeks to deconstruct the apparent meaning of the text, the philosopher goes in search of the ground of that deconstructed meaning, and the theologian goes in search of the ground of the philosopher's ground. And perhaps the fiction writer seeks a narrative thread through the chaos of subjective impressions; seeks, indeed, to construct meaning – and if it was not a fiction writer who wrote the Torah, then who wrote it?

In a sense, as E. M. Forster and the French critic knew it over half a century ago – and inclusive of the fact that some writers are still able successfully to write 'Victorian' novels – the novel really is dead and has been replaced by something called writing, in which what is fiction and what is autobiography or sociology or philosophy or history cannot be taken for granted. We are undoubtedly still at the crossroads where David Lodge found us at the end of the sixties. It is both the same crossroads he found us at and a different one.

I didn't say the novel is dead. I said *as Forster and his French critic knew it*, the novel is probably dead, or may as well be for all the use such a definition as theirs is to us in our attempts now usefully and accurately to describe what is being presented in many books we read today as novels. I said, Forster's and the French critic's definition no longer applies. I said, the novel is not now what it was in their day. Far from being dead, the novel in fact is flourishing; for, like Doctor Who, it is able to resist the invalidating erosions of time by periodically recomposing itself. We may resent and resist this periodic recomposition. We may feel that our allegiance to the old form is being betrayed and belittled. We may suspect that our values are being intentionally derided – and they often are. We all experience a degree of difficulty recognising the new for what it is. For a little while it doesn't seem to be quite as authentic as the old, the familiar. We miss the features that charmed us in our youth. But the novel is not something static and there's no point in us dealing with it as if it were. We can't have, and don't require, a definition of the novel that will endure. It is no use, for example, us saying how long it ought to be. *Aspects of the Novel* is an historical document – a very intelligent and well-written historical document by a very fine writer of fictions. We read it to find out what thoughtful people were thinking then, ten years before the publication of *Finnegan's Wake* – ten years before the explosion of the supernova in the novelist's sky – and not long after the appearance of the final volume of Proust's great work. And although we read it with interest, we don't read Forster's book in order to derive a model for what we are doing today. We may even read it in order to remind ourselves of the extent of change that has been accepted since it was written.

The novel has been different things to different ages and to different peoples. But the novel, I suspect, has always had a great deal to do with our attempts to make sense of our experience, to create a sense of meaning through connecting the random and unconnected. If history seeks to make sense of the objective world of our culture, of its economics and politics and social relations, then the novel may perhaps be said to seek to make sense of the subjective life of our culture, of our feelings and intuitions primarily, to make bearable the tension of the paradox of present reality in conflict with our imaginations. In an essay published in 1969, to which I've already alluded, titled 'The Novelist at the Crossroads', the English critic and novelist David Lodge wrote, "The novel, supremely among literary forms, has satisfied our hunger for the meaningful ordering of experience". The novel, whatever its form, is surely the genre of the storyteller in any society: the storyteller, elaborating the subjective experience, fabri-

cating an illusion of narrative meaning where there had been a sense of the infinite elusiveness of meaning, bringing meaning to the surface of present reality and holding it together for a moment. We wake into present reality from the fiction just as we wake from a splendid dream, with the words *if only* on our lips.

When it comes to the need for a novel to tell a story I agree with Forster, but my agreement is not made in the same tone of voice as his. Forster felt the need to apologise for assuring his audience that a novel must tell a story; he lamented the fact rather than rejoiced in it, as we might expect a writer of great stories, as he certainly was, to have done. Possibly one reason for Forster's regret was that he sensed that his too-easy definition of the novel had to some extent limited the complexity of the notion he was to put forward of what a story might be. The story, for Forster, could not be the allusive and complex knitting together of images that it is for, say, Elizabeth Jolley. For Forster the story was that part of the novel visibly concerned with suspense and what was to happen next. Perhaps our disagreement is largely semantic after all, but for me Forster's is an unfortunately limited idea of what the story might be – not his writing, it is not his writing I am calling limited, for his practice fortunately did not conform to his theories.

At almost exactly the same moment in history that Forster was delivering this lecture at Cambridge, Virginia Woolf, writing about women and fiction, felt no need to apologise for being a storyteller and she opted for quite another approach than Forster's. "Fiction here", she said (in *A Room of One's Own*) "is likely to contain more truth than fact. Therefore I propose, making use of all the liberties and licences of a novelist, to tell you the story of the two days that preceded my coming here". To get her views across to her audience (for hers was also a room with a view) she tells them a story; "Here then was I (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please – it is not a matter of any importance) sitting on the banks of a river a week or two ago in fine October weather, lost in thought." The fictional name, the lie, is not important, it makes no difference. It is the truth of what she has to say that is important, and for this to be carried across to her listeners she finds it most apt to construct (to compose) it into a story. For hers is a kind of truth, it is a subjective truth, that requires the artfully fashioned carapace of a story if it is to survive in the objective reality outside her mind, even for a moment – for meaning is not durable or robust and withers quickly in the presence of facts.

Forster was very concerned with the attitude of the guardians of high culture towards his work. He wished to be taken seriously – he *was* taken seriously, but perhaps not seriously enough for his liking – by the academy and by the intellectuals of his society, including, of course, Virginia Woolf herself, who was three years his junior and knew the people he knew. Forster was afraid that his emphasis on the story as the fundamental aspect of the novel would lose him points with the gatekeepers of high culture. So, instead of elaborating his idea of what a story might be, he apologised for it. But despite his apology for being a storyteller, like Virginia Woolf, he was that, a fine storyteller, and we can still read his work with satisfaction whether we care a great deal or not for certain of those fashionable values which high culture seemed to admire as he did, and which now seem somewhat self-enclosing. (The artist, seeing an enclosure being constructed around her, sets about the business of transgression at once. At all costs, she must get out. Classify her as Modern or Postmodern or as something else and she will subvert the classification at once. She knows Charles Darwin was right and that *all classification is genealogical*, and she wishes to preserve her fiercely garnered imaginative independence from tradition at all costs. We cannot see her for the dust. She has gone. She is already elsewhere even while, under the banner of intellectual rigor, we are constructing our fiction of literary classification around her.)

Nothing, including the story, is ever quite what it seems. To be certain there is not the smallest temptation to imagine that anything but the roughest outlines of this question are behind addressed here, I'd like to intrude another voice. It is the vividly intelligent voice of Marguerite Duras (to be found in her book of conversations, *Practicalities*), talking to a friend during the winter of 1990: "Writing isn't just telling stories," she is saying. "It's exactly the opposite. It's telling everything at once. It's the telling of a story, and the absence of the story. It's telling a story through absence."

The novelists of ancient Greece (Achilles Tatius, Chariton, Heliodorus, Longus, Xenephon Ephesius) did not share Forster's delicate concern for the opinions of the gatekeepers of high culture, but wrote, without apology, for anyone who could read. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* says it bluntly enough. They wrote, it says, "so as to captivate the interest of the readers of popular fiction". And further, that "they were not esteemed by the intellectuals" for doing so. Emulating the Greeks' achievements in the arts admiringly, the Romans nevertheless developed no tradition of long narra-

tive fiction. There are individual works, such as Petronius' *Satyricon*, which are sometimes classed as belonging to the genre of the novel, but no tradition of the genre as such, and it is the idea of a tradition of long narrative fiction in prose that conforms most nearly to the modern European idea of the novel.

The broadening during the last twenty years or so of our ideas about what might be and what might not be properly called fiction make it worth remembering that the origins of the novel in the Greece of late classical antiquity are thought to have been, variously, the Alexandrian Love-elegy; a degenerate historiography (history degenerated into the 'fabulous', that is; an idea we must find amusing when we think of the work of the South American magic-realists and, even more particularly, of Salman Rushdie's books); and/or, thirdly, the development of a lay version of religious prototypes. If the Greek novel of the second and third centuries was derived from these other previously elaborated genres, the novel of today may be to some extent finding its way back to them, to its sources (perhaps its origins) in the broad social experience of the religious, the historical and the mythological, and be regarding its own form rather less anxiously than it has been inclined to do during the past four or five decades – since the explosion of Joyce's supernova and the offering of Proust's heroic persistence. Perhaps the visual shock of Joyce's achievement is beginning to dim, and we are regaining our night vision.

The 'novel', as the genre of the storyteller, has always been with us, and will undoubtedly remain with us. Extended narratives, in verse or prose, with religious, historical or mythological subjects are found in every culture that has left traces of itself. Before the invention of the book (a kind of portable memory-bank not all that unlike the computer disk) the more likely these are to have been written in verse (the chant has been traced back more than four thousand years), for the reason that verse, with its rhythms, repetitions and cadenced formality, is easier to commit to memory than is the randomness of prose. And of course it is its very randomness that is one of the principal strengths of prose, as against verse, not only for mimicking reality, but for transgressing its apparent impermeability. Before the book the only way of saving stories, the only way of preserving and developing them and passing them on, was to commit them to the memories of individual storytellers. Socrates is said to have lamented the invention of the book because he foresaw in it the end of extended memory. He was right about the end of memory as he and his predecessors had known it and valued it, though whether he was right to lament its passing is something else. There are undoubtedly people today who see the end of the book foreshadowed in the capacities of the computer and who are as unhappy about this as Socrates was about the loss of extensive memory. In placing our memories outside our bodies and committing them to books, and now to computer disks, we have not only increased our storage capacity, but have elevated the significance of prose as a form of extended narration. (Common sense tells us that film is not the threat to the novel that some critics would have us believe. The book is cheap, portable and accessible to the would-be narrator whereas film is a relatively inaccessible, enormously expensive, genre. Which is not to depreciate film, merely to observe that to make a film is logistically far more taxing than to make a novel.)

It is the extended narrative that we are talking about – in prose, now that we have the book, more likely than in verse, (it is an aspect of the post-modern diversity that novels in verse occasionally get written, as well as 'Victorian' ones). Whether we continue to read novels from bound volume or from a screen doesn't matter all that much I suppose – no doubt some people are as sentimental in their attachment to computers today as others used to be in their attachment to finely bound volumes. In 1967, in his lecture 'Cybernetics and Ghosts', Italo Calvino proposed a radically avant-garde use of what he called a literary automaton, a machine for authoring works of literature. Fractals are intriguing to look at and even beautiful in their implications, but so far the computer seems to have authored nothing literary and has in fact developed alongside an increase in the number of literary works authored by people. No doubt the computer will have its day and will eventually insist on the validation of its subjective life.

The novel, if we are to see it in its loosest form as merely an elaborated style of storytelling – and this is how I wish to see it – has always had a place in human society. There is no word to distinguish what a novelist does that other writers do not also do except the word storytelling, and this is so, in part at least I suppose, precisely because, despite the disdain regularly expressed by exponents of high culture for the story – which they seem to believe must be self-evidently simple in its structure – this richly associative word nevertheless carries the most durable sense for what it is that novelists actually do. Whether or not they have always done it in a way that has been immediately recognisable to their contemporaries as storytelling, this does seem, in

the end, what their activities have amounted to. Semantics can be used to defeat us in this, but I use the word story to mean, at the very least, a connected narrative line. The form of the novel has changed and is continuing to change in response to developments in cultural structures and technologies, but its function, I suspect, has remained much the same since the first storyteller attempted to make sense out loud of the mysterious and bewildering paradoxes that constitute what we call the human condition, however we wish to express this.

The so-called degenerate historiography of the Alexandrians as the form of the Greek novel of the second and third centuries, may provide a parallel with Milan Kundera's depreciated legacy of Cervantes. *Don Quixote* is usually seen as the first modern European novel, and Kundera sees it so. It was published in parts between 1605 and 1615, roughly contemporary with the appearance of those seminal works of Galileo and Descartes on which the premises of a technologically progressive human project came to be based – Descartes' *Le Discours de la Methode*, in which he proposed a quasi-mechanical conception of the universe, appeared in 1637, and Galileo's forced repudiation of the Copernican theory was made in 1633. Kundera feels himself to be still firmly attached to the Modern European period. "...the last four centuries of European culture, to which I feel all the more attached as I am not a philosopher but a novelist," he writes in his essay 'The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes', in his book *The Art of the Novel*, (Harper & Row, 1988). Kundera believes the novel, along with technology, is the invention of modern European man. But something has occurred which has detached the world I inhabit from that tradition. (I don't, of course, wish to suggest that Kundera is mistaken in *his* feelings of attachment to Modern Europeanism. Such a suggestion would be absurd. It is his real attachment – and that of others – to European Modernism and my own displacement from it that I wish to distinguish.)

Like technology, until very recently, the novel has also been seen, not only by Kundera but by most Europeans and many non-Europeans, as something both uniquely modern and European in origin. As novelists today it is to the rather draggled tail-end of this splendid tradition that we find ourselves problematically, not firmly, attached in Australia in the 90s – and I wonder to what extent this is not also the case in other countries. What is modern and European is no longer responsive to the sorts of questions our altered circumstances require us to ask. And it is this, more than anything else that makes us post-modern, rather than merely Post-modern (the concept of a Postmodern era must surely be as fraught with fallacies as we now acknowledge the concept of an Age of Enlightenment to have been). For it seems, after all, that there is to be no fundamental particle, no basic building block of reality, for us, the technological culturists, to refashion reality with. It seems there is no final author[ity] for us to appeal to for the validation of a 'true' reading of our scientific project, no stable ground against which to securely buttress our consciousness and our consciences.

The tradition of the novel to which Forster referred, and to which Kundera refers, and the tradition of a technological Europeanism to which the fundamental particle physicists referred with an even greater assurance than either of these until less than twenty years ago, no longer adequately represent our reality – in recognition of the loss of the fundamental particle, scientists operating in that area of research today refer to themselves as high-energy physicists. In Australia, and in many other countries, we have found ourselves to be the inhabitants of a disestablished world in which the dominant cultural experience is that of displacement. In modern European societies cultural displacement has traditionally been viewed as a negative value, as marginalising and deprivation to be endured against or struggled against. My perception as an Australian, however, is that displacement has constituted a positive endowment in the elaboration of our culture – displacement, not tradition, has been our workplace in Australia, and has increasingly come to constitute the workplace of writers in other countries.

For those of us who find ourselves compelled to tell stories in order to make sense of experience, there are some wonderful ironies to reflect upon. Beginning an essay which she subtitled 'A Polemical Sketch', Iris Murdoch wrote in 1961, "We live in a scientific and anti-metaphysical age". Thirty years after Ms Murdoch wrote this, things have changed remarkably; for the scientific community has abandoned the search for the concrete building block of reality and, for the first time since Descartes, is rediscovering intellectual respectability in the metaphysical. Meanwhile, some of our groundbreaking philosophers are abandoning metaphysics and are setting out in search of a non-metaphysical theology. In what strangely disguised, beguiling and mysterious ways do we find our storytellers reflecting upon this "fearsome ambiguity"? What values are engaged by us in the subjective life of our culture now?

For Milan Kundera, the founder of the Modern

Era was Cervantes as much as it was Descartes, and for Kundera this fact required restating as recently as 1986 (*L'Art du roman* first appeared in 1986). I suspect that for most of us who are writing today the founders of the post-modern (among whom many would place Kundera and Murdoch at the forefront) are less obvious, more urgently debatable, and more important than the founders of something that used to be called – by those who wished to see history in ages and eras the Modern Era. For me one of the founding thinkers of recent, post-modern, times – an impression resisting the criticism of her work that has appeared since the publication of *Sexual Politics* – will always be Kate Millett. For it was when I read her book in 1971 that *I* first realised the world had changed and was no longer familiarly post-war, but was something else. To understand Modern and European, is – and the paradox is semantic – to understand something about the past. The present is engaged with other concerns than those which engaged Modern Europeans. The draggled tail-end of Kundera's and Forster's splendid tradition is the messy beginning of something else. It is the beginning of something in which it is no longer possible to write within the enclosures of European and Man. Whether we are writing or reading the story, it is as newly arrived, and therefore as rather confused, citizens of a world in which European Modernism is not, and can never be for the majority, a central repository of cultural memory, that we now engage with experience – for the moment at any rate, until the circumstances of history refashion us once again.

Alex Miller's third novel The Ancestor Game *(Penguin, $14.95) is reviewed in this issue. His previous books are* Watching the Climbers on the Mountain *(Pan, 1988) and* The Tivington Nott *(Robert Hale, 1989). His plays include* Kitty Howard *(Melbourne Theatre Company, 1978) and* Exiles *(Anthill, 1981).*

D. R. Nicholson

DAVID M. MARTIN

The Mary Martin Story

My eldest sister Mary was just thirty years old when she started the bookshop in Alma Chambers, McHenry St, Adelaide, in 1945. Her parents helped her by paying the rent for the rooms that she took, and her sister Florence (and Florence's husband David Painter) set up the office and accounting system for her. Other friends and relatives rallied to the cause, putting up shelves, lending furniture and so on. I had only recently married and gone off to live in Melbourne, so I missed most of the initial and exciting phase. But I well recall trying to do some carpentry in the shop on my first visit back to Adelaide a few months after she had started, and finding that by then it was quite difficult to move around because of the crowd!

An early decision had been to provide coffee for all and sundry for a few pence a cup, so before long the shop was full to overflowing with impecunious students drinking coffee, plus a small but growing group of genuine customers. It was the place to meet people, and these would have included such future luminaries as Max Harris and Don Dunstan. Intelligent conversation was guaranteed. Mary covered every inch of available wall space with prints from overseas sources such as the Medici Society, and they were also for sale. She provided space too for local artists to hang their paintings, and in 1945 this was somewhat of a novelty.

By the end of that first year she had made a profit of £41, and by the end of the following year this had doubled. It wasn't much to show for all the work, but what she had accumulated, and which didn't show in the ledger, was an increasing amount of "goodwill". She was also beginning to outgrow the tiny premises in Alma Chambers. She had made her mark.

It has been suggested that Mary's role model was her great-aunt Annie who was also a student of languages. In the 1880s, Annie established a school for girls after arriving in South Australia in 1851 on the *Anglia*, at the age of nine, together with her parents and sisters and brothers. One of these was Harry, then aged four, and it was he who became our grandfather.

The Martins were a literate family and brought many books with them on the journey out to Australia on the *Anglia*. Harry's younger brother Fred became a competent writer, and his wife Catherine Martin even more so. Her *Incredible Journey*, about the dispossession by white colonists of Aboriginal children, was first published in 1923, and reprinted by Pandora in 1987 as part of the Bicentenary celebrations. There was also Robert Montgomery Martin whose illustrated *History of the British Colonies* in five volumes was published in 1835.

Mary's mother was Lorna Gledstanes Jacob, one of a family of three girls and three boys, of whom two were killed in World War I. Lorna's father Henry had been a surveyor who spent long periods on survey camps away from home, and during the years that the sons were away at the war, the father died also. The mother was Florrie Wollaston, a descendant of Rev. J. R. Wollaston, first Archdeacon of the Anglican Church of Western Australia. Florrie, our grandmother, had become an avowed communist, and in the early days of the bookshop, she was often to be found there, extolling the virtues and superiority of the USSR to anyone who would listen. On mother's side of the family there were people of literary talent too.

Mary was close to her mother, but not to her father. Her sister Florence and brother-in-law David Painter were her main supporters in the family, particularly in her business affairs. I loved her dearly and she used to refer to me affectionately, and perhaps somewhat patronisingly, as "little brother". (She used to refer to the young Don Dunstan as "little Donny" too, in much the same way.)

After finishing her schooling at Girton (now part of Pembroke), she went on to Kindergarten Training

College, but found that infant teaching was not to her liking. For a brief period she taught at The Wilderness School for girls, but this also was not for her. Because she continued to fail her final Latin exams year after year – and it became a terrible *bête noir* for poor Mary – she finally gave up the idea of getting her degree.

During these years she used to earn money at nights and weekends working as a packer in various local food factories. One of these that I recall (with horror) was a backyard manufacturer of margarine. She had a real love/hate relationship with the place, which apparently was paying her on piece rates. It

Mary Martin photographed on a visit to Adelaide, 1969.

was during those years too that she was making her first moves as a trader. She had discovered that it was possible to buy prints of classical paintings from a number of art galleries overseas, and some of these were quite cheap if you could buy in bulk. She used to ask friends and family if they would like her to buy for them (say) two dozen copies of a postcard-sized British Museum print for use as a Christmas card, or maybe some larger-sized print for framing. In this way, of course, she was setting up a network of potential buyers and sellers, and this was to become a valuable base when she took the decision to start the bookshop business in 1945. Mary was a very artistic person, and used to hang lots of pictures on the walls of her little cottage.

She entered into a business partnership agreement with Max Harris in 1947, when the bookshop was in its third year. Max and Mary had been close friends at university during the early 1940s, and they had possibly competed for the distinction of being the most avant-garde and controversial of literary students. Max was six years younger than Mary, however, and had considerably more capacity for enraging the Adelaide Establishment. He founded *Angry Penguins* in 1940, and this was published initially by the Adelaide University Arts Association, whose business manager was none other than Mary Martin. Max moved to Melbourne after university, with *Angry Penguins* going from strength to strength. In 1944 the famous Ern Malley poems were published and Max suddenly became headline news throughout Australia, particularly in literary circles. During those heady years he was one of the founders of the publishing company of Reed and Harris in Melbourne, and had succeeded in being prosecuted by the Adelaide Police for publishing some "indecent, immoral or obscene" material. The *Weekend Australian* reported on January 11–12, 1986:

> Rosemary Wighton recalls those days and how she, with supporters of the beleaguered Max Harris, would gather in Mary Martin's bookshop to sift and re-sift the words, sound and fury of the whole delicious "success de scandale" that thus surrounded them.

It was from this high-profile background that Max returned from Melbourne to Adelaide in 1945, and threw in his lot with Mary. By 1947 they had decided the bookshop could become a success, and Max became Mary's business partner.

