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BARRY HILL
TRAVELLING TOWARDS THE OTHER
Micro-Fiction from China

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130

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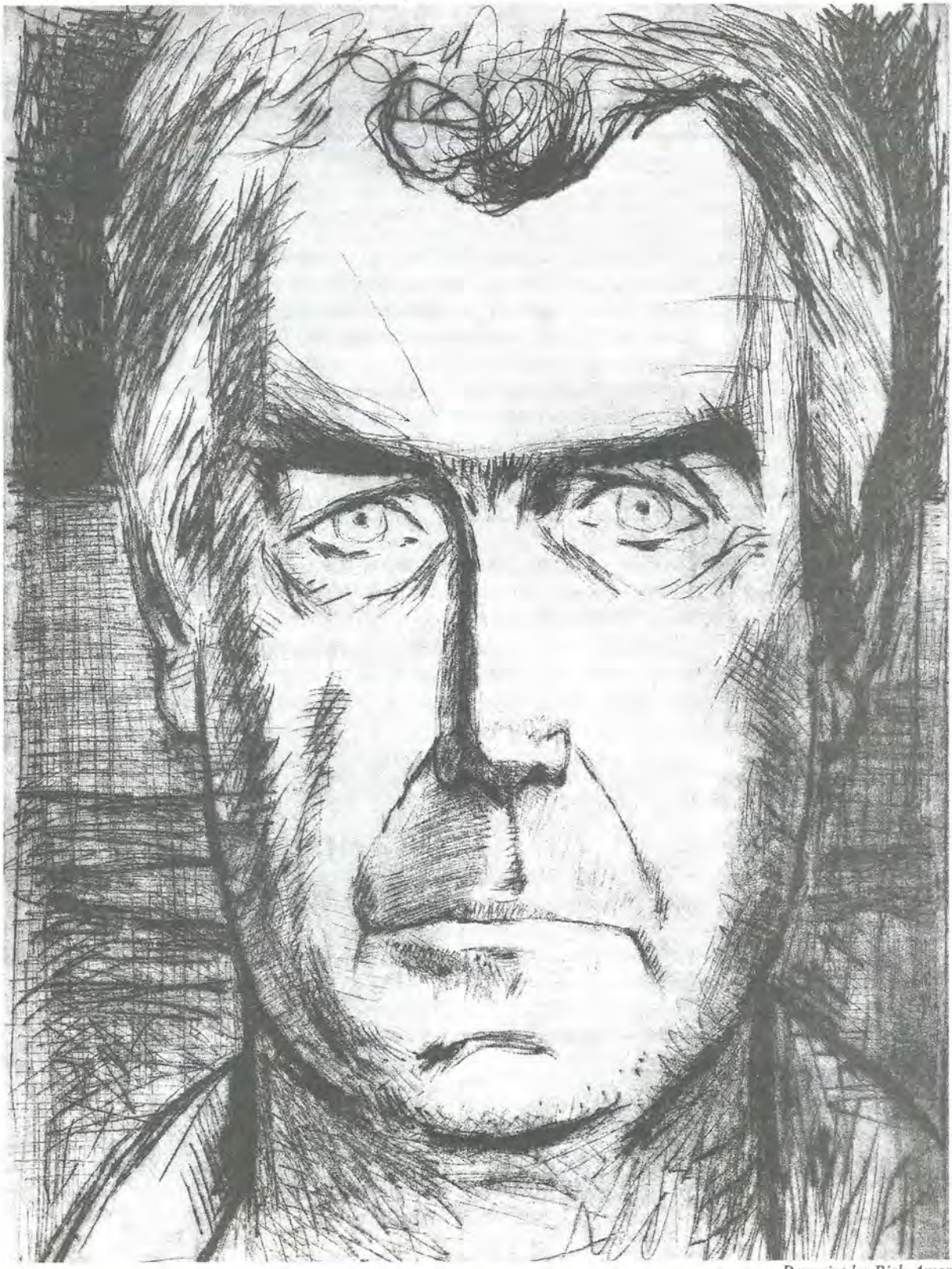
Contents

Contemporary Authors Series, No. 3. Portrait of Barry Hill.



Drypoint by Rick Amor

ODETTE SNELLEN

Bride of Christ

SHE SAT VERY UPRIGHT on her bicycle. All dressed up in white with her golden hair parted in the middle. Bright red on her lips she smiled a smile for Jesus and the air around her head glowed. Some people noticed as the candle pedalled past and others didn't. She rode to the edge of town and tied her bike to a tree. Then she took off her white coat and folding it very neatly put it in the back seat of a taxi. She got in and sat in the front. She asked the driver how much it would cost to go to the capital city. He said three hundred dollars.

The driver said Jesus I'm lucky to get so many pretty ladies in my car. Matilda Daystar looked straight ahead and told him that he must be a magnet. And that was all she said for five hours. She just smiled at the white line in the middle of the road. He tried to talk to her about the weather. He put on some music and asked her if she liked it. Then he gave up.

The policemen out the front of the Prime Minister's house laughed when they saw Matilda walking to their gate with a big red sun dancing on her lips. Here comes the bride they said. She told them she would like to see the Prime Minister to tell him of her respect. Jesus this is fantastic said a producer from the national news. She spoke in the policeman's ear and then told the walkie-talkie that Matilda was coming in with her.

Matilda sat quietly in the garden. Everywhere everyone was busy preparing a special glimpse of the Prime Minister at home. His children were kicking a footy with some aboriginal friends. His wife was in conference with the wardrobe mistress. He himself was walking with the technicians with his hands in his pockets. Some people saw Matilda picking the flowers from the Prime Minister's garden and others didn't.

The director gave a nod and all the walkie-talkies stood-by. The producer put her arm around Matilda's shoulder so that she couldn't stray. Someone turned on the barbie and the Prime Minister started to push the sausages around the hot plate. The children and their friends gathered around him with plates in their hands. He made some jokes and everybody laughed.

Matilda held the bunch of flowers in her hands. The Prime Minister was waving his hands through the smoke rising from the barbie. The producer gave her a little push and she walked in front of the camera towards the Prime Minister's fire. He smiled as she held the flowers towards him and heard her say Mister Prime Minister I respect you. Then Matilda Daystar drew a dagger from the flowers and before anyone could say Jesus Christ she had it in the Prime Minister's throat. It all happened so fast that some people saw it all and others didn't. They caught up when the Prime Minister was lying on the ground with blood pouring out of his neck.

As soon as she did that men in large grey suits with leads coming out of their ears and into their collars jumped on top of her. They twisted her arms around her back and held her tight. The big red sun kept smiling and didn't speak any language. Her eyes looked straight ahead at something else. The producer was screaming who are you over and over. Everyone else was around the Prime Minister on the ground. His wife held a hankie on the hole in his neck. His blood was all over her hands. The children were crying and the crew looked scared. Matilda's dagger was in a plastic bag. Then the ambulance drove up the lawn and took the Prime Minister away. The police put Matilda in the back of one of their cars with two policewomen on either side of her and proceeded to their station.

Half an hour later people across the country turned to the television and saw in slow motion Matilda Daystar's blank face as she pulled the dagger from the flowers and raised her white arm high and brought it down into the Prime Minister's throat. The Prime Minister's eyes turning around in his head as he falls to the ground. They were told that this had just happened and that he was alive

in hospital. The producer was saying with her hair in her face that this woman looked so innocent all dressed in white. No-one would have predicted it. The anchor man said that the woman hadn't said anything yet so it was not yet known if she came with a motive or from any particular group. Everyone who was watching was in a state of shock. Especially her family.

Meanwhile at the police station Matilda sat in a chair looking not one bit dishevelled. She was surrounded by policemen and women and a few psychiatrists because it seemed like it was going to be that kind of case. Some were standing and others sitting on the desk. Matilda said that she did what she did because she wanted to send a signal exposing the government's involvement with extraterrestrial aliens allowing them to take people away in their saucers to experiment on them. People don't remember anything because they put screen memories into their heads. The politicians are keeping it a secret so she needed to kill one. She spoke quietly and calmly telling them she had no regret and that Jesus had flown with her and shown her an aerial map of the landing sites. Then she went all quiet and asked one of the policewomen if she could go to sleep. They took her to a cell. On the screen in the control room they saw Matilda Daystar getting undressed. She folded all of her white clothes and put her underpants and bra under her skirt so no men could see them. She put on the blue prison issue and went to sleep. Staying in the same position all night.

The next morning as they led the would-be assassin to the back of the van to take her to the psychiatric hospital everyone who was waiting got a good shot of her smiling contentedly to herself. She was wearing the same costume as the day before. The police in the van felt relaxed enough to smoke cigarettes en route to the hospital. One of them turned the radio on and when some rock and roll came on everyone including Matilda was tapping their foot.

By the time Matilda Daystar was processed and in the locked ward for very dangerous patients her picture was on the cover of all magazines and newspapers. Internationally as well because of the satellites. The headlines went like a bride she came in all in white a woman that no-one loved. Lots of people had a lot to say about her but she didn't have one friend. Only her father was living and an aunt and an uncle. Her former parents-in-law said that when they saw her on the television for the first time in nine years they didn't recognise her one bit. She'd gotten fat and she didn't have that strange look on her face before. She'd left their son all of a sudden. For no apparent reason. And this was very strange because she was always so openly and unbelievably loyal.

The neighbors thought she was a real weirdo. Whenever they saw her on her bike they would look at each other to say there goes Mad-tilda. They told stories about how she always wore her hair so severe with the part in the middle and that insane red lipstick. Mrs Watts from across the road said that the part in the middle of her head was some kind of sexy revelation. Her landlord said she was always alone except for this cat that she spoke to like he was a person.

In the locked ward there was no television so Matilda didn't see the talk show she generated. The host had a psychiatrist on one side and on the other side was Johnno Johnson the last man to spend the night with Matilda Daystar. Johnno Johnson was a postman. The psychiatrist was telling the host that Matilda was a psychotic on a mission to save the world when she was really trying to save herself.

She was an alienated person. He said that someone like this charismatic Prime Minister is like a magnet to someone in Matilda's state because he is everything she is not. The host asked him if there was anything sexy in what Matilda did to the Prime Minister. The camera got a quick shot of Johnno in case he thought anything. The psychiatrist went on to say it could be thought of as a type of sexual union between this man and this woman but it could also be existential. Johnno Johnson said he was forty-two years old and that he had met Matilda Daystar because she was always waiting for her mail. They had gotten to talking because they both really like the idea of letters going around the world. And stamps. She invited him to dinner and they talked about sending letters. They got changed into their pajamas in the bathroom. Separately. They slept on two single bunks. Before they went to sleep she turned the television to face the wall and put a spoon over the door key so that no evil spirits could get in to speak to her. Johnno Johnson was wearing a country and western costume with an enormous belt. He was very calm with big hands and sideburns. He said that he'd come across wilder things in his life than this.

The next day the police were untying Matilda's bike from the tree where it still stood. And they went into her flat to have a look around. The cat hid under the bed. It was a very tidy place with only one painting on the wall of the three wise men reeling from something incandescent in the desert. They made themselves a cup of tea and sat down to read Matilda's poetry journals in case there was any evidence of a plan. All her poems were about Jesus and love. The constable turned her television away from the wall and started to watch cartoons. The sergeant found a map that looked like the one Matilda said Jesus had shown her. He ripped this page out and put it in a plastic bag.

There were five patients in the ward. Including Matilda. Amongst themselves they all had other names. Because they reminded each other of famous people. There was Lionel Rose, Benny Hill, Princess Diana, and Angus Young. It was Angus's idea that Matilda be Madonna because she was like a virgin. He was lying on the ground next to the cassette player throwing his head from side to side on a pillow. Matilda said she was not as innocent as that. But the name stuck. The nurses brought around the trolley with the Largactil already poured into plastic cups. Benny Hill said large act till what? They told him not be be a smart Alec.

When it was time for the court case everyone knew what the result would be. The Prime Minister was there with his wife and a band-aid on his neck. So was Johnno Johnson. Matilda sat quietly in the dock. A sun set on her lips with no color. She looked at her hands in the middle of her lap. The police and the psychiatrists convinced the judge that this was an unwell woman and that in the interests of everyone including herself she be detained for treatment.

Johnno Johnson watched Matilda get into the van. She saw him as it began to move away. He waved but didn't smile. Matilda Daystar turned her head and the air around it glowed. Through the window of the moving car she watched him as he kept on disappearing.

BARRY HILL

Travelling Towards the Other

GAUGUIN'S GREAT PAINTING has been rolled out again. *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going to?*

They are the right questions in the right order. There is the *ravissement* of the painting, its enactment of the dream of the noble savage, and at the same time there is one's knowledge that the artist was doomed to disillusionment almost as soon as he painted it (perhaps by virtue of painting it!). So the books that hit the desk in the Year of the Indigenous are daunting. On the one hand the sensual and still-mysterious images. On the other, the modern philosophising about 'difference' (and distance) that seems to have no end. I pick up the books and hope they will help me to travel towards the Other, while at the same time wondering if cognition is entirely the point. What *body of knowledge* is at issue here?

On a kangaroo hunt I went once, in Central Australia, and it took me further than expected. The driver was a Pitjantjatjara elder, Illyatjari, and the co-driver was Ernest, his employee, a white man with a .22 Browning Magnum.

The afternoon was quietly lying down between the trees when we shot our first *Malu*, the lovely red kangaroo of the region. As if to the sound of the rifle, it leapt and twisted in the air, the spirit of life flew out of it, but it took another shot to bring it down. Then we were all out of the car surrounding it.

It writhed and tried to hobble up on one leg while our six Aboriginal boys beat it down with sticks. In the weave of its thrashing legs the little grandson danced, and then, when the animal lay still, he seemed to have come out of the bloody scrum with some prize – some pink thing – that the older boys had wrenched from the animal's belly.

Immensely proud he was of his tiny foetus.

We shot another *Malu*, and as it was beaten I heard myself yell at the white man to put a bullet in its head. But no, and the animal was again killed in the traditional way.

This time the foetus was a big one. All legs and eyes, it seemed, for the triumphant boys. Back in the truck it was allowed to rest in a lap, where it twisted and turned in search of the nipple of its mother, who now lay dead at our feet with her fur warming our knees. As we trundled across country the rubbery figures were passed around. It was when a black boy held one in either hand and bumped their faces together that I snapped.

No, I said. No.

What? said the looks from the black kids. What! Who are you?

I'm a human being, who cares for animals, I said to myself. I have my culture too. It says you don't torture animals. For whatever this was for the black boys, it was torture to me.

The big foetus had come to the white boy who pressed against me in the squash of the car.

Kill it, I said to him. Put it out of its misery.

He slewed me a look.

There's a difference, I hissed, between killing and cruelty. You know that?

It was hard to tell what he knew as he passed the foetus to me.

Hey, hey, said the black boys – in their language, with their furious looks.

No, my face said back, and I held the foetus. I put my thumb and forefinger on either side of its neck and began to squeeze.

The boys watched the animal do a super squirm and shoot its legs out straight. The legs continued to kick.

Sitting opposite me was a chaplain from Melbourne University. He seemed to be paying me the respect of not looking at my hands. He asked my eyes: how's it going, any success?

I changed my grip.

I bent the head back and the neck was like rubber. Unsnappable.

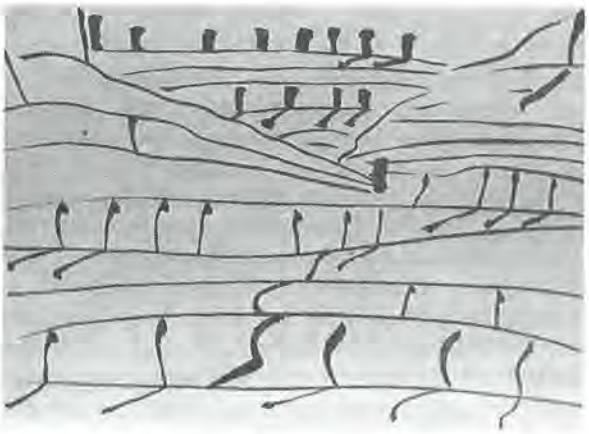
I returned to the steady pressure under the ear, resolved to keep it on all the way home if need be. The other foetus, the tiny one in the black baby's lap, was almost dead. Why wouldn't mine die? Had the black boys pointed a bone at my sweating hand?

No? inquired the chaplain as we pulled into camp.

No, I said, miserable and embarrassed and yet somehow stuck in my 'liberal' resolve.

Welcome, welcome, cried the women. How was the hunt, how was the men's business?

Fine, fine, we white men said, and how was the women's business? For while we were away the black women elders had taken the white women into the fold and told them things. What things? Ah, about women's bodies and so forth – that's all you could say.



The black boys had seen me move away from the bus. I could hear the agitation as the reporting of my theft began. I got to our camp table and put the foetus on the chopping board. But I couldn't find the blasted knife. I was rattling around in a kind of white madness. Ernest strode past and looked at me as if I was certifiable, but he did not interfere with my interference.

The boys – elders beyond them – were coming. I inspected my foetus on the chopping block and saw, at last, that it was very limp, close to death.

Here, I said, here.

They glared and took it and ran off with it.

They would – I was given to understand – play with it some more. Then they might cook it. They might eat it.

Later I looked into the fire, the big communal fire that was cooking *Malu*, and tried to see foetus among the coals. And much later, on that sleepless night, as I lay in my swag under the full moon with the morning star coming up as thick as a witchetty grub, I realised that I would not have behaved like that but for the presence of the two white boys: I felt *culturally* responsible for their view of the hunt. The other complication was the Toyota, and the white man with the gun. What was Aboriginal, or natural, about that? Why shouldn't I butt in?

It took a few days for another point of view to settle in me. While the women were back in camp reflecting on life, the men were off contending with death-in-life. The boys' 'cruelty' with the foetus was their way of laying hands on the mortally unborn, a harsh reality which I had trouble facing. It was possible that a larger scheme of things held existence in balance. Did I owe the black boys an apology? I wondered.

AN ANTHROPOLOGIST with many years in the Centre has written to me about the hunt.

No, you do not owe the black boys an apology! she says.

"I got sucked into your story with a Bosch-inspired zoological garden of baby animals mewing and limping into my memories", and she recounts her numerous experiences of the unborn callously treated. "They forgot to warn you that, despite the trappings of Toyota and .22, *the Malu hunt is bound tight with the Law...*

It was a beaut letter to get. It socialised my ignorance, while at the same time saying, "Look you are entitled to your *gut* reaction, culturally speaking. Cruelty is cruelty – be done with it. Trust in eternal verities."

This is a simple recognition of difference. One should say *felt* difference, which comes from the shock of eyewitness. The history of the New World could be written in terms of 'cruelty'. Todorov's *The Conquest of America*, which gives us the clearest exemplary cases of anointer with the Other when he describes the culture of sacrifice (those pagan, cannibalistic Indians) meeting the culture of massacre (16th century Spaniards with their blood lust, gold lust, and lust). After Todorov we can place 'cruelty' on the altar of our self-consciousness, and see it in terms of *armour* with respect to the Other, and also from the angle of *epistéme*, the knowledge of the Other that is required in order to understand 'cruelty'.

Stephen Greenblatt's magnificent book *Marvellous Possessions*, which should be used as a benchmark for all thinking in the Year of the Indigenous, sparkles in the shadow of Todorov. Greenblatt reminds us that even the exemplary travels towards the Other are preceded by other journeys. Thus Columbus had in his head the narratives of Marco Polo, the documenter of exotic plutocratic powers,

and also the adventures of Sir John Mandeville, who was a less grasping and more fictive imaginer of the Other. Greenblatt's premise is that our history with the Other is very much a history of images, that our narratives constitute our own culture's *mimetic capital*, which circulates and recirculates.

At the same time, though, our histories of the First Encounter spring from something altogether more palpable. This is the experience of *wonder*, the visceral response that is central in the European reaction to the New World. It's the shock – the visceral response – that throws appropriate intellectual considerations out of kilter. Greenblatt gives vivid examples of how wonder gives way to a justifiable shudder of revulsion when Christians witness certain things. This is wonder as a prelude to flight. But at the same time, and in that very moment, avoidance is transformed into approach – as the Christian draws near to what was fearful – in this case, dancing, singing men. "Whenever I remember it, my heart trembles, and it seems their voices are still in my ears", says the witness once he has settled.

William Buckley, remember, had a similar experience when he was discovered by the Watharung tribe. All that singing and dancing about him, the chanting and the naked women, the fires and flickering shadow. Horror, lust and blood lust. A holy terror. He thought he would be eaten – until he realised that this was a welcome dance! Thereafter the force of corroboree registered differently in his memory.

"Wonder – thrilling, potentially dangerous, momentarily immobilising, charged at once with desire, ignorance, and fear – is the quintessential human response to what Descartes called a 'first encounter' ", says Greenblatt. Heightened attention. A sudden surprise of the soul. "At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds", to use Milton's description of the rebel angels as they enter the council chamber of Pandemonium.

In the Year of the Indigenous the question might be: how many of us have met an "Indian"? How many of us have shaken hands with a native man, or native woman? Who has – dare one ask – loved a black man or black woman? In speaking of the reciprocal illumination of one culture by another, Todorov uses the 16th century phrase *making us look into the other's face*, and goes on to speak well of ethnology in helping us do that. I'm not so sure; it's as if the more I travel in Central Australia the less ethnology helps me know my self through the Other, or the Other through me. To make matters worse, I'm not sure why.

MY MOST POWERFUL MEETING with an Aboriginal was with Tony Tjamiwa, an elder at the Mutitjulu Community, which owns Uluru and administers the Uluru National Park with National Parks and Wildlife. It was the meeting with Tjamiwa that moved me to start a book about the Rock and the Park, about the whole contemporary business of travelling to a sacred place, about the experience of pilgrimage towards the Centre and the Other who inhabits 'our' centre.

Tjamiwa spoke in Pitjantjatjara. Our translator was the Mutitjulu Community adviser, Jon Willis. We were in Jon's kitchen out at the Rock, and Tony had just come in from a kangaroo hunt. His T-shirt was splattered with blood.

"...the more I travel in Central Australia the less ethnology helps me to know my self through the Other, or the Other through me."

Bill Harney, Tjamiwa tells me, had it all wrong.

He is of course referring to the first ranger at the Rock, Bill Harney, the man who wrote the legends down, even though he could not speak the local language, and had informants from another place; the Bill Harney many Australians came to like for his yarn-spinning and decent way with people, especially the black man. Bill Harney's ramblings around the Top End were a perambulation with the Other, and spotted as such very early on, when anthropologist Elkin helped him with his first book, *Taboo*, which describes, through real-life stories, the contradictions that define the cultural clash. In those stories Bill Harney writes with a certain wonder that the races are able to get on at all, and one realises, in hindsight, that they were the work of a man who had married an Aboriginal woman he loved.

In the old days, Tjamiwa says, we didn't have government rules because the grandfathers and grandmothers were all here looking after it. It was all spoilt by Bill Harney coming along and seeing it and saying, what a great Rock. Bill Harney came here for the government and looked at this place. Bill Harney rode in a motor car. He came here and thought, My place.

Tjamiwa says that Harney got their stories wrong. Not only that. He was careless with secrets (which makes it impossible today to say which stories were wrong). He never knew anything, he didn't say anything. He was never capable, he was just a child.

He was not an adult, he was a bit of a monster, an evil spirit.

Tjamiwa is speaking of the white man as the Other. And in so doing he is mirroring the classic European response to difference when that difference is felt as threat: he is categorising the Other as inferior – a child, a primitive in human understanding.

Later on we go together into Yulara, the multi-million-dollar resort, whose capital is partly invested in images of the Indigenous in Central Australia. We take coffee at the Red Centre.

There are paintings all around the walls. Tjamiwa is agitated and speaking in his own language. He has his back to the paintings, but you can tell he is referring to them without wanting to look at them.

They are big, crudely drawn kangaroos, childish cartoons in the manner of the McDonald's icon. One big kangaroo has fallen off his bike, with Uluru in the background. The caption reads, Which way to the Rock?

They shouldn't make paintings about the Rock like that, Tjamiwa is saying. It makes it look silly, that's not a real animal, it makes it look stupid. The depth of the offence is clear as he goes on: he is speaking of his own blood, the ancestral bond to the place. He has his head down: they are not to be looked at, these images of profound insult.

On behalf of my culture I feel embarrassed and ashamed, until he looks up. You, he says, are leading your boy in the right way. He is indicating my fourteen-year-old son, who is travelling with me. You are teaching him, he says, the right way. That's how we teach. And if you don't teach him he won't be able to train you.

This in Pitjantjatjara, which neither I nor my son speak. But I am moved and flattered to be addressed thus. It is as if I am moving towards the black man now. And the wonder is that we meet on universal matters of pedagogy: the care of the young, the rearing of our boys. It is a connection he has made out of his culture as I nod, while wondering whether I am reading too much into the union we seem to have at that moment.

ALWAYS THE TENSION for the European is between the analysis that separates and the sympathy that unites. There is the infinite capacity to make distinctions, which is our European signature – to use the language of Canadian anthropologist E. Burridge (*Encountering Aborigines*, 1978) – and the philanthropic urge towards oneness with the Other. Both impulses can assume the form of truth, and the account given of that truth is founded on Logos or on the Incarnation, depending on whether we find Aristotle or Christ in the cradle of our consciousness. One frame of mind accentuates difference; the other seeks to smother it with the embrace of soulfulness. Between these poles you can write the history of colonialism that issued from the First Encounter.

If our consideration is "the discovery *self* makes of the *other*", then there are a few exemplary cases, as Todorov would say. You can quickly slide contemplation of difference onto the stake of inferiority/superiority. Thus the Indian is not only cruel: he is barbaric, a heathen, a mere dog. This is to place him low on the great chain of being, and it only remains for Darwin to validate that in scientific terms (the analytic approach reified) for the mass grave of the indigenous to be widened. Difference is dealt with simply by expunging it.

An alternative is to value difference as an expression of religious order that is a challenge to Christian zeal. One comes to know the beliefs, and the language, of the Other, in order to win souls for Christ. On this model, difference is washed away by baptism, but again the indigenous culture has come to signify insubstantial knowledge, and we have come to nothing but ourselves by knowing it.

There is another way, which might look better at first. This is to exalt the difference absolutely, to so idealise the Other that it becomes the repository of all good things. Romancing the primitive, we compound disillusionment with our own culture. Hence the impetus of Robert Lawlor's *Voices of the First Day*, a book that takes all strands of New Age religion and weaves them into *a* notion of Aboriginal culture.

Lawlor makes *everything* of the religiosity of Aboriginals. "Everything in Aboriginal life", he insists, "defines a world view utterly different from ours yet urgently relevant to our need to transform the way we exist in the world. In this light, aboriginal culture can be considered a guiding code, a seed, for the re-emergence of our tribal soul and primal mind". *Where do we come from?* is Lawlor's great question, which he answers with a unifying myth of our Aboriginal origins. The body of knowledge he draws upon is often our most speculative science. In the section on the earth's magnetism, he links the magnetic fields with Aboriginal sensory powers, sacred knowledge, ritual, and iron in the blood. The mystical unity is akin to Lawrence's blood consciousness, and just as celebratory of primitive powers.

AFTER THE HUNT I hoped to see a corroboree. After all, we were at an outstation in the Mann

Ranges, with an outfit run by the Aboriginals. I had come all that way hoping to see the real thing, but I turned out to be the real thing.

The men were taken aside and told to take their shirts off. And here, a red headband. And then, as you knelt behind a mulga bush – we had been led out of sight of the women – some paint for your chest and shoulders. The paint was ash mixed with water, a greyish line here and there.

One last thing. A spray of foliage. Tuck that in your belt, at the small of your back. Tail feathers.

Now the new emus were ready.

Ilyatjari taught us how to move like an emu.

No, no, this way. Knees higher.

Yes, this way. Bend a bit more.

We mimic him mimicking the great bird of the plains.

That's right, that's right.

Now eight white men, in various stages of identification with a feathered creature. Laughter and solemnity. A strange mix.

Number one emu, Ilyatjari points.

Number one emu.

Who, me?

Yes you, number one.

How about that!

Okay, ready for the show.

All our bird heads turn at this call.

What show?

You are the show.

The clap sticks have started. Over in the clearing a black community is waiting. The women are chanting, the rhythm gaining in tempo, and out we come as emus, our tails to the setting sun. Later, when we had bowed off, we put our shirts back on while proudly leaving in place – a surreptitious pride – our red headbands.

Initiates!

Then it was the women's turn. While we were becoming emu, they were learning the giant lizard's seed dance – the shuffling forwards and sideways, the hands gesturing bountifully, the circular movement echoing the curve of women's breasts.

Most of 'our' women did it bare-topped, their body paint joining them, after a fashion, with the culture of the Other. They were lit by the fire as they danced, flickeringly exposed in their steps towards the Other, and as they did they met the ribald laughter of the older black women, and the enigmatic scrutiny of the black men. The randy reserve of some white men was easy to read, but what was one to make of this whole shemozzle of cultural performance?

IDEALLY, LOVE KNOWLEDGE on that Malu hunt would have consisted of being able to 'be' that kangaroo. The Dreaming would have united me with it. By becoming it on the hunt I would have become more of myself. Thus my unity with creatures...A dream regained...What might become of a man then...?

Yet our culture does not think easily in unities precisely because European thinking does not run that way. Our culture's distinctive cast of mind is to separate from the object in order to *know* it rather than identify with it as subject in order to *understand* it and the larger scheme of things. (The relationship between knowledge and possessive control is a grim one, compared with the way in which understanding speaks of acceptance, tolerance, the wisdom of letting systems be.) Still, it is part of my cultural legacy, my mental power, to be able to think and say this: to monitor my separating self-consciousness, and to yearn as I do for something more binding and bonding.

And so one approaches the Other *epistemologically*.

Out at the Rock, in the Uluru National Park, there are wonderful things happening at the knowledge level. There has been a meeting of cultures in terms of sharing of knowledge about nature. For a decade now there has been the fire management, with CSIRO working hand in hand with local people. No fire rhapsody here, as in Stephen Pyne's *Burning Bush*, an ecstatic dance of connections across a pyromaniac's landscape, but rather the methodical business of listening to each other and planning.

More galvanising to the European imagination is the monumental CSIRO fauna study. Monumental not simply because of its comprehensive survey of animal life in the natural habitat of the park, but because of its inclusion of the indigenous knowledge. From the start, local people were

involved in the field work and the result is a chapter on species and their habitat that is unprecedented in western scientific literature. Hitherto European taxonomies would have been privileged. Here they are on a par with Aboriginal understandings. The result is an exciting introduction to the depth and breadth of Aboriginal perceptions, a display of their powers of observation, and of their 'scientific' knowledge that has supplemented European understandings. We meet meshing ecologies.

To encounter this admirable text, with the Aboriginal chapter sitting there in the middle of it like *Malu* in a wheat field, is to freshly appreciate holistic thinking. For at crucial points in the Aboriginal account of things, an account which has its own story of how animals and plants and birds and topography are interrelated, we meet the point where knowledge yields to belief. For example, in Pitjantjatjara there is a word for kangaroo country. It designates the combinations of terrain and flora that are the best hunting grounds. *Ulpuru*. This is one of several terms people have for habitat that fits their sense of the country, and as such is a subject of great

"Our Culture's distinctive cast of mind is to separate from the object in order to know it rather than identify with it as subject in order to understand it and the larger scheme of things."

interest to us as we seek to enter their full understanding of the place. But *Ulpuru* can only be spoken of to a limited extent. In fact, as a concept it can hardly be explored as we would do it – by going into it, handling it 'objectively', grasping it and passing it on, like some new thing to be shared, our own foetal find. No, *Ulpuru* cannot be approached like that because it is so bound up with the Law that the elders easily fall silent about it. *Ulpuru* is so integral to the sacred scheme of things that it cannot be spoken, at least not to initiates.

In Suzuki and Knudston's laudable *Wisdom of the Elders*, I see there is a chapter called 'A Sacred Law against Laughing at Animals'. The reference is Malaysian, but straight away I thought of Tony Tjamiwa's distress in the Red Centre Resort. There is a whole section on the kinship of humans and beasts, and on the relationship between humans and vegetation. The indigenous teachings range from the Amazon to arid Australia, where the Red Kangaroo Dreaming is described in terms of the relationship between humans and land. The kangaroo material is drawn from the pioneering work by T. G. H. Strehlow, which CSIRO's John Newsome brilliantly applied to ecological understanding about ten years ago – a seminal work for colleagues seeking to meet the knowledge of the Other. Newsome travelled the songlines mapped by Strehlow and found what he felt to be the sacred conception site for the Aranda people. "The ancient Aborigines", he wrote, "who created these legends must have been well acquainted with the ecology of the red kangaroo, and appear to have passed that knowledge into the mythology to be hidden by allegory."

Sharing. Silences. Allegories. Knowledge is like love: its exchange is no simple matter, and on so many borders distinctions blur. Constantly you find yourself neither here, nor there, but somewhere *in-between*.

ON MY MOST RECENT TRIP to the Centre I hardly spoke to an Aboriginal. I am shy of them. I fear to impose, to be there taking, when so much has been abused and plundered. I try to learn the language, then shy away from the opportunities to speak it. Excruciating in-betweenness, even within myself.

There are also the images of exactly what not to be. The glamorous anthropologist David Maybury-Lewis comes to mind. Remember the first episode of the hugely promoted television series *Millennium*, the show that was supposed to put us all on the road to the Year of the Indigenous? Its roots were partly in the good work that Maybury-Lewis did with Cultural Survival, the international agency that seeks to protect today's traditional cultures (the 200 million people throughout the world, 4 per cent of the world population). And the book, of course, bears this out by highlighting the lessons we might learn from particular cultures. If Lawlor does the cosmology and Suzuki the botany, Maybury-Lewis does the ethics of what we might draw from the Other. He gives object lessons in cooperation, austerity, personal identity, the proper relationship between art and life. But on the screen we are dominated by Maybury-Lewis's anthropological project, by images that project a 'great white chief' hellbent on *capturing everything* with his camera. The book's deeper message is the old-fashioned liberal tolerance of difference. The TV series shows altruism defeated by the will to possess, by the European habit of technological intrusion.

I never travel with a camera and am starting to wonder if I should leave my tape recorder at home. Being in-between is a condition of such ambiguous oscillation that conversations with an Aboriginal

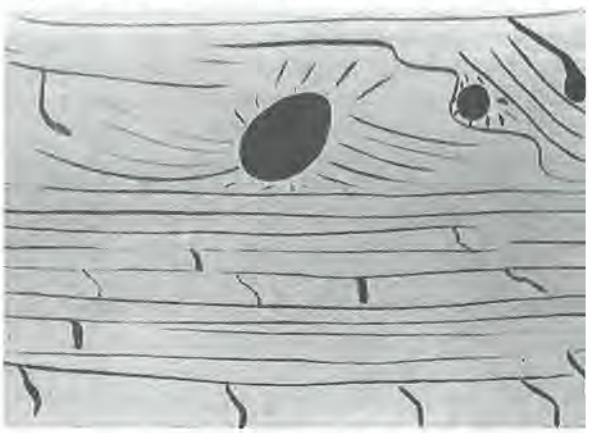
and even conversations with white people about Aboriginals are problematic. There is always so much beneath the surface and so much broken up in the language.

In *Long Time, Olden Time*, the language is broken in telling ways. This – in the text and on the audio cassettes – is the Aboriginal English that grew up with black labour on the cattle stations. Massacre is the theme of this landmark publication, and its mode of communication is a legacy of massacre. The stories are told by those with living memory of bloodshed, and what is instructive, once you get the outline from Peter and Jay Read, is the circuitous form of the Aboriginal narration of bloody family histories. The white person is in a peculiar position as a listener to such stories. Clearly the Reads won the trust of the speakers to get any dialogue at all; and yet at the same time, it's as if the black narrators are talking to themselves, or speaking very quietly, or drawing pictures softly in the sand as they talk – strategies that serve to keep the white traveller at bay, in a permanent state of in-betweenness.

When you are in-between you sense that there is no straightforwardly useful way to go. Thus we can read Jeremy Long's *The Go-Betweens* as an authoritative pioneering history of those government men at the cultural interface: the *Patrol Officers in the Northern Territory Administration 1936–1974*. The anthropologist T. G. H. Strehlow, who became the Territory's first patrol officer in 1936, was thrust into NT politics because the police were making such a brutal mess of native affairs. The patrol officer would be the more responsible go-between for the damaged and misunderstood tribespeople and the pastoralists whose interests the police largely served.

Strehlow knew as much about Central Australian Aboriginals as any man, having grown up with the Aranda people at the Hermannsberg mission. He was fluent in the language and inherited his father's ethnological knowledge of tribal ways. To this extent he could speak for the indigenous people, and yet he had to do other things as well – discipline those who broke the white man's law, for example. But his office had no summary powers; and there was no native police force to step into the ethnic gap either. Strehlow argued for the corporal punishment of the Aboriginal, once the case was explained to the culprit's elders. This was his being in-between the police and them, and between the magistrate (which he was not) and them. Furthermore, in his justification of that corporal punishment he placed himself between the generations of Aranda, supporting the elders in their efforts to discipline the younger men caught between the old and the new orders of indigenous life. Anguish for the sensitive patrol officer consisted in being between so many considerations at once.

Long's history is firm and clear, though incurious about the movement of thought and feeling in a man like Strehlow. It does not reach into the heart of the problem of being in-between. Paul Carter in his two new books goes further. This is because he speaks of theatre, metaphor and the *poetic structure* of the encounter. The body of knowledge we employ with Carter is that of all rebel angels: the living body of the imagination. In key places in both books he explores the non-verbal performances involved in



the first encounters with the Other. One says 'non-verbal' not because there was no attempt to speak with the Other, but because the absence of linguistic understanding reduced words to signs, the body signs that went with incomprehensible speech. These often became mime, or pantomime, as each party moved to display to the Other what might be able to be interpreted.