Although the family did not share Mary's great enthusiasm for Max and his enormous panache, I now think he probably brought with him exactly what the fledgling business needed. The address of Australia's largest literary controversy became the Mary Martin bookshop. Furthermore, Max went on to give free rein to his literary talents in a number of new directions. He produced *Mary's Own Paper*, generally known as *MOP* which was an instant marketing success. He provided the bookshop, tucked away in a backstreet of Adelaide, with a top-line literary sparkle. And, in return, the business gave Max what he needed: a regular job, and some money.

Mary began to be interested in Indian temples

when she was at the University, "...not because of the set courses" she wrote in her diary, "but in spite of them". She goes on to describe her reactions to seeing a number of good photographs of Indian sculpture for the first time, "...as I turned the pages in great excitement I felt that this was quite unlike anything I had ever seen before. My first impression was of sensuousness combined with a strictly disciplined sense of form and composition. After I had looked a little longer, I saw the sculptors could portray tenderness, grace or repose, and then turn with equal facility to make figures of terrifying vigour and ferociousness." It was a few years later that she first saw Shivarem, the Indian dancer, during his visit to Australia. "I went expecting pleasant entertainment," she wrote, "such as I would have had from Russian ballet. Shivarem's opening dance was an invocation to Shiva and, as soon as he started I felt rather as if I had been caught eating chocolates in church, because it was obvious that this was not entertainment, but religion."

For Mary, his dancing had clearly opened some door into a whole new world. She turned to reading Indian classics such as the Mahabharata, and learning all she could about India's ancient cultures, particularly its art and history. The walls of her cottage began to be covered with drawings and paintings of Indian temple carvings. "The more I read", her diary continued, "the more I want to go to India."

Her diary recounts that she and Max often used to discuss "...where we would go, if we ever made enough money to travel. When one day without any warning he attacked: 'You must go to India – you'll object of course – you always do – but there is money in the bank, I think, and nearly all the bills have been paid!'" In 1952, barely a month after Max's "attack", she was on her way. It was to be the first of many visits.

In 1953 Mary and Max decided to move into larger premises upstairs at 75 Rundle Street, and they also employed their first member of staff. But the business continued to grow, and in 1957 they moved again. This time they took a considerably larger area on the first floor of the Da Costa building, which was in an excellent position on the corner of Gawler Place and Grenfell Street. By this time Mary had made several visits to India, and the bookshop was handling quite a wide variety of Indian craft goods as a result of her travels.

In 1961 she made her penultimate visit to India. This time her objective was to see two ashrams one at Mayavati and the other at Almira, and on this visit she was met and accompanied by Dr Hardikker, an MP of the Indian upper house. Although she was not greatly impressed by either ashram, she was very fascinated by new aspects of Indian life that were shown to her by her distinguished guide. Soon after returning to Australia, she made the decision to leave Adelaide, and to go and live in India, and this she did early in 1963.

The idea of Mary actually selling her interest in the partnership, however, appears not to have been discussed with any finality until after she had left. In her letter to Mary early that year, Florence suggested that Mary consider selling (as opposed to remaining as an absentee partner), and rather tentatively went on to suggest that Max's wife Vonne might be a possible buyer. Mary had been thinking along the same lines herself apparently, because in a slightly later letter she advised "I have had a letter from Max in which he agrees that I should resign from the shop but adds that I can re-join if I like." Eventually, an agreement was drawn by Mary's friend and solicitor Bob Clark, but an amusing letter from him after the event tells us that Max was apparently unable to find all the money needed by the due date.

The balance sheet as at 30 June suggests that the price at which the business changed hands was probably unduly modest, but on that date one of the company's major assets was its loans to Max. At the time of this sale, Mary was trying to start a new life in India, and a new business, and she was so short of money that the family were actually sending her food parcels to keep her going. Yet I doubt very much whether Mary's plight was ever properly conveyed to Max, who apparently had a few money problems of his own at the time. To my surprise I discovered that Mary's will had been claused at that time, to leave her interest in the business to Max. "My will," she wrote to Florence, "as it now stands, leaves Max my interest in the shop, so he is safeguarded I think."

It is clear that Mary was determined to do everything in her power to help Max, and that she wanted very little in return. Certainly her apparent lack of assertiveness upset both Florence and solicitor Bob Clark. But if Mary did do badly out of the deal, as some people have suggested, it was because she wanted it that way!

From this rather inglorious beginning as a proprietary company, the bookshop went on to prosper under Max's management, and in 1974 he sold out to Macmillan. In 1986 it was again sold, this time to Rosemary Wighton and family – Rosemary having known Mary from earlier days at university. The business has changed hands once again since then, and a number of interstate branches have closed.

Mary started her new life in India in early 1963 and lived at first in Bombay in the family home of

her friend Vipin Chandra, a Jain. Mary and Vipin shared the house for some weeks discussing repeatedly and at some length whether they would marry, but each decided to remain single. Mary soon found the Bombay climate unbearably hot and tiring, but her friend Vipin told her of a cool hills resort within a few hours travel from Bombay, and this news gave Mary some comfort. She had decided to sell books published in India to Australian institutions and individuals, sending out booklists to them. She felt that little capital would be needed for this, and for the time being her bedroom could be her office. She was also considering selling Indian handcrafts. She moved to Bangalore in March, where she found the mosquitoes so bad, especially on her legs, that she decided to adopt Punjabi dress, which consisted of baggy pants drawn in at the ankles, and a tunic about knee length.

Mary Martin in Punjabi dress

She learned that she couldn't run a business until she had a bank account, and in one letter home she tells an amusing tale of Indian bureaucracy. She had made application to open a bank account, but the bank had done nothing. The government was crying out for more exports, but they would not grant her a bank account. She wrote "I thought that the time had come to use influence" so she fronted up at the bank with this announcement: "The deputy minister of foreign affairs is very interested in the work of Community Aid Abroad, and she has said that in case of difficulty to let her know – and this *IS* a difficulty!" At the sound of the name of a cabinet minister, an electric charge went through the bank, a clerk was summoned, a telegram was to be sent to the Reserve Bank on the spot, and the result would be known by Monday:

Although she had sold her interest in the bookshop, she decided in August to call herself the Indian branch of Mary Martin bookshop, because that helped her to get credit without fuss. At that stage she had sent off about thirty booklists to libraries throughout Australia. She also learnt that some things she thought had been mailed had not, apparently because the unfranked stamps had been stolen by postal staff!

She said in one of her letters that she was glad to be out of the Adelaide bookshop realising the peacefulness of her new home. Nevertheless she was uncertain where she would finish up, and the number of "nets she was putting out was greater than the number of fish she had caught".

In December 1963 Community Aid Abroad people began placing book orders. But she was having some trouble with asthma in Bangalore, and decided that she should look for a cooler place to live, making an exploratory visit to Ooty. Upon returning to Bangalore she was pleased to find a large book order from Geoffrey Fairbairn at the ANU. She decided that Ooty had produced an improvement in her asthma but was not really a suitable place to live. By March 1965 Mary was handling enough orders to try increasing her markup from 33 per cent to more than 50 per cent. She was also targetting her smaller and more specialised booklists at university departments.

At that time she was living on about £6 a week including £2 a week rent. CAA was sending her orders for craft goods, and to obtain these she made

a number of journeys, which she enjoyed, to more remote places.

It was in May 1965 that Mary first met Kesava Murthy who in 1991 was the sole proprietor of Mary Martin Booksellers in India. Murthy (pronounced Murti), as he is known to his friends, was a Brahmin, and at that time was a servant of Mary's friend Dorothy, in Bombay. In Dorothy's opinion he was far too talented to be a domestic servant, which Mary records in one of her letters, is a job in which people really get exploited. Most servants are on the job before 6.30a.m. and go on until the last members of the family choose to go to bed. Before meeting Murthy, Mary had decided she was not ready for this move financially, "having only just managed to get on the right side of the breadline". But when she saw him she quickly changed her mind. Before he came from the South to work for Dorothy in Bombay, Murthy learned two southern Indian languages, and in Bombay English, Hindi and Marati. He had also learned typing and shorthand, and was working hard to lift himself out of the servant class by studying to pass his matriculation exam, and this meant staying up until midnight. Mary decided to take him on part-time and he could start off by cooking meals. After Murthy finished his exams, Mary began teaching him to be her assistant, starting him on £10 a month plus food and lodging, with an increase when sales rose as a result of his work.

At the end of September 1965, Mary was planning to go again to the Nilgiris to look for a house, and Murthy suggested trying a smaller place called Kotagiri, outside Ooty. On 16 November the family had a letter from "Fair Glen", Kotagiri, saying that they had almost settled in to their new house there, and that she had finished doing her first full day of shop work. She was delighted with her new arrangements, with Murthy being in his element, her health being good, and "the place we're in now has well water (spring water) but is fed into the house by electric pump – a great a rare luxury locally. We live like royalty". Also at this time, Mary learned of the work of Dr Narasinhan, known locally as the Dr Schweitzer of south India, and she soon became heavily committed to helping him. In the following nine months, Mary and Murthy moved house nine times, each time having the house sold over their heads. Despite this, the business continued to grow, with Murthy taking over more of the bookshop work, and Mary spending more time on the work of Dr Narasinhan.

She considered making a trip back to Australia in 1967, but postponed this because of lack of money. Murthy now had an assistant, and clearly they were confident that he could manage the business in her absence. Eventually she did get away in 1969, and was kept busy giving public lectures in order to raise funds for Dr Narsinhan's work amongst the Adivasi people.

By mid 1969 she had extended her customer base to include America, Canada, New Zealand, and Japan. Murthy was running the day-to-day affairs of the business, and Mary's banking and other troubles were behind her. They were still unhappy with their house, however, but at least they were in a position to seek and obtain a better one. Mary was spending long hours with Dr Narasinhan, and financial help for his work was now coming from Australia and elsewhere. She was also giving money out of her own income from the business. In 1970 they even bought a small secondhand car, and were enjoying the freedom that this gave them to move about more easily. Murthy was looking for a wife – a serious business for him but one which Mary viewed with some scepticism.

In 1971 Mary's letters contained more details about the work of the Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare Association, as the Doctor's organisation was called. She also wrote that "Murthy will be marrying next week, though the date still has not been fixed. He is marrying a girl who is in the middle of doing a university course and who knows English which is lucky for me...The marriage will be fixed on a day approved by the Astrologer. They marry not only within the caste, but within the sub-sect of the caste".

Although we now know Mary collapsed in Perth just before she left Australia in May 1969, her first mention of actually feeling unwell came in a letter late in 1971, when she reported she had been feeling ill "for the last couple of weeks, since returning from Madras". She was apparently out of action for a month, but by mid January she had recovered sufficiently to be back at work. It was about this time that her financial situation suddenly improved. The values of some Australian family shares increased; while in India "we have been entitled to benefits because we are [exporters. The amount] is so considerable that it can well go towards buying a house".

In December of 1972, in what was to be her last letter from Kotagiri, she writes that she has been in bed with a sore back and could not sit up, or move much at all. Dr N. said that she had a calcium deficiency, and gave her some treatment. "In the midst of all this," she wrote, "we learned that our present landlord's son-in-law was planning a communal disturbance to get us to move out of the house." They decided to move then and there. She continues: "I told Murthy it was his fate to move

me when I'm ill – it happened when we last moved. He of course is a boon, and very tolerant of sickness and inability – it is an Indian trait." A note penned in the margin of her typed airletter says that Murthy had found a house with a superb view. It is no wonder that Mary wanted to do everything in her power to help Murthy – as she had done with Max in earlier years.

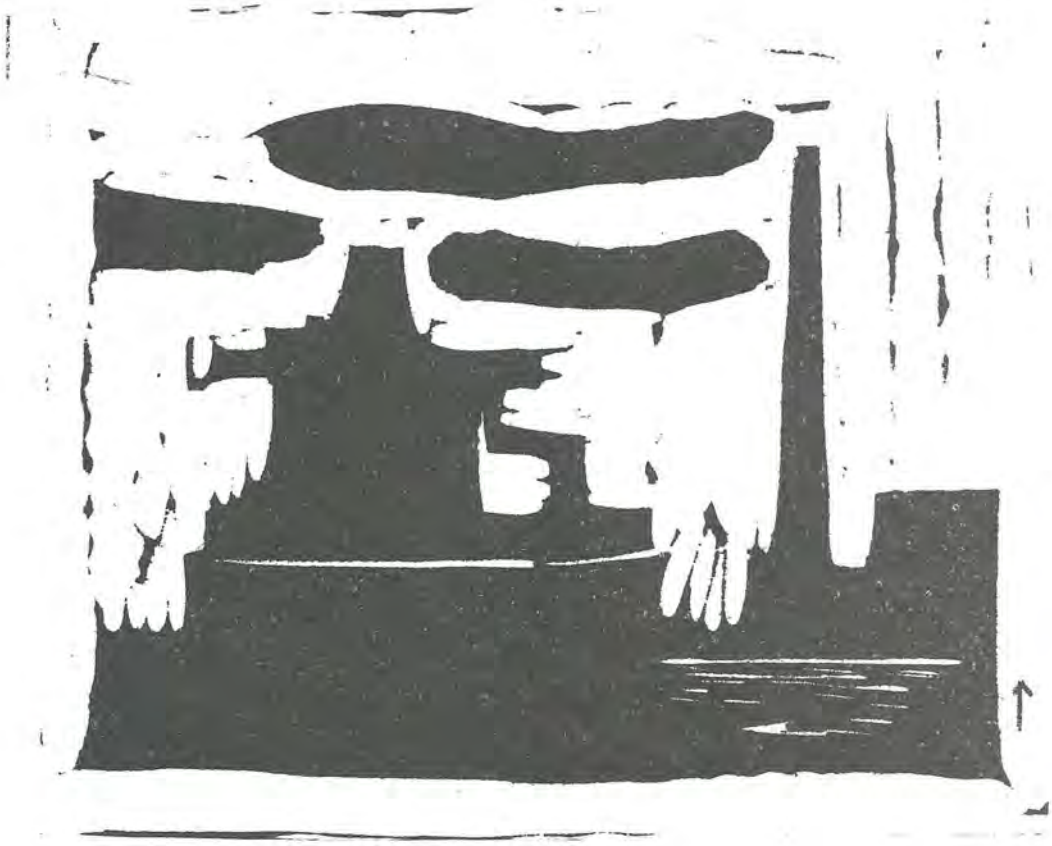
They were convinced they must buy a house, but this was not to be. December 24 found her in Vellore hospital 250 miles away, whence Murthy had taken her (via hospital in Madras) following a collapse. After some days of tests she was eventually diagnosed as having insulinoma, a pancreas problem which results in the production of excess insulin and lowering of blood sugar levels. Whilst waiting for surgery, Mary wrote last letters to family and to Murthy, setting out what should be done "in case there were unforeseen difficulties". She underwent surgery and was reported as making a satisfactory recovery, but collapsed suddenly and died without regaining consciousness, on 25 January, 1973.

After contacting the family in Australia by cable, Murthy brought Mary's body back to Kotagiri, and we gathered from subsequent reports that her funeral was a major event, and one that will long be remembered in Kotagiri.

Murthy became possessed of Mary's Indian assets as she had planned, and has carried on the business very successfully ever since. As a footnote, it is hard to believe, but he is still fighting (through the courts) the decision of the Indian authorities to levy him for Indian death duties on Mary's Australian assets.

The family kept all Mary Martin's letters, and we also have copies of the letters written to her by Florence in the years she was in India. There is also her substantial diary – surely, the makings for an excellent biography?

David M. Martin, Mary Martin's brother, is an engineer who now lives in Adelaide.



Rick Amor

LET'S DRIVE

Let's lay a new paint job over th rust
in th body, chuck th leopard skin over th seat

so th girlfriend'll know to slip on th black matador
stretch pants
& white cardy with th sleeves worn empty

slip 'long & winding road' on th tape deck as
we ease
onto elphinstone road & curl down mount stuart
like smoke

across a windy beach flavored with snags
on a stick
recalling a new dark on th dunes, suddenly there –

'you've got to lose it sometime', back seats
in lovers' lane
& as you pull up at th lights at th bottom of th hill

th two of you not using much of th front seat
this morning a cold ghost of th steamed up
windows of adolescence

LOVE between th right hand knuckles, HATE
between th left
a sleeveless denim tattoo on th panel of th right
hand front door

th air as crisp as th crunch of tyres on blue metal
taking th lower longley turn-off, trees burned
to purple foil

all th way down to pelverata, stop at ski's shed
full of tin-lids
opposite th concrete block hall just like the
hastings footie club

third grade, where we drank jugs, earnestly
increasing our capacity
by disgorging with loquacity, th lowering of th
brows

to sour, heavy fights, as measured as a
sabre duel
we move on when we feel th early afternoon
sea breeze

come up from th coast, we want to take th
back roads
& slow time, around th inlets, as loose as lazily
coiled string

coming into cygnet, slowing at th top pub,
past th middle
at th bottom pub putting th foot down,
th sickly challenge

of warm beer flooding your throat, past a
young woman
writing SWALLOW at the edge of th incoming tide

so you park, thinking of sweeney, while you
scratch HORIZON
& watch until it becomes a watermark, waves
out of an unnamed sea

you've driven through purple trees, & now
crossing a darkening beach
a purple sea, moon highway, GO BACK YOU ARE
GOING THE WRONG WAY

white catspaws under a prowling sky
th wind licking its salt paws

a boat out there fishing with th tide
& a slippery dark coming inshore to feed

easing out of th bay, shoulder hunching into
th long pull into town
wild thing, lying on th warm road, th passive
resistance of th bush

we drive slowly, hoping to avoid th sadness
th sudden bump of orgasm with a stranger,
we take our time

in an FJ holden, a dinosaur on a freeway
th tape playing buddy holly with a double bass

wombat, possum, wallaby, flattened out maps
of australia
th nineties go blaring past us, multi-layered
tracks of sound

remembering th hip freak jive of th sixties
got a nail man I've got to get myself a gig,
get some bread together

now it's let it rip rap in a world of frictionless zip
uphill th FJ holden has an australian whine
in th engine

a complaining upward rising inflection
conveying affection, supplication even

as we move off from th lights back up
elphinstone road
winding up mount stuart, th mountain brooding
over giblin's quarry

life's a slamming of doors in a high wind
waking a hundred childhood
nights in a squall of stars

ERIC BEACH

TWO POEMS BY GRAHAM ROWLANDS

IT'S TRUE, MR SPEAKER

It's true, Mr Speaker, I've often had cause to
congratulate Australian voters on their intelligence
& thank them for the great trust they've
placed in me
& I've warned the hypocrites of the Establishment
& even (& I say this with complete friendliness)
one or two of my own Parliamentary colleagues
not to underestimate the intelligence of the voters

but because of this particular occasion,
Mr Speaker
I repeat, Mr Speaker, on this *particular* occasion
the blunt fact was, the political reality was this:
that everything we've ever worked towards
everything we've ever struggled towards
stood the very real chance of being lost to
the liars & hypocrites of the Establishment
because, Mr Speaker, on this particular occasion
the very future of the country was at stake
(yes, the future of the country is always at stake
but it was my judgement & it still is my judgement
that on this one, this very particular occasion
the very future was *particularly* at stake)

it became necessary to make a promise &
keep that promise to the Australian people
even if that meant making another promise
even if that meant making an opposite promise &
being bound in good faith *not* to keep *that* promise
& even denying the very existence of that promise
because if you have to choose between promises
you keep your promise to the Australian people
you always keep your promise to the Australian
people
because you respect the intelligence of the
respect the intelligence of the Australian people.

SHIT

Yes, shit. Not by any other name, it was shit.
Trees thrived on it through old broken pipes
until the loo swelled & swilled over the
top like a bayonet charge in all directions
or the little boy with his finger in the dyke
hallucinating Houdini in a barrel over Niagara.
Actually, it was Archimedes pushing up olives.
The cutter cut through the roots one, twice &
I didn't deny the plumber thrice. After that
it was copper sulphate crystals – or bust.
It was *Root Rid* to be shit rid. Good riddance.
Then I heard it. Shit! Where? Ah shit!

In my son's bedroom. Shit! he said & Shit!
he says when he stubs his toe on his *Lego*.
Shit! he says when he's going to be late.
Losing his sandals is; the wrong channel is.
Constipation or diarrhoea, they're all Shit!
Patience & politeness won't end his Shits!
any more than trying to scare him shitless
by shitting on him from a great height.
Nothing but his days will end his Shits!
I've tried Excreta. I've tried Defecation!
To him they're just more loads of shit &
I'm one great heap of shit. A real shithead?
I can't even begin to tell you how shat off
I am with the little shit Shitting! himself
but after dropping those Excretes! and Defecates!
I can tell you this: no matter how much
the little shit keeps shitting me, I'm
not going to try Sexual Intercourse!

MY BACK PAGES

When mum reads the paper
she turns to the last page
first: scans the Obituaries,
eyes glint like glass
as light from a familiar name
strikes them. "Maisie Boots,"
she says, "I haven't heard
from her in years". Lately
the list is getting longer;
it's inevitable, I tell her,
as more and more her age
are 'called away' neglecting
to add it'll get shorter till
it shrinks to almost nothing
at all – barring accidents –
the gap before the next generation
"goes into the trenches".
I try to cheer her up, completely
misreading the mood; it keeps
me going, she says – & I see
how it's like a gathering where
she meets old friends
for the very last time: a
clinking together of memory
& wishes: a 'bon voyage'
for the other side;
"When did this start?"
I ask. "O, at your age,"
she says.

JOHN L. MALONE

THREE YACHTSMAN SONGS

Cold-chiselling a weld to free a pipe,
sandpapering wooden bulkheads, overhauling
mooring lines. Children with sticks calling
in the shallows. A rag to wipe
the oil-pressure gauge. The bright side
of the next boat wavers and slims
down to color the water like oils.
Running a saw on the jetty, fitting the slide
to a hatch-cover. Enjoying the weariness of limbs,
the wash of passing hydrofoils.
Bailing the bilge with buckets, drinking beer
among shavings and detergent, a pile
of gear heaped in slow sunset. For a while
nothing can touch us here.

Nothing can touch us here, I again say,
working the caulking gun at gaping seams,
tearing old deck-covering off. Jetsam gleams
palely as it sinks, sliding away
in the green water. Nothing can touch us here.
I work the caulking gun, forcing the compound
into the gaps showing naked in the wood.
The skipper sings in the cockpit, fitting new gear
for the bilge-pump housing. I cut around
old canvas, work the caulking gun. There should
be enough at least to keep hands busy here.
I work more compound into the gaps,
I work more compound in. Torn deck-canvas flaps,
the skipper sings, and the day is clear.

Sun and bright air today as I scrape
the barnacles from this beached boat's hull,
singing because my heart is full,
no longer searching now to find escape.
Such small things can fill the heart a letter
that makes no promises, and yet reminds one
of things too long forgotten. A tentative hand,
a few well-chosen words. This day is better,
and better because of small things. The sun
fires the river, the water laps the sand
limpid and bright. I sing at my scraper,
warm in my shorts, under the boat's red side.
Transparent shrimps quest the last lip of the tide.
nothing is promised, nothing on paper.

HAL COLEBATCH

NO OTHER REASON

To converse over platters
the shaded lovers will salt their
old argument – everything's moving
very slowly, and then suddenly
a phrase or an image amplifies,
as if they haven't slept for days.
One of them loves a woman
with the most stubborn love
that exists.

She won't grow old.
Their best will not be together.
They drink a thin wine,
as metallic as blood.
Outside the heat rushes to
meet them, off the beachside road.

DIPTI SARAVANAMUTTU

THE SISTERS

for Marissa and Marina

At the corner the girls wave
and move with their careful hands,
smile. My daughter joins them
like a soft ball. Their cryptic tones hit
and miss. In their ragged
dress they could be magic, or gypsies,
or disappear.

The youngest says mum's in jail like that's
where you go if you're caught.
Her sister's worried about telling the truth,
and luck. She's discovered cause and effect
the hard way, its dilemma. She'll trust
you, not what you want to be.

Their father appears in the doorway. His black
and yellow skin shines like a narrative.
He'll tell you it all for nothing,
watching for a fall, a weakness.
He thinks 'discipline' makes it easy
unconsciously. At night
the girls dream of being silent without fear.

ANDREA SHERWOOD

POEM

The scratch of charcoal on butcher's paper
    is like the soft scrabbling of beetles
The electric blow heater sends a warm blush
    along my thigh
Rolls of fabric are waiting to be wrapped
The next customer is angry at having waited
    for so long
Instead of asking me to please make a coffee
My boss tells me his throat is getting dry
I make him the sixty-second cup of coffee that
    I don't want to make
The old men wait for me to bring their pills
    after dinner
If I get it wrong
The manager says it probably won't make
    any difference
My shoes are wet with beer
I get more tips if I happen to wear my shorter skirt
I howl like a dog because the dentist's children
    like it
So do I
I blow the whistle and bounce the ball
The hot oils burns me
Turning the compost make me gag
I'm asked for my opinion of cat foods, mineral
    water and ski resorts
I have to work over time
The company I work for indirectly destroys
    rainforest
I have to wear make-up
I cut fine slices of mortadella and sometimes
    my thumb
The umpire's job is always to be wrong
I scoop ice-cream into cones and am told
    not to be so generous
A customer asks me for black roses to send to
    his ex-wife
I think of people who suicide as I clean the back
    of the oven
I put creases in the legs of other people's trousers
I get handed a broom to sweep the factory floor
I have to be nice to my co-worker the boss's
    mother in law
The office girls give me New Idea to read
The solicitor's bathtub is waiting to be cleaned
The old lady chats to me while I pull out her weeds
I put extra chocolate topping in the butcher's
    milk shake
I get paid for it

EDWINA BREITZKE

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

After Poetry 14, A Quarterly Account of Recent Poetry

PRISING

Humphrey McQueen wrote:

> Human history can never be repeated exactly, if only because its participants are alert to mistakes from the past.

T. S. Eliot made a similar comment about literature when he said that any new work of quality wasn't just an addition to the history of literature. To a large or small extent, it altered the entire pattern of literary history. Knowledge of the past alters the present just as knowledge of the present alters the past.

Even the humble poetry reviewer needs a sense of perspective. A masterpiece can be lost in a hurry. A solid work found in a pile of mediocrity can seem a work of genius. Just as selection from a quarterly swag of poetry books provides more perspective than a single poetry review, so arriving at a winner after reading two years of Australian poetry publishing adjusts one's sights. And re-adjusts.

In this Quarterly Account I include five poetry collections read as a judge for an award as well as two from my usual swag. Vincent Buckley's *Last Poems*, Catherine Bateson's *Pomegranates from the Underworld* and Andrew Taylor's *Folds in the Map* have been mentioned already by Kevin Hart, but I'd like to emphasise different aspects of their work. Karl Karlsen's *Sleep Tight Baby* and Peter Eason's *Boozer of Blue* are worth considering despite their small print runs, perhaps because of it.

Close friends and colleagues who knew Buckley as a staunch Irish Catholic Cold Warrior will always prefer to remember him fulminating against Nietzsche and Stalin. I had one glimpse of this Buckley. The Professor of English at the University of Melbourne had been invited to read his poems to students at an arts festival. Using his glorious voice and some of his academic status, Buckley referred to a rumor that God was dead. He had news for the audience. God was alive and well, living at the centre of the universe. Then he read his poems. I was appalled.

Only a few years later I heard him in public again. He had been drinking but (or was it 'and'?) many things seemed to have changed or seemed to be changing. Over the last twenty years of his life, he *remade* himself, just as his favorite poet W. B. Yeats had remade *himself*. Buckley's remaking wasn't without pain and scars. To me, however, it was more heroic than any religious certitude.

In *Last Poems* he investigated his own dying process in the same way that he investigated the chemistry of landscapes and the universe. He often connected things in vivid visual imagery:

> Tomorrows rushed, with less
> time to count them
> than to drink to their passing.
> And that glow in the grass
> was where it all started,
> cold, with the unearthly
> blood-chill of the salt life-forms,
> sucked into walls porous as limestone,
> to stay there, like a leaf-fossil
> mimicking eternity:
> the Oldest Animals.
> And you and I go on, mazed
> in the Byzantine closed mesh of nature
> when all we wanted
> was some place in a story.

Australian-born, he was finally able to focus on the real Ireland, in contrast to what had previously been his sentimental view of the country. He wrote about Irish poets, landscape, history and politics. Although Buckley's political poetry wasn't his best

work, he wrote movingly about IRA hunger strikers:

> Now he is laid on the sheepskin rug
> so that his bones will not burn him,
> pads are put on his heels
> against the bedsores. He is blind
> and deaf. The pain they told him of
> jolts its thin current
> into every movement. His teeth
> protrude like the bones of a dead man.
> He is dying for his word. *Geronimo.*

That was Bobby Sands. Buckley hated English Tories as much as he'd hated Stalin.

In a delightful touch he said that he lived through "six or eight booze years". He couldn't remember exactly. During these years he taught as much as he could. All the time, however, he was learning. In a country where abstinence after heavy drinking has almost become an index of intellectual excellence, Buckley continued to like a drink. *A* drink. It's a generous attitude.

The generosity wasn't confined to alcohol. He was prepared to admit his *fear* of older women relatives. Lest it be thought he was retrospectively caponised by Amazons, it's clear that his immense intelligence responded to modern feminism and to individual women – his new wife and daughters. These lines were written for Grania Buckley:

> Even in the rashness of the close
> night, you ask questions about space,
> as we watch the black spread like lava
> and the stars keep their grip on it
> in the pale, pale cold of Kildare.

His appreciation of adult women, primarily a visual one, showed the male limitations typical of his time. Even so, it included some understanding of the whole cycle of reproduction. His was empathy without 'effeminacy'. He showed tenderness without trying to *be* female. With this in mind, then, the last line of the following is very moving indeed:

> you will not have chosen
> morning or evening for it
> and you will not be able to choose
> whether to die indoors or out,
> whether enfolding your children's bodies
> or shredded, alone on black grass,
> whether by sucking wind or fire,
> by lightning bolt or crushed brainpan,
> you will not even choose
> whether to die as man or as woman.

Bateson's first collection, which plays with the notion of attribution of authorship, is most attractive. The section called Persephone's sequence (which is given a separate identity within the book) and Bateson's poems are similar but intriguingly different. The sections cover Persephone's and Bateson's relationships with men and women, and also self-explorations. The last poem of Persephone's sequence seems to be about a relationship between Persephone and Sappho, but turns out to be about that between Persephone and herself. Bateson has several similar poems. Even in the beautiful poem about her mother called 'One Half of the Sun', she and her mother seem to be twins.

The book's structure couldn't work if the two sections were only mirror images. Part of the appeal of Persephone's sequence is the intentionally anachronistic references to modern society. Whereas Persephone's last poem finds the speaker in harmony with herself, the book's last poem finds Bateson pregnant. The choice, however, has been far from complacent. Numerous poems about luck, gambling and juggling imply that her forthcoming baby is the product of two forms of genetic roulette.

Technically, she has a fine command of pace, colloquial language and varied line lengths. All the poems are clear; some are both clear and complex. All are well-made poems, often with apt and memorable endings.

There's pain but also joy. There's sincerity carried off with a light touch. The poet is often hard on herself. Even so, she can be hard on others, as in the sexual revenge of 'Daddy's Darling':

> Pretty as a silver fish I was
> daddy's little girl, darting out of reach
> of his old man's hands.
> Making him run.
>
> Eating oysters from his fork, their
> baby bodies fat between my milky teeth
> I was his princess and he was my
> wicked king –
> wanting more.
>
> Perched on his knees I could see
> for miles. My plait tickled his nose.
> He undid it, tugging with large fingers.
>
> Secured under his weight I was
> so small.
>
> Fucking boys in the wild grass, my first
> long dress a pile of white like an abandoned cat.

Meeting him in the hallway. My mouth a gash
of bruised flesh.
His eyes cool death.

Making him pay.

Every collection of Andrew Taylor's poems contains some excellent work. His latest is no exception. Even so, it could have been improved by more rigorous editing.

His series about everyday objects is witty, imaginative, sometimes profound. He writes about spoons, radios, dish drainers, pencils, staplers, spades and windows. Letterboxes become fed and rifled cormorants, and the poem 'Wineglass' is a flawless piece of irony, insight and paradox. Here's the thirteenth way of looking at his mirror:

Mirrors are flat
familiars, they magnify
our weight to the speed
of light, instant
photocopiers with no
memory but ours and so
so fragile

Section 3 contains an early Pinteresque view of living among urban technology. In the chairperson's office there's a – chairperson. The bottom of the building has another bottom. A director seems directionless until he escapes into the "bronchial tubes" of the airconditioner.

The book ends strongly when the poet returns to his beloved Europe:

Still we inherit
this – a tower of stone
like ivory, a carillion

of musical sunlight
and the certainty
we'll never build so sure again.

Moreover, it's difficult to imagine an Australian writing a more Eurocentric poem than 'Walluf am Rhein', where his daughter inherits the Rhine in her veins through the poet's marriage to, literally, a Rhinemaiden. An extreme but impressive poem.

Unfortunately, the book varies in quality. There are mediocre suburban poems, slight descriptions and some tedious travel details – not to mention a longish poem in couplets about London. (The less said about it, the better.)

Karl Karlsen's presumably first collection is about gays; and most of the poems not about gays are nevertheless written from a gay viewpoint.

It includes hilarious gay protest chants, poems about AIDS, about relationships of various kinds with HIV positive victims, about 'male' and 'female' gay psychology, transvestites and the sex industry, as well as heterosexual defence and denial mechanisms. Although the 'straight' world is treated ironically, sarcastically and at times bitterly, Karlsen is capable of sympathy for women, derelicts and, surprisingly, police officers.

Unfortunately, the poetry's rhythms let the poet down. Not enough attention is paid to line lengths, and rarely is one verb used when two will do. There's a formality at odds with both the subjects and the frequent use of colloquialism.

There are at least three outstanding poems. 'The passion of our lord oh Christ' describes Christian religious observance not as high church but as high camp. The others convey the poet's relationship with his father – confessing his homosexuality to an ex-soldier (who had strong male bonds) and the following:

Last night my father fucked me in a dream.
Thank-god that's over now – it was no fantasy.
It was a cold, a lousy clammy fuck.

Awake he's not sex I'd want to have,
and we'll not touch until he's dead;
but before last night I did forget
that I had ever loved the man.

I know now, as I rarely have before,
a sensual delight, and warmth between
my father and his son.

Peter Eason's first collection celebrates the joys of the simple life on Kangaroo Island. Although most of these short poems are slight, some about women, the island and mystical aspirations, are more significant. The poet disarmingly admits to being "a bit mad". This isn't necessarily a problem for the reader, and Eason's forays into mysticism are concise and start in the concrete:

Inward I space outward,
Having waited in the courtyard.
Having walked the coast scar
Casting into that dimension
My nets, I caught a calling.

Inward I space outward,
The nets having dragged.
Having caught light chasing
Black arcs of infinity
I will patiently fish.

In John Millett's collection *The World Faces Johnny Tripod* (including the radio play of the same name) the poet doesn't just write about sex and death. He juxtaposes them. He even treats them as if they were identical:

Skin has long memories.
Now you say nothing –
fall through me,
opening for the first time
the women you have killed.

The play's air war over Europe is central to his treatment of sex and death. These themes are also explored in his poems – along with violence, insanity and other extreme stances and experiences. If this sounds daunting, it might be mitigated by Millett's decision to lead with comments on modern social classes. It might be mitigated by a handful of lyric-descriptive poems. It *might* be. The truth is that, no matter the theme or subject, or their 'correctness' or 'worthiness', nothing can make up for poetic quality. The mitigation here is in the imagery. There's not one poem lacking in vivid, original and often very beautiful imagery.

The play's voices aren't naturalistic ones; they're the poet's own. The play is well paced with songs, hymns, sound effects and rounds of words that take on second and third levels of meaning. Is it *too* beautiful? There's no easy answer. Life is intensified by deaths, dying and imminent death. In these poems, imminent death is described in terms of the unreal, surreal and ethereal quality of slow motion. Perhaps Millett's suggesting that the air war is similar to his description of death in action as "like torn porcelain". *Torn* porcelain. He's certainly not suggesting that all war is like this:

After the attack coming home
is to remember the red smear of Leipzig
far under us and those going down
by parachute in slow motion

and one of us
blindfolded by what he had done
throwing the safe silk off
letting himself down
by gravity alone.

The poems are equally impressive. The clamping of a dog's jawbone is compared to its owner's sexism in 'Pitbull Syndrome'. Plants, insects and small animals are taking over Matron Nightingale's house. Elsa Callaghan goes mad. She kills butterflies and then kills her son (because he tries to rescue a butterfly). A German immigrant works thirty years for Dunbarton Street Inc before refusing to suffer his mates' taunts any longer. He torches his oppressor. 'Woman from Groningen' conflates a verbal and physical sexual climax, while 'Jean, Shadow of a Night Hunter' juxtaposes sexual compliance with homicidal mania.

Millett doesn't group his poems according to theme or subject. Even so, some tentative comments can be made about his treatment of sex. He depicts numerous sexual relations. Some are imaginary. Some women seem projections of his desire. At any rate, there can be no doubt about the woman in 'Kaddish for Shulamite':

A silence has come from far away and
I want to cover you with the low bracken
blood grows into.
I want to spread out a tree 500 years old,
warm dead birds in your voice.

You are the loose way stones lie down
and I want to unbutton the sky of your dress,
let the light in.

Millett's startling imagery isn't always successful. It can be obscure, can clash with other imagery or other lines. It can lack the supporting evidence of detail required to produce well-made poems. Moreover, surrealism can't always conceal poetic engine trouble. The reader is well aware of when the poet is working a complex vein of surrealism, as when foxes and humans merge in 'The Hunt as Metamorphosis'.

Kevin Brophy's first collection *Replies to the Questionnaire on Love* includes many performance poems. Whether lists, dreams, repetitions, news items, topical comment or dramatic monologues, they're simplified versions of life. In terms of their mood, these poems are resigned rather than outraged. They mine a vein of comic fantasy and/or menace rather than satire. They're entertaining.

Some are more than entertaining. Their subjects aren't always different from those in Brophy's performance poems, either. Even so, the treatment is different. These 'non-performance' poems have a unity sustained by deep emotion as distinct from the more superficial unity of being apt for performance.

The most moving poems depict close relationships and, broadly, religious experiences. 'Somersault' has the unity of pregnancy imagery. 'Blind Again' is a lovely piece of self-criticism in the context of sexual longing. Although 'Anarchist in the Nest' could be taken literally, it's a series of images evoking the anarchy and insanity lurking in the human race.

'Image/Imago' is about a complex interaction of human and religious love. At least half of 'Portrait and Self-Portrait of My Mother' is filled with a mood of conventional religious hope. In the extraordinary poem, 'Of Father's Fingertips', the poet mixes love and cosmology:

> But his fingertips at least
> must snap and quiver
> – what aches a mile-long crack
> inside the arctic ice? –
> where within, whole oceans of air,
> sparks of star scraps on
> black beasts of space and time,
> crayon yellow suns
> and sweet green planets
> must spin on and on for him
> at the name of love...

Brophy's pattern of religious response is distinctive, even where it may be less than clear. However, it can be clear as Easter bells: "bubbles of resurrection-song, dreams of perfectly hollow / hymns of light".

Graham Rowlands teaches Australian Politics and Crime Prevention Planning in Adelaide. Wakefield Press published his Selected Poems *this year.*

Catherine Bateson: Pomegranates from the Underworld *(Pariah Press, 101 Edgevale Road, Kew, 3101, $12.00).*
Kevin Brophy: Replies to the Questionnaire on Love *(Five Island Press, PO Box 1946, Wollongong, 2500, $10.95).*
Vincent Buckley: Last Poems *(McPhee Gribble, $19.95).*
Peter Eason: Boozer of Blue *(Backstairs Publishing, PO Box 635, Mount Gambier, 5290).*
Karl Karlsen: Sleep Tight Baby *(D. V. Leith, PO Box 1225, Darlinghurst, 2010).*
John Millett: The World Faces Johnny Tripod *(South Head Press, The Market Place, Berrima, 2577, $10.00).*
Andrew Taylor: Folds in the Map *(UQP, $14.95).*

KEVIN HART

"Among All Those Kangaroos"

An edited extract from A. D. Hope *(Oxford University Press, $14.95) to be published this month.*

IN A LATE lyric, 'The Mermaid in the Zodiac', A. D. Hope muses on how he will be placed in literary history:

> I shall be among the English poets, I think,
> After my death', wrote Keats. He had in mind
> A chair beside Chaucer, a seat by Spenser,
> a drink
> With Dryden – poets of that kind.
>
> I wonder among what poets I shall be found,
> Shall I be sorted with the goats or with
> the sheep?
> Among our fractious factions underground
> What sort of company will I keep?

It will not be with the formless modernists, he assures us, nor with the Australian balladeers; and he concludes by admitting, "I expect I shall stand, looking rather out of place". For all its whimsy, the poem poses a serious question: in what context, or contexts, should we read Hope?

When people ask what kind of poet Hope is they usually go to literary history for an answer, and generally label him a neo-Classical or Romantic writer. I also suggested that in doing this they are quietly guided by something in the verse. There are ways in which a work tries to frame itself, and various ways in which it can be framed by its readers. Sometimes people happily accept how a poem, or an œvre, asks to be approached; sometimes they resist that invitation. Here are three common ways in which poetry tried to position itself: with respect to a literary history; with reference to contemporary writing; and in terms of a national literature. Quite clearly, most compelling poetry does all three, and much else beside. (Needless to say, some poetry invites comparisons with music or the visual arts. One example: in Hope's case, the verse might be illuminated by placing it beside certain sequences by Arthur Boyd and Sidney Nolan, painters intrigued by the possibility of valid heroism.) Yet the work of some poets tries more vigorously, or more subtly, to propose itself one way rather than another, and this affects how we respond to it.

Hope's verse asks to be read against the backdrop of the European literary past, and when a critic accepts that invitation it can be with great enthusiasm. If we are to get the right sense of Hope, Geoffrey Hartman advises, then we will have to imagine "a chariot with four wheels: one is the ferocity of Swift, one the energy of Blake, one the control of Pope, and one the 'noble and candid speech' of Yeats". These are some of the proper names which come to mind when reflecting on Hope; however, the Australian's poems do not merely countersign a tradition, they extend it. The chariot which is Hope "is instinct with a single motion, the spirit of an individual who is completely of his time though rarely subdued to a middle flight". Swift, Blake, Pope and Yeats: not one of these names would surprise Hope's readers, though his Australian audience at lest might be taken aback by Hartman calling him a modernist, albeit one of those who "consolidate rather than advance the modernist revolution". This is puzzling until one realises that Hartman's polemic is directed more against the simple periodisation of literary history than by an effort to claim Hope for a movement the poet condemns. The modernists, we are told, were "rebels within Romanticism", and so MacNeice, Graves, Lowell and Hope can be accommodated in Romanticism and modernism. All these contemporary writers "remain conscious of the 'giant forms' of tradition", Hartman argues,

> They wish to save yet subdue the mighty abstractions of a craft with thirty centuries behind it. These abstractions are multiplying. The modern problem is not a lack of exemplary forms refusing to die completely: they bounce back like defeated

Titans. To displace or disconfirm them is just another way of acknowledging their presence.

This tradition is Romanticism in a greatly extended sense of the word, which encompasses and is enriched by the high Romantics from Blake to Shelley, but which begins with the *Odyssey*, the first quest romance. What we have in effect is an inversion of Hope's own model of literary history, for here it is Romanticism which forms the major tradition with Classicism being a fold in that history.