The burlesque in this department came from Stuart, who thought the old blackfellow in Central Australia was making Masonic signs. Stuart returned them, but their communication was no better for that. Imagine Stuart's confusion had he been required to interpret a corroboree. Carter is memorable in his recounting of contact history with the corroboree. There is Darwin's dismissive comment: "It was the most rude barbarous scene and to our ideas without any sort of meaning." And there was, by contrast perhaps, Flinders' attempt to put on his show for the natives: "when they saw these beautiful red-and-white men with their bright muskets, drawn up in a line, they absolutely screamed with delight..." Carter reflects that the redcoat show was recognised as a contact ritual. The new culture had taught the old culture a new ceremony. Human – humanistic (my terms) – appreciation informed the whole episode.

So an exchange had taken place, with the actors

from both cultures recognising the nature of the particular moment. Interpreted as particulars, the signs could have meant anything. The poetic structure of the moment contained its meaning. That meaning was therefore mobile, provisional. Carter says 'poetic' by reference to Valéry: "Lyric poetry is the development of the exclamation". And Valéry's Zenish dictum: "A flower, a proposition, and a sound can be imagined almost simultaneously". One might say that everything is in the moment as it is lived.

ONE LAST ANECDOTE in a narrative that has no end as long as there are radical cultural differences on the planet. I'm visiting a white man who grew up on a mission station with black kids, who had a childhood remarkably akin to Strehlow's. I'll call him Luke. He's pleased to meet me. He wants to tell me what not to do, what mistakes not to make.

Get rid of the idea of the noble savage, he says, his eyes ablaze. This from the man who has just been telling me what a wonderful childhood he had in his Eden with black friends.

And remember, you can only go this far.

He has held up both hands and interlaced his fingers. The fingers are only partly interlaced.

You can't go this far, he says, pushing the hands fully together. The two cultures tightly joined.

The people who try go mad. They lose their grip, they lose themselves.

The two of us are sober. He used to drink but has given up because of the ravages of drink on the kids he grew up with. Half of them are now dead.

See that there, he says, indicating a dot painting on the wall. That circle is the central image of desert painting. It stands for many things but if you put us here – he has drawn in the dust on his floor – on the outside of the circle, we might get to the point of understanding here.

He has moved inside the first circle.

We might with effort get to here – the second circle.

And maybe, after a lot of time in the language with the people, here. And some, the elders, might even be here. He indicates the sixth circle, where the spiral ends up in itself.

But really, he concludes, we are like children. Most of the time out here.

This from a man who has grown up in the fold of the Other, who has black men and women as his aunts and uncles (though he has not been through initiation).

He's pleased when I express the Buddhist model of patient learning, and suggest that the spiral as a model of experiential learning, where you are in the same place but perhaps on a different step of the path, is something I've been contemplating for years.

Good, he says. Because I can only spend a limited amount of time with them.

How come?

Because they are different. And I'm different from them. A week is about the limit. Each year we go out bush and by the end of that week we're all still friends. It's terrific, but we're also pleased to get away from each other.

Why?

He shrugged, as if I should know.

I don't understand.

All right, he said, we went on this kangaroo hunt. We've got plenty to eat in the camps and we've got a thirty-thousand-dollar vehicle. Kangaroo, OK, they want kangaroo. We roar out through the bush and we get one. We go after it and run it down and it stops. There it is, licking its paws: when they are knackered they stop and lick their paws – like this.

It's just standing there and then we go *boom*. OK, we've got a kangaroo. And a man says, we want another one. But why, I say, why another one? We've got plenty to eat.

Why? I said.

Luke shrugged. I dunno. But we went and shot another one. There was no way we couldn't once that man said, another one.

I don't understand that story, I said, it's got so many levels in it. What are you saying?

He grinned, as if to say: I am not saying anything, but I am pointing to a flower, a proposition, a sound.

Is there more tea?

Yes, there is more tea.

NEW PUBLICATIONS MENTIONED IN THIS ESSAY:

Stephen Greenblatt: *Marvellous Possessions; The Wonder of the New World* (University of Chicago, 1991).

Robert Lawlor: *Voices of the First Day; Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreamtime* (Inner Traditions, 1992).

David Maybury-Lewis: *Millennium; Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World* (Viking, 1992).

Peter and Jay Read (eds): *Long Time, Olden Time* (Institute for Aboriginal Development, 1992).

Jeremy Long: *The Go-Betweens; Patrol Officers in the Northern Territory Administration 1936–1974* (North Australia Research Unit, ANU, 1992).

Peter Knudtson and David Suzuki: *Wisdom of the Elders* (Allen and Unwin, 1992).

Stephen J. Pyne: *Burning Bush; a Fire History of Australia* (Allen and Unwin, 1992).

Paul Carter: *Living in a New Country* (Faber, 1992).

Paul Carter: *The Sound In-Between* (NSW University Press, 1992).

J. W. R. Reid et al: *Uluru Fauna Study* (CSIRO, 1991).

Barry Hills' last book was Sitting In *(Heinemann) and his poem* Ghosting William Buckley *will be published by Heinemann in September.*

MICHAEL HEYWARD

Prelude to Ern Malley

An edited extract from The Ern Malley Affair *to be published in September 1993 by the University of Queensland Press ($32.95) and in the UK by Faber & Faber.*

THE YOUNG MAX HARRIS revelled in notoriety. He led with his chin and thrived on attack. "I am iconoclastical, harsh, scraping other people's sensibilities", he wrote. "There are numerous instances where I've got myself heartily disliked for my outlook and approach. Such offending is inevitable." When his first book of poems, *The Gift of Blood*, appeared in 1940, Harris felt sure the book would "cause hostility, criticism, dislike. I am fully aware of people's reactions before I launch it – but I must publish all the same".

He saw himself as an *enfant terrible*, and made a stir when he gave a talk at Adelaide University on the subject of 'Surrealism, the Philistines and You' in which, "after much preliminary talk on the political and intellectual point of Surrealism and some illuminating remarks on women's dreams, Mr Harris recounted some of the more incredible antics of the Dadaists". The result, Harris boasted, was itself "near Dadaistic. There was uproar on several occasions". His politics were firmly, fashionably left wing. He was a member of the Communist Party for several years. In late July of 1941, Harris suffered the indignity of being tossed in Adelaide's Torrens River by some brawny loyalists – led by Tony 'Tubby' Abbott, a scion of the establishment whose uncle, Charles, was a prominent lawyer and conservative politician – in a brawl over what role students should play in the event of any 'emergency' interfering with the war effort. A product of the final strike-ridden days of Robert Menzies' conservative United Australia Party government which lost office to John Curtin's Labor Party a few months later, the fracas intensified Harris's notoriety but does not seem to have done him too much harm: at the end of 1941 he was appointed to the position of research officer at Adelaide University, which meant that he could continue his studies in economics and would not be called up.

Harris reported to his friend Catherine Caris, a journalist with the *Australian Women's Weekly*, that "this town hates my guts", but he was fond of Adelaide, and kicked around with other young artists: Dave Dallwitz, the jazz musician, Ivor Francis, the painter, Geoffrey Dutton, Donald Kerr and Paul Pfeiffer, all poets. His loyal offsider was Mary Martin but his girlfriend was Yonnie Hutton, a dancer whom he later married. It was natural for Harris to be the centre of attention. One of his party tricks was to silence the room by chanting a witty or satirical rhyming poem about everybody there. He made it up as he went along. He loved poetry for its sensuous, exotic qualities and had great slabs of 'The Song of Solomon' by heart.

Max Harris 1940

"Max Harris is probably the most discussed young poet in Australia today", the blurb for Harris's second book of poetry, *Dramas from the Sky*, modestly asserted. "His work is of the utmost importance among contemporary writing." This was not the opinion of another young poet, Harold Stewart, who reviewed *Dramas from the Sky*, in Sydney in mid 1942. "Most of the verses", he remarked, "are

what a practising poet would call first rough-drafts...There is a fatal facility about all such semi-surrealist verse...any poet of talent could produce a hundred lines of it a week for the rest of his life. Once you get the knack, it is no harder to do than a free-association test." Stewart also complained that the poetry lacked wit: "a good course of epigrams and sense of satire would be of benefit", he advised, and suggested that Harris might be "really quite an intelligible poet...still having occasional lapses. For every now and then, a wicked little bit of an idea, with a very naughty gleam in its eye, peeps around the corner of a phrase and pokes its tongue out when the author is not looking".

By this time Harris was famous for more than his poetry. In 1940 he had announced to an acquaintance that he was "producing a magazine for the university arts association. We intend circulating on rather a larger scale than usual with such undertakings". The comic-surreal name of the journal, *Angry Penguins*, derived from Harris's sequence of poems about the traumas of the Spanish Civil War, 'Progress of Defeat'. Its subtitle was "death is non existent: death is bourgeois", and Section VII began:

> We know no mithridatum of despair
> as drunks, the angry penguins of the night,
> straddling the cobbles of the square,
> tying a shoelace by fogged lamplight.

The image stuck – drunken youths in dinner suits, prowling some European city of the mind by night – and the phrase 'angry penguins' seemed a good deal more surreal in isolation. The patron of the first issue was the retired English professor Charles Jury, a wealthy bachelor who had palatial rooms on North Terrace opposite the Botanical Gardens, where he held literary soirées. The issue led with a fruity piece by Jury in praise of Harris: "he shows boundless promise, and what he has achieved is achieved. Like Troilus, he is very young".

Work by young, energetic painters, many of them – like Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker and Arthur Boyd – from Melbourne, appeared in the pages of the magazine. In 1942 Harris visited Melbourne, where he met John Reed, a lawyer with a Cambridge degree who lived with his wife Sunday at Heidelberg, in the hills outside the city, on a small farm they dubbed 'Heide'. Born into establishment families, each had a private income, and they found their joint vocation in surrendering their time, their house, their lives and their money in the support of new art and writing. Heide was a pocket of rural bohemia on the edge of the suburbs, cluttered with books, wet canvases, manuscripts, fresh eggs and milk, fruit and vegetables just culled from the kitchen garden. Fair and strong-jawed, Sunday Reed was imperious, intuitive, seductive, possessive, generous. John Reed was a good-looking man with dark hair and a determined, compact face. He was well known as an activist for the modern movement, an implacable enemy of everything hidebound in Australian culture. His sympathy, in spite of his upbringing, was with the left: "my life is lived with artists", he once wrote, "nearly every one of whom comes from a worker's or lower middle class family". Harris's friendship with the Reeds flourished. Reed, who was more than ten years older than Harris, became fiercely protective of him. "He may be egocentric, bombastic," he told a sceptical acquaintance, "but it just so happens that if he isn't a genius, he is certainly about as near to being one as Australia has yet produced – and he is only 22."

Sidney Nolan was the working-class artist with whom the Reeds shared their lives most closely. A lithe, slender, handsome man with piercing blue eyes and a narrow, genial face, Nolan was the son of a tram driver. He left school at fourteen and went to work in a hat factory where he made advertising and display stands. For a time he and his wife Elizabeth ran a pie shop. Nolan was an autodidact, a devourer of books, who frequented the great domed Reading Room in the Melbourne Public Library on Swanston Street. He was ambitious, highly gifted, and charming. His transition from factory worker to fully fledged painter was inseparable from his association with the Reeds. He met them in 1938 and went to live with them at Heide in 1941. Their *ménage á trois* was an open secret among the painters and writers of their circle. John was his patron and champion, Sunday his lover and muse. He and Sunday translated Rimbaud together. She bought him his canvases, paints, brushes. Often while he painted in the dining room at Heide she would stand beside him talking to him. He painted for her, put her into his paintings, and gave many of them to her.

From 1943, though Harris continued to live in Adelaide, *Angry Penguins* was produced from Melbourne, designed by Sidney Nolan and financed by the Reeds. Harris was paid a modest salary of £100 a year, less than a private in the Australian Army received, and well below the basic wage. Reed and Harris became co-editors of the magazine (though the influence of Sunday Reed and Nolan was equally significant) and founded their own publishing company. *Angry Penguins* spread its wings. It was the plushest literary magazine in the country. Harris was in touch with the American publisher James Laughlin, founder of New Directions, and through

him obtained work by Dylan Thomas, Robert Penn Warren, and Kenneth Rexroth. The magazine was sympathetic to the ideas of Herbert Read and published his anarchist disciple George Woodcock. *Angry Penguins* also gave attention to the English neo-romantic movement, the New Apocalypse, and printed poetry by Henry Treece, one of its guiding lights and a devotee of Read.

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*"*Angry Penguins *spread its wings. It was the plushest literary magazine in the country"*

THE NEW APOCALYPSE was only a year or two older than *Angry Penguins*. Its first anthology appeared in 1939, including work by Dylan Thomas, Norman MacCaig and Nicholas Moore – though Thomas refused to sign the manifesto. Apocalyptic poets rejected the detached, 'cerebral' verse of Auden and Spender, insisting that a poet's images "should arouse...a massive...response". They went in for an elemental rhetoric of blood, bone, seed, womb, water and earth, derived largely from Thomas and George Barker. Treece's work varied the romantic theme by setting its apocalypse in a fairy-tale world of princes and courtiers, wizards and beggars, harps and runes. The movement drew spiritual nourishment from Lawrence, Kafka and the critical writings of Read. Its politics were a version of anarchism – hostile to the State, in favor of "freedom for man, as a complete living organism", as the devotee George Fraser wrote in 1941. Initiates saw their work as the next, life-affirming step after surrealism. Fraser asserted the poet's right "to exercise conscious control" while agreeing with "Freud's discovery...that it is impossible really to talk nonsense". The difference between surrealism and the Apocalypse was, Fraser wrote, "the difference between the madman, who sits back and contemplates all sorts of strange and trivial relationships, freed from the necessity of action; and a sane man who accepts dream and fantasy and obscure and terrible desires and energies, as part of his completeness".

There was much in Harris's poetry that the New Apocalyptics might approve of, but *Angry Penguins* looked further afield than this British coterie. It ran essays on Baudelaire, Henri Rousseau, Henry Miller; translations of Rimbaud and Seferis; poems by the visiting American servicemen Karl Shapiro and Harry Roskolenko, whom Harris seized on as emissaries from the great, wide world he wanted to conquer. The magazine was hostile to doctrinaire Marxism though it gave debating space to local apparatchiks, and to communist artists like Noel Counihan. There were articles on dance, music, even sociology, with a contribution by the Englishman Tom Harrisson, one of the founders of Mass Observation.

Extending its reach – but not always its grasp – at every opportunity, *Angry Penguin* had found its character by 1943, and Harris defined himself in terms of its activities. He continued to publish in other magazines and took pot shots at other writers. In 1941 Harris attacked Adrian Lawlor, an Englishman in his fifties who had come to Australia in 1910 and soon emerged as a painter, writer and pot-stirrer on the side of modern art. Albert Tucker's wonderful portrait of Lawlor, painted in 1939, shows a bald man with a bell-shaped head, high cheekbones and a crescent mouth. Harris, no minimalist in the way he used language himself, attacked Lawlor's "Tartarean drench of verbosity" in *A Comment* another wartime literary magazine edited from Melbourne but with rather less money than *Angry Penguins*: it was printed on brown wrapping paper. Lawlor replied in the next issue by printing a sound-parody of one of Harris's poems under the title 'The dada Dilly'. He delighted in turning Harris's fragrant abstraction – "may I know you, the faraway sister of time,/dressed in green" – into gut-churning comedy: "may I show you the faraway blister of slime, dressed in gangrene".

But the Angry Penguins could take it on the chin. Among the writers they published was Alister Kershaw, a poet with a sharp tongue who was the same age as Harris. Kershaw fell under the spell of Adrian Lawlor's conversation and identified with his view of the artist as a maverick, accountable only to his own intelligence. He was hostile to the

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"...he primly donned a pair of white gloves before removing a copy of Worker's Voice *from his bag and attacking it."*

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left – "swinish disciples of equality and fraternity", he called them – and to surrealism. He once gave a public performance at Melbourne University where he primly donned a pair of white gloves before removing a copy of *Worker's Voice* from his bag and attacking it. He then read some surrealist poetry – backwards. In 1943, in the introduction to his first book of poems, *The Lonely Verge*, Kershaw attacked the "unending self-abnegatory moan" of

Auden, Spender and Day Lewis, lamenting that poetry had to "celebrate collective farming or vilify the aristocracy" to get printed. Only three modern writers were worth reading: Richard Aldington, Roy Campbell and D. H. Lawrence. "Poetry is a pointing to the essential quick of things", Kershaw wrote, "it is the raging hymn of life", and poets the aristocracy who avoided "cocktail-swilling cretins" and "the imbecile proletariat".

In spite of his loathing of surrealism, Kershaw also wrote apocalyptic poetry of grand effect, indebted to George Barker and abstracted to the point of obscurity. His magnum opus, 'Lands in Force', had appeared in the second issue of *Angry Penguins*. His poems, he said, emerged "from disgust", and his liveliest work was in satire. In September 1943, *Angry Penguins* published 'The Denunciad" in which Kershaw lampooned prominent figures on the local scene. He attacked the bush nationalists as phoneys – "For no rose ever quite so sweetly smelt/Unless at Broome or Alice Springs it dwelt,/And even then it sweeter smells by far/If it's disguised to look like waratah" – and dished it out to the Angry Penguins themselves:

> Around about the 'Angry Penguins' play,
> Cheerfully woeful or morosely gay...
>
> Where Sidney Nolan like a looney don,
> Shows them the canvases he's painted on
> Or – if his art must rightly be defined –
> His blobs of paint with canvases behind...
>
> A point about these pleasant little birds
> Is that their *only* being lies in *words*

Harris thrived on this sort of thing. The same issue of *Angry Penguins* announced the imminent publication, by Reed & Harris, of his first novel, *The Vegetative Eye*. "Its original and vital literary form alone is bound to cause the keenest interest and discussion", the blurb asserted. *The Vegetative Eye* was "a work of sensitive and personal prose, with the haunting images and qualities of Kafka and Rilke", while its author was "already well known in Australia and America as a poet of outstanding powers". The novel would "produce a profound effect on the literary world of both countries".

As chief Angry Penguin, clad in black shirt and white tie, Harris would sweep into the refectory at Adelaide University, an acolyte carrying a pile of books two reverential paces behind him. Educated by the establishment, he was everything a provincial city with tickets on itself loathed and feared and sneered at: a red, an artist, a bohemian. Harris was young enough to want to push things to the brink without being aware how high the stakes were. John Reed, a true child of power and privilege who had thrown in his lot with the likes of Harris and Nolan, understood the risks of brinkmanship. "We are in a position...where we can either influence the course of events quite considerably", he warned Harris early in 1944, "or where, by a single tactical error, we can lose all control whatsoever". He had no idea that two young poets from Sydney were about to make that sentence come true.

I am grateful to Max Harris for permission to quote from his unpublished correspondence; to Alister Kershaw for permission to quote from 'The Denunciad'; to Barrett Reid for permission to quote from the papers of Sunday and John Reed.

Michael Heyward, co-founder of and co-editor of the literary magazine Scripsi *from 1981 to 1989, works as an editor for a Melbourne publisher. End notes have been omitted here. Full references will appear in the book.*

floating fund

BARRETT REID writes: Things were not quiet, as expected, over the Christmas holidays. Manuscripts and letters kept flooding in (I've yet to respond to some). And your indispensable donations kept coming. Remember ALL DONATIONS OVER $2 ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE. From mid-November to mid-February your help totalled $708. Specific thanks to: $74, A.M.; $50, B.J., R.P.; $48, R.M.; $24, J.H., T.M., F.L., L.R., P.O'D., J.McD., M.R.; $20, B.J., G.B.; $14, D.B., B.N.S., J.B., E.D., M.M., J.P., D.R., I.W.; $10, L.D., M.M., L.B., M.W., J.H., D.H., M.C.; $9, M.S.; $5, B.H.; $4, P.R., J.M., M.D., Z.D., P.R., S.MacK., M.K., J.H., B.B., E.W., H.V., M.McL., D.O'S., M.R., E.C., E.M., J.B., H.S., A.M., C.S.; $2, J.S.

on the line

YES, I WAS INVOLVED and deeply concerned with politics and federal political parties' policies during the recent election. Yes, I shared a moment of surprise, even euphoria, at about 9.30 p.m. on election night, even if, in my case, it had always been a case of "defending the bad against the worse." The winning vote for a Keating Government seemed to imply a rejection of a politics based, not on a range of values and beliefs, but on a narrow economic model. And, even then, the model, so wrongly called economic rationalism, was a nonsense as has been argued regularly for some years in these pages. But Keating and Dawkins as much as Hewson and Reith were economic rationalists. Keating, the fast learner from the economists in the Treasury, was the one who introduced deregulation. Has Keating changed his views – really? Or did we see merely some clever packaging by personal staff and cynical and highly skilled crafting by the hasty tasties from ALP advertising?

In small ways on that Saturday night, in the fields I know most about, there were reasons for euphoria. There will not be a tax on books. (The National Book Council ran a superb campaign which attracted a lot of attention and large crowds at a few rallies – during which the Coalition's Senator Baume showed himself to be a bit of a dill.) The Australia Council will not be mortally wounded and the principles of keeping funding at arms' length from government and of peer assessment have survived. The ABC and SBS have escaped the Visigoths, or at least the worst of them, as has CSIRO. The arts found effective voices from all fields to sound the alarm about the Coalition's threat to the Australia Council, most notably in an effective letter drafted by Nadine Amadio and signed by leading artists. Thea Astley, Faith Bandler, Robert Adamson, David Foster, Gwen Harwood and Judith Wright were among the writers who signed and my thanks to them. No thanks to Les Murray, but I'll come to that later.

But right through the election campaign one thing, above all, symbolised the Coalition's values. And, as far as I know, it was never mentioned in the campaign by either Hewson or Keating. The Coalition, persuaded by the National Party, announced that, in government, it would take back the ownership of Uluru from the Mutitjulu Community and give control to the Northern Territory government which had already prepared fast-track development. This, to me, was breathtaking and evil. The Coalition was prepared to destroy a remarkably successful co-operation between the rightful owners and the National Parks and Wildlife administration. Doubtless those who know more than I do could suggest improvements to present arrangements but, on a broad view, it is surely an example of the kind of co-operation between the Aboriginal people and the rest of us which must be developed throughout the country. But it just was not an election issue in the cities.

How limited and trivial and, ultimately how dangerous, are our politics. How brief my euphoria as my thoughts returned to the real world and a whole planet in crisis. What a joke that Hewson kept talking about a world fit for our children and grandchildren as the living planet is being devastated, by both capitalism, socialism and dictatorship, at an alarming rate.

ALP policies as opposed to those of the radical right showed some mild recognition of the crisis but one example shows how inadequate they are. Keating announced new plans to combat the devastation of the Murray-Darling basin. His government plans to plant one billion trees during this decade. But the CSIRO has estimated that *twelve billion* trees are needed to save the basin. One twelfth of an answer, even if carried out, is no answer: the Murray-Darling like so much of the world will continue to die. And no country in no election will make over-population an issue or challenge the beliefs that produce it. And nor, of course, will the United Nations.

So, yes, I'm pleased with the election results but the life-and-death issues are untouched. And the environment will be placed low on the list of priorities for ministries. We will be fobbed off again with the trivial, 'pragmatic' Ros Kelly.

LES MURRAY, in a strategically timed letter published in major newspapers, proposed the abolition of the Literature Board. It was a very odd business. He proposed that authors should be given, instead of grants made by the Board on the advice of peer assessment groups, something he called royalty supplementation. "Under this the government would simply give every author the difference between the royalty paid them by their publisher and the list price." Say that again! Why pay an author that share of the full price that goes to the printer, the publisher, the bookseller? Is this logical? And did he mean every author of textbooks, best-sellers?

Mr Murray takes a conspiracy theory view of peer assessment. Sure the method, being human, makes mistakes, overlooks some fine talent, over-rewards some authors. But intentionally and with malice aforethought by some literary cliques? Come off it. Mr Murray's theory cannot run, it is a horse of

hot air. He claims that over the past fifteen years the Board has been biased against Christopher Koch and Mark O'Connor. Shapcott's *The Literature Board; a Brief History* which records grants to 1985, shows that O'Connor got fellowships in 1982, 1983 and 1985; Koch received fellowships in 1982, 1983 and 1984. Between 1974 and 1984 Koch had eight grants or fellowships; between 1973 and 1985 O'Connor had six. Les Murray, himself, has deservedly received much more financial support from the Board than most writers: $500,000. Over twenty years that is a bare wage for the writer who, Peter Porter believes, could win the Nobel Prize for Literature. But Mr Murray does not need Literature Board support now. He has moved on to the lucrative 'Keating' Fellowships, a fitting support for his poetry. Sucks to the Board which helped him so consistently.

Prior to the election the federal government paid rare homage to Mr Murray. The Justice Minister, Senator Tate, invited the poet to advise on the drafting of a new pledge of commitment for citizenship. The poet is reported to have suggested the following:

> Under God, from this time forward I am part of the Australian people. I share in their democracy, in their freedom. I obey their laws. I will never despise their customs nor their faith. And I expect Australia to be loyal to me.

Under God! Whatever happened to the separation of Church and State? How would this form of pledge have been viewed by the nearly two million Australians who state they have no religion? And what customs and what faith exactly? Senator Tate, who like the poet and this magazine aspires to a republic, sensibly called for further drafting and turned out something more legislatively correct. Sadly, it didn't have the style provided by the "member of the mystical branch of the Country Party."

THE PREVIOUS Keating government supported by the Opposition (Immigration Minister, Gerry Hand, Coalition spokesman Philip Ruddock) refused the British historian David Irving a visa to visit Australia. Irving has become notorious in many countries for denying the Holocaust, for saying that Auschwitz, Bergen Belsen, Buchenwald and Dachau did not happen as the survivors remember them. His views are contemptible, an aid to contemporary neo-Nazi propaganda, affronting the practice of history by ignoring the Nazi's own archive material and would, if repeated in speeches in Australia, cause great distress in Jewish communities, particularly among the now elderly survivors of the concentration camps. His speeches will be supported only the League of Rights and similar lunatic fringes.

Nonetheless banning Irving is an outrage in a democracy in which freedom of speech, of thought and opinion is the most central of values, to be curbed only for overwhelming reasons of public safety and security and then only temporarily. This ban defiles our democracy and the long history of struggle which led up to it, that struggle in which, as Milton wrote in *Areopagitica*, "tolerance even of intolerable error" is a prime value. This ban must be rescinded. Irving should be allowed entry to Australia, allowed to make his speeches, and should be charged if he breaks the law. The process has been followed in Germany. In January a Munich court squashed Irving's appeal against a 1992 conviction and tripled his original fine. The court called Irving a stubborn advocate of the "Auschwitz lie".

I agree with Dr Jacques Adler, of the Department of History, University of Melbourne, who believes in freedom of speech and in no such freedom for free-speech enemies. Dr Adler was quoted in the Melbourne *Age* as saying "It was a great mistake to ban him. We have given him a platform".

The Council for Civil Liberties has protested vigorously against the ban. There have been some protests from some individuals. The political parties have remained silent. Does the Left now protest only when it suits its practical politics of the moment and never on principle? Does the Left have such a short memory that it forgets the intense struggle against the banning of the Czech writer Egon Kisch in 1935? The conservatives banned Kisch because his speeches would upset Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Tens of thousands protested against that ban, in city after city. Now the people lie in stupor as if democracy was a matter for politicians not for them.

RONALD MCCUAIG (1908–1993) died in Sydney on 1 March. He has been called the first voice of modernism in Australian poetry. Younger readers and writers have tended to ignore McCuaig until recently, depriving themselves of a lot of pleasure. This column paid tribute to him last year and, I am glad to recall, his recently published *Selected Poems* (Angus & Robertson, $14.95) was given proper notice by Kevin Hart in our last issue. Last year the NSW Literary Prizes honored with a Special Award.

Ronald McCuaig worked for many years as a journalist and, as fiction editor of the *Bulletin*, was important in recognising and promoting the talents of Hal Porter and Ethel Anderson. Ronald McCuaig died with praises at his feet and with his poems in print.

WE HAVE LOST the editorial assistance of John Jenkins due to increased pressures on him from the work he is paid to do. This is a blow. And John tells me it is a blow to him also. Come back, John, we miss you, even your jokes. So for special assistance donated at short notice I must thank Michael Dugan, Margaret Barrett, and Stephen J. Williams.

Barrett Reid

Nancy Keesing, 1923–1993

The death of Nancy Keesing in Sydney on 19 January was a profound loss to Australia. She was a rare spirit both as a writer and as one who did more than most, often very quietly, to maintain and invigorate civilised values. For many, many people, including myself and most on the Overland Board, of which she was an active member for many years, until her final illness, her loss is very keen. *Overland* will miss her forthright integrity, her wide-ranging sensibility which always seemed to be growing and welcoming new things, her humor, and her use. For Nancy, above all, wished to be of use and had the sensitivity to emerging needs, the care of the past and the hope for the future of our literature, which made her, formidably, someone who helped fine things grow. And we miss her laughter. A Sydney writer wrote to me: "It is a very hard thing to lose Nancy Keesing and Tom Fitzgerald." Yes. They epitomised the most civilised values. We had been in touch with

Nancy's husband Dr Mark Hertzberg during her long illness, and have the deepest sympathy for him and his family in their great loss.

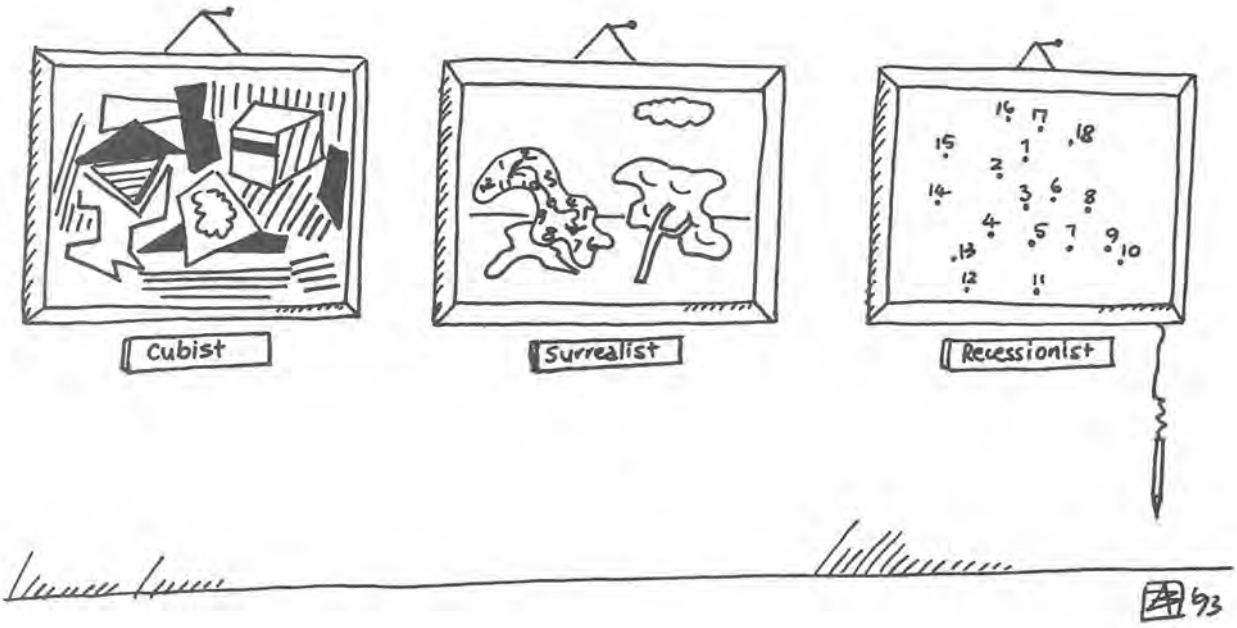
Sadly the fine printer and painter, Rod Shaw (1915–1992) also died a month earlier. Nancy helped create the publishing co-operative Lyre Bird Writers, and Edwards & Shaw, printed her

first book of poems *Imminent Summer* (1951) under that imprint. A copy of this book, inscribed by Nancy, is at my elbow now. She went on to write and edit many books including, with Douglas Stewart, that major and pioneering book *Australian Bush Ballads* (1955), still a standard work. A copy of this is also by me, also inscribed. How generous she was. The companion volume *Old Bush Songs* followed in 1957.

I suppose Nancy became more widely known when she followed Geoffrey Blainey in the chair of the Literature Board in July 1974. She was one of the eleven founding members appointed by Gough Whitlam to the Board in 1973. I served on the Board during Nancy's four-year term and it was in this working situation that I got to know her better. It was a Board which had glittering talents – Elizabeth Riddell, David Malouf, Tom Shapcott, Richard Walsh amongst them. I, and a little later, John Bryson were among the lesser lights. We may have been seen, by some, as 'outsiders'; Nancy sensed this, said nothing, but unobtrusively and with humor made sure we got our say. She looked at the matters before us without fear or favor, she had a great gift for seeing new talent. We did not share some judgements, of course, but I saw that not only did she understand really hard work, and the detail of it, but she was a model of honest dealing.

She wrote about those years, and much else of interest, in her fine autobiography *Riding the Tiger* (1988). Few autobiographies can be so entertaining as well as informative. Her benefactions, and those of her family, are many, and mostly very private. For example, her financial support allowed travel and time for the editing of an anthology of Australian writing from non-English backgrounds. In 1985 Nancy took out a 75 year lease on a writer's studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. It is named the Keesing Writers' Studio in honor of Nancy's parents and the results of residences there are already appearing on our shelves. Elsewhere proper tribute will be paid to her work for the A.S.A. and its journal the *Australian Author* which she edited 1971–74, the National Book Council, Jewish historical and cultural organisations, and so much else. We at *Overland* think of her as a remarkable colleague, a tough, warm, and laughing friend, a giver. And I keep a few of her lesser-known poems very close. There is something uncanny about them.

Barrett Reid



Bev Aisbett

JOANNA MENDELSSOHN

Menzies and Mentors

On page 198 of *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* [Reviewed in this issue. *Ed.*] Judith Brett writes:

> I have not so far found a contemporary who claims to have known Menzies intimately. John Bunting, of whom Alexander Downer says, 'I am sure of all the people in Menzies' life, he regarded Bunting as one of this closest friends', did not so regard himself. He writes that Menzies had no "universal friendships, by which I mean friendships for all purposes".

One of the problems with specialist research is the way people stay in their allotted compartments. In this case the political biographer from Melbourne, researching papers in Canberra, is unaware of published art biography from Sydney based in part on papers in Melbourne[1]. In *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* there is no reference to Lionel Lindsay, James McGregor or Frederick Jordan, yet Menzies appears in numerous references in their voluminous papers as a trusted friend. It is clear that this small group of men from Sydney's conservative intelligentsia provided Menzies with encouragement and support. The best record of Menzies' 'human face' is the correspondence between Robert Menzies and Lionel Lindsay, lodged away from the other Menzies papers in the La Trobe Library[2].

It was placed there because the La Trobe was where Daryl and Peter Lindsay had placed the bulk of their family papers. For one so conscious of his own importance, Robert Menzies was curiously deferential in the presence of the Lindsays, but there was perhaps another reason. These letters are decidedly frank on both sides. Lionel wrote constantly about his passions and opinions of a maverick, conservative kind. He was not a 'safe' official correspondent. When Daryl Lindsay wrote to Menzies suggesting that his brother's letters be published the reply was cautious:

> Before you proceed very far you had better have in mind the laws of defamation because dear Lionel always spoke his mind and some of the people referred to might still be alive. I think some legal advice will be called for on this matter.[3]

But as well as intemperate advice, Lionel Lindsay gave Robert Menzies a constant stream of nurturing support. Every move he made, every political action he took, was endorsed without reservation. On 10 December 1941, after Menzies lost the Prime Ministership, Lindsay wrote:

> Now after the base and ungrateful actions of your party I wonder if you are not a little disillusioned... It seems to be the destiny of every man who tries to do some little good, and the right thing, to pay for his temerity.[4]

Bob wrote to Lionel of his hatred of Warwick Fairfax and modern art, and confided political secrets. He wrote less often than Lionel (no one could outwrite a passionate letter writer like Lionel Lindsay unless it was his brother Norman) but when Menzies wrote he was confident that whatever he said would be read by no one except his trusted secretary and the recipient's family.

There was another reason for Menzies' closeness to this family. The Lindsays came from Creswick, the home town of Menzies' mother. Lionel Lindsay was the small town boy made good, the adventurer artist turned respectable, a triumph for the values of the Protestant ascendancy. Like the valorised 'forgotten people', he had earned his money through hard work and thrift.

All through the 1940s Robert Menzies was a frequent visitor to Lionel Lindsay's home. Whenever he was in Sydney he would go to Wahroonga and there, in the kitchen, would talk to Jean as she made the meal, and join in Lionel's "divine and disordered conversation"[5]. It was therefore understandable that when Menzies' again secured the leadership of the United Australia Party, he should confide in Lindsay with an almost boyish gloat that would have been political suicide if his colleagues had known [*see below*].

After Menzies' electoral triumph of 1949 Lionel Lindsay joined him as the first official guest to stay overnight at Kirribilli House. The friendship continued, but the Prime Minister had less time than the exile. In 1959 the Prime Minister flew Lindsay to Toowoomba in a VIP plane where he performed the official opening of the Lionel Lindsay Art Gallery, and in 1961 he was one of the final visitors as his friend lay dying. One of the last pieces Robert Menzies wrote was the introduction to the 1974 catalogue of Lionel Lindsay's prints[6]. The cover shows the wood engraving, ***Lethe's Wharf***. The subject is death and forgetfulness.

In 1940 Lindsay made Menzies two bookplates, both wood engravings. One shows the symbols of the official Menzies with barrister's wig, port, despatch box, and the Declaration of War. The other is more intimate: a small boy is fishing for a king's crown. It was a gift of affectionate irony, honoring his friend's imperial ambitions, but recognising their futility.

The correspondence between Menzies and Lionel Lindsay starts in 1940,

with Lindsay addressing Menzies as "My Dear Bob", and sometimes "My Dear Prime Minister", but "My Dear Bob" prevails as the standard form. Menzies in turn called him "My Dear Lionel", and on occasion "Lionello", which was Christopher Brennan's favored name for his friend. Lindsay's letters were written by hand, while Menzies' were dictated to the faithful Miss Lenihan. But usually Menzies wrote the initial salutation in his own hand. The surviving copy of this letter is Menzies' carbon copy, without handwritten additions.