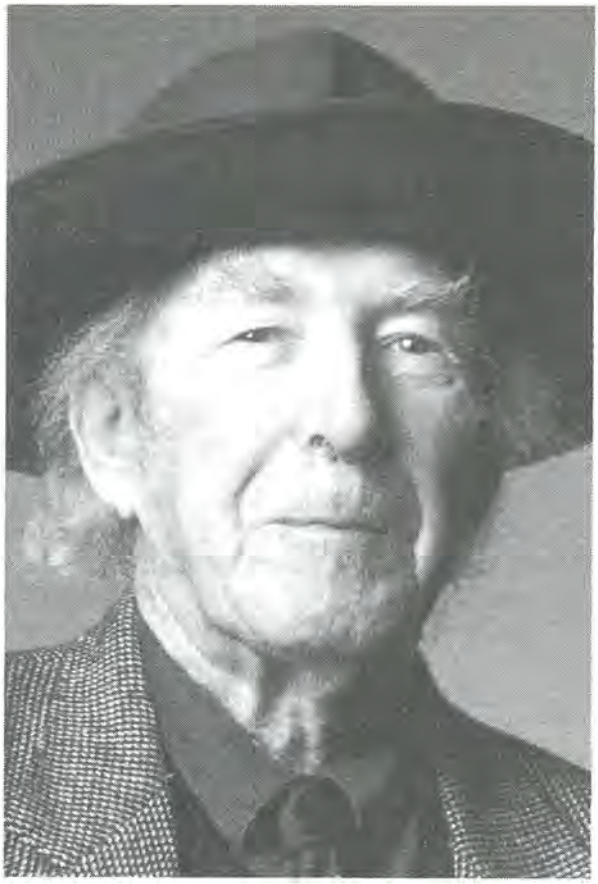
Although Hartman groups Hope with several contemporaries in his review, he principally situates him with respect to English literary history. He picks up the idea of the past presented in Hope's verse and evaluates his achievement in terms of it. One consequence of this type of commentary is what we could call a "greatness effect": the work in question stands beside the canon with a view to being added to it. Hope is not the only Australian poet to whom this has happened – Christopher Brennan used to be named in the same breath as Mallarmé – but he is perhaps the only one whose writing can sustain the necessary comparisons. This is not to say, of course, that Hope's work is our sole living contribution to verse written in English, only that Australian poets tend not to be evaluated positively with the English canon in mind: both Australian and English critics are equally reserved on this point. As one would expect, the greatness effect is more common with American and European writers. Two contemporary examples: John Ashbery whose poems are read increasingly by way of Wallace Stevens and Walt Whitman, and Yves Bonnefoy whose dense, brooding lyrics evoke a literary history to use when elucidating them. (In broad brush strokes it looks like this: Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Valéry...Bonnefoy.) Whether Ashbery and Bonnefoy are as great as those with whom they are compared is disputable; that they are regularly interpreted in those terms is a matter of fact.

All the canonical writers Hartman uses to characterise Hope are Anglo-Celtic. Yet it would be possible, and certainly rewarding, to read Hope in the contexts of other European traditions. He was trained as a philologist, and took great pains to master a range of languages in order to read a wealth of literature. In the 'Western Elegies' he recalls his lifelong absorption in languages:

I think now of those I have learned, adapting
my soul to their music:
Latin, old father of tongues, whose discipline
was the adventure,
First step into unknown space, that tempered
and tempted my boyhood
To discover new countries of mind called
Ovid, Virgil, Catullus,
And the dense and disciplined march of
a prose that thinks in inflections.
Then the daughters of Latin, the tongues
of Italy, France and Iberia,
So rich in their colour and chime and each
so diverse from the others:
And the tongues of the Goths and the
Germans, the Norse and the Anglo-Saxons
Which I chose for my province of study
when I thought of myself as a scholar –
They were native and near as I listened and
moved from one to another
Getting the feel of their strange, their guttural
dissonant music;
Till further afield I found the earthy
abundance of Russian
Last of the tongues of men into which my soul
found translation.

No mention is made there of Greek, which he learned imperfectly at a school in New South Wales (it was not offered in Tasmania), Arabic, in which he gained some proficiency in later life, or Japanese, which he once tried to acquire. Hope says that the most profound influence on his writing has been Catullus, and that he came upon all the modern European poets too late for them to shape his habits of perception. This conviction comes partly from a Romantic belief in the imaginative potency of childhood, partly from a desire to be linked to a Classical tradition, and partly as a claim to have evaded the influence of older contemporaries. There would be little value in tracing verbal and formal echoes from European and other poets in Hope's writing; the main point is that he has had access to a far wider range of poetries and poetics than any other Australian poet. Critics often call Hope a traditionalist, though they might just as accurately call him an internationalist, since in this case, the two words point in the same general direction.

It is hard to generalise about what a poet learns about writing when reading verse composed in another language. Adapting a remark of Roland Barthes's, one might say that the verb 'to read' can be used transitively or intransitively. Poets like their own works to be read intransitively, with the reader lingering over each line, letting each stanza echo in its own space and in its own time. Perhaps that can happen when a poet approaches other people's verse, but is is always shadowed by a transitive style of reading, one drawn inexorably towards an object.



A. D. Hope
Photograph: Loui Seselja
(Courtesy National Library of Australia).

Not that the poet is necessarily all that interested in what is being communicated or even in the act of communication. When contemplating other people's verse, poets are disposed to be driven less by the pressures of hermeneutics than by questions of poetics: How is this done? Can I adapt that? Would it work the same way in that new piece I'm working on? For poets, the pleasures of reading poetry – poetry that *matters* to them – are often made keener by fears of influence and the guilty joys of appropriation. When approaching verse written in another tongue, though, the guilty joys tend to outweigh the fears. For a poet there is often a freedom, a lightness, in reading verse in another language; the poem can be allowed to creep upon you, impinge on your creative space because, at the end of the day, it cannot lay claim to anything that results from the encounter. One might get an idea for a poem when pondering *Les Fleurs du mal* or the *Römische Elegien*, yet even if one speaks the other tongue fluently, the writer's access to the poetic is through the natal language. One is protected, as poet, when reading or speaking another tongue. And yet it is precisely at that moment of freedom, moving lightly in the worlds of Baudelaire or Goethe, that one begins to bump against the limits of one's own language and its cognate worlds; at the moment one feels least obligated as a writer one is returned to the density and specificity of the maternal language.

Perhaps Hope's studies of the French, Germans, Italians, Portuguese, Spanish, and Russians, created a space between him and his precursors in English, especially Yeats. The "noble candid speech" he so much admired could easily have passed from model to mode, taking over his poems completely, if it had not been forced to compete for attention with other twentieth-century voices. The Europeans and Russians supplied some of these voices, and Hope's distinctive idiom was forged in adapting them and others to his own ends. By the same token, that vital literary space gave him some protection against the literary fashions of the day as they entered the academy and hardened into ideologies. Hope's temperament would have never allowed him to be drawn for long to the poetics of Eliot and Pound, even if he had never gained entrée to foreign literatures; but the fact that he knew other literary traditions, whose modern heirs kept resolutely to formal structures, encouraged him in his chosen poetic practice. As Akhmatova and Mandelstam showed him, he could be an authentic modern poet while remaining absolutely committed to form and metre.

All the hard work of interpreting Hope *sub specie* comp. lit. has yet to be done. The unpublished manuscript of *The Swallow and the Bee*, a collection of essays on Russian literature, will provide a starting point, though only one amongst many. Very few Australian critics, if any, are sufficiently confident in foreign languages to begin that labour of comparison. It is more likely that we will start to see Hope in a wider context by placing him alongside his older and younger contemporaries who write in English. To repeat a phrase, Hope feels himself to be "looking rather out of place" among his North American peers. "I keep meeting local American poets", he records in the late 1960s, "Robert Lowell, Stanley Kunitz, William Smith, Richard Wilbur, John Ashbery, Adrienne Rich etc. and I get some of their verse and read it when I have met them and remember the name". The result is almost always disappointing:

> I find it very like the verse written in Australia, but with a feeling of being a little more, and more luxuriously, occasional, as though produced for an audience who could afford a better product

and could equally afford to throw it away when they had used it once.

Once more Hope identifies a relation between the poet and society. Just as American capitalism is driven by an economy based on conspicuous consumption, so too contemporary American poetry is produced in a circuit of perpetual exchange. In the postmodern age the simulacrum is all: "The conditions of the small cultural group, the tribe or culture held together by a single tradition and set of values, which favours a 'permanent' poetry, are less and less possible in the amorphous great societies of today."

Given Hope's distaste for free verse, one can understand (if not entirely agree with) his negative judgement of the American poets he lists. The puzzling name in the group is Richard Wilbur's, for here is a writer whose exquisite sense of form, tone and rhythm should have impressed Hope. Certainly he admires Thom Gunn's early writing, and one might guess as much by placing 'Helen's Rape', 'Tamer and Hawk', 'Black Jackets', 'Autumn Chapter in a Novel', or any one of a dozen other poems, side by side with the *Collected Poems*. The two shared a commitment to strict form, a penchant for the dramatic and a taste for the violent, although Hope could not follow Gunn in his relish for American popular culture, in his choice of a critical mentor in Yvor Winters, or in his later adventures in free verse.

If one were to read Hope by way of a likely fellow feeling with English-speaking peers, there would be no shortage of names to cite, though Roy Campbell, Anthony Hecht, John Hollander, Richard Howard, James Merrill, and W. D. Snodgrass would be amongst them.

Needless to say, no critic is obliged to restrict commentary to elected affinities, real or imagined, and it may well be that the most telling comparisons to make with Hope are poets who do not at all share his convictions about poetic form. First off, it might seem bizarre to mention Robert Duncan in the same sentence as A. D. Hope, and yet for all their differences they are the two most serious Orphic poets of our time. That they would have differed sharply about most things is beyond doubt, though whether those disagreements are fundamental is another issue. One can see Hope as a writer for whom questions of form and metre are crucial, or one can regard him as essentially an Orphic poet for whom poetic vision is prior to everything, including form. In practice he is both kinds of writer at once – poetry and structure are co-ordinate notions as far as he is concerned – yet his readers today are inclined to see him as one or the other, or as more of one than the other; and this is one reason why his name can be a site of sharp disagreement in Australian letters.

Take for example two poets associated with the "generation of sixty-eight", a diverse movement of younger writers who were unified by a longing to introduce modernist and postmodernist poetics into Australian writing. Thus Laurie Duggan in '(Do) the Modernism' pokes fun at Hope for being an arch-conservative. Modernism is a new sort of dance, the song tells us. Things were hopping in America and Europe, but not here:

> Well b-back in Australia they c-couldn't cope
> they do the James McAuley, do the
> A. D. Hope
> they never busted a pentameter or
> stayed up late
> until the g-g-generation of s-s-sixty-eight.

While Duggan sees Hope as fustian because of his calm indifference to Pound's call to break the pentameter, Robert Adamson in 'Lady Faith: for A. D. Hope on his 80th Birthday' reveres the older writer as a celebrant of mystery. "What makes poetry for me these days of fear", he says, "...is the faith that pure song must employ". Like Hope, Adamson feels out of place in a postmodern world which fails to recognise the primacy of art:

> The heart of language's desire wants to see
> its blood back on the page with poets of both
> genders;
>
> in this age that thinks everything can finally
> be explained away if it's not seen to be a form;
>
> though formlessness, including this, in the
> hands
> of a poet, is faith in our own mystery.

Hope would doubtless dismiss that final couplet as so much symbolist nonsense, but the important thing to note is that, in Adamson's view, the old debate between form and freedom is judged to be secondary to the mystery of the creative act itself: Hope is an Orphic singer first and a formalist second.

Kevin Hart's study of Jacques Derrida The Trespass of the Sign *is now available in a paperback edition from Cambridge University Press. His most recent book of poetry is* Peniel *(Golvan Arts).*

MICHAEL McGIRR

Dog Fever

When KEVIN BALL thought his wife had got over the business about the boy, he took the lithograph of the boy in uniform downstairs and hung it on the back wall of the shop. Susan looked up from the counter at what he was doing and turned to an imaginary customer in the doorway. She was calm. Kevin took it as a good sign. She was getting over it. Kevin saw no reason to be afraid of the boy any longer or to lie. When he looked in the mirror of the barber shop he could see the boy behind him, breathing down his neck in the uniform of the light horse. He could live with that. He could live with the curiosity of the customers who noticed any little thing that happened in the mirror.

"Your boy?"

Kevin answered and looked across for his wife's reaction at the counter.

"Killed was he?"

His eyes fell to the razor or the collar for the sight of blood.

Kevin Ball didn't really like the lithograph. He couldn't say that though. It had been his idea to have it done and it cost them a small fortune. The boy was like his mother in it, which was one consolation, standing to the orders of the photographer and leaning his weight against the back of a chair. The face was hers: determined and absent. But sharp. And thinner. Much thinner. Twice during the session the slouch hat fell forward over the boy's face at the studio and spoiled the image. The photographer fussed around about it and finally took the problem into his own hands. He put the hat on the chair in front, running the plumage over his face and smiling as he did so. Yet, apart from his face, the boy's body carried a little condition in the photo. Looking at the chest, he may well have survived to be a stout man like his father, Kevin Ball, who could rest a customer's head on his belly to keep it steady for a shave. The boy's face knew another story.

Kevin didn't move the lithograph downstairs until business was picking up. They were well positioned in Macleay St, Potts Pt, in a row of other shops and adjoining a Pharmacy. They should have done better after the war than they did and it was a mystery at first to Kevin what went wrong. There was a time when he thought they would have to close their doors. That was when the troops started coming back. Kevin had expected different. He was the closest hairdresser to the Woolloomooloo wharf and he imagined the men would be coming straight off the harbor and up the hill for a taste of luxury. His only dread was finding himself searching endlessly for some likeness of the boy in these men. But it never happened that way. There were diggers all over Potts Point but for some reason they brought no business to Kevin Ball. During that first year, he survived more or less on whatever cigarettes Susan could sell across the counter. People tried to explain it. Why the business was so bad. Why it wouldn't pick up. The chemist next door had plenty to say on the matter. He used to come in and say that the men had all got lice in the trenches and were letting their hair grow a bit now they had the chance to live a normal life. Or perhaps they were shrugging off the regulations about beards. Or maybe it was the fashion of the minute. You know how these things come and go, he said. It will pass. Once he said that these fellas couldn't stand to sit in front of a mirror for that long any more. Their looks had changed or they didn't know themselves out of uniform or they saw the faces of their mates. But in all that time, Kevin took it badly that the chemist himself never came in for a cut or a shave, only to talk. He must have been going elsewhere to get his hair cut, leaving the Balls to survive on the smokes and the few odds and ends Susan could sell. That was really all there was between them and God knows what. Losing the shop as well maybe. It was their last line of defence.

But at long last there was new life in the weary bones of the business. Kevin took an apprentice and

for the moment there was enough trade to keep both chairs busy. On Saturday they could still be going till four and beyond, until after the chemist next door had closed up and scurried past, turning a collar or holding up the paper to shield his face from Susan at the counter. He wanted the Balls to think that he was in a bayonet charge for the second half of the football rather than short of trade. Kevin could read the chemist like a book now; he checked the mirror for the number of customers still waiting for service and felt reassured and even victorious.

The customers were also more talkative it seemed these days than when they first got back. Especially on Saturday. They were full of the dancing and the girls and the bands and how much better things were. Sometimes they looked at the picture of the boy behind them and wondered if they should have asked but generally they had second thoughts about it. When Susan got the money off them she'd also suggest before she gave any change that they'd be needing smokes to get them through the weekend and her mouth would soften for a moment as they took the bait. The aftershave worked like drink on some of them and they asked her if she had anything in a plain packet and she said tightly that they could try the chemist next door for that kind of thing if he was still open and then she looked elsewhere, avoiding eye contact. But later she would have to prevent herself grinning about the situation and the small chance she had grabbed to belittle the chemist. Perhaps she'd be in the mood later to send the apprentice off a quarter of an hour earlier. Kevin saw there were plenty of signs in all this that she was coming good. It had taken time.

That was all she needed.

But there had been twelve or eighteen difficult months during which Kevin Ball had time to read the paper from cover to cover every day. It was the one luxury he hung on to. Plus getting the light horse uniform cleaned now and again when he thought Susan needed to be doing something for the boy. He could see that it did her good so he never minded about the money in spite of her protests. He used to take it down to the cleaner himself to ease the burden on her. Kevin also got a bit of a taste for the horses. He read so much of the coverage in the paper and it was often a talking point with the blokes that came in for tobacco in the hope they'd stay and have the beard off or trimmed or whatever. After midday, he used to go upstairs for a while and leave Susan at the counter with the paper.

In his whole life, Kevin had never rested during working hours before. It was like admitting defeat. He only used to go up for a lie down in the room with the lithograph to please his wife. She would send him up and insist that he needed the time. But he never rested. This became the time when he read her diary. Kevin never let on that he read her private thoughts. It was his secret what he did. As far as he could tell, the diary was mostly all about the boy. It saddened him the way she had become obsessed with the boy. "He's getting over it," she wrote of the boy's disease, as if she could bring him out of it by degrees. "He's getting over that business." It went on. "He rests peacefully these days. He must be coming good if that happens." The diary was full of contradictions like that about the boy. Like he was still sick and not dead. It became painful for Kevin just to keep reading. It never occurred to him that she was sufficiently in possession of herself or capable of compassion to be making these observations about her husband. "He's coming good." It was pure fantasy. "He's better. The business is better now." Kevin's pain drew on the fact that there was never any evidence for these statements about the boy even while there was some slight hope of him resisting the onslaught of the disease. Let alone now. "I thought for a while he would never pick up." It was all wishful thinking as far as Kevin was concerned. "But underneath he knows that he fought just like the rest," she wrote. Kevin was sad that she still had to lie about the boy and the army.

The chemist made a killing out of those twelve or eighteen difficult months. Within days of the first deaths out of quarantine and the epidemic being confirmed, he had turned the pharmacy into an arsenal and stockpiled the window. At first it was just displays of Bonox, Lifebuoy and Aspro which he normally had at hand anyway. Then he cut the official declaration of Spanish influenza out of the paper, framed in a black border for effect and put it in the window to keep sales up. Before long, he was pouring his capital into the more expensive lines such as Henzo's mixture and Henzo's Throat Diamonds. People were shelling out for them as fast as he could get the stuff. He was banking on their fear.

For about three weeks the Balls had joined the rush themselves. For some time the empty bottles littered the yard behind the shop where they had fallen. Susan kept a list in the diary of everything they tried: Wawn's Wonderwool, Saunder's Malt Extract, Gippsie Tonic from the purest Gippsland Herbs. These were just a few. And when each new remedy hit the market, the chemist had a story to go with it. Apparently, he knew someone who had come through the influenza and someone else who hadn't and he knew all the reasons why and he knew what was done or what could have been done in every case. There was other stuff that he pounded in his own mortar and sold in unlabelled bottles. It

was clear all along to Kevin Ball that he was making a killing. But for a while they were as frightened as the rest of the world.

The only horror the chemist tried keeping from the Balls was his free advice to everyone else about the barber shop next door. Sometimes Kevin could hear him on the footpath. "It's right through the place," he would say. "You can get it from a scratch with the razor. It doesn't take much. Just sharing a dirty towel might be enough. Or antiseptic with a trace of saliva." He was forcing their backs to the wall. And selling them every other reason imaginable about people coming back from the war for their business troubles.

The chemist had it in for the boy. It was easy for him, Kevin thought, having none of his own to send. During the war, the chemist kept flags on display in his window.

"That boy of yours should be in uniform."

He always said it to Susan, never to Kevin. Kevin read about it later in the diary.

"It's the uniform that makes them men," the chemist said. "You see them grow six inches the minute they put it on."

She wrote all this out in the diary upstairs. Kevin saw it playing on her mind. "I'll never let on," she wrote later. "He'll never find out from me that his father wants to see him in uniform more than anyone." Kevin couldn't guess why she was trying to bring him in on the picture. From the outset of the war he had never discussed it with the boy. He had made a point of it. He never brought it up. The boy could make up his own mind whether he went or didn't. It was his business. He wasn't the one who ought to be sending his son a pale feather.

A feather came for the boy during the campaign for the second conscription referendum. Kevin told his wife that it must have been from next door. The boy felt no shame as far as Kevin could tell, no emotion of any kind. His father watched him discover how he could use the feather to make the cat sneeze or even to make himself sneeze. It was hard not to believe that he was more pleased with it than offended. Even harder to reconcile that image with the paranoia about coughing and sneezing that swept over Potts Point like a tidal wave that came back with the ships just a year or two later during the epidemic. By that time, there were plenty of people wearing face masks and keeping six feet at least from any human contact. The chemist pretended to be discreet when he guessed the boy was sick but made a point of happening to mention next door about the new government ordinances and about every case having to be reported. He pronounced the word as ordnance and that's how it was spelt in Susan's diary. Kevin told his wife that the epidemic affected a lot of people more than the war ever did. The chemist himself had an interest in keeping public concern at fever pitch as Greathead's mixture, Bosisto's Celebrated Parrot Brand, Wawn's Wonderbalm and Gods knows what else all hit the market.

"Keep on the Beef Tea," she wrote and Kevin read in the diary. These must have been the chemist's words again. "The weaker you are, the more you are at risk. That's why it went through those troopships. Those men were run down after all they'd been through."

When the boy got sick, it was Kevin who suggested putting him in the light horse uniform and bribing someone to get a photograph of him on the gangplank of a troopship still moored where Potts Pt suddenly and without warning becomes Woolloomooloo Bay. That plan was impossible. Too much risk. There were penalties for impersonation. But Kevin persisted because he knew it would be good for Susan to be able to remember the boy in uniform. He was vindicated in this by the determination with which she went about securing a uniform on the sly. It was something she really wanted. She campaigned on the boy behind Kevin's back. "He said he would do it to please his father," she wrote, conscripting Kevin to pressure the boy, which he would never have allowed except for her.