THE MENZIES LETTER

13 October 1943

A politician's conscience is, I suppose, not a very animated thing, otherwise I should blush from shame every time I see another of your delightful letters and am thereby reminded of those that have preceded it and have not been answered. But I shall not occupy your time by apologising, for I imagine you know by some strangle telepathy that your letters do reach me and provide always one of the bright incidents of life.

I propose to be in Sydney on Friday and Saturday and might even with a little fortune meet you at Jim's or failing that, go out on Saturday to see you at home. What is needed after the recent election debacle is another meeting of our little group around a friendly table so that I may get things in proportion once more.

You would have been delighted if you could have been hidden under a table in the Party Room the day the leadership was determined. Billy Hughes had been warned by two of his ardent supporters that his number was up and that he must not be a candidate for the leadership. The little man made his own enquiries and found that this was right and so came to the meeting wearing a resigned and almost saintly air. Meanwhile, I had decided that if our misalliance with the Country Party was to continue with a Joint Leader I would not be a candidate. Billy had probably been informed of this.

His opening gambit at the meeting was characteristically shrewd. He said: "Gentlemen, the first question to be decided is whether we continue our joint arrangement with the Country Party. If we do I shall be happy to continue as your Leader and as Deputy Leader of the Opposition. I think we should continue this arrangement. But if you disagree with me on that point so that the Leader of this Party becomes the Leader of the Opposition I shall not be a candidate.

As the Parliamentary journals say — 'debate then ensued'. I entered a caveat against this in a few well chosen words! One of my supporters then (at least I think he was) offered to move an amendment of a highly sentimental kind, favouring an approach to the Country Party for the purpose of bringing about a complete merger not only of the Parliamentary Parties but of the organisations outside. This unreal but dazzling prospect of unity appealed at once to some of the elder brethren, the result being that within half an hour there were before the Chair the original motion and at least three amendments, with most speakers clutching at the idea that the issue of leadership might be evaded or postponed by opening up the indicated agrarian discussion. As you probably know, the most popular device in politics is postponement. I allowed the confusion to develop, holding my fire till the very last moment. Billy in the chair was incredible. His grasp of procedure has never been very great and the task of determining what order and how you put it to a meeting of reasonably talkative men a motion, an amendment, an amendment on the amendment, and an amendment on the amendment to the motion proved entirely beyond him.

For once I was sensible and did nothing to extract him from the tangle, having a vague idea in my mind that his claims to lead an outnumbered Party in the hurly burly of Parliamentary debate were rapidly fading.

Finally the old boy came to some conclusion and proceeded to put some sort of upside down question to the meeting. At this stage I rose and said that Members had remembered everything except the clock; that it was then half past three in the afternoon; that Parliament was meeting the following morning, and that at 10.30 on that morning somebody would have to rise in his place as Leader of His Majesty's Opposition; that the pious aspirations for a merger with the Country Party could not be translated into practical result in anything less than months of negotiations because at least a dozen organisations, each with its own structure, finance and political ideas would have to be consulted. From this it was easy to point out that the Country Party would of course agree to commence the negotiations, and would then stipulate – very reasonably – that while

Bookplate by Lionel Lindsay

the negotiations were being conducted the leadership and deputy leadership of the Opposition should remain with Fadden and Hughes; and that time would then begin to run as always in politics in favour of the status quo. I pointed out that a majority of those in the room must recognise that after our recent drubbing the continuation in office of our election leaders would be hailed with shouts of ridicule and that the public would never take us seriously again.

I then indicated that I proposed to vote against all the questions then before the Chair and that when they were defeated I would move (quite contrary to the sense of the debate up to that stage) 1. that the U.A.P. should revert to the system under which the majority Opposition Party had the leadership of the Opposition; 2. that the Party should forthwith proceed to choose a Leader who should be the Leader of the Opposition; and 3. that such Leader should be authorised to take the appropriate steps towards the establishing of combined Opposition forces.

You will be highly amused, though it would add nothing to your knowledge of human nature, when I tell you that they promptly threw out their own amendments and motion with gusto and unanimously passed mine. Candidates were then asked to announce their existence by standing. Overcome by our natural modesty, T. W. White, Allan McDonald, Percy Spender and I rose. There were 26 votes and the choice was to be by exhaustive ballot, a system under which the candidate receiving the smallest number of votes on the first count drops out and Members vote again until some one candidate has an absolute majority. The figures were not announced but on the first count I had 13 out of 26, and Spender had 2, McDonald and While dividing the rest between them. Spender then dropped out and I was elected.

My first business in the Chair was to conduct an election for Deputy-Leadership. Various Members rose as candidates and I was just having their names recorded when I noticed that the 79 year old 'Little Digger', whose qualifications as an up and coming understudy to a leader are not obvious, was himself in an erect posture on my left. I thought he was just adjusting his hearing apparatus and quite light-heartedly said to him "You are not submitting yourself are you?" to which he replied with a diabolical gleam in his rheumy old eyes: "Oh, yes brother; for the Deputy-Leadership certainly brother." the effect of this announcement was cataclysmic. One by one the other aspirants fell away, with the result that Billy was unanimously elected, and I have as my deputy in the great work of regenerating a Party and enlivening a political Opposition an old gentleman, all of whose dynamic force is used retrospectively. But of course the point is that it means that he still had his secretary and his typist and his masseur and his seat on the War Council and what happens to the political cause with which he is associated does not matter very much.

However, you will see in all this a few gleams of light which I may perhaps be able to work out into a very reasonable picture when I next see you, which I hope will be very soon.

[1] The information in this article and the attached Menzies letter were first published on page one of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 July 1987, 'Politics the Menzies Way'. The article was subsequently cited in the entry on Menzies in the 1988 edition of the *Australian Encyclopaedia*. I also discussed the friendship between Menzies and Lindsay in *Lionel Lindsay: An Artist and His Family* (Chatto & Windus, 1988).

[2] La Trobe Mss 10375

[3] La Trobe Mss 10375 15 August 1973

[4] La Trobe Mss 10375/22

[5] Menzies' description of Lionel Lindsay's speech quoted p. xii Peter Lindsay's introduction to *Comedy of Life*, Lionel Lindsay's autobiography (Angus & Robertson 1966).

[6] Ballarat Fine Art Gallery 1974

Joanna Mendelssohn lectures at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales.

[Judith Brett responds:
John Bunting comments on Menzies' friendships that they were in compartments, although these compartments did include friendships, such as the one with Lionel Lindsay, in which there was a great deal of affection, enjoyment and camaraderie on both sides. It did not seem to me, however, when I was researching the book, that Menzies' relationship with Lindsay was so different in kind from some other of Menzies' friendships that I needed to re-evaluate my argument; namely that Menzies was a man acutely sensitive to hierarchies of male power, and that this inhibited him in the sympathetic sharing of his doubts and vulnerabilities, as well as his achievements and triumphs. This ability to share I consider to be a central criterion of any intimate friendship. Lionel Lindsay provided unquestioning support and encouragement to Menzies, as well as being an enthusiastic audience for his candid and often cruel views of others, but is this enough to characterise the friendship as intimate? I did not think so. I recognise, however, that people may operate with different criteria of when a relationship is a deep and intimate friendship, and some may well want to describe as such Menzies' relationship with Lindsay. I did not.]

ELEANOR MASTERS

Equal Pay; An Early Aberration

[In 'On the Line' *Overland* 129, I recalled Muriel Heagney's leadership in the long fight for equal pay for women, finally achieved under the Whitlam Government in 1974. But there were, of course, some earlier sporadic examples of equal pay. One of our readers got equal pay – for a time! Ed.]

Late in 1942 it became necessary for the GPO in Melbourne to recruit women for letter sorting in the mail room.

I was one volunteer. We were put through a training course in a room, I think, in the Rialto.

We had to pass a test sorting within a set time a large number of letters for delivery throughout Victoria. We then became Exempt Mail Officers, Grade 2.

In a short time, we found ourselves with equal pay. My impression was that the DLP was most unhappy, but mindful of the pitfall of having first class officers on a lesser wage when war ended.

Returning men, however, shunned the mail room – they could find work in better jobs. So we were sorters for about eleven years.

In 1949 Menzies was voted in and, in time, rescinded equal pay. However, those who had won equality won the right to retain it. New female recruits were paid at the new formula rates.

And so, to the DLP's quiet delight, we had the spectacle of two female officers working together – same job – different pay.

It took the government about two years to retrench us in batches and, as the last batch clocked off, there was a notice posted above the time clock requiring (compulsory) overtime to be worked.

MAX TEICHMANN

The Chomsky Film

THE NOAM CHOMSKY FILM and television mini-series has come and gone, leaving a fair measure of dissatisfaction, among some of us at least, and feelings of an opportunity missed. Those not familiar with Chomsky's writings would be tempted to dismiss him as just another American guru, deeply into monologues and the big clichés, paranoid about being interrupted when he himself interrupts; at his easiest when laying down the certainties to voluntarily captive political groupies of all nations. But Chomsky is more important than that. Like Wright Mills before him, he keeps hammering at the secret government of America, if not of the world. *That is*, the military-industrial complex and its organic allies, the CIA and FBI, the monolithic media, and the basically quiescent, and totally bought political class.

Just consider – where else but in Soviet Russia would the recent head of the CIA actually be made the President? Like having made J. Edgar Hoover the President. Again, *consider* taking a politically and culturally illiterate ham actor, locked into the McCarthyite gang in Hollywood, spying for the FBI on his colleagues from 1943 – when others were fighting – a leader of the program against the gifted radicals of that industry; and grooming him first as Governor of a great State, then, following upon a right wing takeover of the Republicans, *President* of a great country! Even then it took the traitorous deal with the Great Satan Khomeini to keep the US hostages locked up until after the Presidential election, to ensure that Reagan won.

But apropos this political class, represented by Presidential and Congressional worthies, Ross Perot was the tip of an iceberg of widespread disillusionment. Next time round it's going to be much harder to roll back mounting public distaste with the cynical charade Chomsky considers American democracy. It's going to need a whole succession of media fed and led little wars and interventions to maintain the obligarachy, which, as Gore Vidal pointed out, has controlled America since the 1830s.

CNN is going to be very busy, so will its Australian outlets. We will be able to see mass murder, all in a good cause, from the vantage point of our living rooms. Anueran Bevan wrote that with time we would be able to watch one another starving to death on our television sets (*In Place of Fear*, 1959). Were he alive today, he would add, watch ourselves polluting one another to death, and watch mass murder in the name of democracy, the United Nations, and the defeat of wickedness.

Chomsky has divided his activities between monitoring the continuous succession of imperial interventions, manipulations and phoney crusades of his government; the smothering of any semblance of an authentic national or individual consciousness by the fabrication of an entire dream world, into which reality rarely intrudes, and self-knowledge has no place, *for* the residents of America, from cradle to grave. His may be an old idea, but it deserves repeating and refurbishing – probably *ad infinitum*. Chomsky does it by disinterring the enormous number of important events, often shameful and horrendous, which are never reported. He then details the ways in which events and processes which *are* reported and described have been reinterpreted out of shape, or sanitised to the point of meaninglessness. It sounds like ploughing the sea for Noam – but what else can he, or one, do? Wait for the Tall Ships Mark II?

Chomsky admits that to make sense of things one needs an enormous amount of time and substantial resources, which most people don't possess; even assuming that they had the inclination to look under the surface to reality, beyond appearance. It is a central concern of mass media and virtual one-party States that people *don't* acquire that inclination – the taste for truth. If they *do*, and seek to propagate it, they are censored, where possible, and marginalised. Like the Savage in *Brave New World*.

Meantime, Chomsky, among others, continues to pile up evidence of the doings of the Imperialists, the intelligence Super State, and the noxious activities of the media empires – but very few of the world's people will even know of it. What other alternative does Chomsky see? When asked, that seeing democracies are useless because *still* unrealised, and Communism has been a comprehensive failure, what is *his* alternative...he gives the orthodox Anarchist answer. States are instruments of power and violence – the bane of our lives – and small voluntary anarchist communities are the solution. So we finish up somewhere before Marx – maybe like the Levellers. I think this is a non-answer, after what he has said about the power of the ruling élites, and how they *refuse* to let us alone.

Incidentally Chomsky would be impressed by the Australian situation, with 90 per cent of the print media owned by foreign right-wing entrepreneurs and, at least until some recent property shifting, 90 per cent of the magazine market in the hands of two men, one a foreigner by choice; eleven of the leading publishing houses owned by multinationals, and Channel 10 being switched to CNN as part of the coming daily global propaganda, via satellite from America. *And* the first 24 hour commercial television station in Russia is half owned by CNN. Comrades, the clock stands at five to one.

"...Chomsky...continues to pile up evidence of the doings of the Imperialists, the intelligence Super State, and the noxious activities of the media empires – but very few of the world's people will ever know of it."

As a friend remarked when I started this: history has always been a dicey business, with gaps, excisions, incisions and changing interpretation; but from now on it's going to be next to impossible, especially contemporary history. The amount of material kept in secret files; the 30 year and 50 year rules; the cosmic unreliability of newspaper records, what with all the secret funding of newspapers and journalists, (although Reuter always received an annual grant from the British Government – nothing new); the shredding; the use of the lie as a normal mode of speech, is making finding the truth an increasingly arduous task – and dangerous, if you try digging into BCCI for example. So more power to the pestiferous, sometimes tedious Chomsky – an honored member of the Diogenes Club.

The Middle East

AS THE LETHAL CLOWNING between Iraq and America drags on, another far more momentous drama is being cooked up in Iran – the Muslim

anti-Christ before Saddam. (Whatever happened to Ghaddafi, Arafat and Nasser?) Arms of every kind are being poured into Iran from the West, including America. As *The U.S. News and World Report* said, (*Sun Herald* 29.11.92), "Iran is busily pursuing the same nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles and other modern military technology that Saddam Hussein craves". In fact, *craved* and got, until the day he invaded Kuwait. *And* chemical and bacteriological weapons. Iran is getting nuclear reactors, uranium separation equipment and is building twenty-three new airports. She is also seeking germ weapons. Bush announced a 'secret' diplomatic offensive to halt this trade, but no more has been heard of it. US business interests are lobbying against restrictions, and the Commerce Department has supported the lobbies for the last two years. Meantime, Israeli and American military analysts are saying Iran could have nuclear weapons before the decade is out, and Iran could be the dominant power, and, if she wished, a major threat in the Middle East.

Just exactly what is going on? Iran is the leader of the Islamic fundamentalists and Shiite expansionism. She backs Hamas and the really off-color terrorist groups. She, along with Syria, was certainly involved in the Lockerbee affair. Iraq was armed up, at great profit to the arms industry, to destroy her (admittedly we kept secretly dealing with and selling arms to Khomeini and Co to avert that). Three possibilities offer themselves. First we plan to set Iran onto Iraq to finish it off. But America can do this herself, any time, and *we* fear a Greater Shiite Iran. Alternatively, we expect Iran to mellow and become a friend of the West; perhaps even a tame or secularised buddy. A counter to the Saudis. Really? But following from that, could a pro-Western coup be in the oven? Thirdly, Iran is being set up, just as Saddam was, for yet another US–UN Military colonialist pogrom, in which the rising movements of fundamentalism in some other countries will be dealt with at the same time; by one means or the other. If you like, "if we crush Nasser (Suez), the Arabs will go to ground, and we can enjoy their oil in peace. And the French continue ruling N. Africa." Or, "if we crush Ghadaffi, or Saddam, we remind the Arabs who's boss; and we can enjoy the oil in peace." Iran and Fundamentalism may be the next blockbuster. The world is becoming like an enormous film lot for staging C. B. de Mille movies. Only the extras really *are* butchered, the countries *really* laid waste, and the heroes and heroines are looking and talking more like members of the criminal classes.

At any rate, the Crusade industry, the arms industries and the intelligence systems of the West, so threatened by the end of the Cold War, are doing better and better.

It might be wiser to step outside the immediate Middle East, forget the current hackings and gougings of the contemporary players, and the essentially parochial feud between the Jews and neighboring Arabs. (Though *they* wouldn't agree, and at times some have felt it was worth a world war.) But let us look at the region and its history.

The peoples of the Middle East and North Africa have been screwed into the ground for centuries with foreign rulers or puppet rulers imposed on them. If they kicked up, they were dealt with.

"The Crusade industry, the arms industries, and the intelligence systems of the West, so threatened by the end of the Cold War, are doing better and better."

Thus Churchill as Colonial Secretary in the 1920s, ordered the gassing, including the mustard gassing, of rebellious Iraqi Kurds. Also in Iraq, young Bomber Harris was first allowed to try out village destruction, by bombing, to teach the native fanatics a lesson. Good practice for Hamburg and Dresden. Nasser, I am told, was the first Egyptian to govern Egypt for a thousand years.

The poisoned chalice for the Arabs was the discovery of oil in *some* of their territories. After that, the departing Turks were immediately replaced by British, French and, as the natives became restive, the Americans. They have been exploited and put down ever since, and will continue to be. Israel was the Grand Distraction, the meat in the sandwich; and eventually chose a side – the one *not* committed to driving her into the sea. This fateful choice has been very bad for Israeli society, but...but... another argument, another time.

The maldistribution of the great wealth in the Arab world, with the bulk going to the foreigners, or to their *own* shonky Western-supported rich, has long set Arabs looking for leaders and a unifying faith or picture, to reclaim their own world. Democratic or Socialist or Liberal regimes or ideas were repugnant to the West, which preferred reactionary corrupt sheiks needing their support against their own subjects, or megalomaniac military bosses who could be played off against one another, while being sold arms. A popular secular movement like Mossadeq's in 1951 was anathema. For one thing he nationalised the oil. He had no claims against anyone, no quarrels with anyone. Naturally, he was destroyed by the CIA, the Shah restored, a fearsome political police created with the help of Mossad and the CIA; so that in the end Iranians turned to Khomeini.

If all possible middle-ground nationalists are opposed by the West, the Arabs must turn to fundamentalism, as people of Central and South America turned to Marxism, Shining Path, etc., when social democratic and even Conservative Nationalists were knocked off or bought by outsiders.

This cruel Middle Eastern game could go on almost indefinitely and the earlier pretext, the Cold War, is gone. Another demon, Fundamentalism, is being created. But basically we are back to the bare-faced Realpolitik of the Colonial Twenties. Come the electric car.

I'D LIKE TO MULTICULTURAL YOUR ACQUAINTANCE

I wanna be your bagel baby
yiros souvlaki too
how about a little spanakopita?
I wanna croissant with a meat pie
I don't want to blue with you roo
I want a falafel
I'm irish stew
I want to bolognaise your borsch
don't be a sauerkraut mate
I want to be a palooka not a malaka
haven't seen you gelati
you spaghetti where I live?
how come I never zucchini you anymore?
you to th pip with me old cucumber?
pie cart
how about a roll mop & a pork pie
down th frog & toad?
where's my broad bean?
how's your corn cob?
capsicum easy go
I dips me tzatziki
bye bye bouillabaisse
taramasalata
for just one turkish delight
paella
cannelloni
needs sweetbreads
must have S.O.H.
Sense of Homous
it's all offal entree nous
plenty more fettucine
see you lasagna
don't come gnocchi at my door
I could have a pizza of you
walking out on our marinara
out of sheer cappricciosa
don't calamari me
I'll give you a squid ring

ERIC BEACH

THE HEN, THE SPANIELS, FRENCHIE AND THE MOON

'Little hen, where are you going?'
'I'm going to lay an egg on the moon'

Each night she crosses the road
Her house is a ruin
An ash-heap of groans

This was a house for dogs
A spaniels' tomb
Thirty copper-glinting bellies
That wailed for love

Frenchie their mistress
Flamehaired
Danced afar
Till the wails caught her skirts

She came at full moon
Scattered titbits
Yowled like a dingo in the sudden still
Then left to dance some more

And the spaniels wailed on
Forgotten

Till the moon smashed the windows in rage
Bleached their fur
Zapped their moans
Lit a candle for hope
The candle drowned
It ignited oil
In one great fountain of spaniel blood
The flame licked the moon

Each night the moon forgiving
Lays a new egg
The hen dusts the egg with soot

NICOLA BOWERY

THE NEW ECONOMIC ZONE

at 12 o'clock you turn 14
a pane of glass beyond the street
coffee & these hazy minutes
to celebrate your wishes

beyond the glass
a different life
as tribes from 20 miles away
fail the understanding test
of what it is they see

at 12.15 the coffee's cold
you're sitting on your fortune

beyond the pane
the middle aged
executives
tradesmen from another world
slippery smiles chalk & cheese

at 1 a.m. a haunting need
begins to crawl along your skin
feathers made of diamonds scratching
like a line of fathers
wallets bulging in their trousers
forming queues before your eyes
to taste this faulted paradise

PETER HARNEY

MIRAGES

Heat paints the portrait
Of the sitting land –
Sparing with color,
Limited in tone,
Dotting with light pools
Flat, unhollowed spaces
Shallow past conception
Not an atom thin.

BARRY DONLON

WHERE WE LAY DOWN

'Where have you led me now?' Your liquid voice
washed your words, a stream upon small stones,
and I was chastened, holding from your eyes

the strength of my uncertainty and need.
'We've changed,' you said, ironic and soft-toned,
'as if we have embraced new marriage vows.'

Later, 'Now lie down amongst these leaves
and feel the roughness and the hardening
of all our old and once-encasing years

that we are here to lose.' We bathed in light
that washed your profile, leaving me dismayed
by sudden longing, colored red and brown

rich and dark as leaves where we lay down.

PAUL HETHERINGTON

THE WRITERS' CAMP, 1908

The cans of diet coke rattle on the shore
going out.

We set out from the Mallacoota camp to walk
along the ice.
Lawson, the deaf man, occasionally touches
my shoulder, while thousands and thousands
of the penguins parade around, almost
to encircle us.
My companion salutes them all.

Lawson's eyes
are edging dull,
cloudy,
the pupils faded,
almost missing, while along the iris
the whites get yellow, sort of
go. An arctic sky.

The penguins keep bobbing up between
the cans.

No one talks.
He has lost the nerve to continue.

WARWICK ANDERSON

THE LOOKOUT

I

Flapping down between the dripping bones of
ghost gums,
the magpie perches on a thin wet arm and carps
at the mist.

It flicks its wary head.
The quiet watery sounds
hang dead in the air,
the smoky wisps that ride towards its face
the fingers of some blank embrace
more eager and grasping
than a hungry bird might bear.

It arches forward,
crying again,
then springs and beats madly off to
the edge of sight
where it turns, and lands on the path
and picks at the roots of a fern.

II

In a cleft in the rock behind me is
the blurred outline of a hand in the stone.

I press into the template,
but my hand slides against the wet coarse sand.

He gripped the world to hold it fast,
but I think I have found his vanishing point.

The magpie soars.
It spirals upwards in long white draughts of haze
and plummets away at my feet towards
the stones.

III

The railing drips with thin red water.
Against the black rock ledge
a little mingling pool
flutters in the wind.

Rising to rain, the mist lifts
and darkness spreads into the valley.
A car, totem of our ceaseless passage,
flays away up on the crest of the cliff,
chasing its own kind into the night.

I turn and walk back
up the steps to the road
and watch them glimmer in the distance,
ribbon-fragments,
whispering down the paths of their own scarce
light,
feeding on travel.

MARK HEARN

RODENTS

When the rodents of the mind
Cease to scurry and to claw,
You may very well be sane.
But there must be something more.

HUGH BROWN

POLITICALLY INCORRECT POEM FROM GALWAY

Out in the gale spitting sleet in my face,
I carefully dodge salami-colored worms
coiling on the wet grey path.

But jackdaws do not spare their cousin worms
in nearby sodden and too green grass.

I trudge past rows on rows
of wet grey public housing
gratefully onto the fuggy bus.

The driver dispenses tickets for the wrong date,
half the children on board are mongols
and the rest suck dummies.

A distant prospect of the town with two domes
swelling over black grey clutter,
the big green nipple of religion
and the small green nipple of learning.

JOHN PHILIP

DEPARTURE

So I watched you walk out of the gallery –
a wide space with ascending pillars, and echoes,
dulled by the concourse of people.

Not a tall man, not assertive, carrying
a pale suede briefcase, and wearing
a dark Humphrey Bogart hat.
Direct and purposeful.
Leaving.

Outside, under the floodlights and tree shadows,
a silhouette, man with a stiff limp, walking.
Out of my sight. It hurt too much to watch you.

Inanely I repeated the same polite questions
to the polite guests departing. Received
the same slightly baffled answers.

In the past when I saw you walking
you were never receding. It was always:
first an object, then a body
moving through space, a person.
And always that person you.
Approaching.

VERA NEWSOM

LETTER TO BRUCE BEAVER

I have thrown away the anti-depressants
and diuretic I once took each day.
But this morning I heard again
the gates of Hell squeaking...

Sure I've been through worse
but different days take you down
their own ways. Yesterday
they shot interiors: gall bladder,
bladder, kidneys, liver, pancreas,
bowels and intestines – the whole
southern tour. My exterior clowned,
as who wouldn't, like me,
forty-eight, grey hair long,
in a white hospital gown.

All my best words pale
in the shade of this dark hour.
You've been there; I am here,
a day at a time off booze'n'dope,
but this mangy attitude returns
to celebrate its anniversary.
I use
carbon ribbon to oil Hell's gates...
Perhaps you could get me off words,
their curse. There again
a man without vices
is no handyman at all.

ANDREW BURKE

HEATHER CAM

Montsalvat National Poetry Festival, 1992

4 December, Friday

There are two dark clouds over Sydney. At the airport flights are delayed for almost two hours. In the waiting hall I spot two fellow travellers, Phyllis Perlstone and Dorothy Porter. Phyllis is one of a number of 'new' poets making the pilgrimage to the festival for the first time in order to see what's going on and to take part in one of the Open Readings. Dorothy is an old hand at all this. Even during take-off she keeps her eyes firmly on the page she's reading.

In just over an hour we're at Tullamarine. A fraught ninety minutes later, Phyllis and I alight at Montsalvat incredulous at our novice taxi-driver's knack of getting lost in Melbourne's northeastern suburbs. He's been on the job only four nights, and after our first hour of meanderings switched off his meter, acknowledging that he was lost. I'd intended to arrive in good time for the "Young Poets Reading" at 6.00 pm. Instead, here I am – three hours later than expected, with just a few minutes to spare before 7.00 pm and the "Grand Opening" – picking my way through the ubiquitous puddles on the path to the long gallery.

Then there it is, with its red corsage of National Heart Foundation balloons bobbing at the entrance. No wonder I couldn't find it on my Montsalvat Guide Map purchased back in March 1991 at the last Poetry Festival. The Long Gallery is a new building and this is the first public event to be held within its long white daub walls. It's sympathetically built in the style and materials of the other mudbrick and stone buildings of Justus Jorgensen's artists' community.

I'm greeted by Mal Morgan and do a double-take: he's not wearing his leather cap. (After the opening night formalities the cap is securely back in place for the rest of the weekend.) However, Mal is wearing, jauntily on each lapel, a red heart. Myron Lysenko takes me up a narrow staircase over the archway between Sigmund Jorgensen's office quarters and the Studio. This will be my room for the weekend. We head back where the crowds are gathering for the opening ceremony.

I spot Hwa Goh, the photographer assigned by *Overland*, armed with his camera. We get down to the business of determining which poets should be shot in the course of the weekend! I even have a chance to talk to James Bradley, the South Australian delegate for the Poetry Link-up Forum, about Friendly Street Poets.

Then the proceedings get underway with Mal Morgan, as Director of the Festival, welcoming us all and urging us to exchange poetics in a tolerant way, to unite and make the Festival a success. With around 150–180 people crowding the Long Gallery, it looks like it will be. Next, Patrice Higgins, representing one of the Festival's sponsors, the National Heart Foundation, explains the importance of zest in life and of a healthy, creative mind to one's overall physical health. Cathrine Harboe-Ree reminds us that not only has Arts Victoria sponsored this Festival, it also financed the roof on the Long Gallery. She is the first to read some poetry, an apt quote about patrons from Alexander Pope's "Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot or, Prologue to the Satires". Tom Shapcott follows to launch the Festival formally, pointing to the portraits of contemporary Australian poets that line the walls of the room and anticipating this weekend's opportunity to see many of the poets portrayed, and many more, in performance.

In the break, Di Morgan introduces me to the painter Jenni Mitchell, whose poet-portrait project provides the visual backdrop for the Long Gallery readings. My seat is opposite the canvases of Alex Skovron, Adrian Rawlins and Kristin Henry when the opening reading begins. But first I talk to Sigmund Jorgensen, the host for the Festival and Director of Montsalvat. He is seated in a relaxed fashion at the door to the hall, next to a display of National Heart Foundation brochures, free cookbooks and bookmarks. Across the doorway, behind the long booktable are Kristin Henry and someone from Readings Books. They are valiantly recording and pricing all of the poetry books that poets are depositing with them for sale.

The hall is crammed with poets and poetry lovers, like one great big family reunion, by the time Mal Morgan begins to introduce the evening's featured poets. Fay Zwicky gets the reading underway and is truly impressive with "Going", a piece about the need to let go of children, to tell the truth and yet to protect those closest to us. I've read it recently in *Southerly*'s special poetry issue, but, hearing Zwicky's rendition, am struck anew by its poignancy.

Gig Ryan gets straight into her session with "Real Estate", which is about "my life-long preoccupation with finding somewhere to live". Her forehead and eyebrows are expressive and not once does she crack a smile. I'm left with the beautifully disturbing inner-city image of cockroaches forming "dark corsages".

Next it's out to the country with Les Murray and his translations from the natural world. Whereas Ryan read down in reserved, almost shy fashion, Murray directs his eyes above his half-glasses upwards to the rafters and the beyond, perhaps addressing the God, king parrots, egrets, ducks, cuckoos and ibises that are so much the subject-matter of his poetry.

"Murray directs his eyes above his half-glasses upwards to the rafters and beyond..."

Mal is just embarking on an introduction to Myron Lysenko, "my co-director", when Myron interjects from the audience, "No adjectives, no metaphors!" He soon has us in stitches with his rewriting of "The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" called "You Can Call Me Alf": "In the room the people come and go/talking of the new Madonna video", and then in sorrowful silence as he revisits Jas H. Duke's funeral six months earlier.

All the while and throughout the weekend, off to the side of the platform, Nolan Tyrrell faithfully monitors the sound system, checking the level of the microphone to ensure the best reception.

Balancing a mug of soup from the all-hours coffee house that is to be my lifeline this weekend, I spot Grant Caldwell and go over to congratulate him on his book, *The Life of a Pet Dog*, which I've just received for review from the *Sydney Morning Herald* and which will be launched tomorrow evening. "So pleased to get your new dog," say I, showing signs of traveller's weariness. We talk about the blessing of having a caring publisher and sidle in to hear an intense, serious, hands-slightly-shaking Alison Croggan read some very recent poems. Grant Caldwell is next up. He decisively shifts the podium before he begins, without preamble, with that wonderfully pseudo-serious spoof, "Reincarnation Explained" – cockroaches again. Halfway through, Mal pops up onto the plat-

form to help Grant work out what he's selected to read next from his handwritten list of order.

Judith Rodriguez read a poem about the Victorian Women's Writers' Train, then calls Tom Shapcott up from the audience to read a poem derived from a creative writing exercise she'd set her students. The exercise is to share a subject between two students who take turns writing lines on a piece of paper which is folded over before being passed back to the other partner. The juxtapositions are at times intriguing, but it remains an exercise, rather than real poetry. Rodriguez also talks about the challenges of writing commissioned poems about stately homes for in-flight magazines.

Next on the printed program is Robert Adamson who, Mal regretfully reports, is at home in the Hawkesbury. He has a virus. Shelton Lea calls from the back, "Adamson has had a virus all his *bloody* life – it's called poetry".

In Adamson's place Billy Marshall-Stoneking will read. He's just received the good news that his play *Sixteen Words for Water* is to be produced in Melbourne. He reads a piece about Uluru, referring back to Grant Caldwell's poem, "Minga, minga, minga", about ants. This is just one instance of the poetic 'conversations', the cross-fertilisation that will take place over the weekend and that are to be found throughout Australian poetry. The reading ends with rapturous applause, claps and enthusiastic shouts for Billy, for all the other readers and for the beginning of a weekend of poetry.

I head off to my room over the archway. A spider is waiting in the middle of my pillow. I whack it with a handy bedside copy of *Country Life*, appreciating the irony. Sleep comes amidst the castanet clicks and myriad burblings of pond frogs.

5 December, Saturday

By morning the sonorous chant of frogs has diminished to a single resounding raindrop pling plonk. I try not to disturb the swallow that has a nest above the women's toilet, shower, eat a handful of yogurt-covered sultanas and head off down to the Studio for Rosemary Nissen's workshop. I'm a bit wary, not knowing what to expect from a Reiki Master, but prepared to meditate, relate and, I hope, create. There are a dozen or so participants, all women, come to learn how to tap their creative energy, their subconscious, and 'unblock' the poet in them in a non-destructive way. This should be good for me, though I don't kid myself that I'm ready to give up the revelations that come to me after a drink or two.

Afterwards I go for a coffee and bump into Mal Morgan in the queue. He tells me of a few gaps in the program: Nigel Roberts, Amanda Stewart, and Robert Harris can't make it. This is a pity. Some great poetry and top-notch performers are missing. The only consolation is that the video of *Call it Poetry Tonight*, featuring a number of the missing poets (Roberts, Stewart, П.О. Jas H. Duke) as well as Grant Caldwell, Lauren Williams, Eric Beach and Billy Marshall-Stoneking, is showing tomorrow night.

"His alien barnyard howls bring people in from the poolside to see what's going on."

After the shot of caffeine I'm off to hear what appears to be a pretty solidly Victorian reading. Joan Scott's archetypal pieces about the moon goddess, wolf woman, raw wounds and states of extremity such as birthing are intense and marked by pain. So too, despite her calm bearing, are Janet Boddy's Nijinsky poems. Sherryl Clark reads about the western suburbs of Melbourne, which clearly are cousins to those in Sydney's west. She reads a spunky poem that came from a workshop with Eric Beach – "I'm on the street and I'm violent". I wonder what poems will issue from the three-hour performance poetry workshop Eric is running at this very minute down in the Chapel. I see him in the break along with Chris Mansell. Hwa Goh and I team up outside the falafel stall to reconnoitre and to talk about other Australian photographers of writers – William Yang and Reece Scannell. Then we're off again, Hwa to shoot and me to scribble notes.

Bev Roberts entertains with some wry poems in which she imagines what it would be like to be an American: "all the good things I would *not* be/Hispanic, black..." and her children would be called Mary-Jo and Chuck.

Next the cartoonist Judy Horacek is the first person to comment on the difficulty of reading to a split audience. This continues to present a challenge to many readers. Later Steven Herrick will comment on the tennis-watcher's technique required of the readers in order to maintain eye-contact with both the left- and right-hand side of the Long Gallery.

After her introduction to Peter Bakowski, compere Connie Barber adjust the microphone right down low. I recall Bakowski as being moderately tall, but soon realise that he is going to sit to read. His "Children of Divorce" – "There is a thief in the house of vows" – is just one of number of superbly powerful, fully realised poems.

At lunch I sit at a convivial table crowded with Five Islands Press people: Ron Pretty, Debbie Westbury, Steven Herrick, Mal Morgan and Jill Jones.

The next session, "Reading Other People's Poetry", under Myron Lysenko's direction, is an innovation and a great success. It works out to be a way to include voices that are absent, overseas, deceased or just plain admired. I determine to get hold of a copy of American poet Sharon Olds' poems after Anthony Lawrence reads "Summer Solstice, New York City". Jas H. Duke gets a couple of pieces represented, reminding us once again of the huge gap in our company. There's everything from work by П.О. to that of an unpublished 23-year-old, from erotica to Christmas poems. The star performer is John Reeves' rendition of a Henri Chopin sound poem. Reeves' use of the microphone is consummate. His alien barnyard howls bring people in from the poolside to see what's going on.

Now comes the difficult part, choosing between two equally enticing readings. I head off for the Chapel for a change of scene, vowing to leave at half-time to catch part of the Long Gallery reading. Instead of introducing each of the scheduled readers, Lauren Williams asks each in turn, "When did you start writing?" This technique elicits some intriguing information. For example, Cornelis Vleeskens is able to date his first poetic efforts back to 1962, because "I didn't have enough English vocabulary to write anything longer before that." Jeltje gives us a sample of her Yarra River environmental series. Perhaps inspired by her respect for nature, a guy in my pew leans forward and carefully removes a wasp from the back of the velvet Old Masters cap of Whitefeather Light, then gently puts it outside.

There is thunder as I head back to hear Peter Rose read some imitations of Catullus. Soon I'm trekking back to the Chapel for the National Poetry Link-

Alan Wearne

Up Forum. There are cameramen from the SBS "Book Show" in attendance. David Kelly, former President of the Poets Union of New South Wales and founder of *Oz Muze* magazine (aptly described by Ken Smeaton as that "flare that lit up the national scene briefly and brilliantly and then was extinguished"), starts off the proceedings. Other contributors are the Chair, Robert Hughes of Metro Arts, Brisbane, Eric Beach (Tasmania), James Bradley (South Australia), Ken Smeaton (Victoria) and Anthony Lawrence (Western Australia). Topics include: the marginalisation of poetry; the tyranny of distance; the need to centralise rather than duplicate (or triplicate) activities; the advantages to be gained from pooling resources and seeking sponsorship and developing mailing lists; Literature Board funding (the paucity and inequitable spread thereof is graphically demonstrated by Robert Hughes).

Two motions are agreed to by those assembled:

> That Literature Board funding be sought for a national newsletter devoted to critical debate and information on events and work opportunities for poets (in the spirit of *Oz Muze*), and that when established its management committee should reflect a fair gender balance.
>
> That investment be sought from the Literature Board and State-funding agencies to facilitate public awareness of poetry and work opportunities for poets.

I go off in search of some nourishment, before the last practise run-through of the poems I'm reading tonight. Consequently I miss Grant Caldwell's book launch.

Back in the Long Gallery for the evening's reading, Alex Skovron, whose *Sleeve Notes* I have just seen through the publication process, joins me and introduces Ron Simpson and Tony Page, just off the plane from Malaysia. We sit down in the blinding light of the setting sun. First Billy Marshall-Stoneking is up explaining that he isn't going to read what he'd planned to, since three hours ago a friend drove off in their rental car for a "little ride" and hasn't returned. Billy's poems were in the boot of the car!