After the boy surrendered to the plan, there was a mad rush to get the correct insignia for the uniform and then there were patches to be sewn. Susan worked with precision. The uniform had to be virtually remade to fit what was left of the boy. She stayed up all night for him and his father to finish it. Then there was the session at the photographer. A lot of families had done this sort of thing they told each other. The photographer was a friend of the boy and allowed him to change into uniform on the premises. That was safer. The whole family was included in the session. They all went over to be photographed. But for all his friendship with the boy, the photographer could charge what he liked. He too was simply protecting himself. There was a risk involved for the photographer as well; there were penalties for doing this.

The boy insisted in the studio on having the pale feather that came during the referendum in the plumage of the light horse. The different shading doesn't really show up on the lithograph. But after it came downstairs, Kevin saw practised eyes run over the picture at the back of the shop and wonder what was not quite right about the headgear. That could be a painful moment. But no one ever put a finger on the extra feather. There was also the fact

that, despite Susan's efforts, the uniform was too large; the dog fever had run over the boy's defences and wasted them. He was already writhing hopelessly when the photo was taken; the photo was of a boy in no man's land. In a fortnight he had lost weight. Stones not pounds. Susan made him wear a couple of pullovers and three or four flannel undershirts. She wanted Kevin to have an image of a boy in condition. But the face wouldn't lie. It asserted the absence from the impersonation and effectively from the back wall of the shop. The face is sharp, determined. Eventually, the photographer gave up on trying to balance the hat over such a narrow face and placed it on the chair. By which stage the boy was needing the chair for support anyway. But he would not sit down.

In total, he fought the influenza for twenty days. Better than most. Almost twice the average. Every one of those days was listed in Susan's diary. She wrote about his fighting spirit and his dignity in the face of defeat. Kevin knew she was lying to herself about this; she was trying to talk herself out of her real memories. That's why she simply wrote up in the diary the stuff she read in the paper downstairs in the middle of the day as the whole world endlessly raked over the coals of war for more glowing deeds. She thought to turn the boy into a hero. That's why, thought Kevin, he came up with the idea of the faked photograph. To support her illusion.

Kevin Ball was infuriated that the chemist found out about the fever. No bloody wonder. For three weeks, Susan was in every day for the latest medication and for news and advice. She returned with Henzo's Mixture, with Apos Tonic, with Dr. Morse's Indian Root Pills, with Hean's Tonic Nerve Nuts. The chemist wasted no time in letting on to the rest of Macleay St. He spread it around that there was an unreported case next door. His best advice was to take your business elsewhere.

"They've got it next door." He said. "The boy who never fought got it."

At the moment when they were going to need their savings to tough it out, Kevin Ball put more than he could afford into the hands of a man who would do a portrait of the boy in a uniform that was never his. So his wife could get over the business. She agreed and did what she could to make up the money selling cigarettes so Kevin could live with an image of the boy as a man.

"They've got it bad next door," said the chemist, making a killing. "It just goes to show what I said."

Susan kept writing. "He's getting over it," she wrote. "He tells me how much better I look," she wrote. "It's a good sign, for the moment," she wrote. "He's getting over it. He has forgotten about the cleaners and the uniform and has begun once or twice to look at the face in the photograph." She had to keep writing. "Underneath, he has picked up somehow that the boy stood his own ground. Like the rest. He sleeps in the middle of the day. He must be coming good if that happens." She wanted Kevin to keep reading.

television

Bev Aisbett

A Poet's Worth a study in hot air by Lofo

THE MORAL: GIVEN THE RIGHT COMPANY, POETS START TO LOOK GOOD.

ROSLYN PESMAN COOPER

The Italian Woman Immigrant in Fiction: Velia Ercole's *No Escape*

THE PRESENCE of Italian women in Australia was but slight until the mass immigration of the 1950s and 1960s. According to the census of 1901, some 90 per cent of Italians in Australia were male. And of those who came from Italy to Australia in the 1920s, only 20 per cent were women. We know precious little as yet about the lives of the Italo-Australian women of the prewar period whether lived out in Italy or Australia or in both. But what we now do know is that we must be wary of generalisations and stereotypes such as that of the eternal and universal peasant woman forever clothed in black. One stereotype of the Italian immigrant woman is that of the helpless victim, a stereotype that pervades the rare literary representation of Italian women in Australian writing of the 1920s and 1930s.

A number of Australian novels and short stories written in the first half of this century contain representations of Italian immigrants. Among their authors were Eve Langley, Katherine Susannah Prichard, Jean Devanny, Velia Ercole, Eric Baume, Vance Palmer and Louis Essen.[1] The reasons for this quite surprising prominence of Italian characters in Australian literature are difficult to gauge. Jean Devanny and Eric Baume both journeyed to the North Queensland sugar fields and used that terrain as setting. Eve Langley wrote of the lives of itinerant farm workers. While in the case of the North Queensland novels, the setting was likely to produce Italian characters, it was also the writer seeking the exotic and adventure who deployed them.

The very small number of Italian women in Australia in the inter-war period is reflected in their near invisibility in literature. Although a number of the writers who have just been cited were women, Italian women rarely appear in the literary sources. Italian characters were almost exclusively confined to men. In literature generally, the immigrant almost always stands for the alien, the outsider. The woman immigrant is doubly marginalised, by gender as well as ethnicity. And the three women who have so far been found – in what is by no means as yet a total search for Italian women in Australian literature – are representations of the outsider. The three works that contain the Italian women are Eric Baume's *Burnt Sugar*, Louis Essen's short story *La Popa* and the novel *No Escape* by Velia Ercole. The focus of the following discussion will be *No Escape* which could be classified as the first Italo-Australian novel. The Italian women of Ercole, Baume and Essen do share common features. All three are tragic victims who come to violent deaths, all totally reject their new society.

Louis Essen's short story of 1927 *La Popa* is the vignette of a young *contadina*, who comes to Australia from Calabria on the death of her grandmother to join her *fidanzato*. He had emigrated four years earlier. Lucia is still the wild peasant girl, the granddaughter of the village witch, and the Luigi that she expects is "the ragged Luigi that she knew as a boy tending goats on the hills". The Luigi who meets her has changed; he is now urbanised, "a clean-shaven young man in a smart tweed suit and felt hat". Moreover, Luigi now has another girl, also Italian but acclimatised; Angela was a pretty girl "who worked in a factory, wore short skirts, put paint and powder on her cheeks". The primitive, wild Lucia blazes forth against her faithless lover; more to the point, she resorts to traditional magic, acquiring a doll and sticking pins into it. Luigi becomes very ill and expecting to die sends for Lucia and declares her to be his true love. Lucia then goes down to retrieve the doll which she has hidden on the river bank but she slips into the river and drowns. In the short story, Lucia is no more than the stereotypic wild, primitive, precivilised peasant girl of Anglo-Celtic imagination, merely the vehicle for a melodramatic vignette.

Equally primitive and primeval is Marta Zobella, the Italian matriarchal figure in Eric Baume's novel of racial strife in North Queensland and of the iden-

tity crisis of second generation Italo-Australians. Marta is the mother of the protagonist of the novel, Mario Zobella. Her husband is a drunken wastrel and it is Marta who runs the farm and protects and advances the family's interest. After the then nine-year-old Mario is beaten up as "a dirty Dago" by a drunken Australian canecutter, Marta sacks her one Australian employee and refuses to engage any more Australian cutters. Over the next few years she is held responsible by the local authorities – police and union – for the mounting racial tension in the town. Marta's closest associate is the local Italian doctor who is also an ardent Fascist. As Mario grows up, his ideas and ambitions come into collision with those of his mother and Dr Marchesini. She wants to retain her son as pure uncontaminated Italian, Mario's resolve is to become Australian, to be an Australian hero. The relationship between Marta and her son reaches its tragic climax when she forbids him to attend the dance to celebrate the twenty first birthday of his friend: "I don't have you mixing with Australian trash". Mario sneaks off to the dance but Marta discovers his escape, follows him and horsewhips him in public. On her way home, Marta stumbles in the dark and like Essen's *contadina* falls into a river and drowns. His mother's death leaves Mario with little regret and he sets about his determination to become an Australian winner via a business career eventually turning himself into Mark Zobler, businessman of Rose Bay. His mother was never a real person but again a stereotype – of the all-possessive, all-powerful Italian mother.

Marta Zobella disappears from *Burnt Sugar* one third of the way through the novel. Teresa Gherardi survives for half of *No Escape* and is a more central character. Before going on to look in some detail at Teresa Gherardi, it is worth briefly noting another novel of the Queensland sugar fields, and that is *La Casa in Oceania* by Filippo Sacchi, published in Italy in 1932.[2] Sacchi was a journalist who visited Australia for the *Corriere della Sera* in 1925. One of the main characters in the novel is an Italian woman, Romana Canzi, who indeed begins her life as a victim; an orphan whose guardian emigrates to Australia in disgrace. Shortly after they arrive, he dies leaving her penniless. Taken in as an exploited servant by an Italian family, Romana is raped by the son of the *padrone*, becomes pregnant and goes through a form of marriage ceremony with him. But that is the end of Romana as victim; she takes her child and flees her tormentors, overcomes hardship with integrity and courage and eventually marries an Italian farmer of similar virtues. Romana Canzi forges her own destiny. Whereas the Italo-Australian women of the Australian novelists are ethnic stereotypes, symbols, the Italo-Australian woman of Sacchi, the Italian writer is a female character who acts and reacts as an individual personality.

Velia Ercole, the author of *No Escape* was born in 1903 in the opal-mining town of White Cliffs. Her father Quinto Ercole, left Italy because of involvement in socialist agitation in the 1890s.[3] On coming to Australia, he established a medical practice in White Cliffs, and married an Australian woman of part French background. Two years after Velia's birth, Quinto Ercole moved to the central west wheatbelt town of Grenfell where he became a well-integrated and highly respected and influential member of the local community. In much of its detail, *No Escape* draws on Quinto's life and Velia's own experience of rural life and society in Grenfell.

At first glance, Velia Ercole's Italian roots seem weak. Her mother was Australian, she grew up in rural Australia and was educated at the fashionable Dominican convent at Moss Vale. After leaving school, Ercole became a reporter on the *Sun* and *No Escape* was first published in serial form in that quintessential Australian and often racist weekly, the *Bulletin*. Shortly after *No Escape* appeared, Ercole went to Europe, married an Englishman, Eric Gregory, and settled in England. She published one more novel as Velia Ercole, *Dark Window*, the story of an Australian girl's attempt to build a life with her mother's relatives in France. After *Dark Window*, all Ercole's novels were published under the name of Margaret Gregory and they featured neither Australia nor Italians. Nevertheless, her first novel captures with perception, intensity and sensitivity the problems of the foreigner in rural Australia.

No Escape is set in central New South Wales in the fictitious town of Banton, and is the story of a young Italian doctor from Bologna, Leo Gherardi, who is forced to flee Italy and a promising medical career after he is court-martialled for involvement in socialist political agitation. His stay in Australia was intended as temporary, as an expedient to make enough money to have his case re-opened in Italy and secure a pardon. The possibility of permanent settlement never crossed his mind. The novel's central theme is the narration of Leo's love-hate relationship with Banton and his slow, reluctant, vacillating adjustment and his acceptance that his fate is Australia. Like Quinto Ercole, he eventually becomes an important and influential figure in the town.

Leo is accompanied into exile by his wife Teresa and shortly after they arrive their son Dino is born. Teresa is introduced as a stereotypic Italian figure, dark, brooding, emotional, an opera singer. In the first half of the novel her relationship to her exile

as important as is that of her husband to his. While Leo vacillates between dislike of and determination to leave Australia and the onset of a sense of acceptance, Teresa totally rejects their fate. For her the exile is double. They have lost not only Italy but also brilliant professional futures, his in medicine, hers in music. She lives only in and for the past and the future, she takes no interest in learning English since this would be a concession to permanency. Similarly Teresa tries to isolate her son from the Australian culture of his school. Her overriding fear is that Leo, whom she sees as too flexible, too malleable, will succumb, give up and stay on by default. She must resist for both of them.

> For myself I care, and I loathe this exile. But I loathe it for you too. I know you are unhappy but not unhappy enough to go away. And it must be through me you will go...You will stay here all your life. You will be a little man in a little town in a strange country losing everything which might have been yours. But I will not let you be a traitor...But I do not submit. I will never submit. I will never let you become content. (pp.37–38).

Thus Teresa's mood, emotions and eventually her whole mental health swing in accordance with Leo's relationship to his Australian world. And his relationship also oscillates in accordance with events, rebuffs, humiliations, acts of recognition and appreciation.

Teresa's misery from one point of view can be seen as self-inflicted, as determined by her own absolute refusal to compromise, to make concessions, to do anything to ease her exile. And this is the view from which Leo increasingly regards his wife.

> Their life was tragic enough, but she did nothing to mitigate that tragedy. Things need not have been so bad except for her stubbornness. She could if she wished take it as an adventure, a temporary excursion, which it was. But she rebelled all the time, seethed with revolt...It was not just. She had wanted to come with him. He hadn't wanted to bring her. He had tried to avoid bringing her, had tried to tell her what it would mean, though he had scarcely known himself what this exile would mean (p.28)

But whatever Teresa's attitude and the critical tone taken towards it by Leo, the novel is very explicit about the problems of isolation and loneliness facing this Italian woman in rural Australia and the difficulties in her interaction with the local community. Contact for her was more difficult than for her husband – contact is more difficult for immigrant women than for men. He operated in the public world and as such came into daily interaction with the people of the town; his work as a doctor facilitated and compelled him to contrive an understanding with the community. She was confined to the private arena. When Teresa makes the effort to join the local women in their social activities, she is cut off by language, not only through her poor English but also by the incomprehensibility and irrelevance of the content.

> Yes, they were kind enough. But she could not understand them...What could one talk about? Nothing. Intercourse was shut off as effectually as though she were deaf and dumb. When they spoke to one another, they spoke in such and such a way. To her...in another way.
>
> She listened. A man was speaking. He stopped speaking and there came a burst of laughter. She wanted to join that laughter. What had he said? It did not seem amusing...Mother of God let me laugh.
>
> But her lips were still. (p.44, 52)

If the novel enters the world of the foreign woman and looks out from her view, it also looks critically at the world the women confronts. The female worthies of the town do their duty of trying to include the poor foreign doctor's wife, to assist her assimilation, but their stance is ethnocentric and patronising. Her incomprehension is judged as stupidity and lack of social instincts. In what is considered a charitable effort to put Teresa at her ease at one social gathering, she is introduced to a local matron whose sister is touring in Italy. Teresa is expected to respond in full pantomime Italian style when her native land is mentioned but, uncomprehending, she does not respond at all.

> Julia, thus interrupted was confused for a moment. She had been rather pleased with herself anticipating the excitement of the other at the mention of her country. These foreigners were so quaint Julia considered. Just like children. Old Mr Pitorelli used to grow quite hysterical if he even heard the word Italy. He would turn around, waving his hands and crying...if the word Italy was mentioned. But this Mrs Gherardi seemed different. Probably foreigners were different from each other, had different natures, though they did all seem the same, so quaint and just like children (pp.46–47).

In a further attempt to reach Teresa, one of the matrons enthuses over Venice, only to be met by Teresa's deadpan admission that she had only been there once and that she did not like it; it was dirty. Thus she was judged to be without culture, a peasant.

> Absolutely no sense of beauty my dear. Probably of peasant origin. You know we can't expect all Italians to be the same, so cultured and poetic. It would be just as if you went round some of the poorer farmers here, the uneducated people, looking for appreciation of things which they couldn't possibly understand and had probably never heard of (p.47).

Greeted with incomprehension, her forced efforts to participate in the tennis club or musical evening failures, Teresa retreats more and more into social isolation as Leo reaches out into local society. Her final effort to participate proves disastrous. She agrees to sing in a local concert. But on the evening, appalled by the amateurishness of the preceding performances and horrified and disgusted when a local elderly spinster claims identification with her as a fellow artist who had sacrificed a great career, Teresa refuses to perform and flees the scene. Her withdrawal into the confines of her home, child and own head was merely the external recognition of her isolation.

> In abandoning the company of Julia, Mona and the other, she was abandoning only the shell, the case. Real companionship she had never had from them. Her loneliness was not increased by this withdrawal, but confirmed (p.136).

Teresa's downward spiral into madness accelerates in relationship to Leo's growing acceptance of their fate. Her sense of hopelessness is given a brief moment of reprieve when she discovers that she is pregnant. Convinced that the unborn child is a girl, Teresa plans their future together back in Italy. But she knows that her plans are an illusion and she recognises that the child will be born and grow up in Australia, become an Australian woman.

> Born here, living here, the child would grow into one of the town's women. She visioned the day when her daughter would look at her with the strange eyes of the women of the town and perceive in her mother a difference from herself. She would soon be alone again (p.182).

Thus recognising that there is no escape, Teresa swallows strychnine and dies.

Velia Ercole's portrayal of Teresa is complex and multifocal. She is presented from Leo's viewpoint as an increasingly hysterical, raging, irrational woman. Yet where she speaks for herself and in her encounters with the local women, the isolation and alienation of this unwilling immigrant woman are present with intensity and empathy. Like the other fictional creations, Lucia and Marta Zobella and like almost all Italian immigrant women, Teresa came to Australia not as an agent but as the dependent of a man. From one viewpoint, Teresa Gherardi's life is a tragic failure to which she herself contributes. It is Leo who survives but he survives by compromise, by giving up his dreams and obliterating part of himself. The path of compromise or even self betrayal is the path that Teresa refuses to walk. From her viewpoint, it is Leo's life that is the tragic failure.

No Escape is, however, primarily the story of Leo Gherardi. Teresa's suicide occurs half way through the novel. Later on, Leo completes his integration by remarrying – to a widow from the ranks of the local gentry. Leo's story in its public dimension very much parallels the career of Quinto Ercole. The story of Teresa, with its overtones of melodrama, of the tragic, doomed heroine of literary convention and of gender if not cultural stereotyping, appears to be irrelevant to the Ercole family. But it is not quite so.

Early in January 1901, local newspapers in central New South Wales reported the death on Christmas Day of one Rachele de Marco, the wife of Dr Emilio de Marco of Coolah.[4] The couple had been invited to Christmas dinner by a local family but Rachele, claiming to feel ill, had remained at home and her husband had gone alone. While he was away, Rachele swallowed strychnine; she died that evening. At the inquest, Emilio de Marco gave evidence that while he and his wife were on very friendly terms, she did not value life much, was depressed and lonely, cried a lot and wanted to go back to Bologna. The couple had been in Australia two years. While Rachele de Marco was seven years younger than Teresa Gherardi and childless, they shared loneliness and a desperate longing to return home to Italy. Both took lethal doses of strychnine, both were wives of doctors in small country towns in the wheat belt and both their husbands were socialist refugees. I suspect too that Emilio de Marco's presence alone at the Christmas dinner may indicate that he like Leo Gherardi was integrated into local society whereas his wife, like Teresa, was not. All that needs to be added is that Velia Ercole's

father and Emilio de Marco were old comrades in Italy and that de Marco succeeded Ercole as the local doctor in White Cliffs in 1904[5]. Nothing further has as yet been discovered about Rachele de Marco beyond the press reports on her death and it is unlikely that anything more will be found, but there seems no doubt that her suicide furnished the source for the story of Teresa Gherardi. Rachele de Marco's despair to the point of suicide is the documented experience of one Italian woman in Australia. Nor is her story unique. Teresa Gherardi is a valid image.

The novels from the 1930s that have been mentioned portray the Italian immigrant woman as a tragic, suffering victim. The same image tends to dominate current historical and sociological literature. Where the Italian immigrant woman is highly visible is in studies on poverty, unemployment, exploitation in the workplace, illness, depression, mental breakdown. There is no doubt as to the enormous hardship suffered by Italian immigrant women, of despair to the point of suicide, but this is not the whole story. To move beyond the dominant image of Italian women immigrants as passive victims, we need to record far more oral histories and autobiographies and to create a multiplicity of images. The women themselves must write as well as speak. Only then can the full range of the experience of Italian women in Australia be recovered and represented.

We need to uncover and emphasise the experience of women who despite drudgery, exhaustion, class and gender exploitation created meaningful lives for themselves and their families either in staying in Australia or in returning to Italy. We need the stories of the women who were active protagonists, stories of resilience, resourcefulness and resistance, stories of lives such as that of Amelia Musso as reconstructed by her granddaughter, Maria Triacca, or that of Emma Ciccotosto as told to Michel Bosworth.[6] Amelia's life and spirit is a splendid counterpart to the stereotype of the downtrodden, passive, *contadina* as victim. The journey to Australia for the fifteen-year-old Amelia, accompanied only by her slightly older sister, was also an escape from a life of drudgery. In Australia, Amelia forged her own destiny. Tough as her life was, she was never a victim. We need to know more about the strategies that the immigrant women like Amelia brought with them or developed in the new environment, strategies that allowed them to resist and overcome the various structures of oppression that obtained in both Italy and Australia. We need a literature and representations that empower immigrant women, more characters like Romana Canzi. Images of passive victims play into the hands of existing hierarchies – passive victims embody no threat.