Following readings from *Singing the Snake* is Simon MacDonald, who works for Magabala Books in Broome. He reads about the Kimberley land

Dianne Fahey

claims and has dedicated a poem to the next on the program, Michael Sharkey, fresh from teaching Australian Literature in Beijing. Sharkey's work is nicely intelligent, his delivery wry and sophisticated.

I'm looking forward to hearing more instalments from Diane Fahey's insect project. She doesn't disappoint, but first reads quietly and assuredly from her feminist reinterpretations of Greek myths, and then moves on to poems about booklice and exotic, alien winged creatures.

In the break I meet another Canadian, Ian McBryde, formerly of Toronto! Great to hear the accent.

Ron Simpson, long-time poetry editor for the *Age*, was last at Montsalvat thirty years ago. He reads with contagious enjoyment, good humor and perfect enunciation.

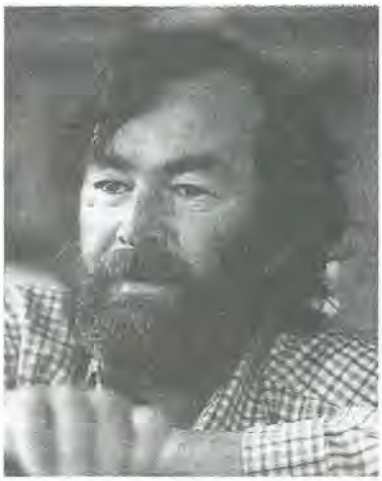
An unnerving intensity is on display in Terry Gillmore's reading. He sighs, breathes with emotion, places his hand with effort to his temple and brow as poems of love, longing, pleading and pain are wrung out of him.

Steven Herrick steps up the pace with a no-nonsense, practised twist of the microphone and a comic piece outlining the differences between Sydney and Melbourne. He's been given a discount on all his R. M. Williams moleskins since writing a love song to this irresistible garment. I'm enjoying this, even though the adrenalin is pumping through because now Kristin Henry is introducing me.

I'm followed by Alf Taylor, whose *Singer Songwriter* has just come out with Magabala Books. In the midst of his black deaths in custody poem, "Alone in the Cell", lo and behold if the lights don't all go out. He isn't thrown, but continues once the lights are on again to read about being taken from his mother and put into white care. How he can have undergone such traumas and injustices and yet remain so gentle and apparently unbitter is remarkable.

The reading is over and I'm in the tearooms chatting to Patricia Munro, formerly of *Redoubt* in Canberra, about how to fund a literary magazine, and to the painter and ex-councillor, Jenni Mitchell, about what an asset Montsalvat is to the Shire of Eltham.

Across the swimming pool (no-one has fallen in yet), an ecstatic, rambunctious, EAGER crowd is filling the Long Gallery to capacity for the Melbourne Poetry Cup. Master of Ceremonies Ken Smeaton is clearly in his element. After Doris Leadbetter reads a scurrilous poem that would shock the folks back



Eric Beach

Kate Llewellyn

in her hometown of Bendigo, I stay for a few more contestants, then tell Mal I'm sure the Cup has been won by Doris, but please to tell me if it's otherwise in the morning.

I traipse back to my room past a huge wedding reception in the Great Hall.

6 December, Sunday

The next morning Doris Leadbetter is proudly sporting a placard around her neck, "Guess Who Won the Melbourne Poetry Cup?"

Jennifer Strauss, who has been editing an anthology of Australian love poetry which she churlishly wanted to call "Erotica Down Under", reads political, conscience-pricking, astute poems which remind us that we cannot go on being mere "innocent tourists". She sings hauntingly in French.

Next Robert Hughes takes us on an imaginative journey to his Brisbane suburb and introduces us to his idiosyncratic neighbors, to human nature in microcosm. I'm reminded of Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*.

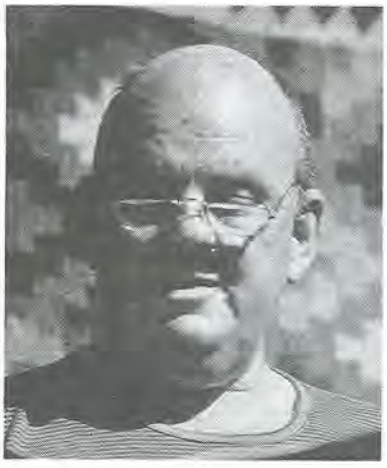
A recent recipient of the Wesley Michel Wright prize, Jordie Albiston, is followed by Terry Harrington, earthy and irreverent. I'm particularly struck by "Toastings", which sings praises of the labour, courage and unpretension of country people.

Hoarse-voiced and hunched over his pages, Patrick Alexander reads an artful set of poems inspired by Grace Cossington-Smith and Georgia O'Keefe, Rembrandt, and Kafka. Having entered the hall in some agitation, he is radiant and composed after his reading.

Tough and tender, Ian McBryde is nicely juxtaposed by Canberra archivist, Lynn Hard's American rhythms and references to jazz and blues. His "Poem to My Former Wife, Geraldine" is utterly understated, honest and moving.

Kate Llewellyn is delightful as ever, considerately introducing each piece with a colorful anecdote or illuminating comment. Her "Lovemaking With Asthma" ("If you move your shoulder one inch lower,/I'm a dead woman"), "Eau Sauvage" and "Breasts" are especially well received.

In the lunchbreak Patrick Alexander dances outside to the accompaniment of two guitarists whose cases announce that they are "Well-Strung". Adrian Rawlins, spectacularly distinctive in a black bowler hat, gold and black scarf, black singlet that says STOMP, Turkish trousers and a black money-belt, invites me down to the fishpond for a picnic



Les Murray

with his friend. He reads in the next set poems inspired by friendship and moral outrage – there's a birthday poem and a tirade against gutter journalists. Rawlins is preceded by Barbara Giles and her out-of-love poems, and followed by Tony Page and John Irving, who begins unnervingly by declaring that he is not a poet any more. Eric Beach is in form with an ethnic food speciality, "Don't calamari, I'll squid ring you". Lauren Williams reads the longest poem she's ever written, "Night Train", about racism and hooliganism and standing up for what you believe in. Just back from Germany and Viet Nam, Deconstructionist Chris Mann bemuses and intrigues us all with a 15-minute piece typed on one sheet in four columns of small blue type that begins *sotto voce*, in a private language of intellectual muttering: "what, but, *yes*, object, subject, maybe, quod". Fingers fluttering before his mouth, eyebrows arched in a perpetual question as though sorting out a problem in internal dialogue, Mann doesn't once look up. He's working something out and, indeed, gradually the sound becomes language, becomes sense.

Indisputably speaking our language is Alan Wearne, reading from a book on our entrepreneurial, excessive 80s and the likes of Bond and Skase. To reinforce the basis in fact, Wearne passes around a book with a photo of Bond and Connell dancing the cancan.

In the break, Chris Mansell talks to me about the precarious and peripatetic life of the performance poet.

Kevin Brophy looks younger than when I last saw him – literally on the road to Montsalvat, 21 months ago, when, mercifully, he picked me up at the end of a long hike through Eltham. Philip Mead, poetry editor of *Meanjin*, cuts his reading back, allowing Terry Whitebeach to bring the reading to a close more or less on schedule. She talks about birds, her children, and of discovering the black blackfellahs of the Kimberleys and of realising that she was a white blackfellah.

The next reading is the last one and I'm compere (com-mère, I call it). It's a beautiful night and I've got an impressive batch of poets to introduce: Mal Morgan and some heartbreaking poems about the joys of life and the unbearable fact of death; Anthony Lawrence, who asks to be moved up the program for the sake of his nerves and who reads a host of new poems in total control; Kristin Henry and her haunting song of the Land of Never-Mind; Alex Skovron and his intelligent Mozart sequence; Dorothy Porter and the gutsy passions

Gig Ryan

of Pharaoh Akhenaten's family; Stephen J. Williams, who rightly points out that introductions are not altogether necessary since much will be revealed in the course of the reading; Chris Mansell, who litters the stage with the pages of her long Gulf War poem of spectacular moral outrage, "And"; Lyndon Walker, who shocks me by casually commenting that he often doesn't keep copies of his poems; and, to finish off, John Forbes in a black leather jacket reading to the converted and leading us into the farewell party with the sweet sound of poetry in our exhausted, word-drunk ears.

Quite a weekend!

Heather Cam's most recent book of poetry was The Moon's Hook *(Poetry Australia, 1990). A new collection is in preparation. She works in Sydney as a publisher's editor and poetry reviewer for the* Sydney Morning Herald.

Micro-Fiction from China

Ouyang Yu

IN RECENT YEARS, the micro-story as a literary genre has become a major trend in Chinese literature, standing side by side with short stories, novellas and novels as one of the 'four families'. On the average, tens of thousands of micro-stories get published annually, and hundreds of critical articles and books have been written about this form. The genre, which had its origin in Northern and Southern Dynasties more than 1,500 years ago, was given an enormous new impetus by the modernisation of China in the 1980s, which has not only contributed greatly to economic growth but also transformed many aspects of Chinese life, developing a new aesthetic taste for the short and succinct in fiction in an increasingly mobile, modernised and post-modern society.

In Australia, micro-fiction is not something entirely new. Henry Lawson wrote 'His Mother's Mate', a story of less than 100 words, as early as the end of the last century; it was translated into Chinese a long time ago. The *Lone Hand* magazine devoted an exclusive column to a genre called 'storiettes' in the first decade of this century. The tradition was lost somewhere along the line but has recently reappeared in Australian fiction.

Micro-fiction in China, called 'super-short-story', 'extremely short story', 'one-minute-story', 'one-cigarette-story', 'portable story', 'focus story', 'pupil-story' or 'thumb-story', has been developed into a most recent sub-genre called '100-character-story' which limits the story to within a hundred Chinese characters. The following is a group of eight '100-character-stories' written by Deng Kaisan. I have chosen and translated eight stories from thirty stories by Deng Kaisan published in *Fiction World*, a major Chinese literary magazine based in Shanghai.

Ouyang Yu's most recent book was a translation of Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch *(Guilin P.R.C., Li Jiang Publishing House) which has sold ten thousand copies. He is writing a doctoral thesis on representations of Chinese in Australian literature.*

DENG KAISAN

Eight 100-Character Stories

The First Night

NIGHT WAS WANING. A dark shadow flashed past. Surprised, Young Li gave chase. Then he hid himself in the corner of the warehouse, secretly watching. When the dark shadow came quietly he swept at him with his leg, sending the shadow sprawling onto the ground with a plop. He went up to have a look and saw his old father who had been a warehouse guard for thirty years. Greatly perplexed, he helped his father to his feet, who said, It's your first night on duty. You're doing fine!

Crickets–Chickens

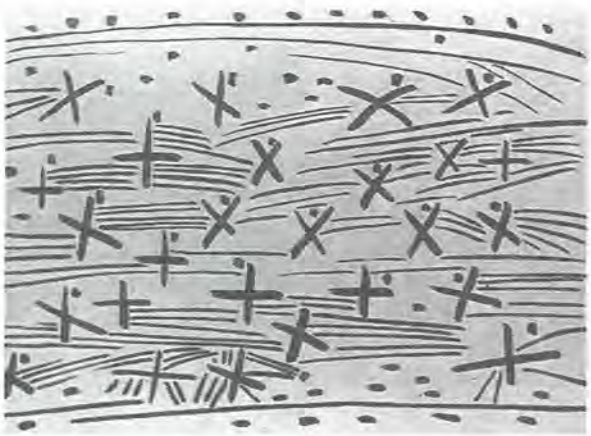
THE PEOPLE OF CITY D suddenly went in for cricket-fighting. Editor A solicited my contribution for ten thousand characters, to be entitled *Interesting Things about Crickets*. I was three months at my desk before I finished the book and handed it in to A, who frowned and said, Well, they now shift their interest to cock-fighting. How about writing another book? I almost fainted with fury. Then I had an idea when I got home: just replace crickets with chickens. It's just that simple. Two months later, *Interesting Things about Chickens* came out.

Nose

DEALING CARDS. Dealing cards. His wife giggled. The cherry-shaped mouth so attractive. Losing again. She hooked her index finger and scraped at his nose sharply. So painful! He had suffered from rhinitis and had had an operation on it. Come again. Come again. He was suddenly upset, recalling his ex-wife. Also playing cards. Also losing. He closed his eyes for her to have a scrape at his nose. A kiss instead! How grieved he was!

A Chance Meeting

ONE DAY, Mr E went to work by bike and he met Miss F who stopped him, saying, I am going to sit for an exam but there's a traffic jam. E then carried her on his bike. A meddler saw this and called E's wife, who was enraged and forced him to tell the truth. He wouldn't. Fighting for three months led to divorce. Then they say E and F became man and wife.



Fishing

AT DUSK Mr A came home, a fishing rod on his shoulder and a pail in his hand. With a big smile on his face. Neighbors surrounded him, watching: a fish weighing as much as one kilo and a half. Ha, ha, as light as a feather when out of officialdom. And as happy. Last month when Mr A stepped down the whole family went for him. Why bother at all. Back in his bedroom Mr A wept in cupped hands. The fish was bought. Who knew the taste of it anyway?

Loss

HOLDING HIS OWN NEW BOOK, C was looking around the bookshelf. For a place. Eight years ago C chose the three thousand books and his brother chose the ten thousand yuan, the choice left

in the will by their strict father. Later, C found a cheque for another ten thousand yuan in a book by his father. He wanted to put his own book side by side with his father's when the book and the cheque suddenly disappeared.

The Curtain Drawer

MR B ENTERED THE TROUPE at seven. He was a failure at acting. A failure at playing instruments. He ended up drawing curtains. Fifty years passed between opened and closed curtains. One day he handed a play to the director of the troupe, excitedly: thirty-thousand characters. The director was overjoyed: give it a go. Strange to say the performance was repeated a hundred times continuously. When reporters interviewed him he said: I guess a man has to live like a man.

Night Rain

RAIN LIKE A WHIP. You woke up and went home in a wheelchair. You had planted a lilac yesterday. It's so small and the rain so fierce. Mother didn't let you. Such a long night! You quietly left at dawn. In the tiny courtyard the egg-shaped leaves of the lilac were dancing. So happy! The little master little knew that an old man had stayed half the night with an open umbrella.

Jiri Tibor

BOB REECE

Green Among the Gold:
Some Irish Ideas About Australia

In memory of Vincent Buckley

IN IRELAND THESE DAYS, the widely held perception of Australia as a land without a history, without a culture, seems to be constantly confirmed by the annual spectacle of Australians coming to seek their Irish 'roots'. The Irish treat this with good-humored tolerance – it is grand for the tourist industry after all – but they cannot help reflecting on the cultural poverty of these lost souls who have to go across the world to find themselves, to discover their 'identity'. A poor country Ireland may be, but one that is rich in its sense of the past. Indeed, if anything, the past impinges to much on the present.

I was reminded of this general Irish view – that Australia, as a very young country, can hardly be said to have its own history or its own culture – at the first public dinner I attended in Dublin on Australia Day, 1987. The permanent head of the Department of the *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) reassured me then that, as Professor of Australian History at University College, Dublin, my responsibilities would not be too onerous – that Australian history, as someone had told him, "made more demands of the heart than of the head". And, although nothing like this was ever said to me by my colleagues at U.C.D., I would not be surprised if it remained the private view of, at least, some of them.

Australian sporting prowess is acknowledged by the Irish, although they take credit for providing the model for Australian Rules in their own Gaelic football brought to Melbourne by Irish immigrants late last century. Strengthening their argument has been the extraordinary success in the Australian national league of Jim Stynes, last year's Brownlow medallist.

There is less recognition of our artistic and literary achievement beyond that of Sir Sidney Nolan and Thomas Kenneally who have chosen to emphasise their Irishness. Paul Hogan's success in the two *Crocodile Dundee* films has confirmed the Irish stereotype of the Australian male: rough and ready, arrogant but gullible. Our women can be good-looking, to be sure, but they are damned once they open their mouths. (If you have ever wondered why no Australian has ever won the 'Rose of Tralee' contest, now you have the answer.) The American accent is as acceptable in Ireland as a credit card but the Australian accent sounds rude and uncouth to the Irish ear. In the land of saints and scholars we are generally regarded as a pretty uncultivated lot, although it is the urban Irish who are more prone to take this attitude.

The upwardly mobile Irish middle classes may still be ambivalent about Britain from a political point of view but they are slavish in their imitation of British up-market style as a means of displaying social status. During my own time in Dublin I saw expensive new housing developments springing up behind signboards proclaiming the same old pretentious names popular in Britain sixty or seventy years ago: *The Chase*, *The Grange*, *The Manor* and so on. It is these Anglophile Irish who are most likely to look down their noses at rude colonials. The cultural cringe is alive and well in Dublin.

With the Irish view of the Antipodes in mind, it is interesting to look at the results of a poetry and short story contest held by the Northern Bank (now the National Irish Bank) in association with the *Irish Times* and Con Howard's *Ireland-Australia Conference*, to mark Australia's bicentennial year. Altogether, this attracted more than one hundred entries from various parts of the Republic and from Irish people living in England, Australia and elsewhere. The judging was done by a panel including Brian Fallon, literary editor of the *Irish Times*, which published the winning entries.

The competition took place against the background of two celebrations – the Bicentennial and Dublin's own Millennium – events which provided reference points for some of the entries. Certainly,

the Australian Bicentennial aroused a good deal of popular interest in Ireland, particularly with the visits made to Australia by the Republic's two best-known broadcasters: Gay (Gabriel) Byrne, whose morning radio and Friday night television shows are compulsory for most of the population; and Mike Murphy, who hosts a popular radio arts show and is also a well-known television presenter.

In their euphoric coverage of Australia, Byrne and Murphy presented it as the new *Land of Opportunity* – as a second America, enjoying boom conditions and offering everything to those with enterprise, energy and luck. Ironically, Mike Murphy interviewed people like Belfast-born jeans millionaire Alistair Norwood not long before he experienced a catastrophic setback to his 'rags to riches' career. Irish immigrant listeners in outer-suburban Sydney and Melbourne who told Gay Byrne of their alienation and their homesickness were lectured on the need to be grateful for the magnificent climate and grand opportunities that Australia offered. No attention was paid to more sobering questions such as the state of the economy and the mounting unemployment figures: AUSTRALIA could only mean Sunshine and Success.

At the same time, Irish media coverage of Australia has done little to change this image. Reports of Australian news in the three principal newspapers, the *Irish Times*, the *Irish Independent* and the *Cork Examiner* are few and far between and do nothing to challenge the romanticised Australia of our exported television 'soaps'. *Neighbours*, *Home and Away*, *The Flying Doctors*, *The Sullivans*, *Sons and Daughters* and *A Country Practice* are enormously popular and have created a powerful impression of landscape, climate and affluent suburban lifestyle. Our ten-year-old daughter was often asked at school in Ireland if she lived near Ramsay Street, and if she knew any of the people living there! Irish people are impressed by the relatively frank and open way in which Australian television characters conduct their all-important relationships in an atmosphere where unwelcome economic necessity seldom impinges and where the moral interference of Church and State, still so powerful in Ireland, is negligible.

For the pre-soap generation, the image of Australia is based more on the poems of A. B. Paterson and John O'Brien's (Father J. P. Hartigan's) *Around The Boree Log*, which has enjoyed wide popularity since its publication in 1921. The empathy with rural Australia is very strong in a country where 70 per cent of the population are still rural dwellers and where Australian bush songs and ballads, most of them derived from Irish models, strike a sympathetic chord. Wasn't Clancy of the Overflow after being an Irishman? And wasn't Father Hartigan after burying him beside the Murray River at Corowa? From the Irish end, too, there is the continuing popularity of traditional Irish-Australian ballads such as 'The Wild Colonial Boy' and others of more recent composition such as 'The Fields of Athenry' which recall the convict era. Exile, political oppression and religious persecution still color the historical perception of Australia and have only been confirmed by the television trilogy, *The Distant Drum*, based on Patrick O'Farrell's *The Irish in Australia*, which was also shown in Ireland in the bicentennial year.

IN SPITE OF LONG CONNECTION, Australia has seldom provided a theme for Irish literature. The only notable poem I have discovered is John Montague's 'Soliloquy on a Southern Strand' (1958) in which an Irish priest sent out as a young man to Australia reflects adversely on his life's mission, against the irrepressible hedonism of the beach culture:

The young people crowd the shore now,
Rushing from Sydney, like lemmings,
  to the sea.
Heat plays upon the glaring cluttered beach,
Casts as in a mould my beaten head
  and knees.
New cars come swooping in like birds
To churn and chop the dust. A wireless,
Stuck in the sand, crackles lovesick words
As girls are roughed and raced
With whirling beach-balls in the sun.
What here avails my separate cloth,
My sober self, whose meaning contradicts
The sensual drama they enact in play?

Is this the proper ending for a man?
The Pacific waves crash in upon the beach.
It is December now and warm.
And yet my blood is cold, my shoulders slack;
In slow submission, I turn my body
Up to the sun, as on a rack,
Enduring comfort. In a dream,
I hear the cuckoo dance his double notes,
Among the harvest stooks like
  golden chessmen;
Each call, an age, a continent between.
No martyrdom, no wonder, no patent loss:
Is it for this mild ending that I
Have carried, all this way, my cross?

It is difficult to imagine a more poignant epitaph for the Christian Brothers, the Marists, the Sisters of Mercy and all the other Irish teaching orders who have had such a profound influence on Australian society.

Returning to the Irish competition, it is not so much the literary merits of the poems and short stories, as their ideas about Australia and Ireland's historical and current relationship with Australia which provoked my interest. If we want to know what the Irish think about us, this might be an opportunity to find out. It may also be that the Irish, either as visitors or observers from afar, can teach us something new and different about ourselves from their end of the cultural continuum. Vincent Buckley told me on the one occasion I met him in a Dun Laoghaire pub that he could always write better about Australia in Ireland. Pursuing this logic, the Irish are in a good position indeed to pronounce on us. So much for the theory, anyway.

"The Irish live up to their reputation as mighty talkers, but they are not strong on candor and certainly do not appreciate it in others."

This brings me to a major cultural difference between Ireland and Australia. The Irish live up to their reputation as mighty talkers, but they are not so strong on candor and certainly do not appreciate it in others. The truth is a dangerous substance and must be handled only with great care, protected from close scrutiny by the most exquisitely embroidered circumlocutions.

First, some background information might serve to put the competition into context.

When I arrived in Dublin with my family in the snowy winter weather of January 1987, emigration was 'all the rage', and I remember the hilarious disbelief of our corner shopkeeper when we told him we had come to Ireland from Australia. The paradox is that while the Irish have lost more of their population than any other country through emigration over the past two hundred years, the world-view of what might be called 'residual Irish' is parochial and inward-looking. Lack of immigration to Ireland since my own Palatine German ancestors fled there in the early eighteenth century has left it one of the most homogeneous societies in western Europe.

There is considerable Irish interest in events in Britain, whose television channels and newspapers keep up a gentle but far more effective bombardment than that inflicted during the Anglo-Irish war. At the same time, America is still the land of instant material success and fame; the annual postal ballot for US green cards (work visas) dwarfs all other lotteries in importance. Tom Cruise's film with Nicole Kidman, *Far and Away*, only confirms the romantic mythology.

Australia, on the other hand, is still relatively remote and not so romantic. Although every Irish family seems to have an aunt or cousin in Melbourne, Sydney or Perth, there is a psychological barrier which prevents easy familiarity. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that historically, indeed as recently as the 1960s, the passage to Australia was longer and more expensive than to America and that relatively few emigrants ever returned to Ireland. To go to Australia seemed to be, and perhaps still is, a more serious commitment resulting in the cutting of family ties.

> Australia, sailing to Australia.
> No longer words of terrified doom...

wrote Olivia Martin of Dublin.

> Sweet Australia, lying soft in the south wind.
> Seductress – green glass water, high skies,
> space, silver spray, stars – our friend...

The sense of remoteness still remains.

The competition produced a quintessentially Irish collection of writing designed for an Irish audience. While the literary standard ranges from the Hills of High Culture to the Valleys of Low Doggerel, the bardic energy and ingenuity of the Gaelic word-spinner is ever-apparent. It is as if poetry were a second language for the Irish, as if the weaving of tales were second nature to the Gael – all of which is of course true!

Most of the short stories seem to be undisguised autobiography, some of it quite traumatic. The winning entry, 'Indian Pacific', by Denyse Woods of Inniscarra, County Cork, is a compelling account of two young Irish women's trans-continental conversation about returning to Dublin, punctuated by graphic depictions of landscapes and fellow-passengers.

For reasons which are not at all clear to me, the other short stories do not match the poetry in content or in literary quality and I do not propose to discuss them here. It will be sufficient to list the themes with which they deal: the convict experience; the decision

to emigrate to Australia; the emigrant returning to Ireland; Australians in Ireland seeking their roots; emigrant experience in Australia.

Surprisingly, perhaps, it is only in one story that what the Irish in their wonderfully euphemistic way call 'the Troubles' are at all explored. A Belfast woman who has recently lost her husband and son in a terrorist ambush is portrayed at the moment of leaving her little semi-detached for Melbourne and the warm welcome offered by her other son and his Australian wife.

The main themes of the poems are similar: convicts and emigration; the continuities between Ireland and Australia traced through family and other relationships; the experiences of the Irish in Australia from Bondi to back o' Bourke, from Perth to Port Hedland. The inspiration is sometimes provided by photographs, letters, films and books, but more by personal experience.

Due to the Irish audience for which they are intended, many of the Australian motifs and images employed are fairly predictable. Kookaburras, gum trees and dry creeks are strongly in evidence; the bright, harsh colors of the Australian outback landscape are more popular than the Dublin-grey tones of a Melbourne winter; convicts, explorers, bushmen and prospectors are almost as numerous as city dwellers; suburban life is perceived through the haze of barbecue smoke and the tinkle of empty 'tinnies'.

As my own recent work has been on Irish transportation to Australia and the life histories of convicts, this theme has a particular interest for me; and, as it accounts for about half the poems, I need not apologise for devoting some time to it.

True to popular belief but not, alas, to historical reality, the Irish convicts are invariably represented as political heroes or social victims; indeed, the historian in me despairs at ever being able to gain a hearing for a less romantic view. The traditional belief is well put by Eitne McKeown of Rathfarnham:

> A foreign power made convicts of them all,
> love of their country was their greatest crime,
> love for a poor and hungry family
> motivated them, perhaps, to steal a sheep.
> Oh! Justice! Where were you hiding?

And again by Tricia Cunningham of Monkstown:

> The simple truths that lay behind
> a stock of sorry crimes,
> were never seen by the law of the land
> as indication of the times...

In Australia their suffering continues. Echoing the ballad 'Van Diemen's Land', Paul Devereux of Rathfarnham describes

> The evil dance of overseers
> yoked like beasts to plow the fields –
> price of penal servitude –
> who broke with iron the virgin soul

All agree, however, that the convicts laid the foundations for Australia. Duncan Jefferson, writing from City Beach in Perth, relates how

> ...Together, against adversity, they gave
> birth to Australia:
> They prayed, they believed, they triumphed:
> They planted Erin's ideals in this distant land

Many of the poems make the link between convict transportation and more recent emigration, and the way in which this long haemorrhage has kept Ireland a weak and poor country. In her 'Ballad of Botany Bay', for example, Tricia Cunningham laments the price paid both by the motherland which lost its youth and by the Aboriginals who lost their land as a result of this transportation:

> I know as my glance casts back the years
> with a wary and wistful eye,
> if we had kept the rebels here
> today's youth wouldn't fly,
> if our land was shaped by those
> women's hands
> who raised Australia high...

> Perhaps the Aborigines would dwell
> unfouled by our decline,
> and Ireland would have grown to be
> as prosperous in her time
> as a foreign land that grew so grand
> on our exported crime.

Closely related to the convict theme is Ned Kelly and the powerful symbolism vested in him in both countries. I have striven in some of my recent writing to undo the mythology relating to John Kelly, Ned's ex-convict father, whose theft of two pigs from an equally poverty-stricken neighbor was hardly an act of political protest. Nevertheless, I think that 'The Sins of the Fathers' by Paddy Bushe of Waterville, County Kerry, nicely captures the continuity between southern County Tipperary and north-eastern Victoria which the Kelly clan represents:

Those huge horizons must have revolved
all possibilities, all planes. Transported
beyond himself, Kelly saw a copper sun

implacable as an English law
(for two pigs I give you Australia).
Wattles against a blue sky sang

of summer furze on Sliabh na mBan.
Gum trees clung like refugees
to red rocks, scratched dry earth.

White noons ached along parched creeks
snaking through the mockery of kookaburra.
Yet those horizons encircled

no tenants, extracted no rents,
demanded no tithes. Kelly stopped
remembering, fenced some horizon.

Law, nevertheless, here and there,
remembers. Landlords' sons here,
become squatters there, remembered

Law and property search the same horizons,
pull possibilities tight, a noose
for sons of cockies and old lags.

No wonder hate became a mask
ultimately of iron, such is life...

Two of the poems address the theme of Irish explorers, notably Robert O'Hara Burke from 'St Cleran's, County Galway, whose gift of fish from Aboriginals in the desert provided an almost Biblical image for the Irish mind. In 'Burke's Dreaming', Ronald Tamplin gives us the explorer's last soliloquy in which he brings together his Australian and Irish incarnations. And in 'The Fish' Rosendra Rawley sees the incident as suggesting a reconciliation between conquerors and conquered.

Not surprisingly, the Derryveagh evictions of April 1861 inspired one of the poems of emigration. When forty-seven tenant families were evicted by John George Adair, a Donegal landlord, the Donegal Relief Fund in Australia raised money to pay for their passages. This story has long been celebrated in Ireland as one of the excesses of landlordism. However, it was only in 1986 that a link was made with a descendant of one of the families in Sydney who returned to Ireland with a film crew to help make *The Distant Drum*.

A refreshing change from the cloying sentiment of most of the emigration pieces is 'Myth of a Missing Man' by Bill Tinley of Maynooth, County Kildare. It begins with:

The bush fires of the fifties silenced him
For over a quarter of a century.
Presumed dead for all those years, he became
A legend in our house, a mystery

Then this mythical figures suddenly reappears:

But myth, it seems, cannot survive hard fact;
Revelation was inevitable...
And he stepped like Lazarus from the tomb
Into new snapshots in our sitting-room.

"for two pigs I give you Australia"

Two lines in the final verse ask a quintessentially Irish question:

We cannot understand this sudden twist.
It reveals our deity as falsehood,
Obliges us to redress the perfect past.
Is there nothing any longer sacred?
Letters from Perth confirm his resurrection
While we begin to crave some new distraction.

Another poem, 'Dislocation', by Ted Nealon of Newcastle, County Galway, explores the emigrant experience in an unsentimental and elegant way:

The language is not different
and yet
their greetings are awkward to my tongue.
Old words still echo in my mind
fractured remnants of earlier days.
I am marooned here...

Whenever two of us converge
the talk is all of home,
though we are distant from it now.
10,000 miles of dislocation
a memory for every mile.

THE PROBLEM OF HOW the emigrant is conventionally expected by those at home to feel about Ireland provides a common theme in literature of this kind. Not so common is the plight of the northern Protestant whose Irish identity if more ambiguous and problematic. This is dealt with by Gerald Dawe in a poem with the cross-cultural title

of 'The Likelihood of Snow / The Danger of Fire':

I've been asking myself, head crooked in arms,
why it could be so easy to forget about home
and all the mumbo-jumbo about one's *People*.
'Mine', if such they are, look for all the world
Like great Deniers, the staunch,
unflappable self-
deceit of always seeming to be in the right
and the fear of being found out that
they are not.
I have watched since childhood their
marches and parades,
with banners aloft, swords and Bibles
displayed,
and I have passed the banks of clipped hedges,
the front rooms
with oval mirrors and cabinets full
of photographs,–
the husband in the Army, son in
the Boys' Brigade,
a fallen brother, the Royal Wedding –
and never known my 'People' since they kept
to themselves in desperate innocence,
or persist behind transparent walls
to explode in hate
or like me in another hemisphere
they disappear in dreams...

On the other hand, some poems express the dramatic rejection of Australia by the returnees who were back in Ireland to pour scorn on the euphoric accounts provided by Byrne and Murphy. In 'Return Ticket Odyssey', Pat Boran of Portlaoise describes the macabre vengeance wrought by Eamonn and Helen on their final leave-taking of Alice Springs:

And when the house is quite full,
chameleons on the bedspreads,
tarantulas knee-deep in the ice-box
vanilla, a newt whirled round
and round in the high-fi at forty-
five revolutions per minute, Eamonn
and Helen light their gasoline trail,
bid farewell to the patio, the deckchairs,
the bathtub of floating cans of booze,
and blow all the ugly creatures
their home can fit
into the ticking midnight of Alice Springs...

Cissie Smith of Dublin's 'Eighty Eight' which tells us most about the anticipation of emigrating to Australia in the bicentennial year when something like 30,000 young Irish people left to try their fortunes elsewhere:

It's the year of the Millennium,
a year of emigration
Unemployment, heartbreak, or
travel education.
Happy birthday Dublin. A proud
one thousand years.
I dearly love my City, but today
I'm shedding tears.
I have lived for only twenty,
percentage wise that's small.
To me it is a life time, but I'm a Dub,
who got the call.
Next week I take the emigrant road
to the land of opportunity.
Tho. I like the feel of freedom, I'm
aware there's no impunity.
I'm headed for Northern Territories,
Darwin to be precise.
I have read and asked about it,
and from what I hear it's nice.
Demolished by Hurricane Tracy,
but rebuilt with love and care
All new and exciting. I know I'll
be happy there.

The experience of living in Australia as an Irish person is tackled more by the short-story writers than by the poets. However, Peter Kay's robust account of the donnybrook following a standover man's visit to a country glassware shop is one of my favorites, with its sub-theme of the Irishman being mistaken for a 'Pom'. It is also the only poem exhibiting some grasp of colloquial Australian:

McKinley and MacKenzie came around
MacKenzie said to me, 'You dirty hound.'
I threw MacKenzie back a 'bunch of fives'.
He reeled. McKinley said, 'It's time
for knives.'
He pulled a heavy blade out of his shirt
And said, 'I'll drain yer brain, yer
Pommie squirt'.

'I happen to be Irish, Pal', I said.
'Either way', says he, 'You're better dead.
Who cares about the nation of your birth;
Here's a flamin' taste of what you're worth'...

The winning poem, 'From A Sepia Print', by Conleth Ellis of Athlone, County Westmeath, explores the true story of twin brothers from Carlow who emigrated to Australia before World War I, joined the 1st AIF and served on the Western Front, one of them dying in Flanders. The survivor, Jack, writes poetry while recuperating in a military hospital in

Hampshire, drawing on images of Australia, the Dardanelles and of childhood in Carlow:

You write an elegy full of the tropical night,
Of space and stars and longings
Without end or beginning, McCarthy's Creek
In your mind and the gaunt gum trees,
The kookaburra's cry,
Almond in bloom against an adopted sky.

You write an elegy loud with the breath of life,
Flanagan's rowdy bar by the Wallaby Track,
the teamsters sparring and old Mulga Bill
Cracking a rawhide thong, a sail
Snapped full above the waves,
Music jostling in Naracoorte's wild caves.

Nevertheless, Jack decides not to return to Australia: the images of childhood Carlow are more compelling. Twice exiled, he sets his feet "toward the streets of youth", to "haul half of the wrecked dream ashore". This is an effective poem, although its imagery depends very much on what may seem to an Australian reader to be the over-familiar and nostalgic image of the rugged bushman and his translation to Gallipoli.

My own favorite poem from the entire collection is Cathy O'Riordan's starkly simple 'Sister in Australia', which provides an appropriately conclusive note:

She
Over there
In sunshine

Me
Here
In rain.

She has fallen to a country.

Behind me
Present
Behind her,
Past,

Before me
Field of familiar
Before her
Yield of the vast.

Between us
Times,
Estranging
Seas,
Mad Islands,
Fragrance of letter
Sister from sister
And radiance of sibling amities.

She has fallen to a country.

Bob Reece is Associate Professor at History at Murdoch University, Western Australia, and editor of Exiles from Erin: Convict Lives in Ireland and Australia *(London, Macmillan, 1991). From 1987 to 1989 he was the first Keith Cameron Professor of Australian History at University College, Dublin, a visiting chair endowed by Dr A. G. F. O'Reilly and the Australian government.*

GEOFF GOODFELLOW

A Letter from Germany

ACADEMICS AREN'T REALLY my go in the main. I find they're usually looking for some obscure angle, some remote notion as to why you do what you do. Of course, most wouldn't phrase a statement in such base terms as that. They'd be more at home stretching that sentence into a paragraph – or two. It seems they are trained to use language as a means of keeping information to themselves, rather than making it public. I like the idea of ordinary language being used to communicate.

It rather took me by surprise when an academic, Professor Gerhard Stilz, on exchange in Adelaide from the University of Tubingen, invited me to Bayreuth University to address his colleagues at the 1992 New Literatures in English Conference. He'd heard me wind up the English One students at the Adelaide Uni by demonstrating how I've used 'the new orality' rather than the 'old' to chronicle the lives of ordinary Australians. He'd also spent enough time in Australia to see that I'd been able to hold the attention of building workers by throwing their language back at them during performances on major building sites in capital cities. I think he was also rather amazed that Australia is a world leader in promoting culture to rank and file workers. He believed that having me at the conference could provide the stimulus for Europe to follow Australia's lead. At a time when jobs are few anywhere in the developed world, I guess we have to start considering non-traditional forms of work and their spin-offs. My publisher and the people it employs would support that notion too.

Professor Stilz issued me an invitation after hearing me perform poems from *No Ticket No Start* (Wakefield Press) to over four hundred English students. (When the book was first published in 1990 with a print run of 5,000 copies, it sold out in eight months and a reprint of 2,000 followed.) I told him I'd be happy to go, if he could line up more than just one venue and provide the same conditions spelt out in the book's title. He assured me that he'd seek funding from the Literature Board of the Australia Council under their International Touring Program and he set the wheels in motion. I subsequently performed at universities in Mannheim, Heidelberg, Trier, Tubingen, Bayreuth, Göttingen, Giessen, Frankfurt, München, Aachen and Essen. And the response was such that I'm already negotiating a return bout in 1994.

It wasn't always easy though. I'm usually in front of a blue-collar audience and I always find that comfortable. My month in Germany was spent performing for academics and would-be academics, people mostly drawn from the middle class, so I don't want you to get the impression that I had a walk-up start. I like the honesty and frankness of the working class. They hide very little in their responses.

I arrived in Bayreuth on a Friday to be greeted by Professor Eckhard Breitinger, and the news that I had lobbed at their Whitsun celebrations. It was to be a long weekend. Other than that I understood very little, until Eckhard explained that most universities would be closed during the forthcoming week, but I'd have a great opportunity for sightseeing. He was an extremely generous host and proceeded to spend the next three days shunting me from castle to castle, from Catholic cathedral to the Protestant equivalent, from the Wagner museum to an exhibition of Gothic art then on to an exhibition of medieval art. After three solid days I could take no more. I told him: "Eckhard, you're a very generous man but I come from South Australia. My home city is just over 150 years old and about the oldest thing I ever have to confront is my old man...and even now I still can't understand him every time we get together. How the bloody hell do you expect me to make sense of all this history?" Eckhard finally understood and invited me to his library where I was able to wade through some Australian authors and make sense of words once again. Earlier I'd tried to look at his weekend newspapers but even some of the photos had me baffled. On Tuesday

morning I attended the university with him, agreeing that we'd meet for lunch and that I'd keep myself occupied in the student cafeteria writing a few letters home.

After realising that my letters sounded too depressing I started looking about for likely starters to fire up conversation. For the week preceding my German tour I'd been working in Karratha and Port Hedland, performing for construction and mining workers, and sharing a house with four blokes who were all heavily involved in those industries. They were all bachelors, big heavy blokes who wore tattoos and emptied beer cans and filled ashtrays at an incredible rate. I looked around the student cafeteria

for a likely head, for someone who reminded me of those easygoing blokes I'd shared such an interesting week with. All I could see were boys in short-sleeve shirts wearing socks and scuffs and making vague attempts to look mature with wispy moustaches. For a moment I felt lost and inadequate. Then I spotted a starter. I set my eyes on his and said, "Hey, do you speak English?" "Yes", was his brief reply. "Then get y'r arse over here and talk to me will yr." He sat down and introduced himself as Momo. He came from Soweto and was studying Business Administration. He was as black as the coffee that we were drinking but had big clear white eyes that shone with optimism and a mouth that still knew how to smile. I told him what I was up against and he understood. I asked him questions about Soweto and he knew too that I understood. He gave me two hours. I still feel the privilege.

I'D BEEN WARNED about German academics long before I climbed onto the jumbo for the trip over. They were, I was assured, very proper and very formal. They were suit-and-tie people. I contemplated contacting Paul Keating to see if could rummage through his rag-bag before he sent it off to St Vinnies...but I thought, he'll know I'm from the left and he probably wouldn't consider it right to accommodate me. So I departed in a pair of Levis. And most of the Akkers at the conference and at the university departments I visited wore clothing that matched mine. On the night of the conference dinner though, I changed uniforms and arrived in a cashmere jacket, cool wool trousers and what was aptly described by my eldest son as "Oh no, not a Ray Martin tie!" My wife had insisted that I should at least attend the conference dinner in other than my normal clothing and had taken me shopping. It worked a treat though. I thoroughly confused everyone. Even myself when I caught an image reflected in the mirror.

Bayreuth is a reasonably small city and I walked from my hotel to the dinner, bumping into a group of Akkers on the way. They too were dressed up, but still down on what my informants had told me. Even so, they hadn't even opened their mouths before I was able to register their surprise. After a bit of chastising by them, I put forth my yarn about the mode of dress I had expected. I was told that within other faculties, my expectations would have been met, but that as they were academics involved in New Literatures, their professional colleagues viewed them as being somewhat inferior. The teaching of Australian Studies, Canadian, Caribbean, South African, Indian, English, all seemed unimportant in the face of German literature. They explained too that they all had problems securing adequate budgets within their departments because of this élitist professional snobbery. But they laughed in the face of it, knowing that they could jump into a pair of jeans and a T-shirt and still be taken seriously by their own. It seemed I had come among the equivalent of the larrikin Akkers of the world.

By this stage they had all seen me in action. They'd heard my tongue-in-cheek apology earlier that afternoon when I'd spoken. I opened my address by stating that although this was the New Litera-

tures in English Conference, I was unable to speak English and that they'd have to be content with trying to decipher my Australian voice pattern and deal with my nasal tone. I'd also had the opportunity to speak at a couple of uni's prior to the conference, so I knew that most of the students had only been exposed to poetry from the likes of Shakespeare, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Longfellow, et al. So I reminded them that Longfellow was dead, but Goodfellow was alive and well and moving among them, listening to them recording voice patterns of the day. I performed for twenty minutes, punctuating my poems with short anecdotes to allow them better points of entry. I shared the platform with Ken Saro-Wiwa of Nigeria, Don Mattera of South Africa, David Dabydeen of Guyana and Dennis Brutus of South Africa, with Emilio Jorge Rodriguez of Havana as the chair. When Emilio called for questions, the only responses were for more poetry. The personal responses I received following the forum were invitations to other universities.

It's a fact that many young Germans are still hung-up about their nation's involvement in the Second World War. At a restaurant one night it was suggested that a quick and easy way to win a girl's heart in Germany was to sit in a bar, wear a Star of David medallion dangling from a gold chain and fiddle with it. It's a sick joke...but it underlines the enormous guilt that many young Germans feel. I suggested to many students that they should read the Philip Larkin poem 'This Be The Verse', and that an answer was to be found in the final stanza:

Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don't have any kids yourself.

My understanding of that stanza is that he is not *really* saying not to have kids, but rather, not to hand on your negative baggage. It's rumored that Larkin himself found an answer in publishing that poem: he was denied becoming Britain's Poet Laureate. If the rumor was in fact a reality, then the case for poetry and the new orality is even stronger.

GORDON COLLIER, an expatriate New Zealander of twenty years, teaches New Literatures at Giessen University. Before I performed for his students I was able to give him a hard time about not being able to pronounce 'six' – and he was able to have a go at me over my nasal sound. But we talked too, about much more important issues – like about what he did on Anzac Day. It seemed appropriate then that during my lecture I asked the simple question "Who won the war?" I was greeted with a brief silence by the sixty or so assembled students, most of whom appeared to be German, apart from about half-a-dozen who were obviously Japanese. I decided to answer my own question. "We won the war" I said..."but twenty years later, looking at Germany and their industry, technology and economy, some of us revised our view. We thought perhaps Germany had won after all. But then another twenty years on, we looked towards Japan", and pointing out a young male Japanese student I continued "and realised then that perhaps it was Japan that had won the war. A week ago though",

"...I asked the simple question 'Who won the war?' I was greeted with silence by the sixty students, most of whom appeared to be German, apart from half-a-dozen Japanese."

I went on, "I read that the Japanese economy is now suffering a major decline...so who did win the war? It seems none of us...and maybe it's a fair thing to suggest that there are no dead-set winners in any war."

I talked then about what Gordon and I had talked about earlier, the faces, the dress, the composure of those men and women who march proudly on Anzac Day in our countries. I talked about how they are the ordinary faces of ordinary folk, their ranks not generally comprised of high achievers from the world of business and finance but, in the main, the battlers and survivors of our nations. I then read 'Marching Orders', a poem about my own father, about him marching off to war and the baggage that he brought home. I asked them to think about and consider their own parents, and more importantly their grandparents, and what the war might have done for them in terms of their own sanity. I spoke too about an Australian film showing the effects of the Vietnam war, 'A Street To Die', and pointed out how it so accurately portrayed not only the seventies in Australia but, in many ways, how it reflected the fifties too. After they had heard my poem and heard about some of the scenes depicted in the film, the floodgates were opened for many of them to comment that their experiences were all too familiar.

For a nation that still calls its young men up for two years of national service at age eighteen, or

offers them a choice of some form of social service as an alternative, I was keen to seek out the attitudes of not only the recipients but the young women also. I don't believe I spoke to one young man who would have actively volunteered himself; however, they all seemed to accept their fate with a less than passive resistance. One couple I spoke to, though, left me with something more to think about. The man stated that national service was unfair because men lose two years of their life before being able to attend university. I could cop that sweet. But the woman commented that women lose two years of their lives in having a child. I have great difficulty accepting that. It seems to beg the question of whether parenthood or a career are more important or significant.

ON THE MORNING of my performance in Göttingen, I was startled by a tank rumbling down the main street with three heads protruding from the turrets. For a brief moment my heart fluttered. I was cursing myself for not being able to speak or read German before I composed myself and realised that the country wasn't being invaded, what I was seeing were just Americans out joy-riding. I shared my feelings on this matter with Klaudia later that morning. She told me that an old woman who lived in the same apartment block as herself had come to her every morning for over a week when she had first moved in, asking if it was the Russians invading. Klaudia said that on the first couple of mornings she had spent a good deal of time reassuring the old woman but, that after a week, she had insisted to the woman that she'd come to her apartment and warn her to pack her belongings if it became necessary. Such is life for the aged. Now that the Americans have announced a major withdrawal from Germany, many of those old people are urging them to stay. The comfort zone has been established. The young, however, seem pleased with the move, and are keen to rid their country of what they often describe as those "mainly brash young boys". "They don't even speak German", was a popular line which many of the students used to heap criticism on the American forces. When I put this point to Norbert Platz, one of my host professors, he admitted that this was a widespread student reaction. Without a hint of a patronising attitude, he defended the position of the troops, stating that they were mostly drawn from a low socio-economic group and that the fault lay, not in their inability to speak German but, rather, in the lack of educational opportunity provided to them by the American government.

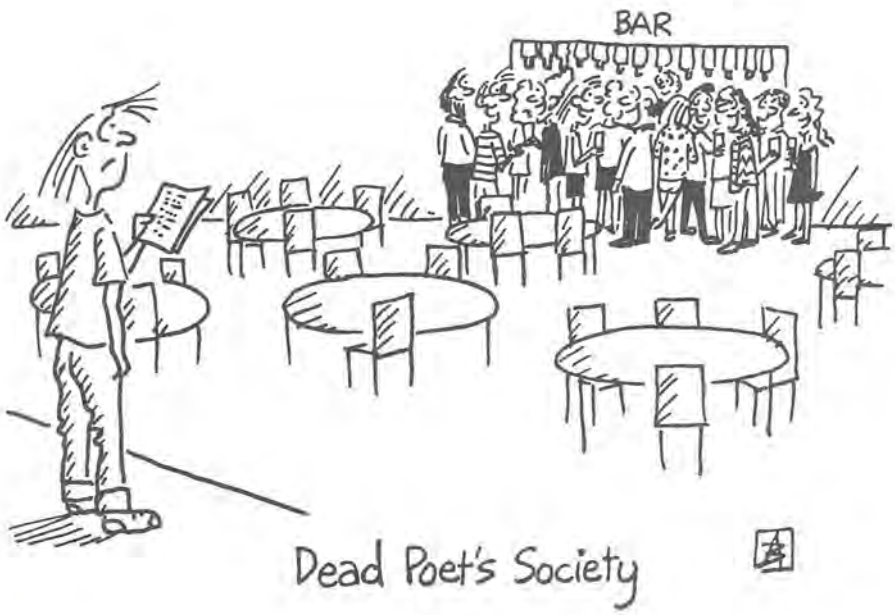
The Americans, however, aren't the only national group to bear the brunt of that same tag. The Turkish community wear it too, perhaps even more so. I put this fact before many students in a number of cities, quietly explaining that I believed them to be bigoted rather than racist in using this as an excuse. "They don't try to join in, they don't try to be part of Germany", was about the best excuse they could offer. A good many of them, particularly those who had been to Australia, threw back the fact that most white Australians have very racist attitudes towards black Australians. I had to admit that they were right, but at the same time, I pointed out that there were a good many people in Australia now trying to address that cultural deficiency. I talked about the Aboriginal Studies units that now exist within our universities, about Aboriginal Teacher Training programs, talked about how material concerned with Aboriginal issues is now culturally screened before included in the curricula of our schools, and also how Aboriginal Studies is taught as a subject in schools, and also about how the media have adopted a more positive attitude in their reporting and coverage of issues and topics concerning Aboriginals. I told them too, that there are many Australians just like me who don't buy into racism, whether it be against Aboriginals or any other cultural group. I was able to relate how my usual Saturday morning was spent at a particular coffee lounge in Adelaide, run by Italians, and that I was not in the least intimidated by the fact that at the table alongside me there would often be a group of Greeks speaking in Greek, and perhaps Italians on the other side, speaking Italian. I was able to point out that we were in fact a multicultural society that operated with at least a hint of democracy and acceptance.

There seems little acceptance in Germany, though, for foreigners seeking political asylum. The weekend prior to my arrival in Mannheim, there was a major protest aimed at the Turks. It was a Saturday afternoon of violence – with talk of cars and motorbikes having arrived from distant parts of Germany. The afternoon concluded with police wading in with batons and riot shields. Not so the next Saturday: when a further demonstration was publicised, and I was being shunted off to Speyer to see the 'Salier' exhibition, we had to pass through roadblocks set up by the police to inspect suspect vehicles as we drove out of town. We saw car boots open with noses and hands poking through them as we moved on to the autobahn. No chances were taken and all reports suggested that an orderly demonstration had taken place.

Although I never got the chance to attend a demonstration, I was told that they are mainly

attended by the young. The major trouble-makers, it seems, are the right-wing neo-Nazis. They have revived the old swastika emblem and although they have a lot of followers, I was assured they have few members. And among those followers, a good many drawn from the bourgeoisie. The more popular paramilitary organisational slogans that I saw as graffiti on many walls read "Auslander Raus" (Foreigners Out) and "Das Boot Ist Voll" (The Boat Is Full). I was told that these slogans are aimed mostly at those termed 'Scheinasylant', those who pretend to seek political asylum when in reality they may just want to escape poor living conditions. The group of about 180 Turks I saw living in a hostel in Bellinghorm seemed to have missed out badly if that was the case. From the look of their accommodation, I would think that even sixty people would have been cramped. Most live with the constant threat of violence, including the possibility of their accommodation being torched. Already children have died in fires caused by reactionaries under such circumstances, and their attackers, when charged, have pleaded for leniency, claiming that they were drunk and incapable of exercising better judgement.

Opposed to the right-wing reactionaries are the left-wing group known as the 'Autonomous'. Little but the badges on their battle jackets separate these two groups at a quick glance. But it doesn't stop there. The 'Skinheads' look like the neo-Nazis, too, but they are more interested in just standing out as radicals and living by the motto "drink till you drop". And then there are the 'Punks'. They too stand out because of their clothing and style, but they are more liberal and are in favor of foreigners. But that's not the end of the penny section. There are the 'Hooligans'. They're the group that bash or get bashed when a football game occurs. All in all it appears to be a fairly divided society. But maybe if we had eighty-five million people living in a landmass smaller than most Australian states, we might have a radically different society.



Bev Aisbett

CROSSOVER

An Inter City Express speeds me
east from Aachen
    to Essen

throughout this journey
    i find i'm on the side of
Bayer
    but drawing closer to their
logo
     a giant facsimile pill
mounted high above their factory
    there is little i can
swallow

as i cross their cross
    i'm confronted by its
symbolism –
& begin to wonder
    is this a cross to the
living?
    is this a cross to the
dead?
    or do Bayer consider
all things to be equal?

i consider what is most
patently obvious
    a Bayer factory wall
covered in a film of yellow
    a Bayer factory wall
covered in a film of white

& as i pass on through Duisburg
    i consider the Bayer workforce –
wondering what price they pay
    for their film development.

GEOFF GOODFELLOW

Geoff Goodfellow's latest book Triggers *is reviewed in this issue. A first printing of 5000 sold out. It is being reprinted. A version on video has been released.*

AN UNEXPECTED SHOWER

Travelling Germany i found myself
constantly surprised
    like one sunny day in Göttingen
along Giesmarland Strasse
    i was struck by what i could
only sense as total insecurity

there...
    on the front of a trendy-looking
showroom
    a huge sign proclaiming
BAD DESIGN

of course i had to cross the street
    i couldn't pass –
& behind the plateglass window
    a classic display of sparkling
bathware
    colour coded i can only describe
it with further clichés as a
decorator's dream

as i nosed the glass i thought
    if this was in Australia
they'd call it
    A TOUCH OF CLASS
or
    FINE DESIGN
& i wondered who really did have
cultural cringe

later that night in a biergarten
i mentioned to a dozen students
that i'd worked out German humour
earlier in the day
"You Germans rely on reverse
psychology" i told them
    & repeated my story

i can tell you now
    they just showered me with
raucous laughter.

GEOFF GOODFELLOW

JOHN MILLETT

The Indian Hawker, 1931

He came out like the swallows of spring – from the east. Usually such men come out of the west, in black coats. He wore a black coat like a swallow, a brown smock and a fez almost maroon on top of his 2 eyes. Mostly men in black coats, stereotypes, arrive to clean up a dirty town – one living dirty – but for the most part Loth was clean living – very very clean.

It was the day the twister plaited the climbing rose in Aunt Ez's garden, (and every Sunday she giving threepence to God), tied knots in Mother Brown's washing, bloomers and all, lifted a small dog called Farter off its 4 randy legs, threw a water tank into a tree and stitched bits of Lysaght galvanised iron into a fence – and Old Jek, prospector, (camped on the riverbank washing for gold in sour river sand) – it took his tent sailing above a landscape messed up by the longest drought in 50 years – paddocks full of sheep skeletons, dock, killweed – and everyone praying for storms to drive nails into the hard earth, with never a cloud in the sky – though dogs of the wind were barking.

The Indian Hawker wasn't like a swagman, a shearer, a sideshow boxer, a fortune teller. If he needed a metaphor he was like a knife sharpener or a scissor sharpener – who sold plumbago, antiflagistine, flea seed, epacacuanha wine and embrocations.

All morning boys followed the gaudy canopy of his gypsy caravan, talking of dingoes and foxes, while he worked his way along the main and only street in Loth – a prince of the flesh with a lean and elegant arm, which could be seen by the way he sharpened scissors or a knife or two. Then he came to Mother Brown's scrawny little house – no paint – only a lick or two of affection she gave to windows always clean – and a garden tight with violets and forgetmenots –

and nobody knew why, uninvited, he just walked into her kitchen, empty except for half a loaf of bread, some jam and a cat – the caravan parked out front, a nosebag on the horse – you could see he meant to stay a while. And the boys drifted off to kill rabbits in their squats, rob nests of amethyst birds.

Everyone knew something was going to happen. There was the smell of incense coming from the small cottage and he went in carrying a long knife – or was it the smell of curry powder?

Mother Brown loved curries. "He was very kind. I don't know why he just came in." The villagers nodded. "He just looked round and went out leaving the knife." The villagers nodded.

"He came back with a leg of mutton." The villagers nodded again. "And more knives all of them sharp." – naturally being a knife sharpener.

Then slash-slash, chop-chop, snip-snip with the scissors and the meat was cubed, diced and ready.

"Then he went out again – came back with a suitcase full of bottles and jars." Again and again the villagers nodded, remembering spicy and piquant odors that drifted up the droughted riverbed of Loth (everything very quiet after the "whirligig") – a smell that overpowered the scent of wattle and honeysuckle. "He knew I like curry. I don't know how he knew."

And that same day, 23 September, 1931, Kruger Lowe died – an old soldier, medals hanging from him like sores – the funeral in the planning stage with talk of him owning a diamond the size of a plover's egg. The Solicitor, the Executor foraging through worn out clothes – letters from Holland and not one of them answered – and the Reverend Howdo preparing for the funeral, came out of his church and said to no one in particular, (nothing better to do) – "The body of Christ is taken down through every moment in men's lives" – contributing nothing at all to the fantasy world of Loth village since only Aunt Ez heard him and then only half heard.

Mother Brown went on – "He made the most superb curry I ever tasted."

That night strange singing came from her house. No one knew whether it was a love song or a Vedic hymn sung over the silence of Australia to Kala –

a voice – the sound of a sitar plucked in a holy way.

"Like a harp." Old Jek said. "It was like a harp played in a church – though it was the Indian Hawker's voice." Long vines of his speech spell-binding the night. "It was like God singing." And Jek said it again the following week, (and he not a man to repeat himself) – in the afternoon a week later it was. He was half asleep on the riverbank under a willow by the green pool watching big trout like underwater pendulums stroking away time – thinking of gold – and, though he was 70, of the transience of sexual pleasure – a time when May-dukes ripened and droll bees writhed in the lilacs. "It was a holy song."

No one saw the bright caravan leave. It must have been before daybreak surely. Some said that. Others said it was noon – there are conflicting accounts – but whenever it was Mother Brown's skin was soft as suede and she hung the new day out with her laundry clean as a shilling in the backyard for everyone to see if they cared – for the foxes in her eyes were always hungry for love.

The day after he left rain fell and broke the drought. No one knows if he had anything to do with that, with Kruger Lowe dying, with the twister, or with anything at all – or whether it all happened innocently – or from some great guilt for sins the people of Loth might have committed in secret and never mentioned.

Though a lot of things were said by others Mother Brown said nothing – and when she died, carried away with her the recipe for the finest curry she sometimes made from the small black jars in her kitchen and lotions of herbs, all dated the ninth month.

And ever since the time of the Indian Hawker every September Loth waits for the rains to fall and for God to begin singing.

TWO POEMS BY LES HARROP

A SECRET OF EMPIRE

The late Lord Megafoam turned on his Lady
hours out of Aden, to end her infernal
yip-yapping of Home. His diction was salty.
He cabled ahead:
WANT NO LOVELORN CUBS
AT MY TABLE. SAME PETTICOATS. SAME VAPORS.
ADMINISTRATION A VIRILE AFFAIR.

...fazed once again that his flesh could be faulty.

Arrived in the flesh, he worked at his papers
and kept his verandah, lightly aware
of the movements around him, fluid and shady.
A masculine laughter slipped through the shrubs
that bedded the compound.
Wrote in his journal:
"Servant and critic of Empire agree
there is no love that is not depravity."

"NO PICTURE EXISTS OF IBSEN WITH HIS MOUTH OPEN"

The day began wet and stayed so till one,
following which hour it palpably dampened,
and several voices were heard in the fog –
deep and
cross, and arguing fiercely: *Where had their baggage gone?*

Their author looked on with an unamused stare:
a deviant cleric deputed to tinker
in Catholic business, and no sort of talker,
he gleamed with contempt: a sour, self-made,
unkempt millionaire.

Travelling by steamer he had to have light
because of the corpses, the 'ex-human beings'
that were down
in the cargo. On a train one night

he thought of a story. – A man on a train
who had used his hat
for lack of a toilet; he'd thrown out the hat
as they sped through a town
to find, getting home, that it stood on his doormat.

DAVE AND JOE

the young father
stands totemic
on the verandah
regarding the garden
the flowers he planted
a month ago
have burst out purple
the grass is long again
this day a kite connects
the immeasurable blue
a signature so high
summer blinds him

ADAM KING

SHE CAME...

Funny how she looked so much like mother.
People would say she was a close friend
    of the family.
At times
She walked past the house and talked
    with mother,
Only to leave as quickly as she came.
I asked why she came.
Mother would say she came to borrow our sugar.
Every fortnight
She and mother would meet at the front gate.
One time
Mother did not come home,
So I stood at the gate with the sugar pot.
She arrived
And looked at me in surprise.
I handed her the pot without speaking.
She opened it
Only to find all my savings.
It was the first time
I saw mother's eyes looking back at me.
The tears answered all my questions.

LORRAINE T. NOGA
(Papua New Guinea)

LOOK AT THE CITY

Eventually Hey may be
sitting on deck
looking at the city

scanning the lights.
Quietly, rain began
to descend in play –

surrounding a table,
two deck chairs, two
benches, two railings

and two doors for the
next exit. Suspended,
the shapes gathered

form and were placed
under the roof of the
house, attached to

the deck, where other
lines kept close to
the rafters, to coast

along rapids by morning
with lightness, oranges,
visibility and ease.

JOYCE PARKES

A THOUSAND STEPS

A thousand steps to climb
the seventh wonder of the world

a trinket hunter's delight
a golden handshake
pride of the Junta

shrine of the eight-armed Buddha,
his aura outlined in carnival lights

a cheeky inward smile

which says "You've come this far,
unburden yourselves –
of attachment. Leave your gun outside."

A mendicant monk belches into a microphone,
a technicality
flesh is heir to, reminder
to a half starved weekend crowd
investing
in palmists of their choice.

Activist and black marketeer confer
on a Johnny Walker democracy
pissing under sacred trees

whose clerics tint the air with bells
and kerosene vapors deter the bees.

What the poor can't show, sell nor buy
– anger, lust, greed –
is carved into the grimace of a gargoyle
bargaining with the flies.

ADAM AITKEN

HIROSHIMA SHADOWS

s w o d a h s a s h a d o w s
w o d a h s a m a s h a d o w
o d a h s a m i m a s h a d o
d a h s a m i h i m a s h a d
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o d a h s a m i m a s h a d o
w o d a h s a m a s h a d o w
s w o d a h s a s h a d o w s

PETE SPENCE

POEM ON A LINE BY JIM

provided you know the back of your room you can write
you can pray that despite much sentimental music
no black stocking commits murder in back of your words
cruel all those things dead worded I'd like to write 'Jim'
but if I write 'Jim' it's just as mean as writing 'theory'
way out back in some desert full of noise a child dies
so 'Jim' & 'theory' become the bricks of a tomb
& 'Hugh' or 'Tolhurst' must die too along with any script
it's like a clock tied to explosives ticks you off
just for coming we'd like to inform you that the department
has withdrawn your visa for life you'd better head West
the salt lakes, 'Romanticism', 'Mysticism' got to go
'O may my typewriter explode! O may I go to the Pub!'
You see me & Jim well we got this theory

HUGH TOLHURST

R. N. CALLANDER

Dog Days

(For Rachel)

DO YOU REMEMBER the summer in Europe in 92? How it started already in May, and we all thought it couldn't last? Particularly after that freak late winter, with heavy snow when it should have been spring. And then, without any preliminaries, come May, it beat on and on, those cloudless skies, thirty-something degrees day after day; the kind of weather people pay thousands of D-Marks for, to go to Menorca, Nairobi, The Canaries. And we had it for nothing.

The kind of weather when the swallows start hurtling around the apartment building at six a.m. in reckless squadrons with their sonic squeaks; God knows how they avoid hitting the walls or each other.

One Friday, Frau Meier told me about the new apartment at the back. It was a compromise. Cheaper than the other one which I was regularly having trouble paying for. "You'll like it", she said, "A change is like a holiday." It was that, or find somewhere else.

Certainly it was different. Two floors above the kitchen of the Italian restaurant, no balcony, but a kind of wide window-ledge next to the fire-escape, overlooking the courtyard of those old buildings which face Urbanstrasse.

Their balconies caught the morning sun, while my windows were in permanent shadow. Okay, so who needs a balcony? I spent most of the time at work, and it was still the same distance for my jog down to the Isar and along the river bank. If I wanted sunshine, I could always take a *bade-matte* with me and sunbathe with the riversiders.

On Saturday morning after sleeping late, I opened the curtains wide and took in the new scene with my second cup of coffee. Opposite my window, there were a few balconies occupied. A hefty young woman was hanging out kids' washing on one, and a mature suntanned lady in a bikini was getting herself ready for some more rays on a deck-chair. Pity she wasn't a bit younger. Another woman shook out her pillows and bedding over the rail and looked my way. I waved to her, but she ignored me and went indoors. On the balcony below her, a little girl about six or seven carefully arranged a bunch of dolls in what was probably an important game.

Down below, there was a courtyard which served four or five ground apartments. There were a couple of cars, a BMW motorbike as big as a truck, and several *kabinen* to house their tools and junk. Over one side, an elderly man was making hard work of hanging a few clothes on a line, pausing to cough a lot. Near his feet, a copper-colored dog lay alert, tail switching, with a tennis ball between its forelegs. The old man ignored the dog.

When I went for my run, I had to strip down to shorts, it was so hot. The river paths were crowded with walkers, cyclists. Streams of people headed for the wide river flats of the Isar, loaded with crates of food and beer. Everywhere there were small signs tacked up directing them to *Willi's Fest*, or *Margret's Party*, or *Dieter und Jürgen's Grill*! Some had firewood for the night's barbecue. This was the endless summer, man.

On Sunday afternoon Zack came over for a game of chess and a few brews, but probably to see the apartment. When I went to the fridge for refills, he sat in the window, and he called me. "Hey Rick, check this out." He whistled, and I hurried back. It was the suntan lady opposite, topless now, and the same deep color all over. She somehow didn't seem as old as I originally thought; the body was certainly in good shape.

We watched her for a few minutes while we drank cold Paulaner. But there is a limit to how long you can look at a lady lying motionless in the sun, even with a great body. Eventually it just makes you depressed.

After Zack went, I took another run, miles down past the canal mill. I walked back the last block into Urbanstrasse, and I recognised the old gaffer I had seen hanging out clothes in the courtyard. He was sitting on a kitchen chair in the entry, sucking on a pipe, with the copper dog at his feet. I paused. "*Grüss Gott.* Another great day, isn't it?" His eyes flicked at me, but he didn't answer. He wore a dusty Prinz Albert pushed back on his head, and his eyes were the palest blue you ever saw, as pale as a glass of gin. I tried again. "That's a beautiful dog." I bent and reached out a hand, but the old man's sharp tone stopped me. "Don't touch him! He bites!" It set him coughing.

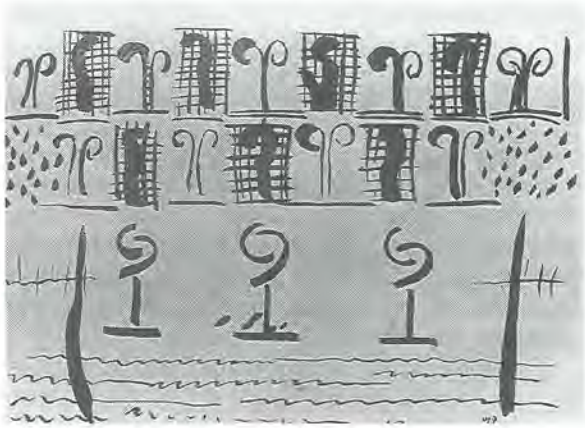
Despite the warning, I hunkered down and made eye contact with the dog. In English, I said, "You wouldn't bite me would you, fella?" The dog understood me, and his tail stirred, but the old man had already stood up and turned, taking his chair with him. *"Komm!"* he ordered, and the dog obeyed. But I swear that the dog turned to look at me as they went inside, and the look said, sorry.

It didn't take me long to get used to the new apartment; after all, I didn't have much stuff to rearrange. If it hadn't been for the alternately stimulating and overpowering smells from the Italian kitchen, the move was definitely an improvement. I had even met the balcony suntan queen while shopping at Tenglemann's, and close-up she was not bad looking. She was probably somewhere between forty and fifty, and looked very athletic. Our supermarket trolleys got tangled together in the aisle, and she said, smiling, "Perhaps we should throw cold water over them." Later that day, the little girl who played with her dolls, waved to me, and I waved back.

They were calling it "Endless Summer". It was a handy gimmick for the advertisers. Munich *stadtmitte* was packed. Tourists kept pouring in, the outdoor café terraces and beergardens were always full. Everybody spent every available minute outdoors. At night it was hard to sleep with the windows open, because of the stifling heat, and the restaurant kitchen clatter, and the hee-haw sirens of the *Feuerwehr* from the local depot.

The next Saturday, a couple of us went to the flea market at Wolfratshausen. Reiner had been looking for a cheap pair of Red Army boots, and we traipsed the trestle tables and car-trunks where locals and refugees and visitors from the East spread out their junk and heirlooms. The *flüchtlinge* from the Jugoslavian wars could hardly believe that people would pay real money for family rubbish like stiff old photo-portraits and grandma's beaded shawl. Don't ask me why, but on impulse I bought an old doll with a painted china face, for the little girl in the building opposite. It cost me twenty marks, and I didn't have the faintest clue how I was going to give it to her without looking like a pervert.

There were plenty of caps and uniforms and badges and stuff, but Reiner couldn't find a pair of boots to fit him, so we drove on to Seeshaupt and drank beer for a few hours while we watched rich people out on the lake in their sailboats.



In the morning, the old guy with the blue eyes was hanging out duds in the courtyard again, leaning against the wire while he had coughing spasms. The copper dog had the ball between his forefeet again, and moved when the old man moved, looking up expectantly, and down again at the ball, daring his master to play with him. As I watched, I willed the old man to please, just once, pick up the ball and throw it for the dog, for Christ's sake. Maybe telepathy works, because as he finished hanging the clothes, the man gave the ball a tap with his foot, and the dog shot off to chase it and bring it back, while the old guy held onto the post for another fit of coughing.

The next time I saw them out in front of their Urbanstrasse entry, I didn't stuff around with preliminaries, beyond the obligatory *Grüss Gott*. I said: "The dog needs exercise. I can take him with me when I run. I would look after him carefully." You wouldn't believe it, but the dog followed this conversation, looking from one to the other, waiting for his master's approval. The old man flicked those colorless eyes at me and away. He cleared his throat and spat aside into the laneway. "If a dog has too much exercise, he eats too much."

"In that case, I will feed him." And suddenly I

knew that I had gone too far, it was inexcusable. The man unsteadily got up and lifted his chair, not looking at me as he turned away. "It is not your business," he croaked, "it is not your business." And I knew that he was right.

As he went back up the alley with his dog and chair, I heard him say, "Fucking foreigner!" I would probably have said the same.

Things had developed between me and the sun-tanned Frau Annelise. I had been to her apartment once, and she to mine, twice. It was hard to believe she was over fifty. She was fitter than many girls half her age. She went like a steam train.

It was one of those nights, still, hot, moonlight, when you can't sleep. I got up and had a glass of water, and then took a cold bottle of beer out of the fridge, to sit on the window-ledge. That was when the copper dog moved, down in the courtyard. He walked across to one shrubbery border for a pee, and then stretched out, lying on the cool cement. I looked up and around, but it was very late; there was no sign of life anywhere.

When I climbed down the fire ladder in my shorts and runners, I couldn't see the dog at first, but then my eyes made him out, standing alert facing me. It made my scalp prickle, and in the same instant, he gave a low growl. "Okay," I said very softly. "Take it easy, dog, I'm in no hurry." I squatted on the ground, and in a minute or two, the dog slowly relaxed and lowered itself facing me, watching me, waiting.

I sat with my arms around my knees, and took a pull on the bottle of Paulaner occasionally. When I did, he would prick his ears up at the movement, and then settle back again. I whispered to it, in English. A lot of rubbish, but what did you expect with a dog, political analysis?

"Good boy. You're a good dog. Where's your ball, dog? Go and get your ball. Go on. The ball. If you bring your ball, I'll throw it for you. Get the ball." Every time I spoke, the dog's head would tilt one way and another, and once, it even whined briefly while it looked away towards where its master would be. And then the dog got up and went strolling. It walked over to the shrubbery and sniffed the bushes. It didn't fool me; I knew it was going to come roundabout and check me out, and didn't want to appear obvious. Sure enough, after a sniff at the bushes and the wall, the dog came carefully within hand reach. I didn't move, but one of my arms hung over my knee with the hand loose. In a minute, I felt the dog's warm breath on the hand like a virgin's kiss. We were at first base.

It was strange how we progressed from there. When the dog brought me the ball, I knew we had established our *raison d'être*. But it is hard to play ball quietly in a deserted courtyard with an eager dog at about three in the morning. First, I scooted the ball along the ground, and the mutt hurtled after it, grabbing it before the ball hit the wall. But the stupid hound was all lit up like a party, and dropped the ball at my feet with a sharp bark, which echoed around the buildings.

"Quiet," I whispered, "you gorilla, d'you want to wake the whole damn *bezirk*?" I tried lofting the ball into the air, so that the dog jumped, twisting his whole torso to catch the ball high, and again this over-excited mongrel returned me the ball with a short bark. I cringed, looking up and around at the buildings above us, waiting for the lights to come on.

"There's only one answer to this, dog," I whispered, "we have got to bug out of here". The way out was through an archway under the apartments, and the door opened from the inside. At the door, the dog hesitated, the ball in his mouth. "It's okay," I reassured him. "We'll just go down to the park and throw a few balls, we'll be right back." Still he hesitated, his eyes alight. I crouched down, and the dog came forward, his ears relaxed as I scratched him and eased the ball from his jaws. The seduction was complete. Out in the street, he took a last guilty look back towards his responsibilities, before following me at an eager run down Urbanstrasse to the park playground.

You know the place I mean? Opposite the Jewish cemetery. It's called Dietramszeller Platz, a long park with playground equipment up one end. Well the hound sure knew what it was for, and he didn't have any more guilty misgivings about enjoying himself. I threw the ball as far as I could into the darkness, and off he went like a bullet. In a minute he was back, panting around the ball in his mouth,

which he dropped at my feet, and braced himself for the next challenge.

Again and again I threw the ball, and each time he brought it back after a gallop which made the ground thrum, his eyes bright. His excitement was contagious. Once when he dropped the ball, I caught him around the neck, hugging him and rubbing his ears, and he rewarded me with soft wet puppy-bites. This is dog-napping, I thought; probably worth at least life imprisonment. After about an hour I was exhausted, but he was still fresh. He was dismayed when I insisted on returning home.

Back at the covered driveway gate, he ran in ahead of me, and dropped the ball again in the courtyard. "No more," I whispered, "not tonight." When I reached up and climbed onto the fire ladder, he sat below me, tail brushing the concrete. For God's sake don't bark, I wished, and he immediately barked. By the second bark, I was up the ladder and into my window. A light came on low in the building opposite, and I dropped out of sight.

The next night, you guessed it, he was waiting for me at the bottom of the fire ladder from the time it got dark, and I was frightened he would raise hell if I didn't go down, although I waited until midnight. Like a lover's meeting, I crept down the ladder to his excited reception, and together we eloped out of the passageway to the street, and down to the park again. For over an hour, I threw the ball for his, and my, delight. In the moon and street light, we ran and played, and wrestled. And once more, I returned him to his courtyard in secret, and climbed up to collapse in my room.