[1] *Eve Langley* The Peapickers *(Sydney, 1942) and its sequel,* White Topee *(Sydney, 1954); Katherine Susannah Prichard,* Intimate Strangers *(Sydney, 1937); Jean Devanny,* Sugar Heaven *(Sydney, 1936); Velia Ercole,* No Escape *(Sydney, 1932); Eric Baume,* Burnt Sugar *(Sydney, 1934); Vance Palmer,* Golconda *(Sydney, 1948); Louis Essen, 'La Popa',* Bulletin, *2 June 1927, pp.57–58. For initial studies of Italian characters in Australian literature, see Claudio Gorlier, 'Italian Characters and Stereotypes in Australian Literature', paper to Frederick May Foundation Conference on Italian Cultural Traditions and Italy Today, University of Sydney, 1982; Paul Depasquale, 'Italian Characters in Australian Popular Fiction',* Conference Proceedings, 'Australia's Italian Heritage' *(Vaccari Historical Trust, Melbourne, 1987), pp.152–161.*

[2] *Verona, 1932. On Sacchi, Camilla Bettoni, 'Gli Italiani del nord Queensland nel romanzo di un giornalista',* Studi Emigrazione, *XX (1983), pp.19–26.*

[3] *For biographical material on Quinto Ercole, Birth Certificate of Velia Ercole, 12810;* The Opel Miner, *5 March, 2 April, 1905; the* Grenfell Record, *29 March, 1934. See also Winston Burchett, 'Forgotten Novels of the Thirties'.* Overland, *72, 1978, pp.38–39; Desmond O'Grady, 'A Life Relived',* Outrider *VI, 2, 1987, pp.54–59.*

[4] The Bligh Watchman *(Coonabarabran), 3 January 1900; the* Mudgee Guardian, *5 January 1900.*

[5] The Opel Miner, *5 March 1904.*

[6] *Maria Triacca, Amelia;* A Long Journey *(Melbourne, 1985); Emma Ciccotosto and Michel Bosworth,* Emma, A Translated Life *(Fremantle, 1990).*

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THREE POEMS BY JOHN KINSELLA

DOUBLE DISSOLUTIONS

A stone penguin leaves the house-yard
    and moves
out over the salt-white paddock, approaches
the fluted wall of the dam and dissolves.
Ducks lift as a wedge, dawn ice flickers and melts.
A local boy flies his Cessna over the
    catching pens
(sheep gunned down by rockets of light slung
beneath the wings) – an Albert Tucker parrot
migrating from desert to deep southern wastes.

BEYOND PAUL KLEE'S *DEATH AND FIRE*

Puffer fish with head wounds
sink into the riverbeach, wrapped
in ashed froth. The lower deck
of the jetty disappears beneath
grey waves, the river absorbs
and then indulges. This,
the aftermath of the "hottest
day on record", the oppression
of logic as the clouds brood
thickly against the heat.
The water guards against
a crossing, an early star
sparks three times and vanishes.
Death and fire, the season
drowns in its own blood.
Extreme, restless, the river
casts back fire rolling down
from parks and gardens, tears
at the moorings (old engine
blocks) of cruisers, yachts,
and ferries. There is fire
and vengeance on its breath.

ON HELEN FRANKENTHALER'S *CASANOVA* 1988

"...here the black has the feel of a massive curtain lifting."

Not lifting but come apart
& falling back in on itself: the catchcry
of the Age: feed back, turn about, & thus
collapse/retract. Sam's dead, I heard today,
though knew last year that he was dying.
He walked into my loungeroom six years ago
& fell face down onto the floor.
For two hours he lay silent until leaping
sharply to his feet and screaming.
Casanova got him too. Yellow – horizontal
& emanating white dwarfs, pulsars, black holes –
called for & received him in a rush.
The curtain lifts only for Casanova
and only then for a blood-letting.
So it is true, after consideration: "here
the black has the feel of a massive curtain
lifting." Laid in state, the canvas curtain
releasing the yellow light, the acrylic
sealing the grave as tight as love.

ON SIGHTING RODRIGUEZ...LAT. 19.42, LONG. 63.25

For Stephen Murray Smith

Sailing with Captain Slocum, Stephen, finding
islands I'd never heard of, I
wish you were here to yarn with, asking had
    your list
once held them – remembering
community was what you studied, viability

And now Rodriguez heaves above horizon,
    nineteen hundred miles
from Cocos, whence the 'Spray'
sped like an arrow. So often, Stephen
I stumble on beguiling facts, lives, islands
new to me, and you're the man to quiz,
to share them with –
and your exuberant life improbably –
is gone, hull-down, for other isles, uncharted.

BARBARA GILES

RECORD

for Ted Whitten

The last lace taut, he snaps his wrist
And leads his men. The home crowd sings
Of red and white and blue, the mist
Dripping softly on the wings.

Ten thousand voices crack the thaw
Over his heart; his spirit stirring
He sprints and swoops, giving the ball
The mule-kick, the leather spinning

In the long blow down the middle,
The clean air of his home.

The long blow down the middle,
The gap swept clean as bone.
The punt spun from the instep,
The bell and the sting like stone.

J. K. MURPHY

SCENT

Rolling across the bed still half asleep
In the morning, I pick up,
Where the top sheet's folded over, a faint waft
Of scent that you were wearing,
And see with swift
And punning appreciation the worth of its name:
Je reviens. You have come back. The cotton's
Weave is storing
A set of subtle instructions
For assembling here a person and a time.

Pardon me, Proust. I think of dogs, or more,
Of possums whose entire
Language, whole *Weltanschauung*, hang
    in shifting
Alphabets of scent
Beyond our drafting,
A realm of discourse we are lost at the edge of,
Like tots with twenty-word vocabularies
To tell what's meant.
The term is "channel". There is
No topic, surely, we could not receive

If we could find the channel through which
    it's sent –
And lock, say, like the point
Where two convergent railway gauges meet,
Feste's songs to the sonic
Wave of a bat.
We scan the skies to strain some alien message.
Ours hurtle nowhere, the mute shouts of a mime,
A frogman's panic.
Who knows but the ones for whom
We search are here? Perhaps they've made
    the passage,

Combed out like microbes from a comet's hair,
Settling as we stare,
Coded like crystals in the mud we step
On, drifting like pollen or
Strands of cobweb;
Each *déjà vu*, awe, spinechill, urge to rant,
Is their brushed presence, their slogan
    being unfurled
Like a sheer banner
Through all the senseless world,
Or memory caught in cotton, like
    your French scent.

STEPHEN EDGAR

THREE POEMS FOR CORPORATE SPONSORS
BY STEPHEN LAWRENCE

CLIENT: NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART

splayed worms of
toothpaste greenyellow

meathooks and
smashed glass

drip-dry
pollockvomit

twisted truths of
the photoreal

radio-static abstracts
sculpt your awareness

black molten
rock erotica

coffee and cakes
from our modern cafe

CLIENT: PORSCHE

No bullshit:
It says money.
It means you're the best man.

The car slips down the freeway,
Smooth as sex;
Cool, virile lines;
Low and laid-back;
All comfort,
All power.

Be convinced:
Fast manoeuvres,
Sharp moves,
Four litres
Fucking flies.

It thrusts superiority
In the faces of scum;
the cunts'll only see your arse.

If you're small, it makes you big:
It means you've beaten them.
Porsche means you've won.

CLIENT: WRITERS' FESTIVAL – POETRY SYMPOSIUM

~~the act of creation~~
~~of creation~~
poetry ~~has~~, ~~like life~~,
is ~~order~~ ~~in chaos~~
~~arising~~
~~growing out of laws built upon~~
~~built upon the contours of living~~
~~rules and structures~~
~~surrounding us~~ like a ~~womb~~
~~like~~ what we do during the day

SHARKS

There must be something in it
after all
eating raw fish
and the occasional human
cruising open mouthed,
faces that wouldn't know where
to start smiling
nor crying either
and teeth that cut
just by suggestion
especially in dreams.
So we've been wrong all the time
thinking they were marine used-car
salesmen.
Motive makes all the difference –
sharks don't have a malicious bone
in their bodies,
cartilage holds them together
and
purity of thought
maybe
their eyes being so far apart
sharks can see both sides
of the question,
'though blood in water
does strange things
to even shark equanimity
it's nothing more than
letting yourself go,
occasionally
in a harmless way
good for your psyche
and keeps shark carcasses
cancer-free

DUNCAN RICHARDSON

TWO POEMS BY ROBERT CLARK

UNCLE NEAR

Ten offspring with this one at the rear.
Fred Farr, his father, faced with finding
a name for yet another child
in desperation called him Near.

He was a Quaker. On Autumn eves
his simple round of labouring done,
ankle deep in fallen leaves
he watched the silence, the stillness come.

Great castling clouds of sparkling white
tinged at the edge flamingo pink
on a deep translucent stillness of light
the sun behind him began to sink.

A leaf would drop, the stillness still.
A thought might come, but never a word.
The bliss of emptiness filled by One
as once it was before creation stirred.

Loud voices crackled down the street.
He started, startled, and stared about.
Far had been near, now all was far.
The Opening shut, he turned with heavy feet.

AN ELEPHANT

has paused beside me, blotting out the view:
a peripatetic clump of four great trunks of trees,
docilely rooted now, content to be
just here where accidentally I am too.

I watch her only movement, the eyelid as
it closes, opens, just like mine. That gaze
could be an entry to her mind and ways.
But to what purpose? I can do no more

to show my strange elation with this miracle
of happening than I am doing now
by standing silent here. Imprisoned in
the separate dungeon of this flesh, my spirit

yearns to be free to trumpet our identity.
Slowly the vast head swivels. She looks at me,
and in that gaze we meet and say "G'day".
The keeper speaks. She's gone. The moment
flicks away.

books

"Humanity Thinking Aloud"

Elizabeth Harrower

Christina Stead: *A Web of Friendship; Selected Letters (1928–1973). Talking into the Typewriter; Selected Letters (1973–1983).* Edited with preface and annotations by R. G. Geering. (Angus & Robertson, $19.95 each vol.).

Christina Stead died in 1983, leaving her good friend and literary executor, Ron Geering, to edit and see into print work not previously published – the short stories, *Ocean of Story* and the novel, *I'm Dying Laughing*. Now the last and most exacting task is completed with the publication of two volumes of letters to relations, friends and acquaintances covering the years from 1928 till her death.

At first, the absence of an index is a severe trial and one is inclined to turn the books inside out, searching, but when the searching ends, fascination begins, because the letters are wonderful, the voice of a unique writer.

Some fine novelists write cautious letters as though anticipating a day in court; others seem to fear a shortage of great thoughts if they are lavish in letters, so use capital cautiously, and others again write to posterity in public voices via friends and lovers – dead letters. Awareness of fame is everywhere intrusive. Fortunately, great and good artists have more often set down their thoughts spontaneously and their collected letters have formed part of that literature which is, as Dorothy Green says, "...humanity thinking aloud – communicating its experience of all that is, holding a great continuous discussion throughout the ages and across the world." Christina Stead's letters are now part of that conversation. To the extent that a book can ever be a substitute for a person, these collected letters set her before us in her very human reality.

In this selection of over four hundred, more than a hundred are addressed to her two dearest American friends from the 1930s, Stanley Burnshaw and Ettore Rella, poets of the Left, from the *New Masses* days. While no letters to her husband, William Blake are included, his life-enhancing presence informs the two volumes.

That the lonely, loveless young woman who was Christina Stead should have encountered and been employed by Bill Blake a week after arriving in London, and shortly after that should have won his unswerving belief in her powers as a writer, was unquestionably the luckiest event of her life. These two exceptional spirits thereafter loved and supported each other for forty years, without children, both writing and translating at a single desk: it would hardly be an exaggeration to say they became one.

The letters home begin in 1928 with the solitary Christina:

> exploring London on my own – rather an exciting, rather a frightening process. At one moment you feel grand to be there on your own and seeing the sights and treading historical grounds and smelling historic smells and next you feel like some small sort of insect crawling about miserably and waving its antennae and only just out of its chrysalis and a long way from anywhere.

Within a few months, she and Bill Blake were joyfully living and working in Paris. In the early letters to the moon-distant Sydney of those times, there is a sense of the overwhelming triumph she feels at having escaped from that dull place to Paradise. There, with her endlessly erudite and great-hearted lover, introduced to the beauties of the city, to food and wine, architecture and arts and fashion, to Bill's worldly and diverting friends, discovering the genius of Joyce and Mann, with Bill searching out publishers far and wide, Christina Stead had found her own true life.

From this time, letters fly around the world from

Salzburg, New York, Antwerp, London, Sante Fe, Basle, Lausanne, Brussels, Den Haag, Surrey, Puerto Rico. What must in a way dazzle and touch any reader of these letters is the brilliant attack of the Blakes', in some respects, always difficult lives. Yet what might seem an immense struggle to the observer was clearly, at base, a life zestful, abundant, productive, fully engaged.

Like an autobiography reported en route, the letters pour out.

> Put me in an express-train, rushing from Here to There, for that is my usual occupation.

In the years before World War II they were living all over Europe, wherever accommodation and wine were cheap, wherever Bill had friends in banking, politics, business, who might have some temporary occupation or scheme to offer. Superficially, an insecure-seeming, endless peregrination, but in truth, as the letters show over and over, this life of intellectual and artistic rigor, of deep and heartfelt friendships, was so grounded in their partnership, that the constant movement – not ideal for novelists, usually – is mentioned only to deal with practicalities: Bill and her characters were home. And from chilly flats without bathrooms and far from transport, messages go out:

> If we can be of any help at any time, please let us know at once. When I say, any help, I mean it. Bill and I would give a great deal to see you without worries and able to give yourself to writing.

But every changed city and changed circle of people confronted Christina with new aspects of her life-given task – to scan, absorb, assimilate and interpret:

> I like to meet people of all kinds and don't mind if I get a jolt and run across people who don't like me and who are difficult to get on with...I like to be accurate...I read medical treatises on tuberculosis...then I have to study tariffs and free trade...I seized an opportunity to go to Calais and study lace-making, the machines and cottons used...Only a minority of outsiders bother about the technique of any industry or profession, and if a writer shows interest, the workers are usually more than liberal in explaining things.

In America for ten years from 1937, Christina Stead published five major works, mostly to critical acclaim but without the substantial sales that would have eased daily life. Bill Blake was also publishing novels and works of economic theory during this time. The Blakes were politically where they wanted to be: innately and devoutly and critically on the Left and therefore out of the mainstream of literary life. (Everywhere and always they avoided 'the literati.) In her biography, *Christina Stead: A Life of Letters*, Chris Williams states that: "United States FBI records hold two hundred pages of information containing references to Bill and Christina".

Describing the early days in New York to an acquaintance, Christina says:

> I'm very grateful to you for sometimes passing on remarks like that of Rebecca West: although I hope to do better, it encourages me a bit, for I really put some gristle into the Seven Poor Men and my New York friends haven't even read it: they are mostly fairly well off...but they expect me to give them my books! And I don't, I can't. So they pass the fact that I write, up in silence, perhaps feeling slightly injured even...I get a lot of fun, though, from time to time, out of Bill's business-friends: they are cheerful, brutal, neo-Darwinians (survival of the slickest), complete Marxians (but on the other side of the fence!) There is no nonsense at all about them and very, very little false sentiment: they are at least as interesting and revolting as tigers and vultures are. And then how simple-minded: they have one idea, like bakers – 'dough'.

Back in Europe after the war, the Blakes opted to live in England where, in due course, Bill would be eligible for a pension. Recognition and ease of publication had waxed and waned: working for their bread and butter, living from hand to mouth, as a sanguine letter reports in passing, this was *la vie bohème*. While the typescript copy of one novel was awaiting a publisher's decision, three or four others were clamouring for expression. Brief mention is made of books translated from French and German, as a pot-boiling task, while, as ever, attention was fixed on major works to come.

In Australia interest in Christina Stead had been stirring for some years and, when approached, she responded cordially but without excitement to voices from the far-off homeland, unvisited, partly for financial reasons, since 1928.

After the unexpected death of Bill Blake in 1968 her life, at the deepest level, broke, but she had rightly claimed as a much younger woman to have 'grit'. With dignity, self-possession, X-ray vision and imagination intact, she attended to her life as a solitary being. The letters continued, and very shortly, the moving on.

The second volume deals with the last ten years of her life which were spent at many addresses in the eastern states of Australia. These letters still display the jaunty, jokey, American toughness, the fireworks, puns and quips, the analytical power and interest in everything from Russian grammar and Mozart to Halley's comet. Sometimes she berates herself: "I must not revel. I must work", but most of all the personal letters show a profound longing for the love and attention of men, or at least for intimate friendships with like-minded wayfarers.

A woman of almost genetic tolerance, rare in having immense strength without an accompanying urge to dominate others, Christina Stead excluded some categories, but few individuals, from her dispassionate benevolence. When new people offered friendship and diversion in these years, she accepted hopefully and was grateful, though letters to and from her scattered family of old friends overseas were crucial transfusions, linking her again to Bill and to work.

Unquestionably these letters give new access to the inspired and inspiring life of a novelist whose greater comprehension of what it is to be human has sometimes been called genius.

The novelist Elizabeth Harrower lives in Sydney. Among her books are The Catherine Wheel *and* The Watch Tower.

"There is another world and it is here." Alex Miller's New Novel

Tom Shapcott

Alex Miller: *The Ancestor Game* (Penguin, $14.95).

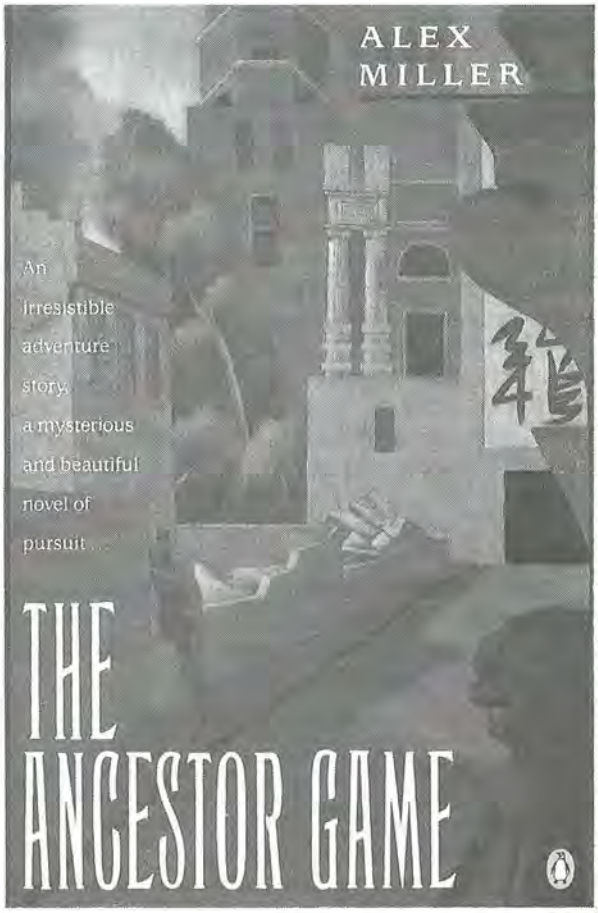
It can now be seen that Brian Castro's first novel *Birds of Passage* introduced into our literature what has become a flourishing sub-genre, the Australian fiction on Chinese themes. The list is already impressive. Rod Jones' *Julia Paradise* and David Brooks' *The Book of Sei* each explored 'Chinese' material with quite different intentions of narrative invention (Jones playing upon Freudian psychology, and Brooks being postmodern), whereas Nicholas Jose in *Avenue of Eternal Peace* structured a complex but much more conventional novel on contemporary Chinese politics filtered through Australian disquiet. More recently (1992) Brian Castro himself has published *After China*, a superb mingling of contemporary Australian satire with Chinese ancestors of various powerful sorts. In its succinct way it prepares one for the considerably more complex games Alex Miller plays with Australian /Chinese apprehensions of exile and inheritance.

The Ancestor Game is a polished contribution to the Asian fiction genre. It is more than that.

One of the many speculative characters in the book is Dr August Spiess, born in Hamburg but living for the crucial years of the narrative in Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s. He escorts the protagonist Lang Tzu to Melbourne in 1937. He has long considered himself one of those European-born 'interterritorialists' resident in Shanghai.

> We seemed to live as people outside history. Each one of us an actor who wrote his or her own lines as the play progressed...Life was all imagination to me. I was drunk on it for twenty years. I spent my time at dinner parties and at the races gazing at my fellow extraterritorials with a kind of muted adoration, as if they moved in a story which I told myself.

It is not difficult to make parallels with the Australian experience. This quite real but entirely unreal world was destroyed in the Japanese inva-



sion of Shanghai in 1937.

Dr Spiess arrives in Melbourne and immediately recognises where he is:

> I am at the centre of the world. I am in the secret place I once knew in my imagination. There is no nostalgia in what I feel. I cannot say this is a European city. It is not a European city. For where is the grand public architecture memorialising mighty regimes, the tyrants and emperors, the conquerors and princes from whose ambitious struggles this State was fashioned? There are none...If there were to be a revolution in Australia there would be nothing for the people to tear down, for they have put it all up themselves...These folk reside beyond the reach of history. Here extraterritoriality is the status quo.

The book is a parable exploring the gifts and the fantasies of living or wishing to live in a state of 'extraterritoriality'.

The skeleton of the story is simple though its perceptions are complex. The narrator (one might better think of him as 'The Master of Ceremonies') is Stephen Muir, born in England of Scottish and Irish parents. He has fled constrictive ancestry to settle into exile, comfortably in Melbourne.

He meets Lang Tsu and Lang's friend Gertrude Spiess, the daughter of Dr Spiess. The complex relationship between Lang and Gertrude is one of the threads that lead the reader through the labyrinth. The principal matter, though, is the process of recovery of Lang Tzu's ancestry.

The book, after a deceptively self-absorbed introduction that would seem to place Stephen Muir himself at the centre of things (not so deceptive, indeed), locates us firmly with the concept of the subjective nature of 'objectivity'. The means to illuminate this, Stephen's youthful gift of the Thames & Hudson book on Sidney Nolan to his unappreciative father, is only the first of a series of brilliantly resonant art references, the last being a nicely inverted parallel to Nolan: Claude Lorrain's idyllic abstractions of a Classical Past without roots, as against Nolan's myth-recycling images among very specific Australian sets.

The Australian environment takes over almost in tandem with the invention of Lang's Chinese ancestry, a rich tapestry of tale and tang and tangle.

The book stands or falls on the sense of authority in the long Chinese segments, a separate 'narrative' fed to the reader as in a very rich banquet of innumerable courses. Let me say quite firmly that Alex Miller held me in thrall.

There is something of the Borges-like mystery making that you get in David Brooks' *The Book of Sei* here, but it serves a larger purpose and does not remain self-absorbed. The reader is led through a complex maze; the thread, as always, clearly if puzzlingly leading onward. There are two worlds in this recreated China: in Shanghai there is the world of Lang Tsu's father, the internationalist Feng's capitalist enclosure in the heart of European Settlement. And in nearby Hangshou there is the Ancestor-ridden world of Lang Tsu's mother, Lien. Her father, Huang Yu-hua, a venerated 'literary painter' holds (and withholds) the entire learning of his caste.

Lang Tsu, offspring of the heretical Feng and the surrogate-son daughter Lien, is from birth an exile.

Alex Miller juggles this material almost without faltering. The book is a virtuoso display at many levels, tossed to us in such detail it is received with a sort of exhilaration; certainly not with any sense of pedantry or meticulousness of purpose.

One of the problems, though, when the reader accepts such a high level of overall veracity is when there is a sense of it faltering, the reaction can be strong. I felt a sort of betrayal at a point three-quarters through the novel, in a passage that threatened to scatter the card-house of credibility so carefully built into the narrative. The reader has just been led through one of the great set-pieces of the book, an epic account of how the ten-year-old Lang Tsu steals the sacred 'book of the ancestors' with its guardian mirror, and through water and fire destroys these. Like the greatest of tale-tellers, the author leads us through this labyrinth with marvelling conviction.

Then there is a knot in the thread.

The story-within-a-story-within-a-story attempts one further intricacy. That evening, in Huang Yu-hua's house, an old story-teller entertains the assembly with a tale. It is the story of Lang Tzu's great-grandfather Feng, a boy orphaned in China then taken by boat to Ballarat as a shepherd where he eventually discovers gold.

As a tale in itself it is as fabulous and convincing as the preceding narrative of the Destruction of the Ancestors. But the reader cannot possibly accept it as being a tale told in the courtyard of Huang Yu-hua. Even in Feng's Shanghai Australia as a concept remains utterly remote, unknown, unknowable.

So what happens to the reader? The reader is forced (and perhaps this is Alex Miller's intention?) to recognise that the whole narrative of old China is an invention, quite specifically penned by the character Stephen Muir after conversations with the living (invented?) Lang Tzu in Melbourne. Okay; but immediately after this Ballarat 'story' we re-enter the told world of Hanshou to pick up the Lang

Tsu narrative again. For this reader, the author had to be more than trebly plausible from this point on.

Let me say, he was that. I did go on, and marvelled further. What sustained me was not only the invented world of various Chinas and the invented world of contemporary Melbourne, but the teasing out of concepts of exile, inheritance and the 'inter-territoriality' so strikingly exemplified by the messenger figure of Dr Spiess, whose daughter carries forward her own paradox as 'translator' of his diaries.

Alex Miller's writing is rich, poetic, full of resonance and style, and yet his book remains compulsively readable. If I found one bone in the banquet, that does not mean I left the repast any the less feasted and fat.

Thomas Shapcott is a poet and novelist now living in Melbourne. His most recent book is the collection of short stories What You Own *(Imprint, 1991).*

Poems that allow you to think

Rae Desmond Jones

Ken Bolton: *Selected Poems 1975–1990* (Penguin, $14.95).

Most writers go through a period of growth and experimentation, in which other writers' voices and concerns are tried on for size. Usually these are discarded; a few undergarments may remain. Finally if he or she is lucky, the developing writer finds something to write about and develops a manner of writing that suits it, and from that point they move more or less irregularly through their writing career. Ken Bolton is different. His concerns and the basic lineaments of his tone are present in his earliest poems. He tries on the styles of other writers but the writers he chooses are those he knows are compatible with the tone and the content that interests him. Any modification of his own voice is minor. While there has been some change, a Bolton poem of 1975 wouldn't look completely out of place in a Bolton book of 1990.

The effort and strain of the early poems is in perfecting the voice. In 1975 in Australia, there were few models for his style of writing. Although John Forbes, Pam Brown and Laurie Dugan were related forms of poetic life, the Bolton combination of earnest allusion and comic interrogation is his alone as in 'The Mysteries':

above the trees there is no
mystery there is
just the plane it is crawling slowly along the
sky like a fly along the rim of a lampshade

in the paper bag the greyhound the mystery
  the
hydrant mysteriously moth

mystery

making its way in to the restaurant, the
  mystery. & on
the hanger
the coat

The interrogative flatness of tone, part ironic and part serious, the insistence on the limits of perception and the denial of intuition, make his writing both accessible and repellent to many. Poets are supposed to find meaning beneath appearances. Aren't' they? In the satirical poem 'Christ's Entry

Into Brussels or Ode To The Three Stooges' he observes remorselessly:

– even the intellectuals are affected! O stooge
effect,
that was terrific, you are the 'great Leveller', –
now *no*-one
knows what we're talking about, not even the
smart ones!

& it must be you
that makes all those writers that write about
True Life,
who believe in myth, & in raw-deep emotion
that anyone-can-understand,
seem 'OFF THE AIR'!
Congratulations, they have given poetry
a bad name
by making us all seem 'too sensitive'

Such is his consistency of direction that he never writes a bad line. He works within a narrow range and has never (apparently) had any doubts about what it is that he wants to say or how he means to say it. There is nothing left for him to do but develop precision. Referential, autobiographical, but not at all confessional, what he writes about some artist friends could be said of his own work:

I like paintings like this,
that allow you to think, that
make you think, but don't tell you
what to think,
and which stay, throughout this, interesting

Bolton's firm refusal to accept other than surfaces for all but ironic purposes has its limitations. Motive is not only unknowable but the contemplation of it is foolish, indulgent or stupid. The question may be idiotic, but Bolton expends so much effort showing the futility of asking that he could be suspected of indulging in the pleasures of the game himself:

the case is full of lint & infinite sadness (this is
found
when it turns up). Surprisingly there is no
despair nor, despite its emptiness, much regret.
there is
not even any mystery – all that travel, all those
years the War the Great Depression,
unmysteriously,
have left no trace. the case seems simply
'present'.

Mystery is a word that occurs often in the earlier Bolton poems. He is a precise observer of landscapes and places and, oddly perhaps, atmospheres:

the electric light, the dead flies, our company,
the Rolling Stones coming from blocks away,
postponing our departures

Geographical shifts are important in the poems. Glebe, Redfern, Coalcliff, Adelaide, all are there, as are his various friends and girlfriends. Poems which concern themselves so much with other poets and artists aren't to all readers' tastes, yet Bolton's poems about art and poetry do have content. While many who write of these things cleverly eschew serious statement, Bolton doesn't. Many of his poems have the cranky idiosyncrasy of stimulating criticism. He never emotes about art or poetry; he thinks. What he thinks is often seductive or debatable, but he enjoys the debate:

That's how nature works – randomly. And
that's where
I disagree with Wordsworth. He sees it all
as some big Order.

Most heroics, he says, are bullshit. If so, what is left to write about, but the place where you live, and the people you live around? Bolton is no nihilist. His perspective is finally positive, even if it is cranky and critical:

Nature & the kind of awful
art based on it can get fucked, I'm going
to keep reading these poems & write things
about them.

In Adelaide, Bolton seems to have relaxed. Surmising facts about a life from writing is notoriously complex and I have no other source to go on, but I will take the chance and suggest that he seems to have found a niche. His tone and style are established and in the later poems he becomes confident, sure, relaxed, almost loquacious. The rules and discipline he applied so severely in the early poems are eased. Unexpectedly, he writes a good poem about politics, or at least about politicians and the media:

only Power made any sense

That Fraser
was taller than you

and he had the Power

that 'therefore'
you were Wee Willi Winkie

They made it stick though it wasn't true

They were so
stupidly cruel

stupid & cruel

I was ashamed for the public life of
my country
it has become a Joke

since you left centre stage

The poems about sex are allowed to have an explicit eroticism that the earlier ones do not, where erotic imagery is clear enough, but suggestive, as in 'o terrific cigarette':

– & think about
my poem terrific cigarette
which is
what I compared you to,
though
I 'don't smoke'/
& only fantasize how relaxed and calm
smoking must be like
from films

Compare this with the later poem, 'poem (where I live)':

so I
should drop all this stuff about Romantic Love
Tho of course
you know I was joking
: chuck-chuck-chuckling thru the
Night...

Bolton has produced a body of original poetry. He is aggravating, provocative and perverse. He won't appeal to the senses to persuade in the fashion of romantic poetry. He isn't in the mainstream of thoughtful and moderate educated verse, neither is he one of the politically committed, nor is he of the furious and energetic underground. His poetry is a blend of thoughtful irony and moody comedy. He sets out to produce a type of minor poetry, by choice and definition. He has a moral commitment to what he sees as the honesty of minor poetry. Over a period of fifteen years he has succeeded in establishing a tone and style appropriate to his content. Having done so he has allowed himself to expand (slightly) while never dropping the stylistic standards he has always set himself.

For many years, Bolton had to publish himself. He produced high quality magazines on antiquated gesteitner machines and worked late hours silk-screening covers. His devotion to his peculiar artistic ideals meant that publication has never been easy. His own editorial policies were always generous even if his standards were high. Many mainstream publishers have been less than generous to him. He was a part of the long-term underground through necessity rather than choice. The publication of his *Selected Poems* by Penguin enables readers to make a fairer assessment of his output than has been previously possible.

Rae Desmond Jones is a poet and novelist. His novel, The Lemon Tree, *was published by Angus & Robertson in 1990. He is writing another novel. He writes poetry that Ken Bolton probably dislikes. Mr Jones is an Alderman of Ashfield Municipal Council, NSW.*

Massacre: Our Absence from Our Past

Bain Attwood

Roger Milliss: *Waterloo Creek: The Australia Day Massacre of 1838, George Gipps and the British Conquest of New South Wales* (McPhee Gribble, $60).

In delivering the ABC Boyer Lectures nearly twenty-five years ago, the anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner spoke of "the great Australian silence" about Aborigines which amounted to "something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale". While he chastised historians for their role in this "cult of disremembering", Stanner was nonetheless optimistic that the silence about the past would not survive the research that had already begun. On the face of it, this has come to pass. Beginning in 1970 with Charles Rowley's path-breaking *Aboriginal Policy and Practice*, the following decade or so saw a host of histories which documented the pervasive violence which sustained European conquest and colonisation and dispossessed the indigenous peoples (and without the work by Bob Reece, Raymond Evans, Henry Reynolds, Andrew Markus, Lyndall Ryan, Michael Christie, Noel Loos and others, Roger Milliss' colossal study would be inconceivable).

Despite this plethora of research, however, there is a sense in which Aborigines have become present in our histories but remain absent in our national

historic consciousness. As Gillian Cowlishaw has urged (in *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*), these studies are important in that they have "filled a textual gap about our racist past", but at the same time as they present a view of our own past that fills us, as readers, with horror they also remove us from it. when we read such accounts we place ourselves on the side of the Aborigines and identify the European colonists as the enemy even though they are our forebears. Consequently, Stanner's call to examine the colonial past is "in danger of foundering on the complacency of an imagined distance from the spectacle of blood and violence". Cowlishaw's argument reminds me of the comments which the chief judge of the Treaty of Waitangi tribunal, Buddy Mikaere, made in reviewing a new history of New Zealand: "I have been struck this year by the curious fact that Pakeha historians seem to have to dislike their own ancestors in order to justify studying them...The pioneers are the soul of Pakeha New Zealand, and if you can't care for your ancestors who were probably as imperfect as mine, you are never going to make your identity here...I can't understand why, especially in 1990 [New Zealand's sesquicentenary], Pakeha aren't fostering their past. I firmly believe that only then can they start to care about ours as well". A problem in our histories seems to lie not in a silence about the colonial past, but in a failure to conceive the past in such a way that it and its Aboriginal *and* European subjects are present in both senses of that word, here and now. The question of silence turns around the issues of who should be the subject of our (European) histories and how history treats the relationship between past and present.

To some extent, Milliss avoids the pitfalls of distancing histories. Like Cassandra Pybus in *Community of Thieves*, Milliss is less bound by the traditions of objectivist history which insist upon a critical disjunction between the categories of the past on the one hand, and contemporary reality on the other. In the dedication and the closing chapters of *Waterloo Creek*, the author alerts his readers to a contemporary example of the racist violence he has so painstakingly documented – the killing of a young Aboriginal man, Ronald McIntosh, at Moree in November 1982. As the American novelist William Faulkner wrote and Pybus quotes as the epigraph for her meditation on history, "The past is never dead; it's not even past". Like Pybus, Milliss also collapses the past and present through a sense of place – he has donned his boots (as W. K. Hancock urged historians to do) and surveyed the contemporary landscape which forms the focus of the book. The past is no longer 'another country' as he returns to these 'killing fields', where he reads the evidence of the past – in particular the names of sites like Slaughterhouse Creek, Gravesend, Waterloo Creek – which live on, and writes of "the litany of other blood-stained names with which the map of the entire continent is dotted". Milliss also adduces other evidence that these names evoke, by listening to the stories which continue to be told in the places where these bloody deeds were performed. Consequently, Milliss writes not of 'killings' or 'murder' but of 'atrocities', 'carnage', 'slaughter' etc, of 'pogroms' and 'genocide', even of 'holocaust'. This stands in marked contrast to earlier, academic historians (whose work, it should be noted, Milliss' book does not substantively add to), for whom such terms seemed to "stick in the[ir] typewriters" (as another historian, Peter Read, once remarked).

Why have historians been so reluctant to lay bare the terrible violence which marked the colonisation of this continent? There is, perhaps a sense of disbelief, produced by the 'great Australian silence'. (At a seminar on Aboriginal histories in Northern Australia at the ANU a few years ago, someone asked if Aborigines told any happy stories about European colonisation!) More importantly, historians feel bound by disciplinary rules which insist that history must be grounded in evidence called *primary* sources which denies that history is incorrigibly interpretative, the artefact of historians in the present. Not that Milliss does not labour under similar constraints. In fact this brings about his own undoing and constitutes the fundamental weakness of the book.

Not content to rely on what historians regard as hearsay evidence, whether of contemporaries or others, Milliss sets out to prove, as if in a court of law – a discipline that shares history's empiricist foundations – that genocidal acts such as those committed by Major Nunn, his mounted police troopers and local stockmen, occurred 'beyond all reasonable doubt'. Through exhaustive research of the archival record, Milliss amasses a wealth of historical detail, hoping to create the illusion that this *is* the past, to persuade the doubters that this is what really happened. This technique results in an extreme prolixity; not that Milliss writes poorly – he does not, and there are several superb chapters (e.g. the one on the Myall Creek massacre), but I wonder whether anyone but reviewers and literary judges will persevere to the end of the 750 pages of text and 150 pages of notes. Apart from the tedium this occasions in the reader though, Milliss' diligence proves to be of no avail in the end since his case fails for lack of evidence. Like other historians, he finds that the history of the Australian frontier

is marked by what Tom Griffiths has called "past silences".

Given that this is so, Milliss might have made that silence the subject of analysis: to have interpreted "the killing time" and their silences as one and the same phenomenon, as Deborah Bird Rose does in her recent history, *Hidden Histories*. Following the work of Michael Taussig on colonialism elsewhere, Rose contends that colonisation in Australia was marked by "two critical moments" – death and denial. There existed what Taussig calls a "culture of terror", which resulted in "a death-space in the land of the living", a space where frontiersmen were engaged in controlling Aborigines through killing and terror at the same time as they destroyed and concealed evidence of this. "European violence, at one moment understood to be essential", Rose writes, "was at a later moment denied or simply lost to memory". A considerable body of evidence provided by Milliss supports the argument that European colonisation was based upon such a culture of terror.

In other colonial contexts (such as New Zealand), the conflict between settlers and indigenes was called 'war' and was *remembered* as such in colonial culture, but here no such conceptualisation could be sustained since this continent was declared to be *terra nullius*, and so was occupied by our forebears as a peacefully acquired colony. Milliss' narrative suggests this but his interpretive reticence means that he fails to elucidate its full significance. To officially admit to a state of war was to acknowledge that Aborigines were a sovereign people with rights to the land, and to concede that Australia was conquered, not settled. As Rose says, this silence has been and continues to be critical in shielding us from the knowledge of our relationship "to people and land".

In declaring *Waterloo Creek* the co-winner of this year's Banjo award for non-fiction, the judges described it as "timely". And so it is. Despite its shortcomings, it is an important book in as much as it makes manifest that the study of *Us*, the Europeans, is part of the study of *Them*, the Aborigines, that a coming to terms with the other involves a coming to terms with ourselves. Until such time as we can critically reflect upon our past in the present, our culture, as Bernard Smith warned in his 1980 Boyer Lectures, *The Spectre of Truganini*, will continue to lack integrity and authenticity.

Bain Attwood is the author of The Making of the Aborigines *and co-editor of* Power, Knowledge and Aborigines, *La Trobe University Press, 1992 forthcoming.*

The Continuing Struggles of History

John McLaren

Robert Ross, (ed.): *International Literature in English.* (Garland Publishing, New York, $US95).

Bruce Bennett: *An Australian Compass: essays on place in Australian literature.* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $12.95).

The claim that history has reached its end is as absurd as the delusions that nationalism would be superseded by the struggles of the international working classes. With hindsight, this latter illusion should have been exploded in 1914 when working men of all nations rushed to fight for their respective nations. Although the later spectacle of the Russian revolution, as well as the passivist and pacifist writings of novelists like Hasek and Remarque, gave hope that the madness might never recur, it has in fact continued as the most powerful driving force in the history of the twentieth century, providing the sustaining rhetoric even for states that avowed Marxism. With the collapse of the last of the imperial empires, it is now reshaping eastern Europe in patterns that have yet to be discerned.

This reshaping is itself evidence that history continues through the ceaseless struggle of people to gain control of their own destiny. Nor, despite Fukuyama, does the liberal democratic state offer an end to the Hegelian vision of unending struggle between master and slave to define their own personal identity. The liberal state offers this identity in the form of endless consumer goods, but even if this promise were possible for all of the world's population it comes only at the cost of social atomisation. The ideology of economic rationalism is itself an attempt to make history, to subject all peoples to the pursuit of rational ends determined by irrational market forces. This ideology not only ignores the weak, it denies the collective and communal dimensions of human reality. The nationalist impulse embodies an assertion of people to maintain a collective identity outside the control of the metropolis and beyond the fragmenting power of the market.

To say this is not to deny either the importance of the market or the desirability of developing forms of community that will transcend the national. The drive to supernational federations is as strong as the drive to national division based on ethnicity, and the two need not be contradictory. But internationalism cannot be imposed. It will attract support only from people already secure in their national and personal identity. The history of imperialism

has been a history of the attempt to impose European ends and identity on the world. Imperialism itself generated nationalism, both as its justification and as the form of resistance to it. A central issue of global politics today is how people can use nationalism to create their own communities without generating the ethnic violence that continues to tear apart successor states in Europe, Asia and Africa.

The essays in the two volumes under review examine the variety of resisting forms bred by British imperialism in Australia and around the world. Bruce Bennett, editor of *Westerly*, the regional journal of Australian literature, examines identity in terms of place, recognising both the sources of Australian identity in an attachment to the Antipodean environment and the separate regional identities that have emerged in response to the vast differences in this environment. Robert Ross, editor of *Antipodes*, the American journal of Australian literature, has put together a collection of essays that examine the common struggles of writers from a dozen cultures to reconstruct their identity, ranging from Australian Aborigines to the migrants who are returning its global perspective to the imperial source. Between them, the two books demonstrate the difficult work which is needed to construct national identities that will allow room for community.

Robert Ross arranges the essays in his collection in five parts, dealing respectively with the decolonisation of history, patriarchy, boundaries, self and art. The book thus progresses logically from the work of writers in creating new forms that will break from the European standards to work that finds in art the universal bases of community. In place of the choice imperialism offers to the colonies between nativism and provinciality, it draws a prospect of opening the imperial centres themselves to wider visions of human possibility.

The books opens with an essay on Olive Schreiner. This shows how the children of her fiction win from utter dispossession and alienation a hope in which "the nurturiant aspects of nature are balanced with and not overwhelmed by a darker knowledge of guilt and death". Studies of such writers as Albert Wendt, R. K. Narayan and Chinua Achebe – fortunately still with us, despite earlier reports of his death – examine the way their work starts with the alienated victims of imperialism, with the fact of dispossessed cultures, and searches in them for the strength and resilience that will enable them to recover a purchase on the new world order to which they have been subjected. These writers are not merely expressing the fact of alienation, but are using it as a means to dislodge the cultural and economic domination that produces it. Their work is not a return to an idealised past, but a discovery of strength in the present.

The subsequent sections of the book show how imperialism penetrates every aspect of colonial existence. Its patriarchy is reproduced within the family, its boundaries are imposed on existing communities, and the individual self is reduced to the possibilities of the subordinate. Writers however, working outside the metropolitan centres, have consistently refused to accept these restrictions they seek to impose, and have in the process produced work that is international in its scope and interest. Writers as diverse as Patrick White, Thea Astley, Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro have worked within transplanted cultures to reveal new possibilities of humanity; Bapsi Sidhwa, Wole Soyinka and V. S. Naipaul have examined both the liberating and the oppressive aspects of the translations of older cultures into newer forms; Salman Rushdie has shown religion as a form of native imperialism; Colin Johnson and Keri Hulme reassert cultures that have been overwhelmed and Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris speak for those emerging from the new synthesis produced from imperialist displacement and mixture.