The following nights were the same. Soon after midnight, when the courtyard was quiet, he would be waiting for me, the ball ready. And now, when we came back, he no longer barked at me leaving him. I had started feeding him.

I remembered the old guy's comment about him eating more, so I started to take some dogfood as a supplement. I really didn't need this extra expense. On top of my usual tendency to overspend, particularly on beer, there was the other thing with Annelise, who had cost me over 100 D-Marks both times I took her out to dinner.

The regular nightly routine was taking its toll. I was finding it harder to wake up every morning; the dog was running me ragged. And it wasn't only the dog who was insatiable. Annelise was waking me up and asking for seconds. "I can't keep this up," I pleaded. She misunderstood, whispering, "I will show you; come here." I groaned. I was heading for collapse.

About this time, there was a small company dinner, at one of Munich's oldest restaurants, the Hundeskugeln, in Hotterstrasse. Ironic, isn't it; Hundeskugeln means Dogs' Balls, basis for a few jokes. The kind of place I could never afford to eat, on my salary. Even though I hid at the bottom of the table, Herr Scheinberg came and spoke to me. "Well, Richard," he said, "we worry about you, you look very tired, you need more sleep!" "It's the hot weather," I said. "The endless summer!" he laughed.

In a way, it was a bit of a relief when they sent me to Berlin for a couple of weeks. Certainly it was a chance to catch up on some sleep and recharge the batteries. Annelise was beginning to act as though she owned me, and I was tiring of our Olympic performances in bed.

I did feel guilty about the dog. I mean, you can't explain to them, can you? You can't phone up a dog, or send him a postcard: This is Ku-Damm, wish you were here. I wondered if there was some way I could square it with the old guy, to regularise the arrangement instead of stealing his dog every night at 1.00 a.m. I made up my mind to try again.

When I got back, the summer was still going strong. Once I was in the apartment, I looked for the dog, but couldn't see any sign of him. Maybe he had forgotten the midnight gallops. I glimpsed Annelise on her balcony in the sun, wearing nothing at all; not even a wristwatch. I didn't let her see me.

After two days with no sign of the hound, I asked around, and Frau Meier came back with the news that the old guy had been taken to hospital while I was in Berlin. Was it serious? Unfortunately, he had died. He was nearly ninety.

I was sorry about him, but my first concern was..."What about the dog?" Nobody knew. What dog? Surely they knew about the dog. I went to the *polizeiwacht*, and explained. They said they would check and let me know. I went to the Animal Shelter out near Riem, and searched through their mutts, not knowing what the hell I could do with the dog if I found it, but I had to look. It was not there.

A young local policeman eventually did get back to me, and apologised for bad news. The unclaimed dog had been destroyed.

Annelise and I had an argument that night. "Dog, dog, dog; it is all you can think about! Come back from the window." I ignored her, and closed the door behind me. I walked down to the playground at Dietramszeller Platz, and sat on one of the swings in the dark, imagining I heard the dog thundering along with the ball in his mouth. I didn't even know his name. I sat there for a long time.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

After Poetry 16, A Quarterly Account of Recent Poetry

Back to Basics

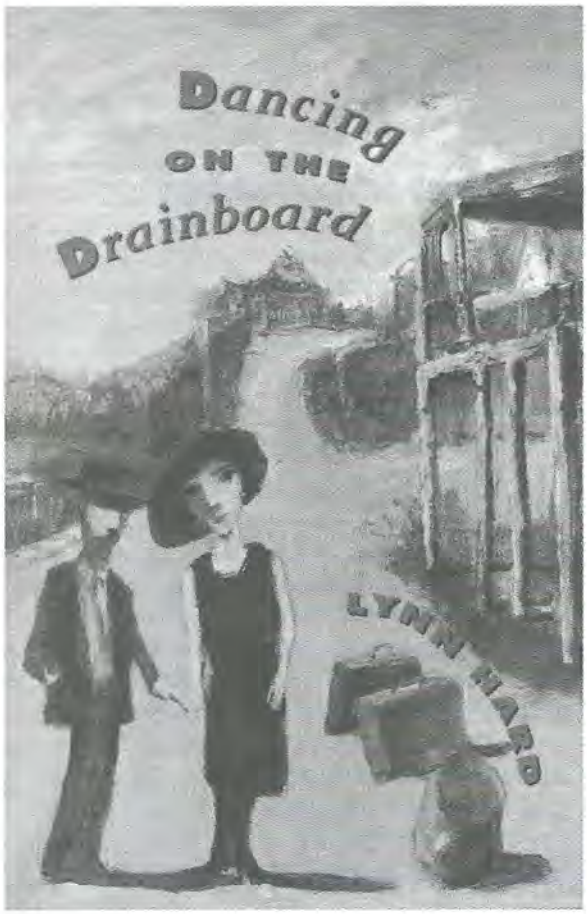
IN *OVERLAND* 129 Kevin Hart said: It is hard to discuss Australian poetry these days without using the words 'modernism' and 'postmodernism'. This is true if read as a *descriptive* statement. If read a *prescriptive* statement, however, it raises important issues for the poetry reviewer. Do these critical isms help poetry readers to value and assess poetry? Do they distract readers from poetry? Even worse, does poetry disappear only to be replaced by critical theory?

If assessing poetry is fraught with the risks of extreme subjectivity, critical theory has its own problems. A study of European critical theory shows that there has been little connection between theory and practice in the Western literary tradition – except in France where the Academy has been a literary version of the Code Napoleon. It's still going on. Where theory is descriptive, it can't be based on *all* literature. How many plays did Aristotle see, anyway? Where the theory is prescriptive, it tends to have been based on little or no literature at all. Inevitably, some literature won't fit the theory and it has often been the case that such literature is ignored or undervalued *because* it doesn't fit the theory. Finally, the relationship between theory and literature is often analysed outside its societal or historical context. History, of course, is more than literary history or the history of critical theory or the two combined. It seems obvious, but may not be obvious to contemporary readers who seem to be in danger of believing that both the author and the author's society or century are, well, dead.

There's something to be said for separating Romanticism from Classicism. If it appears more difficult to separate modernity from modernism and postmodernism, the difficulty may be caused by lack of historical perspective. Even so, it's hard to avoid seeing postmodernism as a fad or fashion. After all, it isn't the first critical theory to dispense with the author's intentions or to regard the relationship between literature and the rest of society as the domain of the last Marxist. (By the way, Marx said he wasn't a Marxist.) Since nothing is outdated faster than today's fashion, then, it seems likely that the postmodernists will soon feel the impact of 'post-postmodernism'.

Are these five recent collections postmodernist? Lynn Hard evokes and interprets other people rather than concentrating on himself. However, this poetic process doesn't make him a postmodernist automatically. Biographical enquiries would be worthwhile. An interview could be revealing. It's possible that Andrew Burke's poetry contains some postmodern features. The overwhelming reading experience, however, is of Burke portraying himself, his marriage and his family. Caldwell's poems are texts – for performance. He's live on stage throughout his collection. To gain this impression it's unnecessary to have seen and heard him perform. It's just obvious. Alex Skovron writes well-made poems. He also writes postmodern poems from which he absents himself. Just who replaces his voice, how many voices replace his voice or whether *anyone* replaces his voice is a matter for speculation. However, the problems that some readers may have with his language aren't postmodern problems. Christopher Kelen *is* postmodern. At least he's located somewhere on the continuum between modernism and postmodernism. The poems range from clear to obscure and unintelligible.

LYNN HARD'S FIRST COLLECTION *Dancing on the Drainboard* isn't centred on the poet but rather on his response to the rest of existence. It would be possible to claim that he concentrates on military history if he made fewer references to time, history and death. Possible to say he has never grown out of Hollywood if he made fewer references to European paintings. Possible to argue that he's just



another visiting American poet if he responded less strongly to Australia and Australians.

More important than Hard's subjects, however, are his tones. Discovering the difference between his wry and arch tones is soon qualified by discovering underlying self-mockery. The tones are expressions of a prevailing voice. No matter how crucial this voice is to his book, it can't be separated from the poet's way of being in the world (as distinct from a set of viewpoints). He values beauty that has to be fading; new relationships in the context of lost relationships; nice places in the context of awful places; a few nice people in the context of many dreadful ones; victory only possible because of defeat; survival that shouldn't be confused with victory and transient joy snatched from doom and decay.

Before he values, he devalues. While he concentrates on the rest of the world, his tones work within his voice that conveys his way of being in the world – attached detachment. It was the quality he admired in the jazz trumpeter Chet Baker. This admiration precedes most of his book's experiences but isn't contradicted by them. Even his invented *God* is characterised by attached detachment.

In 'I Cannot Say' he's attracted to 'the lady fading' and in 'A Declension of Zoftig' he describes her:

> but, I know
> I'm lucky enough
> to have my own Rubens:
> titian-haired,
> indolent,
> artful,
> but no dodger,
> bright white body
> reclining
> against her dark
> Caravaggio mind

They're attractive poems of middle-aged love.

'Visit to Patonga' is a leisurely three-page poem about a leisurely Australian train trip to visit a novelist the poet hasn't met before. Everything is closely observed. However, the reader starts to wonder where the poem is going – until reaching the last lines:

> I had the childish, almost forgotten,
> feeling
> of having been somewhere
> I would like to go back to.

He values the meeting because others have been horrible.

In the outstanding poem 'Hastings' he explains what he gained from – of all things – the Battle of Hastings. Victory, of course, is the other side of defeat:

> You Saxon necklace
> 'round the throat of Senlac
> you gaudy vertebrae
> of Angle land,
> you shield ring of Harold Godwinson,
> you last coil and strike
> of Wessex Dragon,
> you turning point
> that made England
> Norman
> and Normandy
> French.
>
> were it not for you
> and mindless infidelity
> to the ring
> I might be writing this poem
> in Anglo-Saxon

accenting
the lank sentences
with axe heads of alliteration,
reading the loping words
to my gossip:
my flaxen-haired,
Anglo-Saxon lamp
and laughing
at the private,
Anglo-Saxon jokes
that only we two
share.

Qualifications to wholesale endorsement of the collection require care and accuracy. Hard's occasional use of inversions, archaisms and Courtly language assists wryness or archness – even when those qualities are underpinned by self-mockery. His more frequent use of rhyme can be quite funny. Clashing visual imagery would be a real problem if the poet intended images to be born and die in one another *á la* Dylan Thomas's famous comment on his poetic process. If the Metaphysicals used visual images as playthings in their arguments, however, Hard uses them as playthings in his tones of voice. Moreover, he's more than capable of discarding visual imagery, particularly when punning rhetoric is placed in the service of elegy (really, pissed off panegyric).

ANDREW BURKE'S THIRD COLLECTION *Mother Waits for Father Late* is incontrovertibly *about* something – marriage and family. Even so, some pains have been taken to soften the raw forces across three generations. Although only partly outside the ambience of marriage, the first and last two sections are lighter and less fixed in the strengths and weaknesses of the poet's own perspective.

While some readers will cheer the poet on to even more intimate revelation (it that's possible), others will look for poems that might have taken him out of himself. If the first and last two sections can't achieve this by placing alone, are there particular poems that take him beyond marriage and family? Yes. The puns and fantasy. More strategic use could have been made of them.

The title poem is a revelation. Being pure narrative, it could be poetry or prose. Burke's father accidentally killed an old lady in a car accident:

Weeks later Father lay ill in their
giant bedroom
drinking crates of Coca-Cola, no way to
quench
his thirst: diabetes brought on by shock.
Hospital
tests, new life programme, insulin shots
morning and night, not too much sun,
no boozing,
watch that diet. Impossible...

Doomed by guilt, trapped
by alcohol, sick and tired, he went to bed
yet one more time, this night jellybowls
of blood came
jumping out, Mother sick herself on the couch,
I called the doctor. Mother and I rode
in the ambulance, sat in cold hospital corridors
frightened of death. Caught a taxi home,
driver kept Mother downstairs
while I cleaned Father's blood off their
bedroom floor
as best I could. My fourteenth birthday.
He died
two weeks later. My sick mind cleaned up
as best it could
until wacked on
booze and dope, that night rose again
fifteen years later and drove me
to a cliff's edge where I aimed at the sky.
My car bogged and I ran
to that doctor's house, vomited over him
as he opened his door, 5am, startled.

Woke in hospital. White bed, white walls, blue
river
through green pine trees out my window,
worried
wife and child at home. I stared, wondering
who was I,
asked my tidy shrink for LSD, I wanted it all
to rise...

While art is overwhelmed by family history in the title poem, most poems are artful psychological realism that sometimes rises to lyricism. There's such a good balance between what he says and how he says it that separation is impossible. Art predominates, however, in the poems where he's taken out of himself. The amusing 'Bananas' never becomes more than double meanings about bruising, erections, peeling off and going bananas. 'Warble Orble Ardle Oodle' is word driven:

words so
short as to tear at
meaning like knives if
you want
more heart

the hear is in it
'there' is ungeographic

If these arty poems had separated groups of marriage and family poems, they would have been exceptions proving the rule. Perhaps that would have been going too far. Even as *Mother Waits for Father Late* stands, its impact and quality could never have been predicted from Andrew Burke's slight earlier collections.

GRANT CALDWELL'S COLLECTION *The Life of a Pet Dog* is plain, clear and largely comic poetry. In fact, it's about as plain as poetry can be while remaining poetry. The literary techniques are the ones that work well in performance poetry – narrative, listing, repetition, dialogue, exaggeration and dramatic monologue. Caldwell enjoys puncturing pomposity, juxtaposing momentous issues with everyday necessities and just recording stupidity and banality. He loves spotting or inventing the zany and the bizarre, particularly those events *lacking* menace. He alternates upbeat and downbeat endings. His satires are humorous; but not all his humor is satirical. 'Dear Reginald' is both effective and typical:

Dear Reginald,
I am writing to thank you
for the lovely transistor radio
you so kindly sent me.
It is all the more wonderful
that an absolute stranger like yourself
should remember an old lady like me.
I am eighty years of age
and have been in this home for ten years.
We are kindly treated
but the lonely hours are hard to bear.
My room mate, Mrs Jones, has a radio
but will never let me listen to it
and even switches it off
when I come into the room.
Well – now I have one of my own.
My son is very nice
and comes to see me once a month,
but I know he only visits me out of
a sense of duty.
This is why your gift is all the more wonderful
and thrilling to me
as it was given out of compassion
for a fellow human being.
Bless you.
Today, Mrs Jones' radio went wrong
and she asked if she could listen to mine.
I told her to fuck off.
Yours sincerely,
Alice Stockley.

The Life of a Pet Dog is Grant Caldwell's best poetry collection. It's ideal reading if you've lost your way while reading *Paradise Lost*.

IN ALEX SKOVRON'S SECOND COLLECTION *Sleeve Notes* the poet makes an artform out of not calling a spade a spade. Even in poems where the *prima facie* meaning is clear, he often uses imagery to direct the reader's attention elsewhere. So it can be difficult to assess the appropriateness of his language. Although this problem also occurs where the poet creates metaphorical or allegorical worlds, the main problem in these ambitious poems is obscurity. Where poems exhibit tension between meaning and the means to this meaning, they may be successful bipolar or bifocal art. Then again, they may be confused and awkward. Yet again, the reviewer may be too demanding. The reader must decide.

The poems 'Ice' and 'The Face in the Flower' are brilliantly well-made psycho-sexual insights just as parts nine and ten of Mozart's 'Sleeve Notes' are memorable insights into the composer's life. 'Nyctalopia' is a crisp clear piece addressed to the poet's bed:

Rectangular machine
soft hardware for the closing of eyes
in the darker refreshments
you can console me
compensate your lack of bone
beside me
maybe lull me boneless...

A successful poem.

'Escutcheon' reveals Skovron's methods. A wife responds to being deserted by her husband by reasserting herself:

So she began
again before the sky
has phased a whole
full fan to dip
her toes into the milk
of circumstance again

Nothing too *soir*
as yet merely the odd
uncomplicated *tête-á-tête*
for after all
what point when all

was said and done
to mourn till
the messiah came
the cup must hoist
itself anew the liquid
flow again

Indirect language, without question. Since the poem ends with 'nother story' after beginning with the deserted wife finding it 'a bit of a daunt', the poet is deliberately playing with cliché. It works well – provided the reader can also accept 'milk of circumstance', hoisting the cup and the husband's earlier notion of a 'bed of paradise'.

'On the Theology of Ants' is a philosophical fable where an imprisoned metaphysically-inclined ant rejects the view of its fellow ants that God has six legs. The ant is dying in a covered jar. By contrast, the ant's jailer can leave the ant far behind and traverse the earth – up to a certain point. This travel or movement is expansively written via landscape and geography. It's the kind of writing that works for the poet every time he tries it.

It can't be said with any certainty, however, that the four part poem 'Quadrilateral' works at all. The sections are divided into water, earth, air and fire. In the first, the tides go out – all of them, everywhere. In the second, a lecturer or tourist guide speculates inconclusively on the origin and nature of a rock. In the third, an aerial view of history inexplicably introduces twins and some entertaining voices:

We shall die...if it's the first thing we do!...
Or rue for the rest of your lives, if you live that long...
I don't mind praise, so long as it's constructive.

In the fourth section, partly orchestrated by T. S. Eliot, words are treacherous and fire is burning. Not to worry. It's not Dante's inferno; just geothermal activity. The language differs from section to section. The second section's clear statement is meant as someone else's voice. It's placed in inverted commas. Unfortunately the first section is overdone. The dreamer wants to 'regurgitate [his/her] terror':

So, peeling back now as if ignited,
ocean is vanishing: the fast unfurling bed –
blighted, grotesque and cracked,

craggy, segmented –
is waxing, darkening in a monstrous extension
bled of design, the steady

dropping of an endless canyon
into roaring incessant space...At last, at last,
a bottomless, unstopping

smouldering moonscape past
all thought of sea is spread into the distance.
I gasp, clutch at the concept

but meet a horrible resistance.

Oh dear.

Alex Skovron is a poet who has thought deeply about language, politics, relationships, philosophy, music, literature – European culture generally. Even his Australian poems keep referring to Europe. In this collection he's far more willing to mix slang and other colloquial language with the educated discourse of his first collection. *Sleeve Notes* includes many funny lines and some funny poems. Unfortunately, the reader still trips over some of the words and asks the inevitable question: 'Who's to blame – Skovron or me?'

CHRISTOPHER KELEN'S *The Naming of the Harbour & the Trees* is a wide ranging first collection. However, listing its coverage of historical and contemporary Australia, sexual relationships, travel and politics tells little about the reading experience. True, some political and travel poems are astringent social commentary. Even so, it's a moot point whether his political poems in rhyming couplets are making political statements. There's a real possibility that they're parodying politically committed poems. Similarly, some travel poems aspire to the condition of fantasy. What can the reader say about a poem where a river stone is given the opportunity to continue writing the poem in which it features? Is it a pun on dope-smoking? A stoned poem? Who knows? Unlike Burke, Kelen says nothing about his own sex life. Nor could he be accused of Lawrencian sex-in-the-head. What he *does* write is sex in cloud cuckoo land – sex via (or not via) invisibility cream and posted packages of sexual anatomy.

The difficult poems are difficult because the viewpoint is either unclear or changing. It shouldn't be assumed that the appearing and disappearing 'I' is Christopher Kelen. Sometimes the poet's 'invisible hand' directs the poems. At other times meaning is elicited by juxtaposition of objects and landscape. Unnervingly, they keep changing. Where the poet seems to be speaking directly to the reader, he has little to say. For example, in eight lines 'At Upper Bowman' says 'I wrote this here'. It must be deliberately trivial. Any other interpretation doesn't bear thinking of.

Kelen's poem 'Simple Rustic' illustrates the problem of changing viewpoints. It's neither his best nor worst poem; neither his simplest nor his most obscure. A summary follows. In the old days this approach to literature was called explication. Debate, of course, is welcome.

The year's all seasons
and the flood's dim edge.
The monster frog comes
visiting. Embers of the day's
still middle. Good enough
to live in, the fire before
it's lit. And in the dusk
down fading day hunting
the darkness among small
voices – I'll be the village
idiot hindering the men
with why. Always at
the girls gathering
the outskirts in.
Hearth full of old
toenails, graders
tractors. Best
of all the mill. The fat
man on his perfect patch.

Here's a summary of 'Simple Rustic':

— Floods can occur at any time.
— The big frog visits at noon.
— Either the embers of a past fire are inviting or the fire making is inviting, the fireplace in both cases is very large.
— As darkness approaches, the simple rustic isn't afraid to ask the locals meaningful questions.
— This interrogation includes asking the girls (skirts, nudge nudge, wink wink) from the outskirts.
— There are toenail clippings and (toy?) graders and tractors on the hearth.
— The mill is best. (Kelen's choice of words sounds like Cecil B. de Mille as distinct from John Stuart Mill.)
— The fat man, the simple rustic and probably the big frog are all Les Murray.

Over and out.

PUBLICATIONS DISCUSSED IN THIS ARTICLE:

Andrew Burke: *Mother Waits for Father Late* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $14.95).
Grant Caldwell: *The Life of a Pet Dog* (Five Island Press, PO Box 1946, Wollongong, 2500, $12.95).
Lynn Hard: *Dancing on the Drainboard* (Collins Angus & Robertson, $14.95).
Christopher Kelen: *The Naming of the Harbour & the Trees* (Hale & Iremonger, $14.95).
Alex Skovron: *Sleeve Notes* (Hale & Iremonger, $12.95).

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

A Tall Poppy Story

by Lofo

WHAT A GLORIOUS SIGHT! 95612486 POPPIES - TINY BUT BLOOD-RED RADIANT. BEST OF ALL: WHEN EARL, HAVING RUN OUT OF TALL POPPIES, SECRETLY USED THE LITTLE ONES, SOME SAID THE TEA TASTED EVEN BETTER!!

POETS ARE ALWAYS

something else.
They need that sense of
sideways pressure,

the patina of long employment,
a moment rescued in the carpark.
They need the sum

of nine a.m. and five days straight
running to the same command.
They need the money

too, let's face it,
a problem Villon solved directly
and vanished from a hanging.

Poetry's a kind of money,
Wallace Stevens said –
dreaming French between appointments

high in a Hartford window.
Cavafy worked at irrigation,
impeccable reports

dead as pharaohs in the shelving
at the exit to the Nile.
William Carlos wrote a book

for every year in general practice,
a neat half-century dense with work,
typing on between the patients

and off into the night.
Dickinson stayed home in white
attending to the judge,

tied a bow around each poem
and stowed it in a drawer.
The other life

shines through the lines, but not
invariably so;
the seepage works

in different ways.
Compression
is the only constant;

the far ends of a week converge
abolishing excuses,
imperatives long held in trust
with those who in a last half hour
ski dreamily
down lines like these...

and go to work next morning.

GEOFF PAGE

NATURALLY LONELY

I'm as lonely
As abalone,
As solitary
As anemone,
As lacking joy
As a cunjevoi.
Stuck on regret
Like a lone limpet.

HUGH BROWN

UNTUK KAMAL

(In Memory of Kamal, killed East Timor 1991)

"We went to Kamal's mother's land with his two sisters and his girlfriend Bibi. We found a stone in the river and heaved it up the bank to the house and the sister, a sculptor, is chiselling KAMAL into it. We are planting a frangipani over it. The old hut is right on top of a hill and looks out over valleys and more hills..."

Beyond beyond this hilltop perch
Lines of hills roll back and back and back
And sink into the foggy mist
That curtains the horizon.

A distant, uniform musty green
Reveals egg-yolk yellow beacons, flicks
    of white petals
And a thousand hues of red in greeting –
A young branch of bougainvillea sprouts up,
Exclaiming its existence like a puppy.
From a flutter of green fruit
Long ragged leaves arch limply over
The crimson point of a banana bud.

It is dusk now. Tiny birds flit by
Off to the haze of the hills.
Their friends chirp furiously around us,
And the leaves dance in response.

This old house is falling down.
Beneath silver-grey eaves
A ladder rocks beneath my foot.
But the bougainvillea is secure,
Leaping from the grass roof
As if to plunge into the valley.
Soon we will move down from the silver house,
And the bouncing bougainvillea will be left
With our soft tribute.

In preparation, three people bang
At the apex of a timber frame.
Two more dig holes for seedlings.
And yesterday we saw, for the first time,
A coriander plant that had gone to seed.

EMMA BAULCH

GREEN AND RED

Blackboy, grass-tree, Xanthorrhea,
Green shaft towering from a bush of leaves,
Four months ago it was nothing
But a stump blazing in a bushfire.

Rough above the shining shaft
The tight rod of flowers erupts,
The height of a tall man,
Pressing out a creamy flow of blossom.

Now in the still winter sunlight
A crimson finch has landed
And hangs sideways on the pole of flowers,
A flick of flame in the green tonality.

Trembling it sinks its beak
Into the depths of the blossoms,
For insects, for nectar,
What does it matter.
Skittering sideways up to the tip,
Pure dot of fire in the cream and green.
All sprung from a black stump.

And with a flick of wings it's gone.

GEOFFREY DUTTON

FIRST CLASS

When I started school
With my thin skin
And question mark eyes
I watched the teacher
Try to trap my softness

I learnt about masks
Covering faces, hiding foolishness

The teacher wore hers
Stiff and grey
With a hole in the middle
Where words I did not understand
Jerked out and buzzed about my head.

I sat so still
Lest that bee sting of a voice
Alight on me
And paralyse my mind.

My mask was a yellow jumper
I hid
Picking at the edges of a sleeve
Where a loose thread
Led to places with more promise
Did it all unravel
And leave me naked?
To be stabbed
Again and again and again
Motes of rote
At the end of a sharp stick.

I made a cocoon
From the yellow wool
And emerged a butterfly
My black eyes
Burning holes
In all their arguments

JORIE MANEFIELD

THE BLUMBERG COLLECTION

A bibliokleptomaniac in the United States stole 31,000 rare editions worth $25 million from libraries and museums and used them to line the walls of his Iowa home.

The sheer volume of books was overwhelming,
but so, too, was the range and rarity of works.
While none of the books was damaged, their
survival was endangered by inappropriate
temperatures
and high humidity. Less than half of the owners
of individual books have been identified and
many will go to new homes in public institutions.

Culled with devoted cunning from the
sanctuaries of learning;
secreted down the corridors of bibliography
to the unsafe haven
of a manic heart. Yellow parchment,
leather embossed covers, worn
gold-edged pages of history, poetry and romance.

The arresting officer said
You felt like you were in a library
in total disarray.
There were exposed electrical wires
dangling from the ceiling.
A real fire trap – one match and
it would have gone up in smoke.

A grey-haired, grey-clothed man sits
in a bare room, alone now
with a few cheap paperbacks and magazines
of charity. Steel bars
express the anger of soft-spoken men,
themselves lovers of words
and long rows of illuminated spines.

STEPHEN FAULDS

TOWARDS MALTA

There are so many cities
in which old stone reappears.
A crack of marble, twisting into the clouds
a bollard in an endless row, a sudden
gleam when the clouds break
over dark-green granite.

And on the wall a small print and swipe:
a phantom bird taking off, suggesting
the presence of an ancient sea
somewhere.

There are so many towns
in which old stone is ploughed up
flaking trails of dust,
with a softer light from the past.
Where masonry greys to rock,
polished by footsteps
barren with a cadence
of never and now.

Wavering along hollow doorsteps
from the city centre to home,
reeling at the city's fortifications
an abyss of rock slams
into a moat full of weeds...

Bereft of what can be done,
we follow those we loved,
and where their palm
rested on a corner stone, wonder
which way they went.

HUGO BOUCKAERT

CINNAMON WAY, *circa 1992*

Gravity's sprint...and gales across
The channel rearrange old harmonies.
Even this pocket-watch
That purred its millennium
Through a depression's leanness
Has given up
The ceremonial kicking.

There's less precision in circumference
These days. About-facing
The bathroom mirror
A known stranger waves
An impressionist salute.
I ponder: What remains
Of Lindsay's world...Slessor's monarchy?

I say – "Poet...ideals and sensualities
Are posthumous to any cause."
The still-living 'I' accords
A lateral steam-shape
That's form...without grace. Now,
Probability's lit
By brush-strokes; axed and faded...

Entoweled, I wander back to what's left
Of the library's warmth.
"–So the ghost cried, and pressed
To the dark pane!"
Dusk, my blue-chip librettists,
Is diviner dust. It finds us
Placidly profound
In order to negotiate.

On cue, lightning forks the vestibule
And the nearby isle, Mudjimba.
No post-modernism here,
Just a subverted femme fatale
Wringing out the spheres:
And...a stopped watch
Polishing its own numerals.

STEFANIE BENNETT

HER FIANCE

On the drive to her place
she points to a cliff
near the bottom of a hill
& tells me this is where
the car ran off the road & into a tree
while she was driving.
She touched her fiance's head
in the dark & it was wet & sticky.
She ran to the nearest house
to call an ambulance.

In her little miner's cottage
she shows me the spare room
& says I can use it as a study.
She points into the corner
& shows me the death basket
where she keeps photos, press clippings
& letters from her dead fiance.
On the dressing table a photo
of him peering over dark glasses.
In the loft – all his clothes
which she can't throw away.
She says I can wear them if they fit.

She shows me her bed
& says I can sleep on the right side.
Beside the bed, on her side
his last packet of cigarettes
& an old odorless ashtray
containing his cigarette butts.
At the foot of the bed is a hole
where her fiance stretched his long legs.

MYRON LYSENKO

MILKING TIME

Heavy bosoms slopping at their legs
the cows bullock up the ramp
eager to accept the deal –
the feeding in of cake at one end,
milk yielded at the other
where machine cups clamp in sucking embrace
on swollen teats.

And those waiting, docile with country pace,
queue at ease, reaching out blunt, moist muzzles
in stupid, insolent curiosity to tongue at us
down below in the sweet, bowelly intimacy
of the pit
where we stand: Mark, neatly attired, young,
proud to be observed, efficient as at the
factory lathe,
me, notebook in hand, eyes alert for
splashing muck,
hands pressed at the firm, warm bags
seeking to squeeze out a memory flow.
And everywhere the steady humming
of machinery,
the swish-swish rhythm of the spraying milk
in this the heart of the farm.

Sixty in an hour are machined where Dad,
humped over the stool, with stroking hands
would have drawn from six, and found time
in a rare, playful mood to spurt jets of surprise
scattering gleeful kids, exciting starving cats.

Not much left now to excite the past;
odd snatches of harmony to a distant tune
gratefully recorded –
Jim still there, employed 45 years, lumpish now,
toes dug into a life he cannot leave,
hosing out with the same slow perfectionism.
An image still there, in the yard:
three kids at play,
me at the wicket, alert to the bat,
conscious of Dad
staring bovine-like round the cowshed door,
a sprig of straw in his cudding mouth.

JOHN HORNSEY

FAME

Who am I? I was born of poor parents, in a tent,
which is now in a museum in Petersburg.
My first memory is of steam, boiling yak-butter,
the distant Anapurnas white as bone.
As a three-year-old, I was already in training
for my first solo
Atlantic swim. At five, I collapsed in a snowstorm
and was given five hours to live. My survival
amazed medical
science, and I went on to live to ninety.
Fowler's *English*
Usage owes three words to me: *gizmo*,
gleet and *yoyo*.

Who am I?

I went on to become the only Olympic one-miler
to correctly measure the gravitational attraction
between Venus and Mars. In 1970 I developed
the characteristic limp
now beloved by thousands of film-goers
the world over.
Four years later I pricked the conscience
of a nation
by sitting for my controversial Nobel portrait –
in an electric chair. *The Dictionary of Philosophy*
reports
my now-famous conversation with Bertrand
Russell
in which I say: "I can prove now, Bert, that two
human hands exist. How? By holding up
the two hands
and saying, as I make a certain gesture
with the right
hand, 'Here is one hand', and adding, as I make
a certain gesture
with the left hand, 'And here is the other.'"

Who am I?

Who am I? In the 1960s, during a ski holiday
in Lemnos,
I met my third wife, Nancy. We had ten children,
who were all
swept out to sea during the April Monsoons.
Biographers
now see this event as being central to my
'Doomed Fugues' of '68.
In the Seventies, testing the limits of human
endurance
I became the first person to win the
Kentucky Derby,
without a horse. Twenty years later, I have my last
interview and donated my brain to science.
It is now pickled
in a bottle in Disneyland.

Who am I?

JOHN JENKINS

JOHN JENKINS

Sounding Out History

'Paul Carter: *Living in a New Country; History, Travelling and Language* (Faber, $35)

Paul Carter: The Sound Between; Voice, Space, Performance (NSW University Press and New Endeavour Press, $29.95)

IN *ROAD TO BOTANY BAY* (1987) Paul Carter introduced his notion of "spatial history" and, along with it, a highly original account of Australian exploration and settlement. These two latest collections of essays – and of more besides – continue and extend the arguments and forays of his first book.

Rather than neutral stage settings, against which the imperial narratives of invasion and settlement were played out, the spaces that became 'Australia' were the product of a subtle, hazardous and fragmentary engagement. Naming, mapping and travellers' tales, gestures and journeys, sketches and journals – all those cultural moments constituted within language – left their haphazard cross-hatching, as the *locus plenum* of white 'Australia' was gradually inscribed with dialogues, multiple presences.

Given other histories, other journeys, it might have been different – and still might be. Yet, because of our cultural preference for an illusion of 'destiny' – or, to use the jargon, the hypostatisation of the historically contingent into the necessary – it is easy to forget the traces and shadings of alternative histories that lie beyond those sanctioned by office, power or authority. Following Carter's approach, however, these are restored as possible, active, real. In a world in which the possible often appears a mere footnote to the actual, Carter's illuminating reversal of this dour paradigm distinguishes him as a writer of great optimism and boldness.

Living In A New Country continues Carter's journey, but unlike Dad Rudd's furrows in the film 'Dad and Dave go to Town' – "stretching far as the eye can, from the top paddock to the horizon, and each 'un straight as a die!" – Carter's track if full of interesting zigzags and meanders, as he lightly touches upon a seemingly disparate and certainly diverse range of topics. This is no narrow sheep's track!

He begins with Australian journals of exploration, many of which (for example, E. J. Eyre's), do not culminate in major discoveries but record crossings of deserts distinguished by an endless sameness of feature. These almost "plotless" narratives "dwelt on their failure to advance, the repeated experience of disappointment", and are marked by "a deferral of dramatic action". Unable to converge on a climactic discovery, the journals intensify into a dreamlike account of the journey's everchanging, neverchanging foreground. Eventually, the explorer travels in a constant, even pleasurable, state of heightened anticipation, with each step a new beginning, the narrative no longer "motivated by any expectation of temporal closure, return or denouement".

It's not such a big leap to learn then of the uses to which early photography was put in the service of exploration and geography, in the search for a picturesque viewpoint. In its secondary composition and articulation of space, photography corresponded – in Carter's view – "to the explorer's backward view and return route", a looking back at sites that have already become imbued with presence and memory.

Carter advances a little closer to one of his central themes – the experience of being a migrant, a displaced person – when he proposes an alternative Australian visual tradition freed from notions of influence and genealogy. Rebellion against parent cultures, paradoxically, only serves to "objectify myths of descent", to rob works of their particularity, detach them from a local context and ignore those differences which announce "a space for dialogue". Outside "the rhetoric of tradition and influence" are works that interrogate the viewer and propose a new meeting place. For example, Carter claims that Eugene von Guerard's improvisations

in landscape painting embodied unique points of view and systems of spatial reference.

In the figure of Albert Namatjira, Carter finds a subject around whom many of his concerns cohere. Namatjira was an "in-between" person, between two cultures, two languages, ways of representing landscape. Carter finds the painter's work "conceals as much as it reveals", and offers an intriguing mirror to our own cultural blindness, "a double vision, a mirror to our unseeing".

Hovering around these meditations on genealogy is the implication that, in any case, all cultural data is reinvented, improvised, subjectively re-expressed, no matter how watertight its transmission. Reality is always a construct, and unstable. Or, looked at positively, as Walter Benjamin once remarked, "the construction of life lies at the moment".

"...all cultural data is reinvented, improvised, subjectively re-expressed, no matter how watertight its transmission. Reality is always a construct, and unstable."

Next, the oddly titled chapter, 'Towards A Sound Photography', takes a somewhat new path: one gesturing towards Carter's third book, *The Sound In Between*. Written in the form of an explorer's notebook, it traces the author's journey to Lake Eyre, where he made notes towards an environmental sound composition for radio. His jottings, piquant observations, asides, daydreams and snippets of theory, reveal Carter in an energetic (and often poetic) travelling mode:

> By Leigh Creek the ladders of rain had withdrawn into the sky. Dissected tablelands of cloud shadowing the northern horizon foreshadowed what lay beyond. About here the explorer Eyre noticed the ringing quality of the stones in the creek beds, metallic like bells. Has anyone paid attention to the sounds of exploration?

These notes dart and weave, suggest fresh forays, take side-paths, uncover veins of speculation, strike new sparks. And, all the while, Carter is listening as much as looking – noting how our culture places too much importance on writing, too much emphasis on the meaning of sounds, to the neglect of both the voice and of sound itself.

A turning page stirs up a small breeze, dust eddies around our ankles. We climb the next dune to find ourselves suddenly deep in the book's central essay, 'Living in a New Country'. Subtitled 'Reflections on Travelling Theory', it begins by asking a simple question:

> how does life in a new country acquire meaning? How do migrants find names for natural and human phenomena whose character and causes are as yet largely a matter of conjecture? How do they overcome that first giddy sense of being at sea, surrounded by sights and sounds that bear no relation to what they have been used to?