The variety of literature examined in these essays defies attempts to reduce it to any simple pattern apart from a challenge to single standards and a search for the new universality of diversity. They deal both with writers seeking to revive a sense of place and with those finding their identity in the fact of displacement. This is also the concern of Bennett's essays, which are arranged along the axis from centre to margin, metropolis to region. Their common theme emerges clearly in the essay that is common to both collections, 'An Ecological Vision – Judith Wright', which Bennett wrote for Ross's book and reproduces in his own.

Bennett reads Judith Wright's work as "a series of personal pilgrimages to understand herself in relation to the environment in its regional, national and universal manifestations". This recovery of the human relationship to the environment is itself a revolutionary rejection of the exploitative stance that is central to imperialism in both its originary and its contemporary manifestations. Bennett's recognition of a gradation from regional to universal is similarly a rejection of the metropolitan habit of indentifying as universal the interests and standards of the centre, a habit now enthusiastically endorsed by Australia's rabid tribes of economic rationalists. By contrast, Wright has consistently recognised the grounding of our humanity in the landscape where we can feel at home, and the consequent necessity of recognising and transcending the

history that comes between us and our surroundings. For her, our identity as Australians is dependent on our ability to accept our responsibilities both to the land and to those we violently dispossessed of it. Her recognition of our responsibility for both our place and our time extends her regional attachment into a universal humanity. Bennett, following Wright, argues that Australians, heirs of the "disinherited mind" of imperialism, nevertheless have the opportunity to come into a new heritage by bringing to reason the "feeling and imagination" that will enable them to build a "new kind of creative relationship" between humans and the environment.

An Australian Compass starts with a consideration of the competing pulls towards the provincial and the metropolitan, the tension between the patriot Les A. Murray and the expatriate Peter Porter, and between the cosmopolitan literary standards of A. D. Hope's criticism and the nationalism of Arthur Phillips. Bennett however does not present these tensions as exclusive, but as alternates that need each other in their common task of using the power of words "to explore the basis and limits of humanity". The writer who chooses to explore the local does so with a knowledge of the international tradition bearing on it, just as the cosmopolitans bring their local experience to their understanding of the international.

These global oppositions; lead Bennett to his discussion of other supposed oppositions between journalism and literature in Robert Drewe's writing, which overcomes the tension by drawing, to its advantage, on both forms; between regional and national; and between the excitements of adolescence and the challenges of age that Olga Masters and Elizabeth Jolley have analysed so effectively. The regional discussion is extended by comparisons with the American west, a contrast between George Eliot and Catherine Spence that questions the effect of expatriation on Spence's career, and an essay on the hills of Perth that exemplifies the author's dictum that literature is grounded in experience. This experience of the culture of place, unstated in this case, also illuminates the author's analyses of Peter Cowan's 'Landscapes of Silence' and of the success and tragedy in the lives and work of Katharine Susannah Prichard and her husband, Hugo Throssell. The book concludes with essays that place Australia in its Asian and Pacific context, and considers the role of literary histories and literary journals in maintaining its cultural independence.

Bennett brings to his work the same multiple perspectives he discusses. He has not only a deep knowledge of Australian writing and a fine feeling for place, but also a breadth of knowledge that enables him to bring European and American perspectives to bear on his work. He wears lightly his understanding of contemporary theory, preferring, as he notes, to see writings in terms of "their relevance to the situation in which they were written, their audience and their relation to other, similar forms of discourse." He looks, in other words, for what is specific about the writing that interests him, how it enlightens us about its circumstances, and what it has to say to the world. In place of either a narrow nationalism or a deracinated globalism, he demonstrates a cultural nationalism that provides a human alternative to the new imperialisms of economic rationalism and abstract cultural theory.

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Compulsive Reading: The Attractions of Vacancy

Michael George Smith

Andrew McGahan: *Praise* (Allen & Unwin, $12.95).

In the gap left by the failure of hippie idealism...a new kind of vicious teenage nihilism was breeding.

Jon Savage: England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols And Punk Rock *(Faber & Faber, 1991, p.76).*

By 1975, the rot had begin to set in. A young dropout from boarding school in Virginia, Richard Meyers, teamed up with friends to form a band called Television, changed his name to Richard Hell and wrote a song, *Blank Generation*, that would become an anthem for a generation of young people. It seemed to sum up the feelings of disillusion in a world that had quite obviously *not* been changed by the 'Summer of Love'. In England too, the optimism of youth had soured into what would become the punk movement, whose anthems came with titles like *No Future* and *Pretty Vacant* courtesy a band called The Sex Pistols. As Jon Savage elaborates, their songs and others like them seemed to present a new aesthetic, "the attractions of vacancy: not just of being or looking bored, but the deeper vacancy of the subconscious." (p.90).

There is an element of that vacancy in the characters that populate the first novel of Brisbane writer Andrew McGahan, *Praise*, winner of the 1991 *Australian*/Vogel Literary Award. Not that the pervasive boredom consequent in that sense of vacancy is ever specified or extrapolated, but it's there, the legacy of that 'punk revolution', the last

significant social movement to spring from that nebulous and increasingly fragmented entity society lumps under the category of 'youth', Where a case could be made for a claim of some residual sense of innocence in the sixties, for all the media hyperbole of the 'sexual revolution', cynicism has been embraced by more and more young people as the nihilistic icons of punk and its successor styles have displaced those earlier pop icons. Fifteen years after *Blank Generation*, another English pop group, The The, still spurred by the class-conscious anger that has never quite translated to Australia, could legitimately write a song on similar lines in *The Beaten Generation*. The pun on Kerouac and company is, of course, intentional and underlines the irony of taking the philosophy of the Beats to its logical conclusion.

Certainly it is as a documentation of Australia's current "Beaten Generation" that Allen & Unwin's fiction publisher, Stephanie Dowrick, seems to perceive *Praise*, as her comments in the press release for the novel point out: "We had long been impatiently waiting for a novel which would convey the experience of young, urban Australians – and speak directly to that audience: people for whom alcohol, drugs, sex, music and unemployment are the big issues whose emotional stance is largely cautious if not downright cynical...". I must admit I had thought that a number of young Australian writers had already addressed various aspects of these issues fairly succinctly: Helen Garner in *Monkey Grip* for instance, or Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey in *Puberty Blues*, and perhaps even David Foster, more obliquely, in *Plumbum*. The things most disturbing for *me* in *Praise* is that the attitudes and even lifestyles described seem barely to have changed since the late seventies when Javo stuck a needle in his arm in *Monkey Grip*.

While *Praise* might not be the apposite allegory of these recessional times the publishers might imagine, it certainly reflects the other two parts of the paradigm that ostensibly defines the 'teenage rebel': sex and drugs. More specifically, it focuses on the obsession of the protagonist, Gordon Buchanan, with two women, the all-too-available Cynthia, and the object of unattainable desire, Rachel. Yet it isn't even sex that motivates Buchanan, though the book abounds in explicit descriptions of it. Detached, even when he finally engages the sexual appetites of the intellectual Rachel, Buchanan seems to be longing to feel some kind of all-consuming passion, yet remains completely incapable of making even moderate concessions to the concept of commitment. This is no manifestation of some generational cynicism either that, if brought up at all, is left to other characters to convey – it is sheer lethargy. Cynicism would demand some sort of commitment which is, of course, beyond him.

So, *Praise* is not a novel of angry, frustrated or trapped youth on the dole, but rather a novel of impossible love – Cynthia's for a disinterested Gordon and Gordon's for a Rachel he cannot begin to understand. The bulk of the novel consequently revolves around the intense sexual activities propelled by Cynthia on the one hand, desperate for love and stability, and Gordon on the other hand, the complete and compliant supplicant before the altar of Rachel's vagina. It is the painful honesty and desultory description of sex throughout this novel that is, if anything, where McGahan breaks new ground, at least in terms of Australian fiction in the hands of a straight male.

Praise certainly fits neatly into the burgeoning tradition of twentieth-century novels which explore the mundanity of contemporary life and the ennui that has progressively overtaken it. The influence of writers like Charles Bukowski and John Ellis is obvious in the simplicity of style and direct, unembroidered prose. The scenes describing Buchanan's experiments with heroin are as prosaic as those of William S. Burroughs are existential. If anything, the interest in drugs is only perfunctory. Alcohol is the drug of choice primarily, consumed in mind-numbing quantities by all the characters with the help of far more smoking of normal cigarettes than the marijuana you might expect. This, in the end, is very much a novel of the bored, middle-class university dropout rather than the growing legion of working class kids who populate Australia's depressed outer suburbs, who really *do* face a potential lifetime of grind under the bureaucratic wheels of the Department of Social Security. That novel is yet to be written.

Gordon Buchanan's ultimate failure to gain appreciably any emotional growth or insight from his experience in some ways places him as the latest addition to another longstanding literary tradition, that of the classic picaro. His is, however, an emotional retardation increasingly symptomatic of today's cynical youth. Perhaps in this, too, the publishers have recognised something in the novel that fits the claims made for it. The irony, for me, is that, despite the depressing familiarity of the characters and their lifestyle, the austerity of its style and my discomfort with the often arbitrary emphasis on graphic sex, with barely a lyrical moment for relief, *Praise* remains curiously compulsive reading.

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Beaufighters

Geoffrey Dutton

David Wilson: *The Decisive Factor; 75 & 76 Squadrons – Port Moresby and Milne Bay 1942* (Banner Books, 308 Victoria Street, Brunswick, Vic., 3056, $27.50).

Lex McAulay: *Six Aces; Australian Fighter Pilots 1939–45* (Banner Books, $30).

I was going through some old files recently and came across a letter of 1951 to the London *Times*, from my old friend Jock Marshall, the zoologist. Exasperated by a typically inept article, he had written to point out that it was Australian troops and airmen in New Guinea who first pushed back the Japanese. Forty-one years later, Paul Keating has been trying to make the same point. Jock, unimpressed by Churchillian rhetoric, used to refer to Britain as Standalonia. Certainly there was scarcely a mention of the thousands of Commonwealth men who were fighting and dying (especially in the air) for Britain in those lean years.

A new Melbourne publisher, Banner Books, specialising in military history is doing a good job of presenting the facts and paying tribute where it is due.

The six fighter pilots were all in their early twenties or younger in 1939, and they fought over Britain and Europe, Malta, North Africa, Burma and the islands north of Darwin. Some joined the RAF in Britain, others served with it but kept their RAAF identity; only one was flying with the RAAF out of Australia. Bureaucracy and officialdom afflicted them all. 'Butch' Gordon DFC, flying out of Northern Territory airstrips, was not considered to be operational because he was not stationed outside Australia, and he still had his pay taxed. Each time he shot down a Japanese aircraft he would yell "Take that off my tax, you bastards". Beaufighter pilot Mervyn Shepard DFC was ordered off parade by an RAF Wing Commander for being dressed in October in his RAAF summer uniform: "Never appear on my C.O.'s parades again!". Shipard was only too happy to oblige.

With fighter pilots in the air it was skill against skill, machine against machine, luck against luck. For an ex-pilot reading this book, the variety of machines in *Six Aces* is fascinating: Spitfires, Hurricanes, Beaufighters, Mosquitoes, each quite different from the other. For those not so involved, *Six Aces* may become tedious reading at times, with innumerable accounts of sorties, victories and defeats. Nevertheless, Lex McAulay follows his pilots into some amazing adventures. One of the most startling concerns Mervyn Shepard in a Beaufighter based on Malta, when at night he and his observer, with one engine out of action, shot down a Heinkel. It should be explained that the Beaufighter was a big, heavy, twin-engined aircraft which carried a pilot and an observer who managed the radar, radio and navigation. They specialised in night-fighting, a particularly terrifying occupation.

Beaufighters were extraordinarily tough. 'Butch' Gordon DFC, flying out of Darwin, returned from one mission against the Japanese with fifty cannon and 120 7.7mm machine-gun holes in his aircraft.

Perhaps the most attractive character of the six aces, Charles Scherf DSO DFC, was nearly brought down in his Mosquito by a flock of birds he hit near Denmark. When he landed back in England there were thirty-nine bird strikes right through his starboard wing.

The element of luck, chance, fate or whatever is important enough in civilian life; it is almost supreme in war. One cannot imagine how some of these airmen survived. One observer in a Beaufighter had the pencil shot out of his hand and the identity disc shot off his wrist.

What may not have been altogether luck, but psychological exhaustion, led to deaths that were not in action. Gordon was killed testing a new aircraft, and Scherf was killed in a car accident back in the New South Wales countryside after the war.

Provoking fate was of course part of a successful pilot's life. They had to be a bit mad, to press it to extremes. Gaze, flying with famous Douglas Bader, tells how Bader would make a dart at you, and flick his wing, just to see if you'd duck. Leslie Clisby DFC, in a Spitfire, shot down a German bomber; he saw it land and its crew run into a wood. He landed, dashed after them with his revolver drawn and rounded them up.

On 8 December 1941, an RAAF Hudson in Malaya was the first Allied aircraft to attack the Japanese. However, in the first two months of 1942 there was not one RAAF fighter squadron in Australia. Of course Australia was safe, protected by the bullshit of the Royal Navy and Fortress Singapore. 75 and 76 Squadrons were formed and equipped with P40 Kittyhawks less than a month after the surrender of Singapore.

The Decisive Factor tells the story, at times in somewhat overwhelming detail, of the incredible difficulties faced by the so few (much fewer than in the Battle of Britain!) pilots and their Kittyhawks of 75 and 76 squadrons. There were no pilots in

reserve, so no chance of the necessary rest between combats. The airstrips were atrocious; lots of aircraft were damaged in landing or in getting bogged on take-off. Living conditions were utterly primitive and the food basic; there wasn't even any beer. The lack of fresh food meant that pilots suffered agonising stomach pains in changes of altitude and in the G-forces of dogfighting. Even worse, many of the pilots had only about ten hours up and no combat experience. Their Kittyhawks were tough and reliable, but nowhere as manoeuvrable as the Zero. The Japanese ace Saburo Sakai puts it well. After mentioning how the Australians would come "screaming in" regardless of odds, he says "It is important to point out that their fighter planes were clearly inferior in performance to our Zeros. Furthermore, almost all our pilots were skilled air veterans...The men who fought were amongst the bravest I have ever encountered."

Perhaps the greatest victory scored by the Kittyhawk pilots was a moral one. The Australian ground troops were profoundly depressed by the lack of air support. There were rumors that the Kittyhawks were about to arrive, but they never did; the troops talked about 'Tomorrow hawks' and 'Neverhawks'. But when they did arrive, and the soldiers saw Japanese aircraft being shot down, there was a tremendous boost to morale.

A boost of pride must surely also be felt by any Australian who reads these two books. It should be devoid of sentimentality, for that's the way it was with all members of the squadrons. Sentimentality was purged by reality, by death and lucky escapes, above all by a sense of humor. "The narrower the escape, the more hilarious everyone thought it was. A fellow would come in, shot to ribbons, scared out of his wits, and everyone thought it the greatest possible joke."

But there was no humor at all in their basic situation, against which humor was their only weapon. In the homicidal mania of wars, the wild schemes of politicians and campaigns of staff officers are carried though by young men on both sides, equally guiltless, brave and often scared shitless.

Geoffrey Dutton spent four and a half years in the RAAF in World War II as a pilot. His latest book is Flying Low, *a novel about not very respectable goings-on in the RAAF and US armed forces.*

floating fund

BARRETT REID writes: we got, in one week in August, three life subscriptions. Three! And in the same mail a faraway poet said it was the first time he had been paid for a poem, another perched on Sydney harbor said her heart was like a singing bird, and yesterday one of you wrote, enclosing a donation, saying "I always, always renew my subscription to *Overland* and unless one of us changes dramatically I always will". Spring is in the air and we have a springtime message: ALL DONATIONS TO *OVERLAND* OF MORE THAN $2 ARE NOW TAX DEDUCTIBLE. Thanks, dear readers, for donating between 5 June and 25 August, no less than $2,346. Specific thanks to:$1500, Anon; $110, Anon; $100, J.N.; $80, S.M.; $74, R.M.; $52, D.T.; $50, R.E.McG.; $34, R.R.; $28, I.C.McI.; $26, M.F.; $24, A.& K.I., R.F.; $19, F.S.; $14, L.C., F.S., M.H., M.L., J.S., D.A., D.R., S.McC., J.McG.; $10, H.F.; $9, A.L., B.G.M.; $6, D.McN.; $5, G.R.; $4, R.D., R.J.V., B.G., J.S., B.H., K.S., H.N., G.P., G.L., J.R., M.D., H.N., G.M., J.D.R., C.B.

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A NEW INTERNATIONAL anthology is Amnesty International's *From the Republic of Conscience*. Edited by Kerry Flattley and Chris Wallace-Crabbe, it's published in Melbourne by Arid Books and will be distributed internationally.

In only 170 pages, the editors have given us a jostling variety of poems reflecting human predicament: they reach out from many languages and times, but are weighted towards the contemporary with a fair number of Australian poets, from Grandfather Koori to Alison Croggon. An unusual feature is the number of poems from Arabic and South American literatures. Personal pleasures were by Anna Akhmatova, Bruce Dawe, Elizabeth Bishop, Yannis Ritsos, W. S. Merwin and Desanka Maksimovic, that splendid old woman who came to an Adelaide Festival in the '70s and who, now in her nineties in her flat in Belgrade, must be grieving over the peoples of her country.

Ernesto Cardenal is here, Wole Soyinka, Vincent Buckley, Irina Ratushinskaya (freed after a determined campaign and publication by PEN) and Janet Frame; and South American Dennis Brutus, represented by three poems. Here, too, is a poem 'I kept Silent' by Nguyen Chi Thien, a writer in prison who is an honorary member of our PEN Centre.

> I kept silent when I was tortured by my enemy:
> With iron and steel, soul faint in agony –
> The heroic stories are for children to believe.
> I kept silent because I kept telling myself:
> Has anyone, who entered the jungle and who was run over by the wild beast
> Been stupid enough to open his mouth and ask for mercy?
>
> *Translated by Nguyen Huu Hieu.*

It should be noted that all the poets gave permission for free use of their poems.

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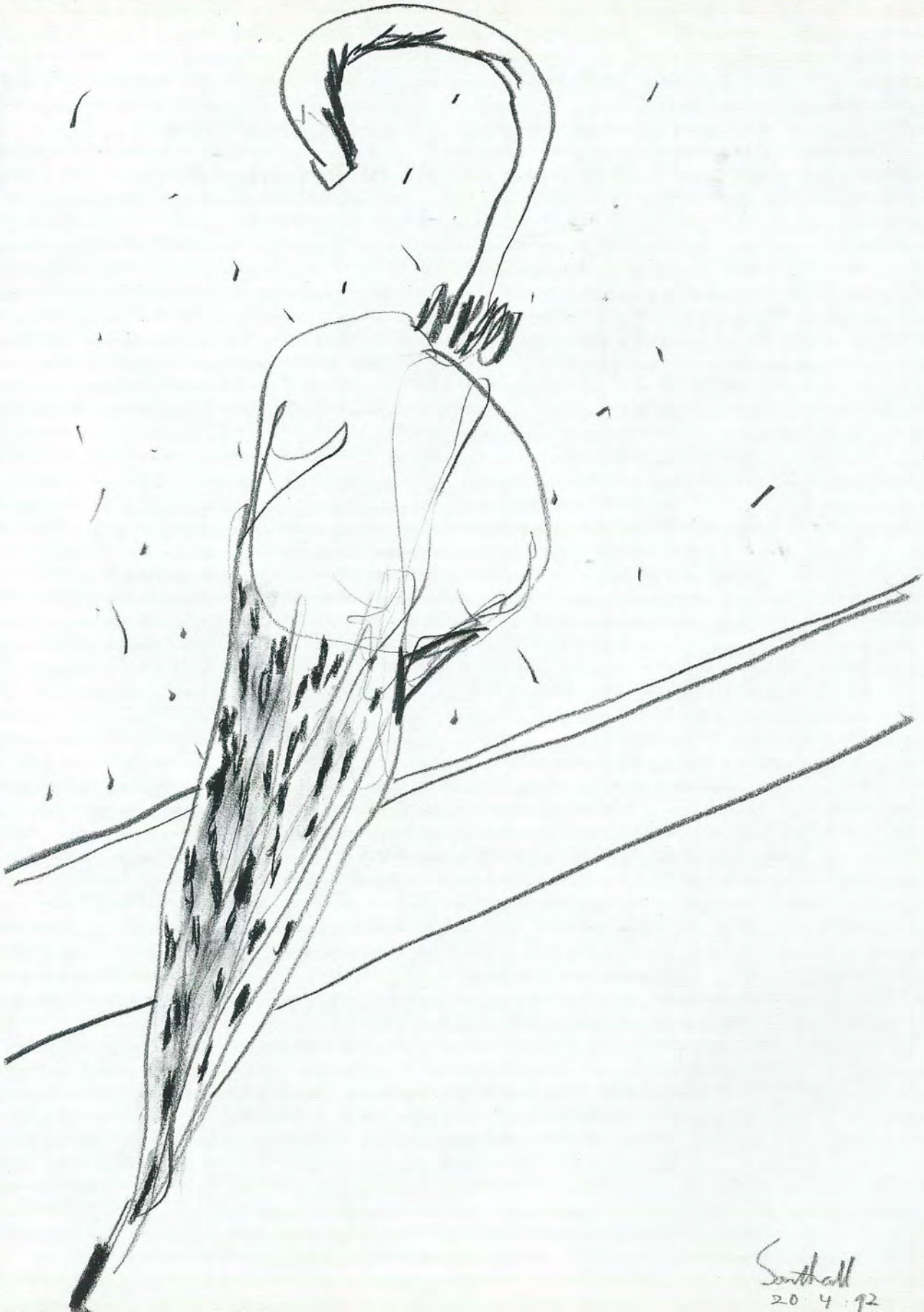
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