On the way to an answer, Carter touches upon the work of anthropologist Bronislav Malinowski and of literary historian Erich Auerbach. He explores the unlikely coincidence of the Lincolnshire village of Stickney having held significance for both the explorer Matthew Flinders and the poet Paul Verlaine. In the course of this cultural ramble, Carter dismisses the mystical idea of "a spirit of place", and replaces it with another notion: the capacity of language to allow a deferral of meaning, the sense of "a historical destiny imperfectly revealed". This capacity is language's figurative dimension, the ability of words and images in one language to throw long lines of meaning – above chasms of distance and difference – across to similar-sounding words and similar-seeming images in another. This saving capacity of language is a genuine lifeline for the migrant placed in an alien context. Coincidences, like puns, Carter says, have "an open-ended value" that carries "a new meaning yet to emerge", yet to be filled in. Importantly, the first step towards communication is mimicry:

> wherever people have met and been unable to communicate, mimicry has been the means of initiating friendly relations, however temporarily. For mimicry, however reductive as a theatrical trick, is the means of opening up a dialogue in the migrant situation; and the value of this dialogue does not consist in the matter communicated, but in the manner itself. For while nothing may be exchanged between the two people mirroring each other's voices and gestures, the very act of mimicry opens up a space between them, a place that they agree to share. Mimicry opens up the possibility of dialogue...

The dilemma faced by migrants is this: either they "bring with them intact the culture of their home country and, as far as they are able, impose it on their new surroundings" or they "experience arrival in the new country as a form of rebirth and,

with a minimum of regret, shrug off their former identity..." However, as Carter cautions, "both these reactions have the air of the manic about them and suggest a conflict suppressed rather than resolved". Furthermore, "whether reacting violently or dutifully to the incubus of the parent culture, the migrant fails to come to terms with the past, to integrate it into the present surroundings". But there remains a third position, an in-between solution:

> An authentic migrant perspective would, perhaps, be based on an intuition that the opposition between here and there is itself a cultural construction...It might begin by regarding movement...as a mode of being in the world. The question would be, then, not how to arrive, but how to move...and the challenge would be how to notate such events, how to give them a historical and social value.

Here – and not perhaps for the first time – Carter could be overstating the obvious. Yes, for many nomadic peoples, travelling remains *the* way of being in the world. There have been great and sustained waves of migration throughout human history. Moreover, for most of our prehistory, travelling was probably the norm and settlement a novelty. *Then* we were *Homo Mobilis* rather than *Sapiens*. Though who is to say which is ever the wiser course, to move on to stay put?

WELL, *WE* MUST MOVE ON, for it's time to cross the Yarra, into Carter's sixth chapter. First, however, a brief baptism into his historical methodology. Carter reminds us midstream how, for many historians, the value of phenomena is in their being able to furnish historical explanations in terms of cause and effect. But history is also full of "open-ended actions" that "may or may not prefigure the future": that is, things that may have happened, or have been part of the daily grind and grain of experience, but did not make much impact on the future. This meditation introduces Carter's thoughts on the naming – or misnaming – of Melbourne's river, the Yarra.

He asks: was 'Yarrow Yarrow' the Aboriginal name for the river, or for the water and waterfalls generally? Or perhaps for 'flowing hair'? Was 'Yarra' a word at all, or just a sound? If a word, was it actually invented by white men, because it *seemed* like a native word – and then imitated, mirrored back, by the Aboriginals? Was the Yarra also called the 'Eastern River' by some settlers? Why didn't Fawkner's official name of 'Hunter's River' ultimately stick? Batman thought to name the river after himself, but why didn't the Port Phillip Association enforce his choice? Why was 'Yarra' finally chosen out of all the contenders? Carter's ingenious speculation is this:

> The new name, Yarra Yarra, replaced the earlier, European names because it *disguised* any usurping claims of the newcomers. Its role was diplomatic. Non-associative, evidently meaningless to English ears except in reference to a unique geographical object, it had the prestige of a founding myth; it was as if the Port Phillip Association based its claim on time-honoured fact...

Just as subtle is Carter's account of the way the words and gestures of Port Phillip's Aboriginals were misinterpreted; how, excluded from ordinary conversation, the Aboriginals, mirror-like, mimicked the gibberish that became the white parody of their actual language. This deadening process echoed their powerlessness, a loss both of the space of dialogue and, eventually, of their own language. The imposition, Carter says, of "a culture which believed in closed systems, whose machine-like functioning was independent of local conditions", filtered out "the chaos of the Aboriginal presence":

> From the earliest days when, thwarting an Aboriginal attack, "Fawkner and his men, aided by Henry Batman, then herded the blacks into their bark canoes and had them towed across the river; they burned the canoes and returned to the settlement!", the south bank came to be associated with those who, by a reversal of natural vision and logic characteristic of the mirror, could now be regarded as occupying the country illegitimately. But the Aborigines did not go away. Instead there grew up across the water a ghostly canvas town mirroring the makeshift dwellings built by the Europeans on the north side.

As well as speculation, Carter allows himself moments of fiction. His seventh chapter is a memoir on Vincenzo Volentieri, an architect of fabulous buildings and distant cousin of both Ern Malley and the composer Johannes Rosenberg:

> ...strung out along our arterial roads at heights of two to three hundred feet, attached to the earth by hawsers, his aerial dwellings resembled nothing so much as a giant grass field.

CARTER'S INTEREST IN PERFORMANCE is clarified when he relates how Matthew Flinders, at the end of a time of friendly contact, staged a military drill, purely as an entertainment, for the Nyungar people of King George's Sound. The blacks, who regarded the performance as a sacred exchange, tried to emulate the steps, and the marines, to help them, exaggerated their movements in response. Here was a possible meeting place, when "by sheer coincidence the Europeans manifested a mode of social behavior with which the Aboriginals could identify". In Carter's view, the Aboriginal corroboree was a type of historical record: made up of traditional dance and song forms, it was never a mere repetition of them. Far from being a gratuitous entertainment, the corroboree was "improvised and institutionalized *in response to the white invasion*". Importantly, as Carter notes:

> Properly acted upon, the corroboree might have inaugurated a mode of occupancy acceptable to both sides...(because its) symbolic function was to normalise the extraordinary state of affairs – the appropriation of their (the Aborigines') land – and to inaugurate and stabilize a new system of trading and reciprocal obligations.

If Carter is right here, and had the white man been culturally sensitive enough to enter this exchange, it is fascinating to speculate on the mutual accommodation that might have evolved: a hybrid white/black form of corroboree/performance that would have marked the shifting borders – both actual and symbolic – between the two cultures!

It is hard to escape the conclusion, argued here as elsewhere, that, for Carter, the real 'stuff' of history is precisely such exchanges – something as transitory and insubstantial as voice answering voice, gesture mirroring gesture, moments of hazardous dialogue, of improvised social agreement. The fact that – after such exchanges – people then go and raise armies or taxes, raze or build cities, write histories and pamphlets, only proves the ironical human capacity to make abstracts substantive, to attribute a thing-like durability to mists of thought and language.

It is these swirling mists – the particles of language that make them up, and the spaces in between them – that Carter seizes upon as the raw material for what he calls a "post-colonial collage". Given that our everyday modern environment is already a huge collage – of voices, sounds and fragments of various media – Carter's radical approach, in both his radio and performance pieces, and environmental sound installations, is to encourage even greater fragmentation. In theory, this releases a free play of words and images (in the jargon, 'promiscuous, free-floating signifiers') that 'unstick' from their contexts and the objects they are meant to signify and, just like puns, re-circulate and re-combine, focusing the listener's attention more completely on the actual nature, the articulation and occasions, of speech.

THE SPACE IN BETWEEN consists of two parts: the scripts for various radio and performance works (some have been broadcast on ABC-FM's 'The Listening Room' and elsewhere), and essays which put these pieces into a theoretical context. Carter's interests throughout remain as wide-ranging as ever. The importance of mimicry, and of a radical collage technique, is reiterated, and Carter's definition of in-between sounds extended. They include phatic speech and non-word conversation markers, the mimicked words that characterise first mettings between disparate cultures, throat-clearing and verbal tics that have a purely personal meaning, as well as various word-sounds that hover in and out of sense, and others halfway between language and noise – for example, crowd sounds that become a booming word-surf when heard from a distance. Carter sees (hears) all this as more than aural flotsam, as he is interested in the boundaries between language and music and, more importantly, in the nature of history of speech itself, as opposed to writing.

The 'spatial history' of that Australian in-between word-sound, 'cooee', receives an entire essay, one of the most fascinating in the book, despite the chapter being strewn, bower-bird-like, with both dubious conclusions as well as gems of poetic insight, and with all sorts of curious odds and ends of discredited 19th century phonology.

Carter notes how, in Aboriginal usage, 'cooee' was probably "a sign of sociability, a means of keeping in touch, an injunction to come together, to assemble about a new site". He then contrasts this with the white man's use of 'cooee': because the

sound travelled a long way in the open bush, it was used to attract attention when people became lost, "a voice crying in the wilderness". But the shared use of the call suggests that, at some time, "Aboriginal and European must have entered into imitative dialogue". But this sharing, Carter contends, was short-lived. Thereafter 'cooee' merely helped

> to bind the *colonists* together. Adopting it, genuine "currency lads" demonstrated their difference from mere new chums. In due course "Cooee" came to signify an Australian identity...

But there are white (and contemporary) uses of 'cooee' which Carter plays down or ignores. For example, bushwalkers use it to maintain mobile contact after fanning out into the bush or separating along a trail. Passed backwards and forwards, group-cohesively, the call becomes a sort of aural glue. A member of a party who reconnoitres ahead, or searches around camp for wood, might use it to gain a lazy directional fix. It is sometimes bounced off distant landforms, to gauge distances (and fill

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them with human presence?). It can have an aesthetic use to: that of savoring the contrasting ambient sounds, or silence, that flood into the wake of the call. Some hikers use it frivolously just to express high spirits, others to wake themselves or others up. Trail riders make sure the horses are well tethered before they shout "cooee" – and I've known a few who could shatter mugs with it! Carter's assertion that, in white mouths, 'cooee' was "adopted as a means of increasing the distance between people, not diminishing it" seems not within a cooee of adequate. Still, his discussion of how the word-sound was co-opted in imperial war recruitment posters, or shouted down the first telephone wires in Australia, and the historical and spatial displacements these events announced, *does* stir up my echo of assent.

Perhaps the best essay in *The Sound In Between*, and the one to read first, is 'This Other Eden', a tough-minded, witty and brilliantly argued account of the 'development', on the Yarra bank, of Melbourne's World Trade Centre and adjoining hotel complex, 'Eden on the Yarra', as well as the environment-consuming, mirror-encased vacancy of the Rialto complex. Passages like this are withering, witty and illuminating.

> In 1835 the Tasmanian speculator John Batman allegedly purchased 600,000 acres of land (including the future site of Melbourne) from the so-called "Dutigalla" people in exchange for, among other articles, "thirty looking glasses", to be followed by an annual "tribute or rent yearly" which included sixty mirrors. After more than 150 years of failing to honour this treaty, a considerable back rent must have accrued; and if the country's legal owners were to claim all the mirrors owing, I imagine they might have on their hands a tower of glass not unlike the Rialto.

CARTER'S STYLE in the two books ranges from the highly poetic to the witty and teasingly playful, from the calmly lucid to the brilliantly illuminating. There is often a conversational ease and sense of intellectual enjoyment, and always a spark of *daring*. While he is not afraid of critical or philosophical jargon, Carter uses it carefully, sparingly and with accuracy. He doesn't fall for the 'Honest Joe' fallacy, either: that is, the demand that even the most complex ideas *always* have to be expressed in a plain-speaking, unadorned way. At the same time, Carter may choose to write with great simplicity and candor. Sometimes he says obvious things in irritatingly complex ways, but his usually refreshing and original insights more than reward one's patience with an occasional lapse. Carter is at this worst when he tries to elucidate an idea or position you suspect is still 'raw', 'uncooked', barely more than an intuition. Then, like a cowboy doing some odd lariat trick, he unleashes sentences that spin out and spiral everywhere, but without snaring his meaning and leaving the reader to pick through the tangle. But even here, at least, you sense that he is *genuinely* trying to lasso something important.

At his best, as Carter so often is, he is wonderfully stimulating and surprising. With these recent books, in addition to his first, Carter emerges as one of Australia's most original contemporary thinkers.

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books

Learning to See

John McLaren

Bernard Smith: *Imagining the Pacific; In the Wake of Cook's Voyages* (Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, $89.95).

Australia's recent history is a by-product of the greatest achievement of the European Enlightenment, the scientific plotting of the Pacific and its life. In his latest book, Bernard Smith complements and extends his seminal *European Vision and the South Pacific* to show the crucial role played by graphic artists in extending the sway of science to this new world and at the same time laying the basis for the scientific revolution that was to culminate in Darwin's enunciation of the principles of evolution.

The hero of Smith's account is not, however, an artist but a seaman, James Cook. In a footnote, Smith rebuts the distinction Paul Carter has attempted to draw between the 'explorer' Cook and the classifying 'discoverer' Banks. Both, he points out, were engaged in the task of bringing a new world within the bounds of European knowledge, and both were guided in their perception by the concepts of Enlightenment science. "Perception itself implies conceptualisation, and both exploring and discovering...imply the perception of differences." Smith's book shows how the perception and classification of differences, their portrayal in graphic images, and the work of the imagination in interpreting these images, permanently changed the way we see and utilise the natural world.

In placing Cook at the centre of his work, Smith is aware of the dilemma of the historian who, like the portrait painter, is obliged simultaneously to celebrate his hero and show his shortcomings. So, while appreciating Cook's achievements, he recognises also both the weariness and self-deception that eventually destroyed him and the significance of his role as an agent of the free market that traded syphilis and iron for sex and supplies, and eventually destroyed the societies it opened. Similarly, his artists, sharing his belief in the unity of humankind and depending for their success on amity with the people they portrayed, by their work promoted individualism, loosened the social bond, and prepared the way for the destructive racism of the missionaries.

Even the theory of evolution, noblest product of scientific enlightenment, served to replace the image of the noble savage, type of unfallen humanity, with that of a brutal creature just above the ape.

Yet, while recognising these contradictions, Smith writes with an optimism that art and science provide means by which we can learn to understand the world around us and thus ourselves. He starts from the materialist assumption that

> If we are to understand the Pacific world we must also accept the reality of the objects out of which the concept of the Pacific was constructed, together with the reality both of those European minds that sought to understand it and of those Pacific minds that found themselves at once the objects and victims of that 'understanding'. In imagining the Pacific, Europeans imagined from a reality that they had to come to terms with, not a fancy or fantasy that might eventually disappear.

He shows how this understanding was constructed first by the work of draughtsmen who, in the service of navigation and science, had to find their way through the assumptions of neo-classical idealism to a new empirical realism that eventually integrates the demands of both science and art and renews the sources of imagination.

Smith defines imagination as the construction of images away from direct sensory contact with the

objects that give rise to them. But he shows also how imagination comes into play even in the work of artists directly constructing images of the people and places they encounter. Hodges' interests in light and atmosphere, for example, provide an interpretative unity for works he paints from the great cabin of the *Resolution* as well as for those he reconstructs from his experience and his sketchbooks after his return to England.

The book's most extensive examination of the operation of the imagination comes not in a discussion of painting but in the chapter on the genesis of Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. Smith argues convincingly that the sources of the poem's imagery, and even of the route of the mariner's voyage, come from the tales Coleridge heard from William Wales, his mathematics teacher who had sailed with Cook on the *Resolution*. These are fleshed out by Coleridge's later systematic reading, but the emotional power of the poem comes from the capacity of its plot, suggested by Wordsworth, to exorcise Coleridge's childhood guilt and grief for the death of his brother.

While this example demonstrates the power of the Pacific voyages to transform the European imagination, uniting earthly terror, psychological pain and moral degeneration, the bulk of Smith's book deals rather with the more mundane issue of the loosening of classical restraints to enable Europeans to view more directly and comprehensively the variety of the world around them. He shows how this loosening meant a break from the great achievement of the Renaissance, the understanding of perspective and its celebration of despotic power. Instead, empirical realism placed its emphasis on the relationships between objects and their environment. Humans, once the centre, became parts of a whole, still individuals but no longer commanding circumstance. In the global economy at the end of the nineteenth century, they had become merely "so many frigate birds lying as best they can upon life's ocean."

"Humans, once the centre, became parts of a whole, still individuals but no longer commanding circumstance."

While the figure of Cook gives the book a clearer focus than the earlier work, its scope is still immense, reaching back to the beginning of realistic portrayal in the thirteenth century book on falconry prepared for King Frederick II of Sicily, and forward to the economic integration of the globe. It is not a history of art or of science so much as a history of ideas as expressed in art at a time when the mathematics of science was geometry and its product was, before it was again overtaken by religion, the ability to see. Although most of its content has appeared previously in various journal articles, it reads as a fresh and continuous work.

Not the least of the riches of this book, superbly designed for Yale University Press by Gillian Malpass, whose contribution is acknowledged by the author but not by the publishers, is its integration of verbal and visual texts. Through these, Bernard Smith not only pursues his fascinating argument, but also takes us into the perceiving and creating minds of the artists who furnish his subject.

John McLaren teaches Australian and Pacific studies at the Victoria University of Technology. His latest book, The New Pacific Literatures, *is due for publication in New York this year.*

Gödel 1, God 0

John Philip

Paul Davies: *The Mind of God* (Penguin, $19.95).

In September 1930 there was a conference of mathematicians in Königsberg. Its major and heroic figure was David Hilbert, Germany's and perhaps the world's leading mathematician. The city conferred on Hilbert honorary citizenship, and he delivered a much acclaimed address, 'Naturkennen und Logik',[1] in which he affirmed that there are no insoluble problems, concluding with the battle-cry, "Wir müssen wissen, wir werden wissen."[2]

The previous day a small unprepossessing person in thick glasses had announced to a sparse audience his incomplete proof that there are, and always will be, insoluble problems. Hilbert was not there: he was polishing his oration for the morrow. The unprepossessing figure was Kurt Gödel.

Gödel's proof gave a formal basis in mathematics for what intelligent men of common sense had perceived for centuries: that we cannot lift ourselves up by our own intellectual bootlaces, that it is a fruitless diversion from the real challenges and pleasures of life to become bogged down in contemplation of the infinite regress.

The implications of this for the power and limits of natural science were well understood, for example, by Thomas Huxley, disciple of Charles Darwin and pioneering biologist in his own right.

He recognised frankly the separate and equally necessary contributions of science and ethics to a reasoned life; and he was perfectly clear that ethical considerations were most definitely not the business of science.

Peter Medawar, Nobel Laureate and a wise and highly literate thinker on the broad issues of natural science, expresses cognate insights in his demolition of the pretentious nonsense of Teilhard de Chardin. He deplores extrapolation beyond the proper ambit of science as "an active willingness to be deceived".

Stephen Jay Gould, the eminent Harvard geologist-cum-biologist, is another who stresses the importance of recognising clearly where natural science ends and groundless speculation begins. As he wrote recently, "Answers to questions about ethical meaning cannot come from science."

My own roots in science are predominantly in physics rather than biology. It is therefore with shame that I record that sane and modest acknowledgment of the limits of natural science seems to come more from biology-based scientists than from physicists. Paradoxically, theoretical physicists, who might be expected to be the most rigorous and most honest thinkers, seem the most likely to fly off into idle and unfounded speculation.

Consider *The Mind of God*, the latest in a lengthy sequence of books by Paul Davies. Davies and Penguin appear to have settled into a profitable symbiosis, aimed at meeting the needs of the apparently large number of book-readers (or at least buyers) who can't swallow established religion but hunger for some form of, seemingly science-based, space-age metaphysics. *The Mind of God* is a best seller in the UK, the USA, and here. ABC TV shows the author doing his bookshop thing, signing copies for a dense queue of admirers. Let us be quite clear: *The Mind of God* has been acclaimed with respect by reviewers around the world; but, in my peculiar way, I find this perplexing.

The bulk of the book consists of a stream-of-consciousness grab bag of snippets of modern physics, mathematics, and cosmology. The bits and pieces are reasonably well written; but they are connected largely by a common enthusiasm, not a sustained logical progress. For the most part the approach is overheated, with the speculative character of certain concepts and theories underplayed. Yet here and there one finds frank recognition of the dubious status of one or other titbit. But the innocent reader will soon forget any reservations as the book charges off headlong in another direction.

This parade of trinkets will certainly impress the lay reader, and he may well be so dazzled that he fails to notice that the much-bruited conclusion of the book is essentially a *non sequitur*. The blurb has it thus: "The universe is no accident, but is structured in such a way that provides a meaningful place for thinking beings. By means of science, we can truly see into the mind of God."

The index reveals, unsurprisingly, that God gets a guernsey on seventy-nine of the book's pages. Not so expected is that Gödel (alphabetically next) appears on thirteen pages. This statistic summarises neatly the complexion of this work. Gödel is tossed in here and there to add spice to this mathematical-physical-theological salad; but it is recognised nowhere that Gödel's proof sends this speculative structure (and any like it) tumbling to the ground.

Robyn Williams (ABC Science Show), writing about the award to Paul Davies of the Eureka Prize for the promotion of science (!), discloses that Davies was missing from the award ceremony: he had been summoned to the Vatican to brief the Pope on cosmology. One can but hope John-Paul gets better advice on cosmology than he does on population problems.

A penultimate remark, perhaps aesthetic, perhaps ethical: people must, of course, be free to deck out their bounded lives with whatever fantasies they choose (so long as they do no demonstrable damage to others). For my money, however, the satisfying (good?) life is one where people recognise that life is finite and the world ultimately inscrutable; and they go on from there to pursue creative lives, curious and concerned about both people and the world, enjoying the light and unafraid of the dark. And the hell with props.

Finally, gentle reader, a quiz question for you. Let's suppose you are suddenly privy to the information[3] that the whole universe will end in the year 2100. Does this news change anything in your life?

[1] Natural Science and Logic.
[2] "We must know, we shall know."
[3] For obvious reasons you, and you alone, know this; and you are forbidden to tell anyone else.

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Explaining Menzies

Clement Macintyre

Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* (Macmillan, $26.95).

Robert Menzies continues to fascinate and intrigue. A quarter of a century after his resignation as prime minister, a poll conducted by the *Australian* shows that in popular opinion he still stands out as one of the best post-war prime ministers. Whether this is because of the achievements of his governments, because of his role in the formation of the modern Liberal Party, or simply because of his long tenure in office, is open to debate, but by any standards, understanding Australia in the years since World War II demands an understanding of Menzies. In *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*, Judith Brett offers an insightful and challenging analysis. She attempts to explain Menzies by exploring the nature of relationships between him and Australian politics, England, the monarchy, and the factors behind the orientation and pitch of the Liberal Party in its early years, as a product of the relationship between him and his parents and the formative experiences of his early life in an isolated corner of the British Empire.

The key to all this is revealed in a radio address delivered by Menzies over the Macquarie network in May 1942. 'The Forgotten People' was an attempt by Menzies to define the nature of the political appeal he was to make to middle Australia in the post-war years. Such was the ultimate success of this broad appeal that despite the extent of the humiliation and disappointment of his resignation in 1941, he was able to return and enjoy a dominance over Australian political life that lasted from his election in December 1949 until his retirement in January 1966. Conventional wisdom has it that the sobering reassessment forced by his fall in 1941 ensured Menzies' survival as Australia's longest-serving prime minister by pushing him to temper what was widely seen as his arrogance and aloofness and allowing him to build a new party, safe from the domination of vested interest groups.

Brett explains it in another way. She argues that, from his childhood, Menzies had seen himself as destined for greatness. This was in part a reflection of his mother's love for him, part a reaction to the distance and criticism he felt from his father and part a product of the role he saw for himself as a member of a privileged British community. A childhood ambition to become Chief Justice of Victoria was revised so that as a successful barrister he sought high political office. After a period in the State Assembly, he turned to Federal politics, entered the Cabinet and assumed the prime ministership on the death of Joe Lyons. But this rapid and almost effortless rise was not sufficient for the child of empire who had grown up with the stories of the Clan Chiefs of Scotland and the histories of the Great Men of England; he saw himself playing a yet larger role on a grander stage.

His first trip 'home' to England allowed him to move in the shadows of these Great Men who had occupied his mind as a child. He measured himself against the leading figures of the day and found little wanting. For Menzies, success in the eyes of the great at the centre of the empire would at last demonstrate to the world that the criticisms and slights he had suffered at its periphery were unfounded. Accordingly, Menzies' ambitions moved to include political office in England.

In 1941 he returned to Britain, this time as Australian Prime Minister. He lobbied hard to be included in the British War Cabinet as a Dominion representative – and for a long time allowed himself to dream of replacing Churchill as British Prime Minister. Brett argues that his failure to achieve these dreams goes a long way towards explaining the nature of his subsequent domestic political directions. It was Churchill in England who was the brick wall that blocked his rise and forced the political reassessment, not the humiliation of his subsequent resignation in Australia.

Seen in this light, the articulation of his beliefs as expressed in 'The Forgotten People' and in the ideology of the early Liberal Party is shown to be Menzies' final acceptance of the realisation that he would remain stranded on the Australian stage. Henceforward he would need to adjust his style and the nature of his political message to the mood of post-war Australia. Thus we see the appeal to middle or forgotten Australia, to "the new political demands of women in the home", to the anti-Communist sentiment of the 1950s, to those who had "a stake in the country", to "the backbone of the country"; these were the "lifters [who] grow muscles" who would secure his ascendancy.

So far, so good. What we have in *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* is a convincing explanation of the forces behind Menzies' rise to dominance and of the factors that helped to shape the modern Liberal Party. But is it the right one? Are there any others that might be just as valid? To answer this we really have to cast our net wider than a study of a single man and investigate the other forces driving the political debate at the time. Certainly Menzies was not the first to discover the importance of appealing

beyond class, and to women as a specific group, in sustaining anti-Labor political alliances. More than thirty years before the 'Forgotten People' broadcast, Alfred Deakin (who, in the words of Manning Clark, "had the gift to make the ladies feel that in the heartland of Australian suburbia all went well") had argued for "no division or antagonism between classes in Australia".[1] Menzies' newly discovered focus was hardly original. Similarly, can we not see other explanations for the development of the Liberal Party organisation and ideology that draw not from the personal experience of Menzies, but more from the realities of the recent political experience of the non-Labor parties and from the policies of the Curtin and Chifley governments?

Throughout the book Brett pays close attention to the language used by Menzies and the way in which he communicated his ideas, and the values that underpinned them, through speeches at public meetings and radio broadcasts.

She suggests that these show the origins of Menzies' beliefs and help to reveal the deep psychological motivations behind his initiatives. This might well be true, but the argument seems less persuasive when it is applied to the broader political developments that he helped to shape.

The strengths of the book are the new interpretations it offers to explain Menzies' character and behaviour, especially between 1941 and 1949, the years in opposition. In places these are built on some debatable assumptions, but they certainly demand our attention. At the same time, however, the book is less successful when it uses his character and behaviour to explain the shape and orientation of the subsequent political debate in Australia and Menzies' extraordinary domination of that debate.

[1] *C. M. H. Clark,* A History of Australia, *vol. v, MUP, 1981, p. 307.*

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A Talent for Friendship, the ABC – and All that Jazz

Ray Marginson

Clement Semmler: *Pictures on the Margin; Memoirs* (University of Queensland Press, $39.95).

This is a book of a kind we rarely enjoy from an Australian writer. Reflective, urbane and frank, illuminated by wide scholarship, covering a remarkable range of friendships with creative people here and abroad, it adds significantly to our understanding of a span of forty years across many areas of society.

Although *Pictures on the Margin* was published in late 1991, this review is published only now (to the annoyance, no doubt, of the author and of *Overland*'s editor) because I had difficulty in getting my perspectives clear about Dr Semmler's chapter on the chairmen of the ABC. My own views had been formed by involvement in policy roles at Post Office headquarters from 1951 to 1965. At that time the Director-General of the Australian Post Office exercised considerable influence over the ABC, through ministerial advice. I knew Charles Moses slightly, and much by report, and, to a greater extent, I knew Talbot Duckmanton.

It has been a long haul for Dr Semmler from the poverty and privation of his Lutheran boyhood, to which he remained steadfastly loyal despite the sophistication and breadth of his later education and international experience. The dedication in his admirable biography of Banjo Paterson says all of that and more; it was this background that gave him the application and determination to progress through scholarships to a level of education, and in fact erudition, that one can only envy and admire.

I hope that, despite the arguments which rage about systems of education, our children will continue to have the benefit of devoted and charismatic individuals such as those who helped Clem Semmler through all the personal and family difficulties he had in keeping to his determined course. Eric Pfitzner, his high school science teacher, provided a perceptive role model; and the consumptive Welsh pacifist, Gilbert Dutton, was the mainspring of a pacifism that led eventually to Semmler's conflicts in the ABC over Vietnam. He also had the good fortune to read English under the young Professor J. I. M. Stewart (later known as the author Michael Innes) fresh from Oxford. His period as a high school teacher was clearly one of great satisfaction and reward. In fact these and the university days are lovingly recreated in his recollections as truly halcyon.

For those who a decade later trod the same paths of discovery of Ronald Firbank, Graves, Sassoon, Eliot, Huxley, Laurie Lee and Joyce, as well as the Elizabethans and all that followed in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, it is difficult not to read these chapters without nostalgia; particularly so if one also believes that the "decline of the teaching of Latin in schools is one of the great tragedies of our education system and a major cause of the increasing illiteracy and verbosity of everyday writing and speaking".

That Semmler took the ABC road is one of those decisions that came through a series of accidental conjunctions, not the least of which was his passion for jazz as well as the serendipity that Rudolph Bronner, the federal director of Educational Broadcasts in Sydney, was not only an Adelaide University graduate of distinction but also a South Australian of German extraction. Out of the initial assessment, Semmler managed to get into the Sydney interview list and by April 1942 he had survived that and was at work as supervisor of Educational Broadcasts. Bronner was to become his guide, philosopher and friend at the ABC over some thirteen years.

From this first appointment came career opportunities and wider horizons for his talent and enthusiasms; wider than, I feel, he would have had in an academic role, however successful. From there came the friendships and the acquaintances that people this book. Despite the Byzantine political climate, the power in-fighting and the frustrations of the final years, Semmler's role once he had reached the level where he could "rock the boat" was a significant one. It also gave him the opportunity and environment in which to flower, enabling him to become program head for television, radio and overseas broadcasting. There he gave us 'Four Corners' and much else besides.

In my contacts with the ABC, to my great regret, I did not get to know Clem Semmler personally. However, it is clear from Semmler's earlier work, *The ABC – Aunt Sally and the Sacred Cow* (MUP, 1981), and the reviews of it by people such as Alan Ashbolt and Richard Harding, that Duckmanton's appointment as general manager prevented Semmler from bringing to life his vision for the ABC.

What emerges in *Memoirs* is that the succession of Duckmanton was inevitable, when one reviews the personalities and the relative skills for operating in the turgid waters of the bureaucratic process of Dr James Darling, ABC chairman 1961–67, Charles Moses and Clem Semmler himself. The exacerbation of the political sensitivities of Menzies and his colleagues caused by 'Four Corners', a program which Semmler to his ever-lasting credit created, played a major part in all this. Nonetheless a former public servant's mind boggles at the rashness (which Semmler freely admits) of his confiding, while in Canada, his London conversations with Darling, which got back to Charles Moses, on the pipeline, before the appointment had been made.

I cannot comment on Dr Semmler's evaluation of Sir Henry Bland but think it is considerably tinged by the fact that Bland considered Duckmanton "should go". I think that Semmler is wrong in his overall evaluation of Richard Downing as chairman, despite his account of the 1974 conflict over attempts to have films "not recommended for children" screened later at night. To say that under Downing, permissiveness in programming and staff militancy "emerged" seems to misunderstand the total change in society and its values that took place from the late sixties onwards. It was not possible to hold the ABC in an artificial cocoon referring back to the Reith-style BBC. 'Four Corners' was part of that change in society. Strangely enough, Darling protected it and this was one of the reasons he lost the chairmanship. What Downing was trying to do, and what his tragic, premature death prevented, was to ease the ABC into the changing world. That this transition has now taken place through Whitehead and then Hill, in a manner that Clem Semmler would see as being far from his own vision, should not in my view denigrate the understanding of the ABC's position that Downing, and later Ken Myer, had.

"His pictures of the six ABC chairmen...should be compulsory reading for all those interested in Australian society."

His pictures of the six ABC chairmen under whom he served should be compulsory reading for all those interested in Australian society. I learnt much from this chapter, including confirmation of my own view of the unsuitability of having a senior post office official on the commission. I knew well the person who assisted in stopping the publication of Semmler's book on Australian broadcasting which Oxford had accepted in 1955; he should never have been in a situation where he could do so. This attitude is hard to credit today, as was the formal reprimand Semmler received, when his excellent biography of Banjo Paterson was published in 1966, for neglecting his duties and writing too much.

So, in the pages of this book warm personal pictures emerge of those people whom Clem Semmler counted as his friends and those whom he met and evaluated; at the BBC in its great days; through the long friendship, intellectual and personal, with the Caseys; with Patrick White, friend and favorite novelist; with Professor Muriel Bradbrook, the English scholar and author of studies of Commonwealth literature at Girton College, Cambridge; with Laurie Lee in the Cotswolds; with Spike Milligan, comic genius (and

in Semmler's view one of the most remarkable men he has known); and with the Irish wits. He recalls his great friendship with Frank Hardy, with whom he worked to get Billy Borker to the screen, not to mention *Power Without Glory*; and, again in Australia, with another highly individual and very funny, multi-talented author, Bernard Hesling.

I regret not getting to know Clem Semmler; regret for a number of reasons, not the least of which is a shared passion for jazz. I suppose not every reader will appreciate, or perhaps even read all of, the last two chapters in the book. To those of us who are fatally injected with the old 78 needle, these chapters are a great pleasure. The hagiography of jazz, particularly Australian jazz, is limited and few who have attempted it write with any personal style. Exceptions include Semmler's (and my) friends Dick Hughes, John Sangster and Graeme Bell. For those who bought their first jazz record before the Second World War, there is much that is new and much that is evocative. As someone who did not get to Condon's in New York until 1968, I can only rejoice with Semmler that he saw the great classic performers in the mid-1950s. Many of his anecdotes are fresh. I particularly like the styling of Max Kaminsky (who is one I did know) as Max Buyderbook, which combines beautifully a crack at Max flogging his *My Life in Jazz* with a nice word play on the immortal Chicago cornet player Bix Beiderbecke.

One day I hope to play for Clem Semmler the rare Australian Regal recording, The Lazy Levee Loungers' 'Shout Sister Shout' and ask him if he thinks, as I do, that the trumpet is Henry Allen; or perhaps share with me the delights of Allen's playing on 'You Might Get Better But You'll Never Get Well'! It is Allen who figures so much in the final segment of this intriguing and highly personal series of reflections and evaluations; memories of a diverse group of people who have come into the reach of Clem Semmler's talent for friendship.

I am sorry that he does not like live theatre but prefers reading plays; I am glad for Australia's sake that he escaped that truly horrific and traumatic Boeing 707 crash at Heathrow. I hope he continues to write and publish.

Looking back on his talent for friendship, his published work, the things he has created and initiated, and finally assessing the positions he has taken on many occasions when standing up to be counted held great risk, one must regard Dr Clem Semmler as a national treasure. I only hope that the future holds a few more like him.

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A Golden Bright Gamble

Trevor Hay

Eric Rolls: *Sojourners: Flowers and the Wide Sea* (University of Queensland Press, $49.95).

Diana Giese, in her review of this book for the *Australian*, described it as "a feast" of Chinese history. In view of Rolls's obvious relish for his task, not to mention the literal basis for the metaphor (a whole chapter devoted to the glories of Chinese cuisine), this is entirely appropriate. But I would rather draw on a different chapter – 'Golden Bright Gambling Places' – to illustrate the nature of the author's achievement. Despite its monumental scope and meticulous detail, *Sojourners* is at heart an invigorating uproar – a bright, game and robust saga of fantastic characters and events. Like most sagas, it is also quaint and disjointed in places, because there is always a gamble involved in taking on what Rolls laconically calls "a big subject" and treating it with a storyteller's flair and fancy. Like any gamble, this one sometimes exhilarates and sometimes disappoints. Overall, however, the book is a win for those with a personal or professional interest in the history of Australian inter-cultural contact.

"Sojourners is at heart an invigorating uproar – a bright, game and robust saga of fantastic characters and events."

In the opening chapter Rolls deals with the possibility of contact between Aboriginals and the Chinese, with China's age of exploration in the early Ming dynasty, and with Chinese as shepherds in Australia. He goes on to deal with the heyday of Chinese mining activity in Australia (including the Northern Territory) and the effects of resultant contact between Chinese and Europeans. The books swells into a fabulous saga of treasure and tragedy, prejudice and cruelty, the sea, the land, addiction and disease, murders and marriages, strange plants and animals – and Rolls himself. There is a chapter

on smallpox and leprosy, and a chapter on opium, including opium production and use in Australia. And there is a chapter on eating, 'The Five Great Attributes of Food'. At this point Rolls seems to lose his grip. Or, to put it another way, he is so unintimidated by scholarly conventions about the need to avoid digressions, anecdotes and assertions that he becomes almost provocative. But more of that later.

"The book swells into a fabulous saga of treasure and tragedy, prejudice and cruelty, the sea, the land, addiction and disease, murders and marriages, strange plants and animals – and Rolls himself."

A commendable feature of this book is its use of Chinese terms, both in Hanyu pinyin romanisation and in characters, throughout the text. Rolls uses characters "not only because they add beauty and authenticity to a page but because they make the phrases . . . readily understandable to Chinese readers". By and large this has been done with accuracy and consistency, except for a few terms (e.g. p. 350 where three characters need to be read from right to left instead of left to right, as in the rest of the book). That mistakes should be made in such an undertaking is more than understandable. There is, however, a tendency on the author's part to stray from useful clarification into dubious use of etymology and literal translations. For example, Chinese are no more likely to think of *zaofan* as "early cooked rice" (p. 424) than Australians are to think of 'breakfast' as an end of nocturnal abstinence. More importantly, the use on the dust jacket and title page of the expression "flowers of the Flowery Land" in describing traditional Chinese national self-image seems misleadingly picturesque to me. The character in question, with its basic idea of efflorescence (from which a great many other meanings have evolved), appears to be related to an ancient tribal name, the origins of which are shrouded in remotest antiquity. I don't think it provides a convincing metaphor for contact between Chinese and non-Chinese civilisations, or that, in a literal sense, it has much to do with a Chinese concept of nationality, either now or during the period Rolls is discussing. By contrast, there are passages (e.g. p. 21), where the use of Chinese and English terms provides a helpful insight into the nature of inter-cultural contact.

Overall, I am impressed with the way Rolls has used the language, including consistently accurate use of Hanyu pinyin, a skill which eludes many authors, Chinese and non-Chinese alike – Amy Tan, Nien Cheng and Jung Chang are some recent and notable examples of a fine disregard for such niceties. Rolls's work – or that of an assistant, since it is not made clear who did the Chinese, either in print or calligraphic form – may mark an increasing sophistication in Australian publishing on Asian cultures.

Now, back to the author's fearlessly idiosyncratic manner. Rolls allows himself two obvious indulgences – the inclusion of material (e.g. the chapter on eating in China) which is tangential to the themes of contact between China and Australia, and the omission of sources, which he says would add too much to the book's length. He can get away with a lot of self-indulgence because he is such a fine writer. He has a style that is both masterful and elegant, an eye for detail that is astonishing at times, and above all he brings a kind of gusto to the telling of his 'epic story', making this a most entertaining and engaging book. He is witty, tough and perceptive, with that veteran countryman's self-assurance that marks his writing on landscape and environment. But he has made it very difficult for others to follow his tracks, and, in so doing, he has restricted the usefulness of a book which I for one will not hesitate to put on student reading lists.

In his last chapter, '1888: The Division Between Sojourners and Citizens', Rolls foreshadows his second volume, yet to appear, which deals with the period since 1888, and documents the story of Chinese as citizens in Australia. If he has managed by the end of this to lead the general reader towards an appreciation, not just of "China's relationship with Australia", but of an Australian culture that has been profoundly affected by Chinese citizens, then he will have made an outstanding contribution to the literature of inter-cultural contact, which is enjoying a real 'flowering' in Australia at present.

Trevor Hay has written Tartar City Women *(Melbourne University Press, 1990) and (with Fang Xiangshu)* East Wind, West Wind *(Penguin, 1992). He is Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Melbourne.*

Two Australian Writers

John S. Leonard

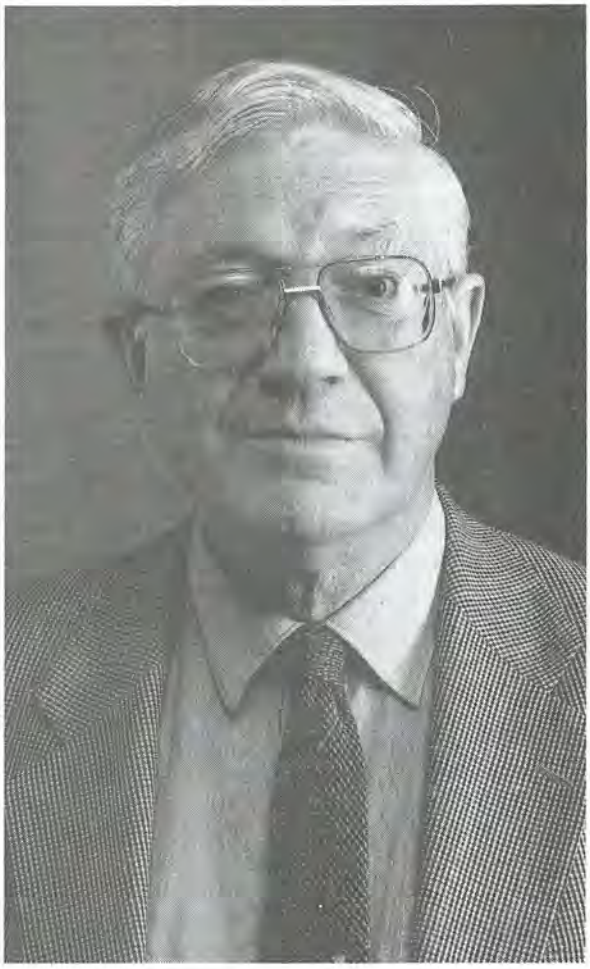
Lyn McCredden: *James McAuley* (Oxford University Press, $14.95).
Peter Steele: *Peter Porter* (Oxford University Press, $14.95).

These two books are among the first titles in OUP's new *Australian Writers* series. The studies in this series are designed, according to the blurb, to take "account of new cultural formations and developments in literary theory". But it is arguable that in choosing to continue the author-centred format of the old *Australian Writers and Their Works* in the new series, the publisher has already begged a number of important theoretical questions.

This is particularly the case with Lyn McCredden's study, *James McAuley*. Here, in two introductory chapters, she distances herself from an older style of criticism with the aid of Derrida and de Man. Leonie Kramer, for example, in her anthology of McAuley's writing describes the complexities and contradictions of his work and resolves them in terms of the author – McAuley himself embodies these contradictions and transcends them in his poetry. McCredden's move is away from McAuley himself towards the texts that make up his œuvre. These texts are now read as embodying the complexities and contradictions of 'McAuley': "conscious and multiple stances taken by a writer are read as symptomatic of an ongoing and inevitable drama, a linguistic drama played out in language's constant shifts and slides."

But is there a real distinction between these two readings of McAuley/'McAuley'? Some parts of McCredden's study, notably the chapter on McAuley's epic poem 'Captain Quiros', are virtually indistinguishable from the older criticism; the poem is read as embodying an "unresolving dialectic" as though this is what every poem has always done and must always do, rather than what certain poems do in certain readings in certain periods.

A notable absence, apart from a brief mention in the introductory chapter, is the dangerous figure of Ern Malley, the hoax-poet whom McAuley invented with Harold Stewart in the 1940s. The poems of Ern Malley are as much a challenge to McCredden's view of McAuley's work as to the older criticism; they are not in his name, yet by him, and they are a collaborative work, and so move beyond the limited range that McCredden's theory of the unitary text of McAuley allows. Instead of the claustrophobic reading that we have here – where scarcely another writer, let alone a contemporary event, disturbs the exclusive focus on McAuley – it would be interesting, for example, to read McAuley's writings on New Guinea in the context of contemporary anthropological and colonialist writings, or his writings on poetry and society of the 1950s in the context of Cold War rhetoric. Such possibilities are tantalising, but McAuley read wholly in terms of McAuley, as here, is the worst kind of circular argument.



Peter Porter

Peter Steele's study, *Peter Porter*, is a more satisfactory book because it is less up to date and makes fewer 'theoretical' gestures. It is in fact a good old-fashioned eulogy of Porter's poetry, seeking to define precisely the flavor and the qualities that distinguish his work. Steele uses Whitehead's description of the three stages of learning as romance, precision and generalisation to organise three chapters in the middle of the book. He ends with a

chapter giving a close reading of three of Porter's poems and begins with an attempt to define the 'province' of Porter's poetry.

Steele is more inclined than McCredden to discuss the influences that operate in Porter's poetry, although with Porter, a writer who wears his influences very much on his sleeve, it would be difficult to ignore them. There is a particularly interesting discussion, amongst several others, of the influence of Auden on Porter. The range of reference is wide, as in this typical passage:

> Pascal distinguished between *esprit de geometrie* and *esprit de finesse* favouring the second for certain purposes...I think that this is the kind of thing that Porter is up to in most of his poetry: he is courting the *esprit de finesse*, the perfect pitch for the moral and aesthetic actual. He tries and tries again: he sounds like Wittgenstein, like Yeats: he sounds like Socrates. The melancholy which spreads its thin coat over everything he does is like rust on armour, patina on copper domes – always noticeable, at some future stage disabling, but frequently a diversion from what is going on beneath it: a wield of wit, a hunger for delineation, a plea for the truth. The medieval moralist said that 'manners maketh man': Porter, realising that art and human styles alike depend on one's knowing where to draw the line, is engaged constantly in the search for exacting illumination. Suggestively, in reviewing Les Murray's *The Daylight Moon*, Porter salutes Murray's "dramatic sense of moral discrimination", even though he has clear reservations about some of Murray's conclusions. His phrase seems to me to be an excellent one for what is happening in much of his work.

It is not often that writing like this is so successful, at such length, but there does seem to be a danger in situating Porter in the rarefied company of the greats of Western thought and literature, as in this passage. The reference to Les Murray is a rare one in a book that manages to say little about Porter's problematic relationship with Australia, and fails, in a similar way to McCredden's book, to discuss the relation of the poetry to any non-literary discourses or contemporary cultural formations. At one point Steele underlines the valorised status of the writer:

> Books abound with titles like *The World of Shakespeare* or *World of Dryden*: these tell us of the social milieu and physical circumstances and cultural currency which surround a writer. All these things would have been there regardless of the writer.

James McAuley

But it would not be difficult for an irritated reader to read this dictum in its opposite sense.

Both these studies are conspicuously well written; McCredden's is lively, intelligent and well organised, Steele's is slower, more single-minded and more eloquent. Both critics range widely amongst the works of their respective authors and carefully avoid most of their authors' anthology-pieces. The strength of both these valuable studies lies in their close readings of a number of poems. But close reading in itself is not the end of literary criticism, which is moving increasingly towards a practice of criticism that is more fully contextualised, which sees literature not as an essence, but as a social practice, with its own specificities and conditions of possibility. It is likely that, in the future, close-

reading will become more of a tool for uncovering the traces of other discourses in the literary, rather than searching through the literary in order to uncover the literary.

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A Singular Voice

Helen Elliott

Ruth Park: *A Fence Around the Cuckoo* (Viking, $29.95; Penguin, $14.95).

Autobiography is a difficult genre. To say that it requires truth without banality and sincerity without mawkishness is obvious, but that the autobiographer should be constantly mindful of Sydney Smith's maxim that good writing should "please and instruct" is perhaps not so obvious. That consummate storyteller – "all I have ever wanted to be" – Ruth Park, in the first volume of her autobiography, *A Fence Around the Cuckoo*, fulfils every one of these obligations. The result is, as one expects from Park, impressive. Ruth Park's best writing radiates a simplicity and immediacy of experience that is elusive when it comes to analysis, although she has always had that mark of a born writer: a singular voice. *A Fence Around the Cuckoo*, vivid, lively, comic, and often moving, explains much about this inventive and ebullient writer.

Park was born in New Zealand into an Irish/Scottish/Scandinavian family, both working-class and Catholic. Her father, called by the Maori name of Mera, was a Scot, a romantic dreamer from whom his daughter inherited her imagination and her sparkling capacity to love without stinting. Her mother, a city girl, as beautiful as she was practical, gave Ruth the inestimable gift of an Irish grandmother whose dexterity with language was as astounding as her intuition, and a flock of chattering, giggling, charitable aunts who swoop in and out of these pages like a chorus from a 1920s revue. The passionate love the child felt for her parents is the leitmotiv that underscores the book. Park writes of her father, "old, very ill with a worn-out heart", facing death with the dignity and irony with which he faced life, and she cries: "How the heart aches when one recalls these things. It's a specific ache, I find, constricting the chest, moving upwards and grasping the throat in an iron grip. What fool said that one ever forgets love and grief, dear voices and faces?" There is an intensity and truthfulness embedded in the rhythm of the prose and throughout the book the language sustains this idiosyncratic purity.

Many writers acknowledge that their creativity was shaped and moulded by their childhood, and that continuing creative nourishment comes from returning again and again to those internal childhood landscapes. Park is no exception. The many-layered world of home and family, the Maori villages and the bush that she roamed in her New Zealand childhood when her father worked as a bridge builder and road maker, has fashioned and informed everything she has written since.

> I cannot emphasise sufficiently the importance of my early life as a forest creature. The mindset it gave me has dominated my physical and spiritual being. The unitive eye with which all children are born was never taken away from me by the frauds of civilization; I always did know that one is all and all is one.

Park was an unusual child – herself a cuckoo in the tranquil nest of her parents' marriage. She was a much-loved cuckoo, but her parents puzzled over her as much as they took pride in her obvious cleverness. In those tough, early Depression days this wild, imaginative little girl – these days she would

Ruth Park

be called "gifted and talented" – was given to the nuns to educate. Never one for cliché, Park writes of the nuns with love and admiration and she is affectionate in acknowledging what she owes to them: most spectacularly her introduction to the young Australian writer, D'Arcy Niland.

In her parents' house there were only two books and Ruth would read these obsessively. From the vantage point of the 1990s she writes of the intuitive understanding she had about what books would offer her, but she shows not a pinch of self-pity:

> But if only there had been books, any books at all to expand my horizons, increase my vocabulary, pervade my soul! For years I thought this and mourned. But now I think that whatever little gift I inherited probably needed for its development the circumstances into which I was born – a solitary childhood; an introspective, often numinous landscape; people very close to their ancestral roots and showing it on their faces and in their idiom and manner of thought. But at the time I yearned for, died for books.

If young Ruth was deprived of books she substituted other things for them. She became particularly practised at studying the people around her, observing and eavesdropping. Nothing could have been finer training for a young writer, and, as she says: "From my earliest days I was a kind of writer ...I called it 'putting things down' ". *A Fence Around the Cuckoo* could make a good case for depriving imaginative children of books, because what Ruth Park developed was a way of looking at the world that was completely individual, an ability to go straight to the heart of the matter. She never had to resort to the innocent plagiarism of most young writers because her own imagination, kindled by her curiosity and observations, had to be her single source and her guide. It's this quality of childlike spontaneity in assessing the world that gives so much pleasure in Park's writing; a quality that she shares with Dickens, who nourished that part of himself which could never grow up, and also with Emily Dickinson, who talks about seeing the world, but seeing it "slant". I suspect Park inherited this gift from her father who, she writes, "closed his memoirs with the words: 'I have had a great life. I have known some good people and many wonderful dogs' "!

This is only the first volume of her autobiography and takes Park up until 1942 and her voyage to Australia, which, with characteristic generosity, she writes of as "the ancient, indifferent, nonpareil continent that was to become the love of my life". Of course, it wasn't. D'Arcy Niland met her off the ship and they were married for nearly twenty-five years until his untimely death. Throughout this first volume Park hints at the extraordinary bond that was between them and the hopelessness of the grief that she had, and obviously still has, at his death. She catches Niland's attractiveness and the fatefulness of their relationship with great clarity, but there is an aching sense of withholding. Perhaps some things are just too painful to write about? Or perhaps she will cover more in the next volume.

The next episodes in her extraordinary life are certain to contain more shadows and depths, but given the delight and openness, and the formidable courage, with which Park greets life they should be as instructive and as engaging as this quite exceptional and beautifully produced first volume. Park certainly puts paid to Christina Stead's comment that writers "should never write autobiography".

Helen Elliott is a Melbourne reviewer who is preparing a study of Lesbia Harford (1891–1927) and would appreciate hearing from readers who may have reminiscences, letters or other material.

Profusion of Poetry

Michael Dugan

Timoshenko Aslanides: *Australian Alphabet* (Butterfly Books, $11.95).
Colleen Burke: *the edge of it* (Feakle Press, $12.95).
Geoff Goodfellow: *Triggers: turning experiences into poetry* (Wakefield Press, $14.95).
Sudesh Mishra: *Tandava* (Meanjin, $12.95).
Mal Morgan: *Once Father and God* (Five Islands Press Associates, $11.95).
Bev Roberts: *The Exorcism Trip* (Pariah Press, $12).
Marguerite Varday: *Spiral* (Monash University English Department, $7).

Poetry book publishing is flourishing if the number of new books of poetry being received by *Overland* is any indicator. Unfortunately this means that there is now no chance of reviewing all those that merit review in a magazine that can be published only quarterly.

Australian Alphabet, Timoshenko Aslanides' fifth collection, is a series of poems and poem sequences that are titled in alphabetical sequence. The poems are about many aspects of Australia with characters ranging from the doomed explorers Burke and Wills, to the impressionist Arthur Streeton and other major contributors to our ethos, but also taking in others, such as the eccentric William King, the 'flying pieman' and Mary Ann Brownlow,

hanged in 1855 for murdering her husband.

Aslanides, relating Australian history and mythology, is also attempting to relate himself to the Australian ethos. To a large degree he succeeds and the poems are evocative, witty and portray the characters that have led to our characteristics. However, a critical editorial eye would have been useful to remove occasional clumsinesses such as 'if a time to be born, then a time to quickly grow out of', and corninesses such as 'if Brahe didn't dig because he thought it "infra dig"', which mar this generally successful essay at an ambitious project.

the edge of it is Colleen Burke's first collection of poems since 1984. These are very direct poems in which the author conducts a dialogue with herself, her children, her recently dead husband and, in the process, with the reader. The result is a series of very personal poems at an unusual level of emotional honesty. Many of the poems deal with the death of her husband, the well-known folk musician Declan Affley, and with her struggle to make sense of her life after it, including responding to her children and trying to explain to them a world that is not secure.

However, this is not a mournful book. The poems reflect their author's love for life, for her children, her friends and the world around her. If at times there is grief there is also humor; if at times there is anger there is also understanding. After reading this book I hoped I wouldn't have to wait eight years to read the next book by this poet.

Geoff Goodfellow's *Triggers* is an interesting examination of one poet's craft. For it he has made a selection of his own poems and then explained how they have come about. The title refers to his notes on the experience or observation from which a poem grows. Drafts of poems are also included with explanatory notes pointing out why he has chosen certain words or devices. There are also reflections on each poem and suggestions for further writing. Anyone interested in how poems are made will find *Triggers* absorbing. It would also be a useful textbook for young or new poets.

Sudesh Mishra is a young Fijian Indian who spent some time at Flinders University in South Australia studying for a doctorate. Although some poems in *Tandava* are drawn from his Australian residence most are concerned with his own country. Fiji's colonial past, its post-coup undemocratic political system and its racial and social structure form the basis for these well-crafted polemical poems.

To label Mishra merely as a polemist would be to do him an injustice. Even a reader unfamiliar with Fijian and Indian culture can see that these are accomplished poems that portray their author's struggle to find his own place, both in his country and in his writing. Perhaps he comes closest in the sequence of ten sonnets that closes the book:

> I begin once again this hammering
> At metaphors while the sky grins from ear
> To ear and frogs go pogoing amid pads
> Of lilies. *There is something of the naif*
> *In you*, she said over a disembowelled
> Aubergine. Outside the rain javelined,
> & rodents torpedoed through the thicket,
> & palmtrees curtseyed like scullerymaids.
> I've stood, a dreamer in a menagerie
> Of ignoramuses, surveying the seam
> Of the sea like some doddery prospector,
> As the season ordains our new Diaspora,
> As the West burns after the Inquisition,
> As the Boar's hoof snaps for the
> weight of Kali.

Mal Morgan has done a lot for poetry in Melbourne. He co-founded and organised the La Mama Poetica monthly readings for several years and edited the anthology that arose from them. Currently he is Director of the Montsalvat National Poetry Festival.

Once Father and God is his fourth collection and reflects the mixture of wit, compassion and a sensitive approach to everyday life with its small mysteries, joys and sorrows, that characterised his earlier work. Perhaps the poem 'To Tell You' can act as a summary of this collection in which the author's journey towards understanding is recorded:

> To tell you my inner life,
> largely chemical, but with a bizarre
> apparatus of imagination. Of my constant
> wandering within the labrynth of this
> interior, long and undulating as intestines.
> What my woman and my sons are doing there.
> How frequently my heart turns into a red
> stone, with its accompanying heaviness.
> To let you in on it, how my outer life
> is a little light, on the dark surface of
> a night-time lake; fleeting, but with its moment
> of effulgence. And I am not sure of anything
> feeling such an abundance in everything.
> Yet even this telling I must relinquish.
> To tell you how I am unsure of this serenity,
> whether it is an accrescence, or the start
> of a great slowing.

The Exorcism Trip is Bev Roberts' second collection. Her poems are very accessible and a number of themes reoccur, including children and child-

hood, women's fears about men's potential to harm them, and alcohol and its potential dangers. Many of the poems are autobiographical with Roberts surveying her life, often with wry humor as in 'The Road to St Kilda Pier (Or: You've Got a Lot to Answer For, Jack Kerouac)':

I was on the road to St Kilda,
headquarters of Bohemia and that alluring
stuff called Vice.
I had my carefully saved holiday pay,
my carefully bought Bohemian outfit
(a kind of trousseau, mainly black),
and a few volumes of San Francisco poets
carefully placed in my coat pocket.
Cool, man?
I was a little glacier of hip.

There's a generation can relate to that!

Spiral is the second collection from Marguerite Varday, a children's author as well as poet. Hers are quiet, reflective, often domestic poems such as this one on waking:

Some mornings
between first glimpse of light
and waking to digital time
a child appears through curtains
to play and laugh for a moment.

To remember childhood
is to begin again
renew strength for today
discover meaning for tomorrow.

There are many moments in this collection in which the world of the everyday is transformed into something richer.

Michael Dugan has published many children's books as well as several collections of poetry and four books on Australian social history.

Contributory Negligence

Max Teichmann

Robert Murray and Kath White: *The Fall of the House of Cain* (Spectrum, $9.95).

Mark Considine and Brian Costar eds.: *Trials of Power; Cain, Kirner and Victoria 1982–1992* (Melbourne University Press, $19.95. All royalties to Amnesty International).

Australians have been privileged to enjoy the spectacle of a variety of Labor Governments at work over the last decade, or parts thereof. Rather like the educated ancient Greeks, who were able to observe and compare the different kinds of political and civil systems operating at *that* time. Democracy, aristocracy, theocracy, timocracy and so on. Plato and Aristotle wrote it all up for them.

We have seen the economic rationalist corporate Laborites in Canberra; the familiar good old Tammany Hall of Sydney – part patronage system, part criminal conspiracy. Then there was the right populist plutocracy of Brian Burke; the all-things-to-all-people Cordiality Club of Tasmania, and the left populist neo-pseudo-Keynesianism of Victoria, with its underground emanations of Trades Hall Tammany, and fancy soup kitchens for the radical Yuppies. These soup kitchens served chicken sandwiches, indifferent champagne...and job vouchers. But you had to know the right people and have the right handshake, and oink the correct radical sentiments, in order to have access to the People's Swill.

In more recent times the poor could be observed sampling the dustbins outside the trade union barbie, left-bourgeois mutual congratulation gatherings, and the corporate state social happenings of Labor leaders, banker/speculators and union bosses. Just as the poor from Bucharest between wars used to rifle through the wasted food from gatherings of Rumania's rich. Inside, the élites spoke bad French and danced the Wiener Schnitzel Waltz. Five-sixths of industry and most of the banks were owned by foreigners, for the top people weren't really into work, or things of the mind. The Left had been destroyed, and the only honest party remaining was the neo-Fascist Iron Guard. Naturally, they were on the run from King Carol's gendarmerie.

Australia has no Left – it was bought, not crushed – and our equivalent to an Iron Guard has its headquarters in the Zoo, and its main support in the geriatric institutions of our country towns.

Two rather different books on the Victorian saga have just appeared – the one by Rob Murray (who wrote *The Split*) and Kate White, being a no nonsense monograph, written to anticipate the election, which it did; without an index or endnotes, eschewing deep analysis but concentrating upon the principal financial disasters, for example Pyramid, the Victorian Economic Development Corporation (VEDC), Tricontinental, the State Bank. They tackle the policy failures, for example transport, Work Care, and the inability to either maintain morale, contain spending or push through changes desired by the Government, in sectors such as

health and education.

One cannot divine the political preferences of *these* authors – they let the facts speak. On the other hand, the Considine–Costar collection comprises twenty chapters devoted to most aspects of the Cain–Kirner regime. It is indexed, and well referenced, and most contributors appear to be not simply very partial to Labor, but as having had, in many cases, extra-mural connections with one or another of the multifarious activities of the Cain regime. The Murray–White book tells the story warts and all, while this larger effort comes out, quite frequently, as a rearguard action, a wistful apologia. But there is much common ground, and agreement, just the same.

The Cain Government started with high hopes and widespread public good-will. It had a carefully worked out program, a seemingly fresh, talented front bench; an Opposition tired after twenty-seven years in power, with a new Leader, Jeff Kennett, who became the target of the most sustained character assassination campaign since the days of Jim Cairns and Jack Lang. In other words, the media, both commercial and public were not merely supportive, but in some cases virtually intertwined with the Government and its lavishly staffed media units. Near the end the *Herald-Sun* tired of this game, and started blowing the whistle on some of the more blatant disasters and malfeasances in Victoria. The shock-horror reactions to this first breath of criticism – "ban them, stop them, the editor is a monster" – show the dangers of a government becoming addicted to number crunching, pollsters and public relations propaganda.

There was really no need for the Labor Government to lean upon such comforting allies during its first two terms, for the thing was working. Thereafter the kind of disasters which crept through the State could not be concealed indefinitely, nor were they – in the end. But the processes of denial, cover up and diversionary tactics ensured that the crash, when it came, was worse than it need have been, the general disillusionment greater, and much of the damage and many of the losses irreparable: a bit evocative of the last years of Brezhnev.

There appear to be three main culprit areas. The unions, particularly, the public service unions, went along with Cain and Co as long as they got what they wanted, meanwhile stonewalling on any of the overdue reforms needed by the government to maintain budgetary stability and serve the public – this latter supposedly being the primary aim of government. Strikes or threatened strikes by transport workers, power workers, teachers, nurses, and public servants, produced for times most likely to embarrass the government, regularly ensured an undignified retreat by Spring Street. When Labor really had to go in for cost cutting, all hell broke loose or was threatened. One great reason for Victorians voting Labor in 1982 was that Cain spoke of an amicable end to the regular confrontations under the Liberals; this to be based on the special relationship enjoyed with Trades Hall. By the end of the day, Labor had a quite different reputation: as patsies who were steered by J. Halfpenny. Even the impressive statistics of a low level of industrial disputes under Cain and Co became a *double entendre*, as voters came to feel that peace could be bought at too high a price.

Sensible budgeting and an end to restrictive practices in areas such as transport and health, labour shedding in a contracting state education system, and reforming the Work Care system, which despite all the planning became once again a happy hunting ground for lawyers – three Labor law firms raking in over $40m. on their own – were sabotaged or slowed down by vested interests operating on the principle of "what we have we hold".

These two books speak of the politicisation of the public service, with the marginalisation of regular public servants, the creation and filling of large numbers of new and existing posts by party sympathisers; the detachment of departmental heads and seniors from their departments, to be replaced by their semi-incorporation into a higher world of the Minister, his advisers and ideological commitments of the party, not the public.

Lois Bryson is quoted extensively on the situation where a senior public servant, if not already an ALP supporter, came to feel that allegiance to the Minister and the party in power took precedence over corporate responsibilities towards colleagues, or the consumers of the service. One complication was that ministers kept changing, and the existing place holders would be supplanted by a new mob of place seekers. Murray and White recount stories of sudden dizzy rises in rank by hitherto lowly bureaucrats, and the correlative discovery that the upwardly mobile character had been a closet Labor supporter. Many people hastened to join the Party for the same reason that many joined the Polish Communist Party or the Italian Fascist Party: to advance their career or just to preserve their livelihood. Why did the Cain regime feel it had to turn the public service on its head and pack it with supporters, or outsiders?

The professed reason was the same as that given by Whitlam and Hawke – to stop the "Yes Minister" situation – and the sabotage of Labor reforms by covert Conservative bureaucrats. If so, the cure

in every case was worse than the disease, and the conspiratorial diagnosis of the various Australian public services seems overdrawn, if not insulting. In fact, the Labor strategies were familiar examples of populist regimes – Left or Right – at work. You incorporate or pay off all potential rebels, critics and disrupters, who usually call themselves Left, while marginalising those who won't be incorporated. The problem of disunity, of rancorous pressure groups, is common in most political parties, but especially so with Australian Labor.

In Victoria, chronic disunity, faction fighting, and the babel of opposing pseudo-ideologies had kept Victorian Labor out of office for many years and made it the idiot child of the ALP. It was Cain's achievement that he changed all that for a time, but in the end he was brought down by a mix of the same old recidivist forces and a crowd of fresh players, purportedly representing new populist single-issue group, which in turn reflected the desires for legitimation and empowerment of the post-Vietnam middle class. The multifarious, exponential and often contradictory demands by this mendicant subculture, with each member playing his or her own hand with little or no regard for the good or the aims of the PARTY, let alone the society, eventually made the task of the Labor leaders impossible. Wishing to manage Victoria in the light of their own ideas of probity and justice, with efficiently managed social development and economic growth the *sine qua non*, they found themselves increasingly devoted to managing the Party. The pork barrel became the escutcheon of the Victorian Labor Party, with a gold pass at the end of the rainbow.

"This obsession with assuaging the upwardly mobile host of mendicants...produced a deformed profile of government activities."

This obsession with assuaging the upwardly mobile host of mendicants – "the ambition factor" as they were called in Party circles – produced a deformed profile of government activities. Neither of these books examined, quite rightly, the concerns of a large section of the electorate because they simply did not feature. The farmers and our whole rural society, so important and in deep trouble, are ignored. (Though there is a reference to a Labor woman's rural network.) The small and medium business sector, who have supplied so many of our jobs...might as well not have existed. The pensioned or the grey sector were not needed either. Let the Feds fix that.

Youth, so flattered and beslobbered by the media, the video and CD industry and the sellers of jeans, don't *really* loom large in these accounts of Labor's plans, policies and philosophies. The whole grave problem of the disappearance of jobs, career paths and predictable futures for youth – caused by economic decline, technical change, the mass entry of women into the workforce – and, dare I say it – the deschooling, and deskilling for work and for life inflicted by contemporary culture, make them a loaded dog in our society and economy. But in Victoria over the last decade the middle aged male unionists and the Wiener Schnitzel dancers didn't want to know.

In fact the Victorian policy-making profile reflected a party that wanted to stay in power at all costs, a party which worked out who wouldn't vote for it, than consigned them beyond the pale, and concentrated on paying off its noisier supporters and distracting and sedating the rest. Incidentally, nothing is said here about the enormous expansion and facilitation of every kind of gambling, for people who can't afford it, under Labor. This Nirvana land used to be anathema to traditional Labor, as was the spreading of the booze culture. But not any more. Keeps them happy.

Nor will readers in future years get the flavor of the cargo cult mentality promoted through Victoria and Australia, by governments and the media. Or the endless succession of happenings and events – the political street theatre based on the original Hawke model of the Bicentennial, the Tall Ships and the 150th anniversary of Victoria. Or was it the fiftieth?

Another culprit area: the hostility of the economic rationalists of the Hawke–Keating party towards the quasi-Keynesian aspirations of Melbourne rendered vain, as things got tough, all hopes of support or assistance from the Feds. Canberra had already made things pretty tough for the States, by pushing them to join the Gadarene rush to deregulation and privatisation; by exporting Federal Budget Deficits to the States by cutting grants; and by engineering the depression. Old buddies Burke and Bannon got sympathy a'plenty – Cain and Kirner federal raspberries.

The strange inattention of the Reserve Bank, of Federal Treasury and the ASC to the obvious signs of impending collapse of great Victorian institutions, of the property market and the very well-

known skulduggery of numerous entrepreneurs and heroic borrowers...takes a lot of explaining. Or else very little.

Victoria's education, although one of the most powerful subliminal factors in voter dissatisfaction, is scrappily handled here. Murray and White treat the VCE like a hot potato – they worry about the haste and the chaos but don't tackle the hard questions. Andy Spaull (Education Faculty, Monash) has no problems. The VCE was a great idea, sabotaged by "tired criticisms from some universities", and the hostility of the Liberal Opposition, the bad mouthing of the *Herald Sun* and the loss of nerve by Labor. If only things were so simple.

As to the financial crashes, with their widening ripples of ruin, for thousands if not tens of thousands – it seems clear that we are not going to be allowed to know who did what and who got what. Our masters have learned a lot from the near disasters of the Costigan and Fitzgerald Enquiries.

Finally, a word from John Cain who has a most interesting chapter in the big collection. He thought the Freedom of Information legislation marked a permanent breakthrough in public accountability. Incidentally, Cain was outvoted seventeen to one in Cabinet on proposed FOI legislation, but still got his way. He thinks the workers and the public service unions benefited greatly under Labor, but rarely stuck to *their* promises. Labor gave much to the teachers, and got nothing in return. He sees the decline in the national economy and the shrinkage of the revenue base as helping to bring down what were long-term reforms needing funding over a period of years. As a proportion of total Commonwealth tax collecting, the State's share fell from 36 per cent in the early '80s to 26 per cent in the early '90s.

Deinstitutionalisation of the seriously handicapped, conservation policies, Equal Opportunity Laws, penal reform, cleaning up the more odious aspects of the building industry, he regards as all permanent achievements; in public consciousness as much as anything else. The cuts in road deaths *and* alterations in public behavior have been major reforms. Speed and red-light cameras, opposed by lobbies and many of his colleagues alike, speak for themselves.

The long and ultimately unsuccessful struggle by Cain and Crabbe against the shooters and the gun lobby, is an honorable page in Labor's history. Cain thinks that the replanning of Melbourne *has* been a great success – although many would not agree. He slides too easily over the so called "financial disasters" of the VEDC, the State Bank, Tricontinental and Pyramid.

He sees himself and Jolly as completely cleared by the Royal Commission. These "so called" disasters destroyed Labor, and *greatly* damaged Victoria. Not really good enough. And there is *nothing* here or in the two books reviewed about the Auditor General, and the obstacles and attempted deterrents placed in his way. *That* was not a good idea.

Cain thinks that a reform government loses good will each time it makes a change; someone has to give up something and resents it. That society often gains doesn't interest them. So a reform Labor government has it harder than a quiescent one; and the conservatives, who favor doing very little, usually have a quieter life. But it was the public's perception that Whitlam and Cain were genuine reformers not just phrase mongers, that led people to first give these men their enthusiastic support. Outside events, less than enthusiastic colleagues, insatiable lobby groups ended the dreams.

The abortion of the 1982–1992 plans of Victorian Labor made the Kennett phenomenon inevitable. Many conservatives finished up regarding Hamer Liberals as having been too nice, as seeking compromise where the others wouldn't compromise. And they finally regarded Fraser and the Wets in the same light. Hence the Hewson–New Right phenomenon. Labor is really going to have to decide on who its true friends are. Those on whom they can rely and those they can't. The media and the PR industries won't decide this one for them – and the place seekers and networkers shouldn't be allowed. Labor, in Victoria and elsewhere, must return to its original support base.

All in all these books tell a sad story (even sadder as we watch the Luddites still tantrumming on empty stages on which the lights have gone out). The last year or so of the Victorian government was painful for all of us. The thing disintegrated before our eyes, until in the end, the only things working were the tunnels between Spring Street, the *Age* and the ABC. That from the Trades Hall became periodically impassable, because of falling rocks and rotting timber.

The Most Comprehensive Printed Guide

John Arnold

Martin Duwell and Laurie Hergenhan (eds): *The ALS Guide to Australian Writers: a bibliography 1963–90* (University of Queensland Press, $29.95).

For librarians working in the field of Australian studies one of the most useful reference tools has been the 'Annual Bibliography of Studies in Australian Literature' published in the May issue of *Australian Literary Studies* since 1964. So functional was the bibliography that photocopies for each year would be kept at the reference desk stapled together or bound in-house. It was the first thing one would go to when students enquired about articles or book reviews on a particular author. As the stapled copies became thicker and more dog-eared one yearned for a cumulation of the many years of the annual bibliography. The University of Queensland Press, as part of its valuable 'UQP Studies in Australian Literature' series, have now effectively produced such a publication. In doing so they and the compilers have provided the most comprehensive printed guide to material on Australian authors which neatly complements the Auslit database at the Australian Defence Force Academy, now accessible in major libraries through the AUSTROM CD ROM package.

The compilers, Martin Duwell, the assistant editor of *Australian Literary Studies*, and Laurie Hergenhan, the magazine's foundation editor, have not simply scissored and pasted the various annual bibliographies together. As they explain in their introduction they have added retrospective material on new authors whose first or early publications were not covered in the annual bibliographies but whose writings in recent years have "attracted substantial critical discussion". They have also excluded the 'General' section of the annual bibliographies. Thus the *ALS Guide to Australian Writers* is not a comprehensive guide to Australian literature nor one that attempts (bibliographically) to define the canon. Rather it is a guide that "reflects changing critical values and tastes rather than imposing them".

This, of course, raises the how long is the piece of string argument. Although users of the *Guide* will benefit from the listings and head for the library with their photocopying cards in hand, a few will note some surprising omissions. The standard names are well represented – Patrick White heading the list with twenty-two pages of reference followed a long way back by Henry Lawson and Christina Stead with eight pages each – but writers such as Marion Halligan, Alex Miller, Peter Goldsworthy, Gabrielle Lord and Georgia Savage are missing. So are some books that one would have thought automatic selections: Brenda Niall's biography of Martin Boyd, Dorothy Green's two collections of essays – *The Music of Love* and *Writer, Reader Critic* – and Gerald Murnane's novel *The Plains* come to mind. There are also some inconsistencies. David Walker's 1976 study of the Palmers and their circle, *Dream and Disillusion*, is listed under Nettie Palmer but not under husband Vance; and only one of Graham McInnes's four autobiographical books on Melbourne and his early life is included.

These are minor criticisms. More serious ones could be levelled at the publisher for the rather crowded format of the *Guide* and its utility would have been extended if an index of contributors and critics had been included. The *ALS Guide to Australian Writers*, however, will automatically have a permanent place beside the PC of all serious students of Australian literature, and in a short time will become in research libraries, like its photocopied predecessors, dog-eared and in need of rebinding. And that certainly is a compliment for a reference book.

John Arnold, a former librarian, is now Deputy Director of the National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University.

WRITERS IN PRISON **P.E.N. Report, 12**

LIAO YIWU, CHINA

In March 1990, the dissident Chinese poet Liao Yiwu, aged 31, was arrested on accusation of publishing 'subversive poetry'. More than two years later, he remains in jail in Chongquing, without trial or sentence.

The only 'subversion' which could possible be read into Liao Yiwu's poetry is in its protest against the inhuman conduct of the Gang of Four, tyrannies which the present government condemns. This could be mentioned in appeals for his release.

Righteousness, Equality. Universal love.
Peace, in these vague desires.
Stand on the horizon.
Attract more of the living to death!
It rains.
Don't know if it is rain or transparent ashes.

Liao Yiwu, from
'Slaughter', Part III.

Overland readers are invited to send direct appeals for the release of Liao Yiwu to: His Excellency, The Chinese Ambassador to Australia, The Embassy of the People's Republic of China, 15 Coronation Drive, Yarralumla ACT 2600.